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# European News

June 2016

## Angry Yes to Europe @GMB Congress

Another fantastic GMB Congress was held from 5-9 June in Bournemouth, with passionate debates on the blacklisting of workers, access to affordable housing, the living wage, the Trade Union Act, and a moving speech by Hillsborough Family Support Group representatives Margaret Aspinall and Sue Roberts, which delegates will never forget.

Congress unanimously adopted the CEC General Statement on an Angry Yes to remain in Europe, with CEC members **Bill Modlock** moving the CEC statement and **Cath Sutton** seconding. They spoke of the importance of voting in the EU Referendum on 23 June, the result of which will affect not just our generation but the lives of our children and grandchildren too. With the Conservative Government set to introduce the Trade Union Act, we will increasingly rely on the EU to guarantee our employment and social rights and protections. Do we really want to risk leaving these solely in Tory hands? – they asked.

**Labour leader in Europe and GMB MEP Glenis Willmott** also addressed congress, emphasising that trade unionists are in the front line of the battle against injustice and that only by

remaining in the EU will we have any chance of delivering for working people and society's most vulnerable, working together with our European partners.



GMB knows the EU isn't perfect but believes it can only be improved from the inside and that's why we're campaigning for an Angry Yes in favour of remaining. Reforming the EU to re-establish a Social Europe that puts people before profits is our top priority, and something that GMB will continue to fight for, together in solidarity with our European trade union colleagues. Walking away is not the answer and will only further threaten our jobs, services, rights, standards and protections.

GMB has also signed an [open letter](#) to *The Mirror* with other major British unions, warning that a vote to leave the EU will be a disaster for working people,

### Remembering Jo Cox

GMB was shocked and deeply saddened to hear of the brutal murder of Labour and GMB MP Jo Cox on 16 June, and all our thoughts are with her family and friends at this unimaginably difficult time. Jo, who began her political career in Brussels working for Glenys Kinnock in the European Parliament, understood the importance of Britain's role in Europe. GMB has been concerned about the increasing aggression

and abuse that MPs, MEPs and others in public office are subjected to and they have our support to allow them to continue their work in safety and with respect. Jo's husband has written: "Jo would have wanted two things above all else to happen now, one that our precious children are bathed in love and two, that we all unite to fight against the hatred that killed her."

### In this issue:

GMB's Angry Yes to EU **P.1**

Remembering Jo Cox **P.1**

Protect posted workers **P.2**

Hairdresser H&S **P.2**

Digitalisation and workers **P.2**

My Week in Europe **P.3**

Trade deals opposition growing **P.3**

More paternity & parental leave **P.4**

EU fighting for tax justice **P.4**

Ending energy poverty **P.4**

with mass job losses and the erosion of our hard-won rights, and risks closing off all future generations to the jobs and opportunities being part of the EU has given us.

Catch up on all the Congress debates [here](#).

### 48 hours to save workers' rights



That's how long we have until the EU Referendum on 23 June – one of the biggest decisions of our generation. Watch the GMB video [here](#).



## Protect posted workers



The ETUC and the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers took part in a joint demonstration on 16 June outside the meeting of EU employment ministers to protest

### Workers on company boards

The ETUC has called for EU-level standards to strengthen workers' representation and participation in European company boards. It has been well proved that workers' involvement at board level helps companies perform better. "Giving a stronger voice to employees is an indispensable counterpart to company mobility and a necessary tool for a more democratic and successful society and economy. Democracy should not stop at the factory gate," stated the ETUC.

at the latest moves from eleven European governments to try to block crucial improvements to EU posted worker rules, which would help tackle undercutting and ensure equal pay for equal work in the same place.

### Unions demand EU H&S laws for hairdressers

Trade unions and employers in the hairdressing sector have adopted a [Health and Safety Declaration](#), including recommendations on risk assessment, training, maternity protection, musculoskeletal disorders, mental health and well-being at work. This goes in the face of continued EU Commission refusal to lay down EU-wide rules on health and safety in the sector. The social partners are also currently drafting a European Framework Agreement on health and safety in the industry, which would increase protections for workers, minimise social security costs for employers and promote better working conditions.

## Digital technology and workers

The EU Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) has published a [paper](#) on how to harness digital technologies to improve the quality and inclusiveness of public services and make them more adapted to users, whilst also ensuring workers are protected from any negative effects such as outsourcing, job losses and privatisation.

The ETUC has adopted a [resolution](#) calling for the EU to monitor and shape more actively the effects of digitalisation on Europe's society and economy, including measures to avoid job losses and ensure the creation of new quality jobs and decent working conditions, EU-wide rules

on privacy at work and fair terms and conditions for crowd-working. New proposals have been published for an EU-wide digital single market, which aims to remove obstacles to users watching online content anywhere in Europe. This includes banning the practice of 'geo-blocking', where customers have their digital choices limited and can end up paying higher prices for the same service depending in which country they are. Socialist MEPs are also leading calls to ensure consumers' online rights are fully enforced and protected, and that every European has the opportunity to improve their digital skills to ensure no one gets left behind.

## EU Trade Union Action Update

**France:** Mass protests continue to take place across the country against government **labour reform** plans, which trade unions say will lead to a decrease in employment rights and protections.

**Germany:** **Construction** workers have agreed a new collective agreement, which includes a 4.5-5% pay increase. Trade union **Ver.di** has launched a campaign to demand decent pay and working conditions for the **self-employed** and to make the minimum wage compulsory for freelancers.

**Sweden:** Following a week of strike action, **construction** workers have reached a nationwide agreement which includes wage increases, shortened working hours and a commitment to promoting more gender equality and diversity in the sector.

**Croatia:** Trade unions have reached a new collective agreement in the **construction** sector, including action to stop social dumping.

**Turkey:** The ITUC is demanding the Turkish government put an immediate end to **trade union repression** and plans to amend **labour laws** that will further weaken workers' rights.

**Denmark:** Trade unions are working with the government and employers to help **refugees** enter the workforce and ensure they are well integrated.

**Bulgaria:** Trade unions are preparing to negotiate the country's first collective agreement for **civil servants**, following a complaint to the Council of Europe that the government was not respecting their fundamental bargaining rights.

**Poland:** A successful trade union challenge in the constitutional court means that **self-employed** workers can now join trade unions.

**Austria:** The **ÖGB** trade union confederation and the Chamber of Labour have produced the first **Apprenticeship Monitor**, a national survey enabling young apprentices to assess their experiences at the end of their vocational training.

**Italy:** Trade unions have signed a protocol with employers and the Red Cross against **gang-masters**, worker exploitation and undeclared work in the **agricultural** sector. **Metal workers** have gone on strike after no deal could be reached on a new collective agreement.

**ENGIE:** EU trade union federations for public services (**EPSU**), building and woodworkers (**EFBWW**) and the energy industry (**IndustriAll**) have signed an important new agreement with energy group ENGIE, earmarking €100mn to train workers to adapt to energy transition.

# My week in Europe, and why we should stay in the EU

by Lewis Bye-Brooks

As a young GMB member, I spent last week in Brussels with the GMB European office in order to gain an understanding of politics, trade unionism and democracy in action. With just a week to go till the referendum vote, this was certainly an interesting time to visit the home of the European Union, especially for a young person with so much resting on the outcome of the vote. For my generation, the result of this vote will affect our entire futures: whether this be opportunities to study, work or holiday abroad. Leaving the EU could be an economic disaster for the young people of Britain, with Brexit fears lowering the strength of the pound; we could be faced with mass youth unemployment, fewer resources for education, and further austerity. But most importantly, our generation doesn't want to be an isolated nation, we do not want to be a small island – our voices are stronger united and European.

During my week in Brussels, I attended the launch of the Party of European Socialist's European Youth Plan – a €20 billion budget plan which will offer: quality jobs and training for youth with a

permanent European Youth Guarantee, free and quality childcare for all, and a meal at school.



The European Youth Cheques for cultural activities would give free access for all young people in the EU to cultural events, and most importantly supporting education by opening the Erasmus+ scheme for study and training abroad to those in high school and in vocational training. While the European Union may not be perfect, it is important we remain a member so British young people can both benefit from and be a part of the progressive ideas being shared across Europe. Whether it was visiting the European Parliament, the European Trade Union Confederation, the Economic and Social Committee or the European Federation for Building

and Woodworkers, I was greeted with open arms by likeminded people of all ages, races and nationalities while being offered the opportunity to learn about the processes of European politics.

With the referendum getting closer each day, voting intention polls are suggesting that 72% of young voters are in favour of remaining in the European Union. Regardless of the outcome on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, it is clear that the young people of Britain are choosing a path of growth, stability, internationalism, democracy and peace. Let's hope that the voice of the young people of Britain is heard.

## One step closer to glyphosate ban

EU national ministers continue to disagree on whether or not to extend the license for glyphosate, the world's most used weed-killer and potentially carcinogenic. After failing to agree to even a 2 year extension of the license, GMB is calling on the EU Commission to admit defeat and ban the harmful and dangerous substance for good. If the deadlock continues, companies using the chemical, such as US agricultural giant Monsanto, may be forced to issue an EU-wide recall once glyphosate's license expires on 30 June. Hundreds of GMB members are exposed to the substance in their work in roads, gardens, parks and leisure.

## Opposition to trade deals continues to grow

GMB has [responded](#) to the public consultation on the draft sustainability impact assessment for the **EU-US TTIP** trade deal, opposing the deal and calling on the EU Commission to admit the huge negative impact it will have on jobs, industries, public services and standards across Europe.

German activists are collecting signatures in order to file a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court against the **EU-Canada CETA** free trade agreement. Through their campaign, they also hope to raise greater public awareness of the dangers of the deal to EU standards and

protections. Meanwhile, a growing number of national parliaments – including Dutch, Hungarian and Luxembourg – have demanded they be given a final say on whether or not to ratify the deal. GMB has written to Cameron to demand the same in the UK. The EU Commission is expected to adopt its position on this in July. The European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) will launch its anti-CETA campaign on International Public Services Day, 23 June. More information and campaigning materials are available on its [website](#). GMB has also prepared a new update briefing on trade, available [here](#).

## Cameron must stop blocking EU anti-dumping action and protect industries

Labour MEPs have warned during a European Parliament debate on anti-dumping measures that the EU needs urgently to introduce strengthened and effective trade defence instruments to deal with unfair competition – notably from China – and protect Europe's threatened industries, such as the steel sector. GMB is demanding David Cameron immediately stop blocking talks on these necessary improvements in the EU Council.

## Better paternity & parental leave for more gender equality

Fathers should be given two weeks' guaranteed paternity leave across the EU, Members of the EU Parliament have demanded. High-quality and accessible childcare facilities must also urgently be introduced in all EU Member States. "These measures will introduce an element of gender equality and fairness, allowing for

the better sharing of family tasks and giving women an improved capacity to participate in the job market on more equal terms," said Labour EU employment spokesman **Siôn Simon MEP**. MEPs also demanded minimum parental leave be extended from four to six months, with decent pay rates.

## Labour demands end to energy poverty in Europe

The EU Parliament has overwhelmingly adopted **Labour MEP Theresa Griffin's** report on 'A New Deal for Energy Consumers'. In it, Theresa calls on energy companies to play fair and help the millions of people across Europe living in energy poverty by ending termination fees when switching energy supplier, simplified energy bills, guidelines to ensure suppliers notify customers when cheaper tariffs exist, and for affordable energy to be recognised as a basic social right.



"More than 50 million EU citizens are living in energy poverty – approximately three million of whom are in the UK. What is even worse is that energy suppliers are paying less for wholesale energy and are not passing on savings to consumers – it is unacceptable," Theresa said. "This report is a prime example of 28 countries coming together to challenge the practices of large multinational energy companies – leaving the EU would undoubtedly make it harder for the UK to challenge the behaviour of energy suppliers," she added.

## EU fighting for tax justice

GMB has welcomed strict EU measures adopted this month to tackle tax evasion by multinational corporations, including tougher sanctions on tax havens. Demands include giving national governments the right to tax profits generated by shell companies in countries with less than a 15% tax rate, and common EU rules on how companies calculate profits. Conservative MEPs abstained in the EU Parliament vote.

"This is yet another example of the good work the EU does to tackle tax avoidance and evasion," said Labour EU taxation spokeswoman **Anneliese Dodds MEP**. "Tax avoidance does not respect national boundaries and only by working with our fellow EU countries can we effectively close the loopholes created by the lack of a common approach," she added.

Thanks to pressure from Socialist MEPs, the European Parliament has also decided to set up a special inquiry committee on the 'Panama papers' tax scandal. They are calling for full transparency and strict sanctions for those who help individuals and companies avoid paying their fair share.

### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For further details on any of the items in this issue of the European News, please contact the GMB Brussels office:

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## OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF:

**Skills and training:** ETUC has welcomed the launch of the Skills Agenda for Europe – a new programme that will ensure all Europeans receive the right training, skills and support to play an active part in the labour market and find a good-quality and long-term job. Trade unions are to play a central role in ensuring these commitments – including a European Quality Framework for Apprenticeships and greater investment in education and training – are met both at national and EU level.

**Female poverty:** The EU Parliament has called for more to be done to tackle female poverty, such as increased investment in childcare and guaranteed equal pay for equal work. More women than men are affected by poverty across Europe, and single mothers in particular are finding it ever harder to make ends meet.

**Employment:** Employment levels are slowly rising again across Europe with working conditions and health and safety clearly improving, according to the [Eurofound 2015 yearbook](#). More must be done, however, to improve people's quality of life, decrease poverty levels and stop labour market segmentation.

**Uber:** Uber has been fined by a French court for running an illegal transport business and using non-professional drivers. The exploitative ride-sharing service is also to be banned in Hungary.

**Affordable medicine:** Labour and wider Socialist MEPs have launched an EU-wide [call](#) for national governments to increase investments and guarantee affordable access to preventative healthcare and essential medicines for all.

**Medical devices:** The EU is to introduce stricter monitoring and safety certification procedures for medical devices, such as breast and hip implants.

**Refugee crisis:** At the ILO's annual conference this month, the ETUC and ITUC [called](#) on governments to show solidarity and compassion, and support the right to safe haven and work for all refugees.

**Unfair trading:** MEPs have called for stricter EU rules to end unfair trading practices and business relations in the food industry supply chain.

**Conflict minerals:** EU law now bans the use of conflict minerals (such as tin and gold that are extracted in conflict zones and used for electronic devices including TVs and mobile phones) in the EU market.