



CEC Special Report

International Solidarity in a Changing World



**MAKE
WORK
BETTER**

GMB CONGRESS 2025

CEC SPECIAL REPORT

"There is a world of freedom, beauty and equality to gain, where everyone will have an opportunity to express the best that is in them for the benefit of all, making the world a place more to our heart's desire and the better to dwell in."

Will Thorne, GMB Founder

"Each nation has, and must have, its own special means and methods of work. But whatever those means and methods, the end is one all the world over: the emancipation of the working class, the abolition of all class rule."

Eleanor Marx, GMB co-founder and first International Secretary, 1891

"We give the right hand of friendship and comradeship to the comrades in Austria, Serbia, Germany, France, Russia and all other countries who see that the war is not determined in the interests of the workers...the landowners and capitalists are the real and only enemy."

National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association Executive Committee resolution, 1914 (now part of GMB)

"Workers' organisations throughout the world should have no barriers to discussing their problems."

Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths and Structural Workers 1962 Conference resolution (now part of GMB)

"Congress expresses its solidarity with the struggle of black workers for genuine trade union rights, better living and working conditions and against the system of apartheid [and] resolves to support campaigns mounted by the Anti-Apartheid movement and the trade union movement to ensure that effective action is taken[...]"

General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union (now GMB) 1985 Congress resolution on Apartheid in South Africa

"GMB recognises its internationalist duty to offer solidarity towards workers across the globe, who find themselves engaged in the same struggles as our own members, as an attack on one is as an attack upon us all."

GMB Rulebook 2024

Table of Contents

List of acronyms.....	3
Summary of policy adopted.....	4
Introduction	7
The first internationalist trade union.....	8
From the Eight Hour Day to the European Union: GMB's work internationally to make work better	11
Global issues, workplace conversations – GMB international priorities in a changing world.....	15
Solidarity begins at home – building a truly internationalist trade union in a changing world.....	30

List of acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CCOO	Comisiones Obreras
CEC	GMB Central Executive Council
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CSC	Cuba Solidarity Campaign
EFFAT	European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Unions
EU	European Union
FTZ-GSEU	Free Trade Zones and General Service Employees Union
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IUF	International Union of Foodworkers
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and more identities inclusive
NAFTA	National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NUFTO	National Union of Furniture Trade Operatives
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PEM	Pan-Euro Mediterranean Convention
PSC	Palestine Solidarity Campaign
SNTEM	National Union of Energy and Mineworkers
TCA	UK-EU Trade and Co-Operation Agreement
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Summary of policy adopted

This report sets out how GMB can respond in our members' interests to a changing world that is affecting our own world of work and our fellow workers in struggle globally. By rediscovering and updating our Union's internationalism since our founding in 1889, this report proposes:

Building a truly internationalist trade union:

- Include GMB's international solidarity work in our education offers for members and Workplace Representatives.
- A directory for GMB Organisers to contact unions organising in the same employers and industries overseas for solidarity.
- GMB Branches to be able to request information on international policy and guest speakers to their meetings.
- An international solidarity toolkit for GMB Officers and Representatives for information, practical guidance and signposting.
- Prioritise lay-member involvement in GMB's international work and more proactive working with our affiliated Global Union Federations.

Bringing Jobs and Security Home:

- Promote a worker-centred trade agenda that includes:
- A "reset" of UK and EU trading relations which remediates previous disagreements and secures UK membership of the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean convention.
- Enforceable labour standards in any new trade agreements and opposition to UK trade deals with states that systematically abuse and exploit workers and deny them their rights.

- Contributing to global emission reduction targets by aligning the UK's emissions reduction schemes with the EU's to protect our manufacturing industries.
- Pursuing the repeal of blanket prohibitions in global trade rules on 'domestic contents requirements' to ensure that more UK jobs are created when public money is used to invest in industries at home.
- Put both domestic defence and peaceful diplomatic solutions to overseas conflicts at the heart of government policy. There continues to be no alternative for UK domestic security than being part of NATO but it must keep us safe and is not beyond our criticism.

Humanitarian issues are trade union issues:

- Reaffirm our solidarity with Ukrainian trade unions fighting to end the Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine, and for its socially-just reconstruction.
- Strengthen our solidarity work with Palestinian trade unions and support Palestinian/Arab workers in Israel, including providing platforms for them to speak and amplifying their voices.
- Support empowerment of the General Assembly as the main decision-making body within the United Nations on certain matters, following inaction of UN Security Council members to stop violations of international humanitarian law in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan.
- Immediate return to a ceasefire in Gaza by Israel and Hamas and the release of all remaining Israeli hostages and Palestinians unlawfully detained.
- The withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories of Gaza, the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Lebanon and a lasting, two-state

solution to decades of conflict with an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel and guaranteed rights for all minorities.

- Continue to call on the UK government to immediately recognise the State of Palestine, ban trade with Israel's illegal settlements and halt the direct and indirect sale and supply of weapons, including parts, used by Israel in its military action in Gaza.
- Continue to encourage boycott and disinvestment from goods of companies profiting from Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and settlement-building.
- Continue to encourage branches to affiliate to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and support our members right to attend PSC demonstrations in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

For unity and strength of working people around the world:

- Demonstrate support and solidarity with our American counterparts targeted by the increasingly influential far-right in US politics, urge the UK Government to do more to push back against these views.
- Foster awareness of the threats posed by right-wing organisations globally and encourage concrete measures from across the trade union movement to counter their influence.
- Promote a common international agenda that defends and advances workers' rights, human rights, strong trade unions, public ownership and environmental protections around the world.
- Build union-to-union solidarity links abroad in sectors where our members work, including through our affiliated European and Global trade union federations, solidarity campaigns and other groups.
- A worker-centred approach to tackling global issues such as trade, conflict and climate change. Building unity of working people in defence of their fundamental rights so that change is led by them, not done to them.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Trade unionism never stops at international borders and GMB has long offered solidarity to workers across the world in the same struggles as our own. The world we live in is also not working for working people.
- 1.2 Exploitation – the unfair treatment of people and our planet – still underpins our global economy. Union-busting Amazon warehouses and near-collapse of British Steel are just some consequences when political decisions made for ‘free-markets’ and ‘globalisation’ decimate jobs at home and elevate the profits and power of unethical employers abroad.
- 1.3 Hard-won progress on women’s, LGBT+, disabled and migrant people’s rights are now being rolled back by governments particularly in the United States. President Trump’s threat to invade other countries for “protecting the free world” reminds us that such progress has to be fought for.
- 1.4 Trade unions have always been targeted by exploiters and oppressors. A decade of Conservative government has seen historic attacks on the legal rights of unions in the UK. Nearly half of countries arbitrarily arrested or detained trade unionists last year, 87 per cent violating the right to strike.²
- 1.5 When those who exploit at home exploit abroad, workers are hit first and worst. Genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and Masalits in Darfur is unfolding as the violent aims of political leaders in Israel and Sudan go unchecked. Ukrainian trade unions distribute material aid under bombardment from Putin’s aggression. Emergency service workers battle historic floods and wildfires as global polluters delay action on climate change.
- 1.6 While GMB’s own weight in the world is limited our history shows that working people are not powerless if we stand together, no matter who we are up against. Winning at work and beyond is more likely when we build links of solidarity despite differences used by those who seek to divide us.
- 1.7 This report sets out how GMB can respond to this changing world in our members’ interests, and through our solidarity contribute to the common global struggle for the freedom of workers from exploitation in all forms.

2. The first internationalist trade union

- 2.1 Multi-ethnic and multi-cultural in religious association, the members of GMB's beginning as the Gasworkers' Union in 1889 naturally made common cause with others marginalised and exploited by the oppression that impacted workers across borders. Will Thorne and his activist group at Beckton knew that an injury to one was an injury to all, regardless of nationality, creed, or colour.
- 2.2 Gas workers rubbed shoulders with the survivors of the Paris Commune; they worked alongside those exiled by anti-Socialist laws in Germany and they rejected the tropes of empire and militarism promoted by the media at that time. They heard the misery created for workers by the British Empire's trade wars against China, its stealing of land for new colonies like Hong Kong and its carve-ups of territories in South East Asia and Africa.



Eleanor Marx, GMB's co-founder and first International Secretary

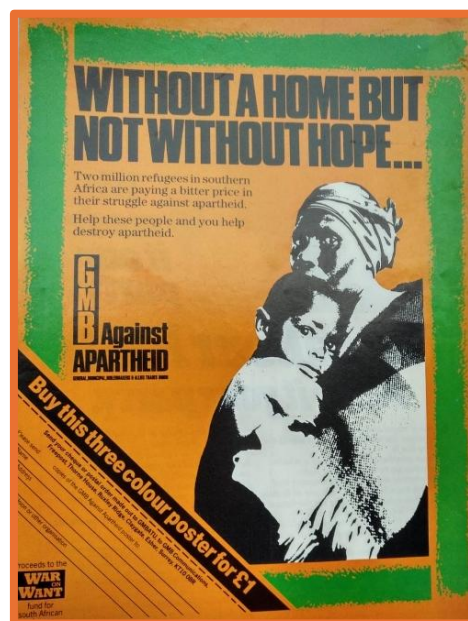
- 2.3 Eleanor Marx on the union's executive from 1890-95 was instrumental in forging links with the international labour movement, promoting practical solidarity actions that assisted strikers in North America and Germany. What little surplus the union had was given freely and out of shared principle to support workers in struggle across the globe.

- 2.4 This worldview, learnt in the school of the workplace bore fruit when the call for solidarity came. GMB's founder Will Thorne spoke in parliament urging that the League of Nations should rally to assist the people of Ethiopia when they were invaded by Mussolini's fascist armies. The union's general secretary at the time, Charles Dukes protested against the detention of trade unionists in Austria while Wilf Jobling – who organised grassroots members to oppose the Means Test in the North East – joined many members of unions which are now part of GMB today to fight fascism in Spain with the International Brigade, and fell at the battle of Jarama. Jack Cooper, General Secretary in the 1960s took back learnings in industrial policies from touring post-war Yugoslavia, impressed by the rebuilding of industry under self-managed Socialism and multi-ethnic unity forged in the anti-fascist Partisan struggle.

"We desire to place on record our highest appreciation of the seven members of No.15 Branch (East End United) who have volunteered to go to Spain to help fight the Fascist menace and to protect the Freedom and Liberty, not only of Spanish workers, but of the workers of the world." **Executive Committee of NAFTA, 1937**
(now part of GMB)

- 2.5 GMB's predecessors stood on the right side of history before it was consensus. The Furniture Operatives union NUFTO rallied British opposition to the failed US war in Vietnam and others opposed the illegal US blockade of Cuba, argued for decolonization and supported boycotts of goods to oppose the racist regimes of Rhodesia and Apartheid South Africa while campaigning for Nelson Mandela's release from prison.
- 2.6 In 1973, the Boilermakers' Union took a stand against the US and UK-backed coup of the democratically elected socialist Salvador Allende government in Chile, and against the torture and murder of trade unionists carried out by the Pinochet dictatorship that followed. While the UK was reestablishing relations with the fascist Franco dictatorship in Spain, the Boilermakers raised awareness of shipyard workers jailed in brutal conditions for opposing the regime that later collapsed in part because of their activism.

- 2.7 Through its affiliation to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, GMB supported the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) which kept the anti-apartheid struggle alive in the late 1980s by organising black workers and fighting the regime's reliance on cheap and racially segregated labour. GMB also played a big part in the successful campaign to free Moses Mayekiso, General Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) who was sentenced to death for organising black workers in in the townships.
- 2.8 GMB's Boilermakers' section also publicised Nelson Mandela's rejection of the apartheid regime's offer to release him from prison if he condemned the African National Congress (ANC)'s struggle to end to the racist subjugation of black people in his country. GMB and other unions later contributed funds to the ANC's successful campaign to become the first South African government truly elected by universal suffrage in 1994.



GMB Anti-Apartheid leaflet for branches, 1980s

- 2.9 Unions like GMB stood on the side of Mandela, the ANC and unions like NUMSA and COSATU when the UK and US governments stood with the apartheid regime. The arrival of democracy in South Africa would have been unthinkable if it was not for the courage of so many working people around the world to take a stand on the right side of history.

3. From the Eight Hour Day to the European Union: GMB's work internationally to make work better

- 3.1 Thousands of GMB members work in sectors and companies that are multinational in how they operate and how they make money. Increasing global integration of businesses and supply chains has meant what affects our members at work is more than just what happens in the workplace.
- 3.2 To make work better, GMB has in the past maximised our influence and leverage internationally to support our members' industrial interests, and develop worker solidarity across borders to help win in the workplace.
- 3.3 GMB was founded with a specific critique of capitalism in mind that had an immediate practical application in improving the lives of its members, their families, and wider society. In an age of unregulated working hours, where gas workers were expected to feed the furnaces at Beckton in 18-hour shifts: the union adopted the Eight Hour Day Campaign.
- 3.4 This was an internationalist movement, originating in North America, spreading quickly across the Atlantic to Europe's Social Democratic parties. Its aim was to divide the day into three equal parts: one for work, one for leisure, and one for rest. It was transformative and its gain was among our union's first great victories, dignifying work and working-class life.

GMB in Europe

- 3.5 GMB has a proud history of leading in Europe, using leverage and solidarity to make work better in the UK when our own government was not. GMB was the first union to establish an office in Brussels when the UK was a member of the European Union (EU) – a forward base for challenging power of unscrupulous multinational employers and anti-union governments.
- 3.6 The UK being in the EU was not inevitably going to bring benefits for the working-class. It was legislation like the Working Time Directive (1998) which

remain a cornerstone of UK employment law on working conditions and safety that became part of the EU's 'social chapter' rights hard-won by campaigning from GMB and other European trade unions, despite UK governments opting-out of crucial protections contained within it.

- 3.7 For example, under UK law today travel time between home and work should count as paid working time for workers with no fixed workplace depending on their contract, such as gas workers and home carers. While enforcement of this remains a task for the UK Labour government, the legislation originates from an EU Court ruling established thanks to a case brought by the Spanish trade union Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) in 2015.³



GMB's European Office march with our steel industry members in Brussels, 2010s

- 3.8 Our work in Europe also focused on defending the rights of migrant workers in the UK including Polish construction workers in 2012.⁴ This initiative was rooted in longstanding work, begun when Paul Kenny became General Secretary, to reach agreement with the Polish Embassy in order to direct Polish workers experiencing widespread exploitation in the UK to the GMB.
- 3.9 Polish branches were established and GMB Southern and London Regions did enormously valuable work in recruiting, helping, and supporting these new workers. At a time of unhelpful, populist, slogans (such as 'British jobs for British workers') GMB blazed a bright path in integrating Polish and other East European workers into the workplace, supplementing skill sets without diluting terms, conditions, and pay; and levelling up right across our industries.

3.10 Much like GMB's political work in Westminster, its work in Brussels was at its core about speaking truth to power. Working alongside our affiliated European and global public sector union federations, GMB put pressure on lawmakers in the European Parliament to take a stand when multinational outsourcing giants cut UK cleaner and facilities staff terms and conditions to the bare minimum. After this pressure put in danger their contracts with the European Parliament, these giants finally agreed to raise conditions.

Global solidarity

3.11 When big trade deals abroad affected jobs at home, GMB stood tall from its presence in Europe and our members solidarity with workers in their industry globally; tall enough to reach the highest corridors of power.

3.12 When the jobs of GMB Scotland members working in the Scotch Whisky industry were under threat from US-UK trade frictions in 2020, GMB jointly and successfully lobbied the UK and US governments with American food and drink sector unions to urge fair trade solutions and protection of our industries from retaliatory tariffs.⁵

3.13 Through its affiliation with global union federations, GMB has also helped build networks of trade unions across key multinational employers such as Amazon and ISS, co-ordinating campaigns to improve working conditions in these companies.⁶ These Federations also co-ordinate European Works' Councils and Global agreements with multinational companies.

3.14 These links have brought invaluable leverage for GMB members to win their disputes in recent years, particularly our London Region members fighting 'Fire and Rehire' practices in Pilgrim Food Masters' Park Royal site, and our North West & Irish Region members fighting the offshoring of their jobs at Jacobs biscuits in Aintree, Liverpool. During these disputes the public solidarity GMB received from the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF) and European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism unions (EFFAT) boosted members' morale and the Vice President of the IUF's intervention with the owners of Pilgrim Food Masters helped force that employer backtrack on their shocking Fire and Rehire plans.



Global Amazon Alliance unions take part in GMB's Amazon Black Friday protest in Coventry, November 2023

- 3.15 GMB action internationally has also helped protect workers' rights to organise in hostile environments abroad. After successive attempts by the Costa Rican government to drive trade unions out of the banana industry which was dominated by unethical multinational companies like Chiquita and Del Monte, GMB action forced the Costa Rican government to back down under intense international scrutiny, particularly by EU bodies.
- 3.16 Through working with groups such as BananaLink, GMB's work to defend the rights of workers in the industry covered many countries in Latin American and Africa, helping unions' build organising capacity and secure historic collective bargaining agreements.⁷

4. Global issues, workplace conversations – GMB international priorities in a changing world

- 4.1 Global issues have increasingly become workplace conversations. The impact of energy price shocks following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the far-reaching shadow of conflict in the Middle East, and racist riots at home fuelled by far-right social media posts abroad are just some examples.
- 4.2 Global issues can be complex and hard to predict, but our aims and values in responding to them are not. Our ability to influence on our own will be limited, but we have many counterparts around the world looking for our solidarity and collaboration on the issues that affect us all. GMB acting on its internationalist duty has made a positive and effective contribution to working people's struggles in the past and we can do so again.
- 4.3 This chapter sets out priority areas of focus to guide GMB's international work as the world undergoes and even greater period of change than it did in the last century.

a) Bringing jobs and security home

- 4.4 If we cannot bring home jobs offshored by deindustrialisation and protect our public services decimated by austerity, then our global solidarity will have no organised working-class left to deliver it.
- 4.5 The global economy has been shaken by the trade war ignited by President Donald Trump in his second term of office, declaring his announcement of tariffs "Liberation Day".⁸ Yet Trump's organised chaos was not about putting workers' first, but rather 'America first' no matter the economic cost to American workers or their fellow workers abroad.
- 4.6 That being the case, we must not ignore how Trump's Presidential campaign won by exploiting the disillusionment of the American working-class with the effects of neoliberal 'free-market' policies: deindustrialisation and isolation of communities, despite some of Trump's most notable

supporters being the same billionaire-class who contributed to such problems to begin with.⁹

4.7 In the UK, the Tories' failed austerity agenda and the economic legacy of Margaret Thatcher's government have kept jobs and decent wages in short supply leaving those in left-behind communities with no hope and no places to feel proud of together. Without an alternative policy agenda to this status-quo that points the finger at those wealthiest benefiting from this exploitation, the false narrative from parties like Reform UK and far-right groups that working people should 'punch down' against those visibly different and more disadvantaged will gain traction.

4.8 How our Government responds to these global economic shocks will affect our members' jobs, families, livelihoods and communities for years to come. However, the UK should not turn inwards from the world or itself seek to 'punch-down' from a higher place on the pecking-order.

A worker-centred trade agenda

4.9 Instead, a worker-centred trade agenda is needed in the UK starting with a new trading relationship with the European Union (EU) that restores export levels and establishes policy stability for workers in exporting industries.

4.10 The EU remains by far the UK's most important trading partner. 41 per cent of our exports go to the EU, but UK firms have experienced rising trade 'frictions' since export controls were introduced in 2021.¹⁰

"Mr Trump's logic, if it exists [...] is brutally simple: you may sell your goods to Walmart shoppers, but only if you let US cloud services Hoover up your data, US media flood your screens and US tech monopolies operate on their terms – not yours." ***The Guardian***, 5th

April 2025

4.11 In sectors from chemicals to vehicles production, GMB reps have reported that sales to Europe have collapsed since Brexit, and those orders have not been replaced by demand from the wider world. This has exposed the UK to

the winds of Trump's tariffs and forced the UK to rush into a trade deal from a position of weakness to save our key sectors.

4.12 The UK trading world is struggling to get bigger while many countries across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa benefit from reduced trading barriers with EU member states by joining the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean convention (PEM).

4.13 We note the comments by Government Ministers and former UK trade officials that while PEM is not a customs union, it provides a wider set of arrangements that could make a meaningful difference for industries with complex supply chains, such as car manufacturing, chemicals, and food production.¹¹

4.14 GMB calls for:

- UK membership of the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean convention which would make a positive contribution to the practical challenges the UK government faces in a new trading environment, deepening co-operation with our nearest trading partners while supporting UK domestic industries.
- Any "reset" of the relationship between the UK & the EU must resolve the Tory Government's failure to implement the Withdrawal agreement and supports the Labour Government's aim to remediate these disagreements.

4.15 In line with the CEC Special Report on a New Deal with Europe carried by Congress 2024, it remains GMB policy that the UK's best future would be served through a customs union with the EU combined with tariff-free access to the single market. However, both main parties have ruled out pursuing this aim in the upcoming Trade and Co-Operation Agreement renegotiation in 2026.

4.16 The EU have proposed a youth mobility scheme which is an important part of their requirements for a reset of the EU/UK relationship. The CEC reaffirms its support for the youth mobility scheme and Erasmus+ and GMB has

used its place in the Domestic Advisory Group to call for an ambitious youth mobility scheme to be negotiated.

4.17 GMB continues to work with our sister unions in the EU to develop a strong, worker-centred trade agenda for the 2026 review through our place on the Domestic Advisory Group for the government's negotiating priorities in the TCA review, and our affiliation to union federations in Europe.

4.18 As set out in Congress 2024's Special Report, this includes securing new customs and VAT agreements with the EU to reduce economic frictions, 'Swiss-style' regulatory alignment in chemicals and other key sectors to avoid damaging duplication and restoring energy co-operation clauses the UK's membership of the North Seas Energy Cooperation group.¹²

4.19 Beyond Europe, GMB demands a worker-centred trade policy that:

- Insists on enforceable labour standards as a condition of any new trade agreements and opposes trade deals with states that systematically abuse and exploit workers and deny them their rights under core International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions.
- Contributes to global emission reduction targets by establishing a UK Carbon Borders Adjustment Mechanism, matching EU provisions, to protect our manufacturing industries like steel from being priced-out by artificially subsidised goods with higher carbon-embedded content in countries with looser emissions rules like China.
- Pursues a truly 'rules-based' approach ensuring trade rules work for the UK. This includes ending blanket prohibitions in WTO and TCA rules on 'domestic contents requirements' to ensure UK jobs are created when public money is used to invest in industries at home and an effective response to Trump's 'America first' trade policy.

Taking our domestic defence seriously

4.20 Congress believes that it is in the interests of the trade union movement globally and people across the UK that our government is committed to peaceful diplomatic solutions to overseas conflicts. However, the

government's integrated defence review demonstrates that a reset of UK defence policy is required to ensure that if conflicts do come closer to home, our domestic defence is taken seriously.

- 4.21 Congress 2023 agreed that there continues to be no alternative for our domestic security to properly trained and equipped UK armed forces as part of NATO while GMB has rightly criticised specific interventions made by NATO.
- 4.22 This remains policy but constant review is required in a changing world and a future where our own defence policies are not met by the failure of such mutual defence obligations to keep us safe should not be ruled out. In April 2025, US Ambassador to NATO Matt Whitaker assured that "under President Trump's leadership, NATO will be stronger and more effective than ever before"¹³ yet Trump himself has cast doubt on whether the US would guarantee defence of other NATO countries under attack, has opposed expanding NATO to include Ukraine¹⁴, and has even threatened to invade territory run by other NATO members in the name of "protecting the free world".¹⁵

b) Humanitarian issues are trade union issues

- 4.23 In these times it is more important than ever to stand up for every human being's entitlement to the universal rights that our own members have at home, especially when our governments fail to do so.
- 4.24 We also cannot hope to promote the interests of our members as working people if humanitarian catastrophes destroy workers in other countries' jobs, trade unions, livelihoods and even their entire existence.
- 4.25 For three years the people of Ukraine have endured unimaginable horror, death and destruction at the hands of the illegal Russian invasion. GMB members have led the way in answering the call to help them by raising money and material aid so that Ukrainian unions can put their strength in organising workplaces towards strength organising humanitarian resistance.

- 4.26 Since then Ukrainian pharmaceutical workers have distributed emergency aid, railway workers have been evacuating refugees and care workers grew their union membership by 70 per cent as they defend a health system stretched to the limit by war.¹⁶ GMB continues to proudly stand by our sister trade unions in Ukraine as they fight for a future free from occupation and a socially-just reconstruction of their country with decent work at its heart.
- 4.27 In the United Nations Charter, the UN Security Council including the UK, US, Russia and China bear the “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security”, but have clearly failed to do so when it is most needed. The United Nations’ General Secretary has sharply criticized the powerful but deeply divided Security Council members for a ‘failure of leadership’, using veto powers to avoid action on breaches of international law by members’ allies and to end wars in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan.¹⁷
- 4.28 Removing veto powers from the five permanent members of the security council-level would immediately make the world even more dangerous with direct conflict between global powers more likely and endanger the safety of UN peacekeepers around the world. That said, reform is clearly needed especially given that the ten non-permanent rotating security council members do not have veto powers. GMB supports the broad case for such reforms and the empowerment of the General Assembly as the main decision-making body within the UN, ensuring more balanced and transparent governance in international matters.

Palestine

- 4.29 Congress is outraged by the unfolding genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank by Israeli forces nearly two years on from the atrocities committed by Hamas against Israeli civilians on 07th October 2023.
- 4.30 Gaza is unliveable. Over 50,000 people have been killed, with the majority of verified deaths being women, children and the elderly.¹⁸ Almost the entire population has been displaced at least once and the UN estimates that about 92% of all residential buildings in Gaza have been damaged or

destroyed.¹⁹ Many more tens of thousands have been injured – or are believed to be lying dead under the rubble of the demolished landscape.

- 4.31 Among the thousands of civilians killed in this conflict are health workers, schools workers and aid workers including UK nationals. As Congress 2024's Statement makes clear, Palestinians and Israelis must have the right to live in safety, security and dignity. No one should be subjected to acts of terror, collective punishment or antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate regardless of the justification used.²⁰

- 4.32 Israel is on trial for genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for its military actions and the International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants for senior Israeli leaders for war crimes.

- 4.33 The critical element in determining whether a genocide is taking place is the intent to destroy a group – in whole or in part – and evidence has not been hard to find. After Israeli forces unilaterally broke the ceasefire with Hamas and sent troops back into Gaza, Israel's Finance Minister Belazel Smotrich Cabinet gloated that Gaza will be "totally destroyed" in six months and the Palestinian population "will be looking for relocation". Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz also praised Israel's two-month blockade of humanitarian aid from reaching Gaza as "a main pressure lever against Hamas", a statement that amounts to admission of committing the war crime of using the starvation of civilians as a weapon.²¹

- 4.34 By invading Lebanon and areas of Syria, Israeli forces have spread a humanitarian catastrophe further and brought the region to the brink of conflict. Israel's offensive in Gaza also follows decades of violations of Palestinian human rights, ethnic cleansing, and the imposition of a system of oppression against all Palestinians that is recognised by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) as violating the prohibition on racial segregation and apartheid.²²

- 4.35 Many of the daily indignities Palestinians face under Israeli occupation explain why the ICJ has reached this ruling. A TUC delegation to the West Bank, illegally occupied by Israel since 1967, found that 200,000 Palestinian workers have lost their jobs since October 7th 2023 after work permits to

enter Israel for work were frozen by the authorities. Those entering without permission now face up to four years in prison. Unemployment and short-term poverty have both doubled.²³

4.36 Meanwhile violence is soaring. The UN recorded more than 1,400 attacks by settlers against Palestinian communities since October 2023. Last year, a 22-year-old Palestinian man was shot dead as dozens of Israeli settlers torched his village.²⁴ In October, a 59-year-old woman was shot dead while harvesting olives.²⁵

4.37 Palestinian human rights group Al-Haq reports that while Israeli workers are employed under Israeli labour laws, getting them better wages and other protections, while Palestinians working in Israel settlements are employed under “antiquated Jordanian labour laws on significantly lower pay-scales with no benefits or healthcare,” and are not even protected by any labour laws when working in Israel’s illegal settlements, meaning workers can earn as little as equivalent to £10 to £18 for a ten-hour day.²⁶

“After 7 October, it became too difficult for our workers to enter Israel [...] many of them refused to work in the settlements in the West Bank without any kind of rights, because of the difficulty of living in that area. We want to build factories in our area so our workers don’t have to work in settlements.” **Ahmad, Palestinian agricultural worker in the occupied West Bank.**

4.38 The continued illegal Israeli military occupation of Palestine territories will only exacerbate and increase the ongoing forced displacement of Palestinians from their land and the erasure of Palestinian life, culture, and history in the occupied West Bank, including eastern Jerusalem, and Gaza.

4.39 The continuing aggression under Netanyahu’s government is also a clear threat to the security and lives of millions of working-class and poor people throughout the Middle East, including the Israeli Jewish and Arab working-class.

- 4.40 Netanyahu's regime is growing deeply unpopular within Israel. Resurging peace movements and the first general strike since the government attempted to curb the power of the judiciary on 2 September 2024 have explicitly called for a ceasefire in Gaza and a deal to return Israeli hostages. Thousands of reservists have signed letters demanding Netanyahu stop the fighting.²⁷
- 4.41 GMB condemns the international backing given to the Israeli regime's military action. The UK Government should not be aiding or assisting Israel's unlawful presence in Palestine and is at risk on being in breach of its obligations under international law and complicit in war crimes against Palestinians.
- 4.42 The UK government must therefore do more to uphold international law and pressure the Israeli government to respect Palestinian human rights. This must include a ban on trade in goods from Israel's illegal settlements.
- 4.43 For a just and lasting peace, GMB calls for:
- The withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories of Gaza, the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Lebanon.
 - The UK government to ban trade with illegal Israeli settlements and all other trade that is proven to be aiding or assisting Israel's violations of international law.
 - The UK Government to cease selling or providing weapons of any kind that are used in its violations of international law against Palestinians. Governments, public bodies, companies and other institutions should not contribute to war crimes abroad.
 - Immediate return to a ceasefire by Israel and Hamas and the release of all remaining Israeli hostages and Palestinians unlawfully detained.
 - A lasting, two-state solution to the conflict with an independent socialist Palestinian state, alongside a socialist Israel, with guaranteed rights for all minorities. This is GMB's longstanding policy alongside our

support for peaceful solutions to conflict in the wider Middle East, based on socialist international working-class unity.

- Urge the UK government to immediately recognise the State of Palestine in supporting a two-state solution, as have Ireland, Norway and Spain.

In building its solidarity with Palestinians, GMB will:

- Work with our Parliamentary Group to amplify our calls on the UK government to immediately halt the sale and supply of weapons, parts and equipment, logistics and financial aid for Israel's military action, in line with UN warnings that Israel's use of these weapons is violating international humanitarian law.
- Continue to publicise workplace days of action for Palestine called for by the TUC.
- Strengthen our solidarity work with Palestinian trade unions in Gaza and the West Bank, and support Palestinian Arab workers in Israel, including providing platforms for them to speak and amplifying their voices.
- Continue to encourage boycott and disinvestment from goods of companies who profit from Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and illegal settlements. In line with our existing policy, we will consult closely with GMB representatives in workplaces where employers continue to instruct workers to handle such goods on what assistance GMB can provide to support members who refuse to handle them.
- Continue to encourage branches to affiliate to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and support our members right to attend PSC demonstrations in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

c) Unity and strength of working people around the world

- 4.44 Decent work and workers' livelihoods are being rolled back around the world. The number of workers in poverty increased by 8.4 million in 2023, while the number of those in informal employment reached 2 billion.²⁸ Those who die every year due to work-related diseases and accidents increased by 5 per cent compared with 2015, linked to extreme weather events and atmospheric pollution.²⁹
- 4.45 Anti-union legislation, growing insecure work and new technologies in many sectors across Global North countries have skewed the balance of power in the workplace back towards bad employers. The election of Donald Trump in the US last year alone saw a surge of \$64 billion in wealth for the world's ten richest people including Jeff Bezos, founder of union-busting Amazon.³⁰
- 4.46 In the Global South, workers continue to see widescale violations of their rights and increasing vulnerability to the effects of climate and economic crises. Low wages, excessive hours and lack of labour and social protections are maintaining informal, hard-to-organise forms of work and perpetuating poverty twenty-five years after the United Nations first established universally-agreed objectives for tackling it.³¹



Sri Lankan workers on strike at Sumithra show solidarity with GMB members on strike at ASDA, May 2024. Sumithra workers manufacture clothes for sale in ASDA stores

- 4.47 Global issues affect all of us and are the responsibility of us all to tackle. It is workers in the Global South who are hit first and worst by the floods, drought and wildfires caused by the lasting effects of man-made emissions in the Global North. Yet the effects will also wash up on our shores when global

supply chains that keep food and clothes in our shops collapse, and uninhabitable places from natural disasters and wars force more vulnerable people seek refuge in Europe and North America because they have no other choice.

Another future is possible

- 4.48 The old saying that 'an injury to one is an injury to all' has been demonstrated by GMB supporting workers in struggle around the world for a better future.

- 4.49 The world's unions are fighting back. There have been nationwide strikes called by unions in Belgium, Italy, Israel and Greece in the last few months alone – all called to oppose austerity budget cuts or the continuation of war by their governments.³²

- 4.50 GMB often plays its small part by working with solidarity campaigns which we are affiliated to in order to help build our members' links and understanding. Which campaigns GMB supports is largely decided by Congress and the consideration of our CEC Finance & General Purposes Committee.

- 4.51 Working with groups like War on Want, GMB has built solidarity links with Sri Lankan workers in FTZ-GSEU union making clothes for sale in ASDA stores. Women workers at Sumithra went on strike for five months last year fed up with bullying by management and low pay. They and our ASDA members on strike last year shared solidarity video messages to each other at either end of their shared supply chain, directly from the picket lines.

- 4.52 Working with Justice for Colombia, GMB continues to urge UK support for Colombian trade unions' demands of peace and social justice after decades of conflict where thousands of trade unionists have been murdered and continue to be today. In Cuba, a sponsor of the Colombian peace process, members of the National Union of Energy and Mine Workers (SNTEM) have been working in the aftermath of hurricanes to resolve the country's energy crisis fuelled by the 62-year illegal blockade of Cuba by

the United States.³³ GMB continues to show solidarity with Cuba's struggle for self-determination through the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC), urging branches to affiliate to CSC, raise awareness and contribute to material aid appeals to help Cuban workers keep their schools and hospitals running under the blockade.

4.53 GMB's agenda on the international level will continue to promote:

- A common agenda defending and advancing workers' rights, human rights, strong trade unions and environmental protections which remain under attack by multinational employers and oppressive governments.
- Working proactively with our affiliated European and global trade union federations, solidarity campaigns and other organisations to build union-to-union solidarity in sectors where our members work.
- Action internationally to counter the threat of global markets to the public sector and to promote public ownership of the 'commanding heights' of nations' economy, as is GMB policy for the UK.
- GMB to play its part in international efforts from our affiliate union organisations to promote workers' rights and policies that end exploitation of people and planet globally.
- A worker-centred approach to tackling global issues such as trade, conflict and climate change, ensuring that change is led by workers, not done to them.
- Solidarity with those living under the biggest forms of exploitation such as systematic inequality, Apartheid and violations of their nations' right to self-determination by the aggression of more powerful countries.

Against the global rise of the far-right

- 4.54 GMB has long stood resolute in our commitment to equality and safety for all, and it has never been more needed for us to do so.
- 4.55 Recent gains of the far-right ideologies in the United States elections have raised significant concerns for democracies worldwide, including the UK. The interplay between these reactionary political movements across the Atlantic and the number of marginalised communities targeted by their hate highlights the urgent need for an intersectional response, addressing systemic inequalities still persisting in our society.
- 4.56 The consequences of unchecked right-wing extremism that has risen in the United States, particularly during the Trump administration, is profound. The Trump administration has not only actively championed a narrow agenda in the US that subjugates the interests of marginalised communities, but sought to endorse far-right parties and politicians in Italy, Germany, Spain, Argentina and the UK.³⁴
- 4.57 It is disheartening to observe a regression in the progress for which many have fervently fought— fuelled by the frustration of ordinary citizens exploited by the Trump campaign without explaining the true ramifications of their choices. Nonetheless, the labour movement must redirect our focus to the global repercussions of this shift. It is imperative that other nations do not perceive this as a mandate to perpetuate or intensify their own regressive policies and actions against vulnerable populations.



GMB members at Hinckley Point C project show solidarity with Colombian unions marching for better rights, equal pay and an end to violence against trade unionists, September 2023

- 4.58 We must forge a unified front with unions and progressive forces in other nations to resist and confront this perilous tide of regressive ideology that imperils human rights worldwide. As trade unionists in the UK, we bear a responsibility to lead by example within our workplaces by advocating for and enacting equality policies and legislation.
- 4.59 UK politics is already exhibiting troubling signs of this regressive agenda, and we cannot permit the detrimental effects of Trump and his associates to take root here. We must remain vigilant and proactive in opposing these influences.
- 4.60 In working closely with our self-organised race and equality networks and wider trade union movement bodies such as the TUC, GMB will:
- Demonstrate support and solidarity with our American counterparts targeted by the far-right increasing in its influence in US politics.
 - Foster continuous awareness of the threats posed by right-wing organisations globally and encourage concrete measures from across the trade union movement to counter their influence on working people.
 - Urge the Government to do more to push back against these far-right views from the United States ensure that such ideologies do not permeate the UK.

5. Solidarity begins at home – building a truly internationalist trade union in a changing world

- 5.1 If unity is our strength, then responding to this changing world with our policy priorities and members' interests above requires GMB to deepen and broaden our international work as a union.
- 5.2 Doing so will help us build on our history as a truly internationalist trade union by incorporating international solidarity into what we do at all levels of making work better for our members
- 5.3 This requires GMB playing a proactive part with global trade union partners as well as those in the wider movement against exploitation of working people and the global challenges we face. This will involve seizing more opportunities to shape the international agenda through the kinds of work set out in previous chapters through our affiliated organisations and building our union-to-union links in the changing global economy.
- 5.4 But it will also involve making international solidarity and leverage campaigning a priority for our industrial, organising and educational work as a union. Only then can our solidarity and international work be more member-led and alive to the world of work as our reps and branches feel it, and the impact on them from the world around us.
- 5.5 Developing the awareness and involvement of our lay-members and structures in our international work is crucial, so that our solidarity stands taller and broader.

In building a truly internationalist trade union, GMB will:

- Mainstream the value of international solidarity to GMB's work in our induction and education offers for GMB members and Workplace Representatives

- Build an international directory for GMB Organisers to find the relevant unions represented in the same overseas employer to contact requesting solidarity in our disputes.
- Ability for branches to request information on international policy and speakers, in order to enhance their knowledge base, industrial effectiveness, and branch culture.
- Develop an international solidarity toolkit which GMB officers and representatives of the union can access, providing information on policies, practical guidance and signposting resources.
- Prioritise lay-member involvement in our international engagement opportunities, so that the insight, experience and linkages they provide are reinvested into our members' collective strength in the workplace.

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