



CEC Statement

Politics and the Labour Party



**MAKE
WORK
BETTER**

GMB Congress 2026

CEC Statement

1. Introduction

- 1.1 GMB actively engages in the political arena because what happens here directly impacts on working people's lives just as much as what happens in the workplace.
- 1.2 Pay, pensions, energy bills, job security, health and safety, public services, employment rights and the future of the industries our members work in are not determined by employers alone. They are shaped by governments, by legislation, by budgets, and by political decisions taken in Westminster, the devolved nations, in mayoral offices and in local councils.
- 1.3 If we are serious about defending and improving the lives of GMB members, then we cannot be absent from the places where those decisions are made.
- 1.4 This is the simple truth which was at the heart of our Congress 2025 Special Report on Political Strategy: if we do not do politics, politics is done to us.

2. Our Historic Relationship with the Labour Party

- 2.1 GMB has a deep and enduring relationship with the Labour Party, driven by purpose and the interests of our members. Our affiliation is not about blind loyalty. It is not a blank cheque. It is not silence in the face of disagreement. It is about influence, access and leverage for working-class people through their union.
- 2.2 Labour was founded as the political voice of organised labour, and its democratic structures should continue to reflect that unique relationship. The collective voice of affiliated trade unions ensures that any Labour Leadership is grounded not only in individual membership support, but in the experience and priorities of working people organised through their unions. Preserving meaningful influence for affiliated unions strengthens Labour's connection to the workplaces and communities it was created to represent.
- 2.3 Through affiliation, GMB has a powerful, formal, democratic role within Labour's structures that no other political party in the UK offers trade unions. This includes giving our members a vote in the election of Labour's leadership, representation in policy-making bodies, at conference, and in the wider structures through which Labour develops its programme in government and opposition. This matters.

- 2.4 This democratic relationship is not theoretical. Across our regions, structures are already in place to ensure direct engagement between our lay leaders and GMB elected members, including regular meetings organised through Regional Committees and other structures. This reflects the intent of Congress motions **(M231/M232/M233)**, which are already being delivered in practice.
- 2.5 It means GMB is not outside the room when key decisions are made. We are not excluded and reduced to simply shouting after decisions have already been taken, like when the Tories are in power. We can shape policy before those decisions are finalised. We can argue for what our members need while policies are still being written. We can take the lived reality of our members in their workplaces into the political process before laws are drafted and manifestos are settled.
- 2.6 For a trade union, this is a serious source of power.
- 2.7 The gains won by working people have never come from goodwill alone. Employment rights are not gifts handed down by employers. They are won through industrial struggle and political struggle together. That is why affiliation matters so much.

3. What do we get out of our affiliation

- 3.1 One of the clearest examples of GMB political power in practice is the New Deal for Working People and the legislation that has flowed from it. Through the link with Labour, GMB and other affiliated unions were able to shape the party's plan to Make Work Pay and help build the political case for the new deal. That work helped deliver the landmark Employment Rights Act 2025, the biggest upgrade in workers' rights in a generation.
- 3.2 Such significant progress does not happen by accident. It is a result of working people organising industrially and politically and finding a political expression through the union's affiliation with Labour. GMB has a seat at the table. Our members' workplace experiences are turned into policy demands, which are carried into the heart of national politics.
- 3.3 Whether it is strengthening rights at work, challenging fire and rehire, improving recognition law, rebuilding collective bargaining, or fighting for fair treatment for school support staff, the lesson is the same: workplace demands must be backed by political power.

- 3.4 Affiliation gives GMB the means to turn our workplace campaigns into national change.

4. How do we challenge the Labour Party

- 4.1 That does not mean agreement on every issue.
- 4.2 GMB is clear: we support Labour where it advances the interests of working-class people, and we challenge Labour where it fails to do so. Our union has always shown that clearly.
- 4.3 We speak out where decisions hurt our members and communities. We challenge where we believe the government is wrong – winter fuel allowance, WASPI women, welfare, energy, equal pay, or visas for migrant care workers. **(M232/M233)**
- 4.4 This independence matters. But our independence is meaningful precisely because affiliation gives us standing. It gives our criticism weight. Ministers listen because GMB is not an outside pressure group shouting from the margins. We are one of the great trade unions of the Labour movement, representing hundreds of thousands of workers, with a legitimate and serious voice inside Labour’s democratic structures.
- 4.5 Affiliation means our support matters. It also means our anger matters. Without this relationship, without this political standing, our members would have less influence, not more.

5. Our Campaign Fund

- 5.1 GMB’s affiliation is funded through our Political Fund.
- 5.2 GMB’s own democratic campaign fund is controlled by the union and accountable to our members through our structures and Congress. It exists because our members have repeatedly backed the need for GMB to be politically organised. **(M231/M232/M233)**
- 5.3 Congress has also recently reaffirmed this political approach through the 2025 Special Report on Political Strategy. In that context, the call set out in **(M231/M232/M233/M235)** for a further consultation on affiliation is not necessary at this time, as the union has recently undertaken and concluded this democratic exercise.

- 5.4 This is important, because it means affiliation is not something done to members. It is something owned by our members through their union.
- 5.5 In return, affiliation gives members real benefits. It gives a direct route to influence national policy and representation inside Labour decision-making. It supports GMB-backed candidates from working-class backgrounds and with trade union values. It strengthens the union by allowing us to fight on both fronts: industrial and political.

6. Our changing political landscape

- 6.1 We live in a time of political disruption.
- 6.2 We recognise that we are now in a new era of multi-party politics. The old two-party system is fragmenting, and we are living through a period of unprecedented political volatility. Populism, from extremists on both the right and the left, is on the rise, and many voters are moving away from traditional political parties in search of change.
- 6.3 In this landscape, it is important to be clear about what sets parties apart.
- 6.4 Only Labour offers trade unions a formal, democratic role in shaping policy. Other parties may offer meetings or make promises. But they do not provide trade unions with a seat at the table, nor do they offer an enduring political relationship through which organised labour can influence decisions from within. This difference is so important. **(M231/M232/M233)**
- 6.5 Congress has also debated whether alternative political affiliations should be pursued, as reflected in **(M234)**. GMB takes these concerns seriously and continues to challenge the government robustly where it falls short. However, the current political landscape does not present credible alternative parties that both better represent our members' interests and offer a realistic pathway to delivering change in government. No other party provides trade unions with comparable democratic influence or a serious plan aligned with the industrial realities our members face.
- 6.6 Reform UK have shown time and again that they are no friend to working people. They attempt to present themselves as being on the side of our members, but their record tells a very different story. They opposed the Employment Rights Act at every opportunity, voting against it at Westminster. They have pledged a so-called "Great Repeal Bill" that would tear up thousands of protections relied upon

by our members. They have also made clear their intention to pursue a new wave of austerity, taking tens of billions out of public services and putting at risk the jobs, pay and pensions of working people. **(M231/M232/M233)**

- 6.7 But the politics of easy answers is not confined to the right. The Green Party and others on the left often advance policies that fail to recognise the realities facing working-class people and the industries on which their jobs and communities depend. Nowhere is this clearer than in energy and manufacturing. GMB members work in energy-intensive sectors – from ceramics, gas, nuclear and oil and gas to heavy industry and manufacturing – where jobs, communities and entire local economies depend upon long-term investment, industrial security and a properly managed transition.
- 6.8 Too often, Green Party policies put these jobs at risk. Calls for rapid phase-outs without credible plans for replacement industries, secure employment, energy resilience or skills transition leave our members facing severe uncertainty and substantial job losses. An approach that prioritises targets without a serious industrial strategy risks accelerating the avoidable disaster of exporting jobs, production and emissions overseas while weakening Britain's domestic industrial base and leaving working people to pay the price for the ideology of others.
- 6.9 This disconnect also extends beyond industrial policy into wider attitudes towards organised labour and political representation. Some within the Green movement increasingly draw false comparisons between the democratic political voice of trade unions and the influence of wealthy individuals or corporate donors. That fundamentally misunderstands the role trade unions play within British democracy. Trade unions are democratic, membership-led organisations representing millions of working people collectively advancing their shared industrial and political interests. They are not equivalent to private wealth, corporate lobbying or shareholder-funded political influence.
- 6.10 Attempts to weaken or restrict the collective political voice of organised labour would not reduce inequality of influence within politics; they would deepen it by strengthening the power of wealth while undermining one of the few remaining democratic counterweights available to working people. At a time when many working-class communities already feel excluded from political decision-making, the answer cannot be to diminish the role of trade unions within public and political life.

- 6.11 GMB supports the transition to net zero. But it must be a jobs-first transition as championed by Climate Jobs UK – one that protects jobs, creates new unionised industries, strengthens domestic manufacturing and ensures that workers are not abandoned in the process. That requires serious engagement with trade unions and a plan rooted in the realities of work, industry and working-class communities, not political slogans.

7. The 2026 Elections

- 7.1 On Thursday 7 May 2026, millions of voters across England, Scotland and Wales went to the polls to elect councillors, mayors, Members of the Senedd and Members of the Scottish Parliament in the biggest electoral test for the Government since the 2024 General Election.
- 7.2 While it was always understood that these elections would present significant challenges for the Labour Party, given both the historical difficulties governments face in mid-term elections and the scale of political volatility across Britain, the reality proved far worse than many anticipated. The results represented not simply a difficult set of elections, but a profound political warning to Labour and to the wider labour movement.
- 7.3 In England, Labour lost nearly 1,500 councillors and control of almost forty councils across the country, including areas that had historically formed part of Labour's industrial and working-class heartlands as well as key urban centres. Reform UK, the Greens, Liberal Democrats and independent candidates all benefited from growing political fragmentation and disillusionment among traditional Labour voters.
- 7.4 In Wales, Labour suffered its worst electoral defeat in modern history after more than a century as the dominant political force in Welsh politics. Under an enlarged Senedd elected through a fully proportional system, Labour was reduced to single figures, while Plaid Cymru emerged as the largest party. For the first time since devolution, Wales now has a nationalist First Minister.
- 7.5 In Scotland, despite widespread public fatigue with the SNP after nearly two decades in government, Scottish Labour failed to make the electoral gains they claimed were possible. Labour finished effectively tied for second place with Reform UK, while the Greens advanced in a number of communities where Labour

support had once been deeply rooted within organised working-class communities.

- 7.6 Across many communities, particularly those shaped by industrial decline, insecure work, rising living costs and pressure on public services, voters expressed growing frustration with mainstream politics and with institutions perceived as increasingly distant from working people's everyday lives. In different parts of the country this dissatisfaction took different political forms, but the underlying message was consistent: many working-class voters feel economically insecure, politically unheard and unconvinced that the current political system is capable of delivering meaningful change.
- 7.7 These elections must serve as a serious and urgent warning to the Labour Party and to the wider labour movement. Across Britain, growing numbers of working-class voters are turning away from traditional political institutions because they do not believe politics is delivering materially for them, their families or their communities. Where insecurity, declining living standards and frustration are allowed to deepen, the political space is increasingly filled by divisive, populist and far-right forces that seek to exploit anger while offering no real solutions for working people.
- 7.8 If Labour and the wider labour movement fail to change course, fail to reconnect with working-class communities and fail to deliver meaningful improvements in people's everyday lives, then the danger is not simply further electoral setbacks. The danger is the emergence of governments and political movements fundamentally hostile to trade unions, equality, public services, democratic rights and the collective interests of working people. The labour movement cannot afford complacency. The lessons of these elections must be understood clearly and acted upon urgently

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 GMB's approach is rooted in reality, not rhetoric. We judge every party by what it delivers for working people – secure jobs, strong rights, fair pay and thriving public services. On this test, both the protest politics of the right and promise politics of the left fail GMB members.
- 8.2 Our affiliation reflects a basic truth about class power in Britain.

- 8.3 Employers organise politically. Wealth organises politically. Corporate interests organise politically. Working people must do the same.
- 8.4 If organised labour is absent from politics, decisions will still be made, but they will be made without us and against us. GMB's affiliation helps ensure working people are not locked out of power. We are not left to deal with the consequences of political decisions taken without their voice being heard.
- 8.5 Our task is to use every lever available to advance the interests of our members; organising in the workplace, campaigning in our communities, maintaining a political voice where power is exercised.
- 8.6 The Labour Party's leadership election arrangements should continue to reflect its unique relationship with affiliated trade unions and the millions of working people they represent. A democratic balance must exist between the different sections of the party and the collective voice of organised labour, ensuring that affiliated unions retain a meaningful and distinct role in determining the leadership and direction of the party. This is fundamental to maintaining Labour's identity as a party founded by, and for, working people.
- 8.7 That is why GMB remains affiliated to the Labour Party. Because for working people, politics and the laws that govern work matter. Being at the heart of this relationship gives us power in our never-ending battle to make work better.
- 8.8 In summary:
- GMB's political engagement is essential to improving the lives of working people. Decisions on pay, rights, public services and industrial strategy are shaped politically, making organised influence vital.
 - Affiliation to the Labour Party provides GMB with unique democratic access and influence, including a formal role in shaping policy—something no other party offers. **(M231/M232/M233)**
 - Structures are already in place to ensure direct engagement between our lay leaders and GMB elected members, including regional meetings. **(M231/M232/M233)**
 - GMB's Political Fund ensures that affiliation is democratically controlled and member-led, with Congress reaffirming this approach through the 2025

Special Report. A further consultation on affiliation, as proposed in, is not required at this time. **(M231/M232/M233/MS35)**

- GMB maintains its independence, supporting Labour where it delivers for working people and challenging it where it falls short, including on key domestic and international issues.
- In considering the changing political landscape, GMB has carefully assessed alternatives. While concerns raised are recognised, there are currently no credible alternative parties that:
 - o Offer a comparable democratic relationship with trade unions.
 - o Present a serious, deliverable programme aligned with members' industrial interests.
 - o Provide a realistic pathway to government capable of delivering change. **(M234)**
- Proposals to pursue additional affiliations would risk weakening GMB's influence without securing tangible gains for members.
- GMB remains committed to a practical, outcomes-focused approach, using every lever available—industrial and political—to secure better jobs, stronger rights and fairer outcomes.
- Ultimately, political organisation is about power. Affiliation ensures GMB members are not excluded from decision-making and strengthens the union's ability to win lasting change.