

GMB solidarity with victims of Brussels attacks

GMB's European Office would like to thank colleagues for their messages of concern for our safety and solidarity following the terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March. Our thoughts go to the victims and their families, not only in Belgium but around the world. GMB also pays tribute to the bravery and commitment of emergency, health and other services involved in rescuing and treating the victims, and to transport, public service and other workers and people across Belgium who are pulling together in solidarity to alleviate the current difficulties.

Posting of Workers – Equal treatment long overdue

by Sam Hägglund – General Secretary of the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW)



EU Commission President Juncker has declared that 'equal pay for equal work in the same place' should be the guiding principle in

Europe for cross-border work. Since equal treatment for posted workers is long overdue, the European trade union movement awaited the announced proposal for a revision of the Posting of Workers Directive (PWD) in March 2016 with great expectations.

During the summer and autumn of 2015, a multitude of letters on the revision of PWD was sent to the Commission, showing a deep division in Europe on fundamental issues. The governments of 7 Western Member States stated that the revision of the PWD must be based on the equal treatment principle. As a reply to this, 9 Central and Eastern (CEE) Member States stated that equal treatment is "incompatible" with the Internal Market. Business Europe stated that equal treatment would damage the competitiveness of European industry. The stage was set for a dramatic endgame.

One week before the announced launching of the proposed revised Directive, several versions of a leaked text were intercepted by different stakeholders. From a trade union point of view, these versions would

have been a political disaster. Member States would have lost their competence to define minimum wages; posted workers would have had the right only to a kind of European minimum in terms of wages; the right to strike would have been restricted above this level; and international conventions adopted by the ILO and the Council of Europe would have been undermined.

A frenzy of lobbying actions towards the Commission, notably by Scandinavian trade union representatives and helped by friendly governments, resulted in a U-turn by the Commission, making the launched text on 8 March 2016 fundamentally different to the earlier leaked versions. The most important points of the final text are that it replaces the concept of 'minimum rates of pay' with the concept of 'remuneration', defined as "all elements of remuneration" as laid down in the host Member States' laws, regulations, universally applicable collective agreements and other generally applicable collective agreements. Secondly, a new paragraph is introduced dealing with subcontracting chains, allowing Member States to oblige subcontractors to respect applicable host Member States' conditions for

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remuneration. Thirdly, a connection between the Temporary Agency Workers' Directive and PWD is created, meaning that posted agency workers must be treated equally to comparable workers in the user undertaking.

With such a politically high-powered issue as posting of workers, this battle is far from won. Trade unions have to work closely with groups in the European Parliament to introduce amendments which will remove inconsistencies in the text, and which will ensure that no worker is excluded from equal treatment due to the social model of the host state being incompatible with the definitions in the Directive. Most importantly, the trade union movement must form alliances to prevent the text from reverting to the earlier leaked version, which is likely to be advocated by CEE Member States and Business Europe. This will be a battle to protect the fundamental values and rights of workers and trade unions within the Internal Market.

Trade unions call to break the glass walls on International Women's Day



GMB and our European trade union colleagues marked International Women's Day on 8 March by calling on women and men to unite in breaking not only the glass ceiling but also the glass walls that segregate the labour market and shut women out of certain professions. Only 4% of drivers, construction workers and mechanics and 18% of engineers and IT

professionals are women – compared to 80% of teachers and healthcare workers. Talent is being wasted on an industrial scale and ending gender segregation at work must be a top priority for the EU, stated the ETUC.

Labour MEPs have endorsed calls for the EU Commission urgently to present a new EU strategy on gender equality, which they say should also include proposals to fight violence against women. UKIP MEPs voted against the EU Parliament resolution.

Meanwhile, the EU Commission has promised to review EU action on closing the gender pay gap and is considering binding legislation that would force company transparency on what each employee is paid. The UK's 19.2% gender pay gap is higher than the EU average of 16%.

EU Gender statistics database launched

The European Institute for Gender Equality has launched a new [database](#) offering a single source of reliable information on gender equality in the EU, organised around thematic areas such as labour market, education and training, and health.

Support hairdressers' health and safety

GMB supports the campaign of our EU trade union sectoral federation UNI Europa against EU Commission moves towards increased deregulation. We are especially concerned by the EU Commission's refusal, under its 'Better Regulation' agenda, to endorse a hairdressing health and safety agreement signed by employers and trade unions.

Hairdressers are more likely to suffer from skin conditions, musculoskeletal disorders and work-related asthma than other workers, and the EU Commission is effectively holding their health

and safety hostage.

UNI Europa has launched a major billboard campaign across Brussels to raise awareness of the issue. Go to <http://notbetter.eu> to sign their petition.



EU Trade Union Action Update

The Netherlands: The FNV trade union confederation is raising awareness of the link between **night and shift work** and **cancer**, and is working with health experts to mitigate these risks.

Denmark: A trade union journal has published a list of worst-offending companies in terms of **workplace injuries** – including some of Denmark's most prominent corporations. The FPU union has seen membership increase by 31% since it took on **Ryanair** for its lack of respect of basic terms and conditions.

Finland: Unions have expressed concerns at government proposals to make it easier to hire workers on **temporary contracts**, removing the obligation for employers to justify why they are not offering permanent positions. Probationary periods will also be extended and redundancy rights reduced.

Spain: A Spanish court has acquitted 8 **Airbus** trade unionists who faced prison sentences under a Franco-era law of interfering with the "right to work", after they took part in a peaceful demonstration on the **right to strike**. Hundreds more trade unionists however continue to face prosecution.

Germany: Nearly half of all **young workers** are on **a-typical or vulnerable** contracts, according to new research from the **DGB** union confederation.

Estonia: A bill to legalise **drive-sharing services** such as **Uber** is to be discussed in Parliament. Estonia may become one of the first EU countries to legalise what the bill terms 'negotiated passenger transport' that it says is neither public transport nor a taxi service.

Right to water is a human right



GMB and European trade union colleagues marked World Water Day on 22 March by demanding that the EU implement once and for all the human right of universal access to clean water and sanitation. It has been three years since the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) launched its *Right2Water* European Citizens' Initiative campaign, but the EU Commission has so far failed to act on the 1.8mn signatures collected from across the EU.

The Clock is Ticking

Less than 100 days to the EU Referendum



With only two and half months to go before the EU Referendum on 23 June, the debate is heating up. GMB is committed to ensuring our members receive up-to-date, honest information on the issues important to us and our families. GMB has not joined any of the official campaigns, and we will not seek or promote any argument that pitches worker against worker. GMB knows that currently the EU is far from perfect, and our members rightly expect better. That's why our campaign is an 'angry yes'. We want to see a Europe that stands up for our health and safety rights, for quality jobs not zero-hours contracts and insecurity – a Europe that puts

people first.

GMB has given presentations and encouraged debate at several events across the country, including the GMB national equalities conference in Cardiff and an Institute of Employment Rights conference in Liverpool.

We want to help our members make an informed decision, and are preparing factsheets and other information materials on key issues, which will be available via regional political officers. We will also be launching social media contact and information with members in the coming weeks.

If you feel you need more information to make a considered decision, please contact GMB or go to our website: www.gmb.org.uk/about/gmb-in-europe

You can also sign up for more EU campaign news on our new website, to which we will be adding more information and materials over the coming weeks: www.gmbineurope.org.uk

Trade unions call for binding social and employment protections in EU Social Pillar

The EU Commission has launched its new European Pillar of Social Rights, which will have the potential to reaffirm, promote and improve employment and social rights and protections across Europe. The Commission is now calling for feedback on its proposals and further suggestions of what should be included in the Pillar, through a [public consultation](#) open until the end of 2016. GMB will be submitting a response, though we have expressed disappointment that there will not be a separate social partner consultation on this

important initiative.

The Commission acknowledges the many challenges we currently face – from an ageing workforce and technological changes, to new forms of work and continued barriers to equal opportunities for all – but it has offered only few solutions so far on how to tackle these and achieve greater social progress and cohesion. More concrete proposals are expected in early 2017, once the consultation results have been assessed.

EU must ban toxic pesticide glyphosate

The International Union of Food workers (IUF) has launched a campaign opposing EU plans to grant a new 15 year license to glyphosate, the world's most used weed-killer. The EU Commission is looking at renewing EU-wide authorisation for the herbicide, despite severe warnings from the United Nations' World Health Organisation that the substance is likely carcinogenic, with residues of it increasingly found in our food and bodies.



Continued authorisation would not only place lives at risk in Europe, but would risk undoing efforts to ban the substance in other countries that rely on trade with the EU, such as Sri Lanka, Argentina, Brazil and El Salvador.

Sign IUF's petition [here](#), calling for a total ban on glyphosate across the EU, and for comprehensive EU support for a safer and healthier food system – for both agricultural workers and consumers.

EU sharing economy guidelines delayed till summer

The publication, announced in the February edition of GMB's European News, of EU guidelines on how better to regulate the sharing economy and ensure workers' rights and employer obligations are properly respected and enforced, has been delayed until the summer.

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:

Email: gmb-brussels@gmbbrussels.be

Phone: 0032 2 230 56 75

EU Commission must deliver on its promise to support steel industry, demands GMB

In light of Tata Steel's recent announcement that it will be divesting all of its UK assets, putting thousands of jobs at risk, time is running out for the UK government and EU Commission to get behind the UK and wider EU steel industry.

GMB is demanding immediate UK government action to support the industry and ensure guaranteed steel production and investment. It didn't escape trade unions' notice that George Osborne's budget announcement in early March didn't once mention any support for workers in steel or other vital UK manufacturing industries. Cameron must stop protecting Chinese interests and instead get firmly behind strong measures to support our industry and put an end to

Chinese dumping once and for all.

The EU Parliament Socialist Group has adopted a [position paper](#) opposing the granting of Market Economy Status to China, calling for the EU urgently to carry out an impact assessment of Chinese dumping on European jobs and growth, and demanding that trade unions also be allowed to launch anti-dumping investigations.



GMB is urging the EU Commission to deliver on its promise of a level playing field for steel, made in its

new [EU action plan](#) to preserve jobs and boost growth in the industry. The EU Commission has proposed both short and long term measures to tackle the crisis in the sector, including the removal of the lesser duty rule and accelerating and increasing the efficiency of EU trade defence measures.

The EU must go further, however, to ensure its state aid rules are flexible enough to help Tata Steel and GMB members in energy intensive industries, and guarantee investments to upgrade plants with more energy efficient and low carbon technologies. We need this action NOW.

Serious concerns remain as CETA nears completion

GMB continues to have serious concerns about the EU-Canada (CETA) free trade agreement, which came one step closer to being finalised this month after it was announced the investment chapter had been re-opened and updated. Though the agreement now no longer contains the dangerous Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clause, it nonetheless remains a bad deal for workers and public services.



The new Investor Court System replacing ISDS is just as controversial and still gives investors undue rights and privileges. Other major shortcomings in the deal also remain: it does not have binding or enforceable sustainable development measures, with only weak provisions on human and workers' rights, and it fails to

exclude many public services from its scope. GMB and TUC are campaigning to oppose the deal.

TTIP on "wrong course", say EU & US unions

The ETUC and US trade union confederation AFL-CIO have released a [joint statement](#) that the current EU-US trade deal (TTIP) negotiations are on the wrong course and if not drastically altered, will fail to protect or benefit workers and their families on both sides of the Atlantic. The Investor Court System will give unmitigated rights to foreign investors and put a freeze on governments and local authorities regulating in the public interest. A lack of binding or enforceable labour rights and protections will also open the door to wide-scale social dumping and a race to the bottom in terms of pay and conditions. US Congressional approval of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal is becoming less and less certain as anti-trade sentiment grows across the country.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF:

Working time: New social-demographic challenges and the rise in new technologies are disrupting working time stability, according to [Eurofound](#).

Healthy workplaces: The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has launched a [campaign](#) to tackle the challenges of an ageing workforce. Many workers are now more likely to face longer working lives and therefore increased exposure to occupational hazards.

Healthy schools: New EU legislation will give European countries the option to distribute free fruit, vegetables and milk in schools, promoting healthy eating habits and helping to fight food waste. Though the UK has benefitted from EU funding to distribute free milk in schools, it has opted out of EU financing for other product distribution.

Cancer prevention: The ETUI has [identified](#) more than 70 carcinogenic substances which it argues should be included in binding EU exposure limits. Occupational cancer kills 100,000 people in the EU each year.

Climate change: Socialist MEPs have called on the EU to show leadership and do more to implement the decisions and reach the ambitious objectives made at the global climate change conference in Paris last December.

Children's rights: MEPs have backed new rules that would ensure children suspected or accused of a crime are given a fair trial, with access to a lawyer and a clear explanation of court proceedings.