



**Climate Change, Global Warming,
Sustainable Development**

The Green Agenda and the GMB

**CEC Special Report
Congress 2008**

PREFACE:

James Connolly, socialist and revolutionary, once famously said: **“We don’t want much – we just want the earth”**. Today he might well have chosen to amend this to:

“We just want the earth, to protect it for our children”.

The number of people in the world and their environmental impact is growing. To secure economic and social justice trade unions need to add to the mix the requirement for sustainable development. Without sustainable development economic and social justice can not be securely achieved. We have to recognise that there are limits in the areas described below and that we need to stop doing things that are threatening our environment.

Dealing with environment problems is not new. The generation of trade unionists that went before us had to deal with the pollution of the rivers of Britain and clean them up. They had to deal with the now forgotten smog in London and bring in rules to clean the air. One thing that all these things have in common is that legislation for collective action was needed to deal with pollution.

How GMB can help

GMB can take action on a wide number of fronts to help secure sustainable developments. GMB can look at what we do ourselves and how we can reduce our impact on the environment. GMB can look at how our members do their jobs and what can be done to reduce the impact on the environment. GMB can also add its weight to developing and building support of the policies that will be needed to secure sustainable development.

A number of environmental problems can only be solved by international action involving government, suppliers of goods and services and consumers. We can only solve environmental problems like cutting down forests, over fishing, degrading soil, using scarce water supplies and polluting our rivers and oceans with toxic chemicals or pouring green house gases into the atmosphere by stopping doing a large number of things that are leading to the problems in the first place.

GMB will only support a new Doha round that positively promotes labour and environmental standards. We will reject any suggestion that we are trying to dictate to people from countries less developed than our own that they should meet minimum labour and environmental standards and that we are putting them at a disadvantage to ourselves in doing this. We reject the view which states that the environment and labour standards has to be balanced against the economy. The opposite is the truth – a sustainable economy built with economic and social justice is the only guarantee of a decent economy.

GMB faces some tough decisions and potential criticisms in some areas of our industrial and environmental strategy. In some industrial areas, particularly nuclear and aviation, there will be potentially contentious choices to be made.

However our main task as a progressive trade union is to represent our members’ collective interests. This doesn’t have to be at the detriment of environmental policies.

On the issue of nuclear power provision there is a genuine debate amongst many who would consider themselves as supporters of the Gaia theory (holistic 'Mother Earth' approach) who support nuclear provision as nuclear power generation does not create greenhouse gas emissions.

GMB consider that as part of a balanced energy policy, nuclear power is a critical element in improving the quality of the atmosphere and replacing ever scarcer and ever more expensive oil and gas. GMB also consider that with the necessary public investment clean coal technology can be developed and brought on stream. These two developments will resolve the environmental problem we face with the limit on the amount of oil and gas that there is in the world while reducing the output of green house gases into the atmosphere.

GMB does need to engage positively on the green debate. As a trade union we already put our words into actions. We have a stake of one third in the Ethical Threads Company, where organic cotton is sourced and the whole chain of production, manufacture and supply is ethically based and sustainable.

There is a need to translate this philosophy into everything we do. It will not be easy but we need to establish a position where we can challenge the orthodoxy of the establishment and ensure that green, ecological and sustainable issues are on the agenda of every employer we bargain with. We will need to put continuing pressure on government to ensure that our voice is heard and that enforced standards are set at national and international level.

We will lead by example, and expect our social partners to accept the challenge of following the standards we set.

This is the basis of the agenda that the GMB Working Party will be working towards over the coming years.

CEC SPECIAL REPORT TO CONGRESS 2008:

THE GREEN AGENDA AND GMB: CLIMATE CHANGE, GLOBAL WARMING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

Introduction

The special report ***"The Green Agenda and GMB: Climate Change, Global Warming and Sustainable Development"*** adopted by Congress in 2007 was ambitious in scope.

Many of the actions called for in the original report committed GMB to a course of action to be developed over the coming years. Consequently, the work is an ongoing and evolutionary process and this report reflects the progress made by the Spring 2008.

The two main areas upon which the 2007 report concentrated on were:

- GMB internal arrangements relating to our own workplaces and practices

and;

- the negotiating and training agenda to be adopted by officers, activists and workplace representatives across all industrial sectors.

GMB Internal arrangements

Vehicle Provision

The Senior Management Team (SMT) demonstrated the GMB commitment towards the green agenda by agreeing to change the model of car supplied for the GMB Fleet by Toyota from the Avensis model, as standard, to the Prius model from April 2008. This will be rolled out over a two year cycle to meet existing contractual arrangements.

The Prius was introduced in 1997 and was the first mass produced hybrid car. Since its' introduction there has been further investment in cleaner manufacturing and greener technology, resulting in a reduction in CO2 emissions during manufacturing of 31% for this model.

The CO2 emissions from our current fleet of cars are around 1,225 tonnes annually. With the introduction of the Prius this figure will fall to around 870 tonnes annually. This is a reduction of 352 tonnes, equating to approximately 28% less carbon dioxide emissions. In addition the Prius is 90% recyclable! There are also taxation savings to be gained by the introduction of this model.

Energy Consumption and the Carbon Footprint

A start in terms of energy efficiency has also been made. All our electricity for GMB-owned buildings will be sourced from a single provider. We will then be better able to measure consumption and explore methods of greater efficiency.

Estimates show that the average personal computer uses over 500 Kw/hours of energy per year, equating to 250 Kgs (0.24 tonnes) of carbon emissions at an approximate cost of £59 each annually. Much of this energy is not always efficiently used, in that it is "wasted" during periods while the machine is switched on but not in use.

GMB has over 450 computers including laptops in current use and the National Administration Unit (NAU) investigated whether new software to put machines into standby or turn off when not in use could reduce carbon emissions and produce financial savings. It will issue new guidance to all staff on energy efficient working and use of equipment, with the expectation of reaping energy efficiency and financial savings. The fruits of this exercise are still to be reaped, but the principles involved are sound.

Birmingham and West Midlands Region have volunteered to be an environmental "guinea-pig" in terms of looking at all aspects of energy and material use. The Carbon Trust will help conduct a free audit to help identify priorities for action and develop more holistic environmentally-friendly policies.

The overall procurement strategy in terms of buying in goods and services for GMB is also being examined on an ongoing basis.

Internal Sustainability

Sustainability is often defined as ***"development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"***.

The working party which organises GMB's annual Congress has started to incorporate the green agenda into the planning and organisation stages of Congress itself.

More economic printing arrangements, including sensible steps such as double sided printing will mean up to 50% saving of costs and carbon emissions in this area. All photocopying and printing papers are recyclable. All printed documents in the Congress wallets is printed on paper certificated by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which promotes environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests.

Recycling arrangements for paper, glass and plastic have been agreed with the conference hall organisers, to take place in the hall and behind the scenes. In addition, all tea and coffee supplied will be sourced from Fair Trade suppliers, and the water provided in the conference hall will not be bottled water, but potable water from the mains supply. The GMB carrier bags provided are made from bio-degradable material.

At national level GMB has an environmentally friendly and sustainable procurement policy. Consumables bought by the GMB National Communications Department are sourced from suppliers who use chlorine-free and sustainable sources of paper, recycled where possible. Suppliers are required to operate under trade union-friendly agreements, with a signed recognition deal with the appropriate trade union. GMB also currently sources all goods and services within the UK.

On a national basis work has already begun in co-ordinating our collective buying strategy with one mobile phone provider and investigations are underway for one main stationery provider.

These steps will enable GMB to have considerable influence on both sourcing and sustainability in future contract negotiations.

The Green Working Group

The election of a new CEC has provided the opportunity to form a GMB working group to look at environmental issues, as detailed in last years report. The new group is a mixture of lay representatives with involvement from specialist staff and the National Administration Unit.

The group's inaugural meeting on 21st April will discuss the terms of reference under which the group will operate, and the work programme for the coming year and beyond. The group will meet in conjunction with main CEC meetings to reduce carbon emissions and limit travel and accommodation costs. The intention is for the group to provide an annual update to GMB Congress.

Initially the working group will be steered by the Health & Environment Department, though it is anticipated that the group will rapidly develop and work to its own agenda. At this stage, it is envisaged that it will prioritise the following areas of work:

GMB Environmental Representatives

There is no existing legislation to give trade unions the legal right to elect dedicated Environmental Reps. GMB, for a number of years, has considered the introduction of these reps, with attendant rights, to be crucially important to deal with the changing industrial, political and environmental landscape.

GMB has continued to stress the need for the creation of a role for Environment Representatives in its responses to recent government consultations; DWP: Involvement of the Workforce; DTI: Workplace Facilities. However the deregulation policy favoured by government, epitomised by the Better Regulation Executive, means that the introduction of such reps in the near future is extremely unlikely.

Rather than accept this situation, we intend to survey existing reps at workplace level to establish whether reps elected under a different title, e.g. H&S reps, Union Learning Reps or other branch activists are undertaking an equivalent role, with or without the goodwill of their employer. The proposed questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

By demonstrating the effectiveness of this role GMB will be in a position to influence future thinking, including possible amendments to a new proposed ACAS code which is due for consultation later this year.

GMB External Arrangements

Environmental Workplace Partnership Agreements

One of the key recommendations from the report to Congress 2007 was to establish guidance for officers and activists across all sectors to enable them to negotiate Environmental Workplace Agreements.

To this end the department has drafted an Environmental Policy which can be used as the basis for negotiation. A synopsis is provided in Appendix B and in full on the GMB website. The intention is that this document will continue to evolve and develop as awareness and knowledge on environmental issues grow.

Sectional Interests

Waste and Recycling

Domestic and household waste, while only accounting for 9% of the total waste generated in the UK, has the highest public profile of any potential waste generated. Presumably this is due to two main reasons.

Firstly and most obviously, is the fact that this waste originates in every household, to varying degrees, across the UK. As such it is highly visible, and particularly when uncollected, has strong associations in the public consciousness with public health and control of pests and diseases. Secondly, due to government imposed targets on waste minimisation, there has been a greater emphasis towards recycling over the last decade.

There are a number of varying drivers behind these targets. These include:

- the growing lack of available landfill space (and the consequent rising costs in landfill usage);
- Britain's poor collective recycling performance in respect of our European neighbours; and the need to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle.

There are inherent difficulties involved in moving towards a comprehensive waste minimisation strategy. Decisions taken at a national government level have to be enacted by local councils, which will vary immensely across the country due to a number of factors. These include density of population (rural, urban or sub-urban); the topography of the local landscape; the political will and priorities of the council; and perhaps most importantly the attitude of the client officers from the department, usually environmental health, which determine the collection methodology to be undertaken.

The GMB experience is that all too often these ground floor level decisions are taken with no reference to the workforce carrying out the collection. This often results in the use of inappropriate equipment, both for storage of recyclable materials and the receptacles into which they go, resulting in excessive manual handling and an increase in Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs). In an industry which is recorded as one of the worst in terms of fatalities and serious injuries, particularly when its' relatively small size is taken into account, this is an unacceptable situation.

In the autumn of 2007 the GMB Health & Environmental department drafted a letter to the Minister responsible, detailing some of GMB's concerns on these issues. In addition there are meetings taking place with the Department for the Environment, Fisheries and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on the merits of collections on a two weekly basis, especially in densely populated urban areas, or areas where there are high rise buildings with difficult access for residents and collectors. We are also in discussions with DEFRA on the potential for the introduction of charging for household waste by weight or volume through the use of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology.

The obvious answer to many of these difficulties is the early, and ongoing, involvement of the workforce through their trade union. The workers are the people actually carrying out the job and will be more aware of potential health, safety and environmental hazards affected by the job.

DEFRA have also recently issued a consultation document on Proposals for Establishing Joint Waste Authorities in England, which have implications for sustainability and recycling across the UK. GMB are developing options on the key issues, and will have given a considered response by Congress 2008.

Civil Aviation

The transport sector overall has been the fastest growing sector in the UK economy during the period 1990 to 2005. Within this, Air transport is the largest contributor to greenhouse gases. However, the air transport sector is also at the forefront of developing technology, including aircraft fuel efficiency. Estimates suggest that this has more than doubled over the last 40 years, and there are plans to develop a further 20% reduction in CO₂ and a 60% reduction in Nitrogen Oxide (NO_x) for all new engines in the near future.

The major problem with aircraft is that they are very long lived, which contributes to older, less fuel efficient aircraft still being in service based on the basic gas turbine engine designed in 1947.

The aviation sector is important for GMB in terms of membership. This sector is a growth area and a sensitive one in terms of environmental issues. Currently this industry is only responsible for 5.8% of CO₂ emissions in the UK, though there are difficulties in determining the international aspect of the effects of flying, but it is intended that civil aviation will soon be included under the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (EUETS).

Even in a recession it is predicted that the growth in popularity and importance of air travel is going to continue, though the actual numbers are difficult to state with any confidence. Unless there is a co-ordinated UK transport policy which addresses both reasonable cost and expanded capacity on the railways, customers will continue to use airlines to reach destinations from London such as Glasgow, Manchester and Paris which could be accessible by rail.

It should also be acknowledged that airports themselves have reduced the emissions from terminals during a period when overall numbers using them have increased dramatically. This could be further improved by reviewing and improving public transport access to major airports in the UK. In addition GMB will look at the need to set up environmental committees at each airport where Trade union reps and workers can have a practical input on the management of green issues.

Housing

Surprisingly waste from the construction industry contributes 32% of all waste generated in the UK, equaling 109 million tonnes of CO₂ each year! This in effect means that millions of pounds worth of materials are thrown away, mainly in landfill sites, contributing to both unnecessary wastage and inflating costs in the building and refurbishment areas. There are two areas that GMB can concentrate on in the future within this industry.

The first concerns the introduction in April 2008 of Site Waste Management Plans (SWMP) which will be expected to:

1. Identify the different types of waste produced
2. Adapt the design and materials specification to minimise waste
3. Consider how to re-use and recycle waste effectively
4. Record the quantities of waste produced
5. Comply with a duty of care.

On the surface this appears welcome but there is a considerable “downside” to this. The regulations only apply to those sites where more than £300,000 is spent. In addition there is to be a light regulatory touch from the enforcement authorities. As these are to be jointly enforced, by the local authority and the Environment Agency, both of which are under tremendous pressure in terms of receiving and allocating resources this is not entirely surprising, though it does fit in neatly with the current emphasis of deregulation or voluntary regulation across all industries.

There will be a need to educate GMB reps on all aspects of these proposals so that they may challenge unnecessary waste in construction in the future. We will develop good practice guidance for reps to assist them in achieving this.

The second area where GMB can be actively involved is in the green skills agenda. The government is specifying that all new build houses must move towards strict emissions criteria by 2015. In addition local authorities and other social housing providers can specify ecological installations when refurbishing their properties. As an added incentive this will mean that those members who are trained in using, and installing, green technology, such as photovoltaic panels, will have a competitive advantage in the bidding for, and winning of contracts.

There will obviously need to be a skilled workforce for this area, which will require new areas of training. One local authority branch in London region has already been put in touch with potential training providers with a view to receiving such training. GMB will need to both monitor and develop this area in the future, so that decent jobs are protected and new skills developed.

Energy Provision

The UK's energy needs in both industrial and domestic settings need to be met to underpin the requirements of a civilised society. GMB has existing members and potential members within the energy sector.

The debate on the need for nuclear power is often difficult and emotional. There is however a general recognition that nuclear power, with little impact from carbon emissions, will be

necessary to continue to provide a large proportion of the country's energy needs. This is particularly relevant as gas and oil supplies dwindle.

There will almost certainly be a renewed demand for coal to generate energy in the future. Currently the government is hosting a competition on the viability and resources needed for a Carbon Capture Storage facility. GMB has been involved with the development of practical ideas with Yorkshire Forward and are currently looking to gather information on a project taking place in Norway. (As can be seen much of this is both new and developing at speed).

Globally, the demand for energy will expand and innovative solutions will continually arise; in the developing world the use of organic matter is being transferred into energy sources.

There will certainly be chances to lobby and campaign for growth of the manufacturing sector linked to renewables in the future, and this will be part of ongoing policy.

The GMB will keep a watching brief on the potential for renewable energy generation and in particular any manufacturing opportunities which should arise from developments in the energy sector.

Environmental Representatives Survey (Appendix A)

1. Which union representative role(s) do you currently hold? (please tick all that apply)

- Shop Steward.....
- Safety Representative.....
- Union Learning Rep.....
- Diversity/Equality Rep.....
- Branch Secretary.....
- Other.....

2. Do you currently spend any time, either in work or outside of work, dealing with environmental workplace issues?

Yes **No**

3. If so, on average, how much time do you spend dealing with environmental issues per week? (to the nearest hour)

.....

4. Have you received official recognition from your employer for your functions on environmental issues?

Yes **No**

5. Is your employer supportive of your work on environmental issues?

Yes **No**

6. Do you receive facility time or paid time off for performing environmental functions?

Yes **No**

7. Does your workplace have a committee that allows the workforce to discuss environmental issues?

Yes **No**

8. Would you be interested in receiving more information on how you can become involved on environmental issues as a Union Green Representative?

Yes **No**

9. Which industry do you work in?.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your response will help to shape the future GMB approach to environmental issues.

Please return this survey to: Health, Safety & Environment Department, GMB, 22-24 Worples Road, London, SW19 4DD; or e-mail your completed form to daniel.shears@gmb.org.uk

APPENDIX B:

GMB WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT POLICY: SYNOPSIS

Introduction

Climate change has the potential to impact on all employers through rising energy costs and the upward trend in summer temperatures and the increased chance of extreme rainfall. This policy statement synopsis aims to address the environmental challenges that face GMB members. It details how the union can tackle these issues in collaboration and consultation with the workforce and membership.

Objectives

GMB aims to-

- Work with management, employers, staff and other potential stakeholders
- Help train and raise awareness among officers, reps and activists in environmental issues
- Establish an environmental committee, or as a minimum have environmental issues discussed at regular meetings, such as the H&S Committee
- Instigate monitoring procedures against measurable targets

GMB accepts that necessary changes will not happen all at once and will actively encourage all parties to work together to foster a mutual understanding in moving towards sustainable workplaces. The proposals detailed within this policy are not an exhaustive list and will evolve and develop as collective knowledge and experience grows.

Priority Areas

Currently GMB has identified five key areas for priority attention which should apply to the majority of workplaces. These are –

ENERGY

FOOD AND WATER

TRANSPORT

PROCUREMENT

RECYCLING AND WASTE

(These areas are looked at in greater detail in the advice to be found on the website).

Policy

GMB environmental activists are committed to the following goals:-

- √To establish an environmental forum/committee in the workplace
- √To evaluate the environmental impact of all activities
- √To use energy wisely and efficiently

- √To source energy from low carbon supplies
- √To achieve sustainable use of resources
- √To maximise the use of renewable and recyclable materials
- √To minimise pollution and waste from all activities
- √To use products and processes that have the least environmental impact
- √To reduce the amount of travelling
- √To use public, or sustainable transport where possible
- √To provide mains fed, potable, water in accessible and convenient forms
- √To work with third parties, i.e. contractors, to minimise environmental impact
- √To publicise information on environmental policy and performance
- √To exceed, where possible, regulatory and legislative requirements
- √To regularly audit and review all activities and practices.

Union Green Representatives/Environmental Reps

Although not established in law some GMB reps do act as green reps in the workplace and this section aims to lay down some good practice in carrying out the role. The central role is to attempt to encourage efficient use of energy and resources in line with the policy as detailed above. In addition they should act as a conduit between management and members feeding concerns, suggestions and responses in both directions. They should work closely with other elected reps and they themselves should be elected or appointed in a similar manner to other reps as they will come under the same democratic accountability. Negotiated arrangements on the facilities and time off for environmental duties should include adequate training provision for the role.

Conclusion

The green workplace agenda is a relatively new concept and to some extent it is very dependant on how strong and organised GMB is in each respective workplace. As a trade union we will continue to push for recognized environmental reps, but until this is achieved this policy is designed to help start the process of raising awareness on how the trade unions can make a positive contribution on environmental processes in the world of work.