



## GMB CONGRESS 2011

### CEC Statement – GMB’s Political Organisation

A number of ‘political activity’ motions have been submitted to Congress 2011, these motions seek to redefine the regional and branch political structures within GMB. Unfortunately they were submitted as motions and not rule amendments, so would have fallen. This statement aims to pull together and endorse many of the good points made.

This CEC Political statement also addresses the union’s wider political engagement and current best practice throughout the regions.

GMB political objectives are twofold; firstly to ensure that GMB’s industrial and social agenda is delivered at all levels of the political process and secondly to secure the election of Labour representatives who share our aims and values.

GMB currently has both formal and informal structures within the union promoting political objectives. Nationally, the structure is clearly defined; however at regional and branch levels, a far more informal and fluid structure has developed region by region. These structures best fit the individual political character and historic position of the region. They use our local branch and regional knowledge in a way that eludes many other organisations.

Congress sets the political priorities and objectives of the union, these are then implemented through the CEC and the Political, European & International Committee. GMBs National Political Department then delivers on a day to day basis; engaging with government and politicians on the key industrial issues and assisting in selections and elections.

There is also a Regional Political Officer (RPO) in each of the nine GMB regions. The RPOs work closely in conjunction with the National Political Department to develop and deliver GMB’s political aims at a local level.

#### **GMB members**

Members are actively encouraged to engage with their local Labour Party and ultimately not just vote Labour but also campaign for Labour. One current CEC project encourages GMB members to join Labour in target seats around Britain. Political meetings are organised with the local MP, region and branches. These have proved effective in encouraging political debate and engagement.

GMB has been actively encouraging members to join the Labour Party and there is a special form on the GMB website. There is also a reduced union rate of £1.70 a month. The more GMB members joining Labour, the more influence we can have on policy and campaigns.

#### **GMB Branches & Branch Political Officers**

The level of political activity at branch level varies widely across the union. Some branches invite their MPs and councillors to their meetings, whilst others do not engage politically.

One successful way of engaging members is for the RPO to attend branch and workplace meetings to talk to members and encourage them to get involved with their local Constituency Labour Party (CLP). Regions are further encouraged to support branches and branch officials to ensure political activity is fully developed.

GMB@WORK empowers members to develop a strategy that best organises their local workplace and their communities. Members should be encouraged to embrace political involvement in the same way and engage as appropriate. This should be developed in consultation with the RPO, Regional Secretary and Regional Committee.

### **Constituency Labour Parties**

Sending delegates to represent GMB on Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) is one of the most important ways to build a local dialogue. GMB branches are entitled to send 1 delegate for every 100 members they have living in a constituency. The delegate must be both a GMB and Labour Party member. Branches will have members living in many constituencies, so can therefore send delegates to not just 1 but as many constituencies as they have members living in.

Once you have a delegate to the local Labour Party, you can then submit motions and raise issues that are relevant to your members. Having delegates at CLPs is also important as from time to time selections will take place for councillors or MPs. GMB members who are delegates to their local CLPs will have an opportunity to influence who is selected.

### **Political Education**

Developing a regional political education programme is a key way that some regions have engaged with members. Political education modules have been written nationally; these have now been successfully run in a number of regions and can be tailored to suit all levels from introduction courses for new members, to political debates and discussion for the more experienced.

A number of regions currently run political education courses, whilst others incorporate political education sessions into shop steward and new reps training. This is all to be encouraged and built on where possible.

### **Winning Selections & Elections**

Across the union we work closely with the Labour Party to ensure its success at all elections – local, regional, parliamentary and European. Labour politicians are a critical part of delivering GMBs objectives. It is therefore vital that a key part of GMBs political strategy is to ensure those selected as Labour candidates are solid trade union candidates who share our aims and values.

The GMB parliamentary Panel is now open for those wishing to be selected and stand as Labour candidates in the next General Election. It is important that this is opened far and wide to ensure that the best shop stewards, representatives and members are given the opportunity to apply for it.

### **MPs, MEPs and Labour's elected representatives**

A number of regions currently organise political discussions and involve their regional GMB MPs, which can take a number of different formats. MPs are often invited to speak and take questions at regional councils, and regional or local forums. An important part of GMB's work is ensuring elected politicians are held accountable for the decisions they make on our behalf.

Another key issue is ensuring councillors and MPs are made aware of issues affecting GMB members. In addition to this, the Political Department liaises with the European Office to further campaigns within Westminster and the European Parliament. Some of the current issues we are working on are: Remploy, pensions, the economy, Southern Cross and the energy industry.

The National Political Department and European Office have arranged meetings and visits to Westminster and Europe for branches and members. These have proved very popular; they give members the opportunity, often in an informal environment, to question and discuss the latest political issues with Labour representatives.

### **Regional Political Forums & Engagement**

Each region has developed political campaigning methods that best serve its regional structure. For example, some regions choose a structure that interacts with both regional council and regional committee. Others have a more informal structure with groups meeting where necessary to discuss key issues or elections. Another has a political members' database which they use to organise hit squads of members to blitz areas at election time.

Regional political forums have become popular in a number of regions and have proved a successful way for members to interact with political campaigns and politicians. These forums, although often an excellent way to engage GMB members, are not the only option.

Regional Political Forums therefore can be set up, but size and geographical coverage remains at the discretion of the regional committees.

### **Conclusion - Delivering GMB Political Objectives**

Allowing regions the freedom to develop and deliver their own political strategy, in conjunction with the National Political Department, is necessary to ensure a fast and effective response to changing political circumstances. Being over prescriptive in structure can be bureaucratic and cumbersome. Inviting politicians to attend and having political debate at branch meetings will always be the best way to enhance political engagement.

Overall, the success of GMB political engagement can be measured in a number of ways. One key method is by the contribution we make nationally and regionally during elections. At the last General Election, GMB in conjunction with other unions, helped win 45 seats which stopped an outright Tory majority. The targeting of GMB resources coupled with our engagement with members and activists helped stop Labour's electoral wipe-out; preparing the groundwork to deliver a swift return to power.

### **Menu of options for each region to consider**

- Deliver a regional political education programme
- Encourage more members to join Labour
- Appoint a Branch Political Officer
- Invite MPs and councillors to your branch and hold them to account
- Encourage more members and reps to become CLP delegates
- Set up a regional, council or city political forum
- Organise a regional or local GMB member's election hit squad
- Identify GMB reps and members to stand as councillors and MPs
- Arrange educational visits to Westminster and Europe where appropriate