



Central Executive Council Special Report

GMB BRANCHES – A FUTURE THAT WORKS

**ANNUAL CONGRESS 2013
PLYMOUTH PAVILIONS**

CONGRESS – SUNDAY 2 JUNE - WEDNESDAY 5 JUNE

9.30 am - 12.30 pm, 2.00 pm - 5.30 pm

CONGRESS – THURSDAY 6 JUNE

9.30 am - 12.30 pm

GMB BRANCHES – A FUTURE THAT WORKS

GMB functions as a strong independent union because we have a dedicated solid lay member's organisation built around workplace and branch activity.

The world of work has changed dramatically in the 120 years since the union we know today, struggled into life as part of the birth of new unionism at the end of the 19th century.

Union structures, political landscapes, travel and communications have all changed since those early formative years.

The one constant has been the union branch. Its position in GMB is pivotal.

All elements of internal democracy stem from the branch. Its importance to our future is as great as it has been to our past.

But we have to face up to some difficult challenges around branch activities or risk putting our progress and growth at jeopardy.

The union is blessed in having some wonderful branches in every region, most of which go way beyond the rule book expectations and their membership activity bears witness to their efforts.

Those branches who always turn up, banners aloft, for demonstrations, whether at the local hospital under threat or on the Embankment in London, maybe travelling hundreds of miles, to bring the voice of working people from Hull, Durham or Dorset to political enemies in Whitehall.

Those branches who always nominate delegates for Congress, Regional Councils or external affiliated bodies; whether in Camborne, Mansfield, Wembley, Kings Lynn or Cardiff, branches bring members and communities together, a strong bond of comradeship and support.

The time honoured way of dealing with change is to wait for a brilliant idea to emerge!

For GMB we already have a blueprint for further and wider success. The trick is to raise branch organisation to the level of the best.

No need to re-invent the wheel just fit a couple, to certain branches, that just are not rolling at the moment!

It is possible of course to suggest that no problem exists; real activists know that is not a credible position to take. Some may even argue that if we just dismantle the whole union structure and create one thousand five hundred mini unions that will do the trick.

Equally and strangely some of these same people used to advocate scrapping all the branches and centralising power.

Both these types of suggestions are stupid, wrong, and undemocratic and frankly belong in the compost bin.

If the union is anything it is about

- **People, fighting together for social justice**
- **People banding together for a better future for themselves and their families.**
- **People who get angry about exploitation, discrimination and greed.**

But we have to face up to certain facts, trade unions have always functioned because of a core level of lay activists.

There has never been a time when everyone in the union clamoured to become a shop steward, branch officer or a delegate to Regional Council.

The problem we have encountered in the years since the 1980's has been to bring through that new generation of activists, that group that make the union tick.

The branch model is roughly the same for all, but the levels of activity between the best and the worst are simply miles apart.

It is time to conduct the largest consultation on branch activities we have ever undertaken. It is time to examine the whole structure of branch office holders. Although we have added some new rule book additions over recent years, some branches want new roles, reflecting changes in the world of work or our society.

However, creating a new branch post does not mean we can fill it, or the hundreds of current unfilled branch positions scanning the length and breadth of the union.

Financial organising tools already exist, but they go mostly unused. Regions struggle to fill delegations and turn out for our internal elections for offices like the CEC or even the General Secretary, are poor.

We know some of the reasons revolve around the legal restrictions which shackle our voting procedures but, more willing candidates for Branch, Regional, Congress and Executive Election must be our goal.

This Special Report proposes to:

- Consult with all Regions.
- Consult with all Branches.
- Seek the views of all GMB post holders, employees and CEC.
- Conduct membership surveys.
- Constitute a Working Party at least half of which will be lay branch officers, to examine the findings of the consultation and, report back to Congress 2014 with preliminary recommendations for widening lay member participation in union activities and democracy.

The significant progress we have made in expanding Congress delegate numbers and embracing the equality strands does give us a platform to build on.

A growing healthy combative GMB has nothing to fear for its future existence. The key here is to bring into play just a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of members who currently just do not bother to participate in their own union's future.