



1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 23rd June 2016 GMB members and voters across the UK will decide whether our country will remain a member of the EU or leave. The CEC recognises that this is the biggest decision our members are likely to make in a generation, and it has to be the right decision for our members, their families, for Britain and our future relationships with Europe and the rest of the world.
- 1.2 The CEC knows how important this issue is for our members, and understands their concerns for their jobs, their rights and protections at work, for the economy and, more widely, in their daily lives and the lives of their families for years to come. These concerns are raised clearly in the motions related to the referendum that have been submitted to this Congress.
- 1.3 In view of the great significance of the EU Referendum vote to our members, the CEC is presenting this statement to GMB Congress for debate and decision.

2. GMB in Europe

- 2.1 GMB has long recognised the importance of being active at EU level in campaigning for- and shaping rights and protections for our members and their families. As companies and economies increasingly operate cross border, it is vital that GMB has been able to promote and defend our members' interests at this level, and we have established a proud reputation of doing this successfully.
- 2.2 However, GMB has never been an apologist for the EU. We know the EU isn't perfect, and yes, it needs reforming to re-establish the commitment to the social Europe that our members were promised. We were active in seeing that delivered under Jacques Delors, but have had to fight to defend that progress from being undermined in the years that followed. If the EU is to have a future and regain the support of its people, it has to restore that social balance. Though the EU needs to change, the CEC believes that leaving the EU is not the answer.
- 2.3 That is why the CEC recommended in February that GMB should adopt the position of an "angry yes" to remain in the EU. Too much is at risk to vote to leave the EU, but we won't stop fighting for change for a Europe that works for working people, not big business.
- 2.4 The CEC believes that it is vital for our members to be able to make an informed decision based on the facts of what remaining or leaving the EU will mean for them and their families, and we have concentrated our information campaign on these key issues. For this reason, the CEC decided not to ally GMB to any of the formal remain

campaigns, which involved cross party and/or business interests that do not reflect the views of our members. Former Marks & Spencer boss Stuart Rose of the Stronger in Europe campaign is no friend of our members.

- 2.5 The CEC has major concerns about the bias being shown in the media, including the BBC, towards the Leave campaign, with the 10 o'clock news looking like the Boris Johnson road show.

3. Jobs and employment rights and protections

- 3.1 Many of the rights we've fought for over the years are guaranteed in European law - the right to paid holidays, parental leave, information and consultation, a wealth of health and safety legislation, environmental protections, laws that combat discrimination on a range of levels, and the right for part-time, fixed term and temporary workers to be treated equally. The need to protect and promote these rights is raised in many of the European motions to Congress. When we see the Tories attacking the very roots of our ability as a trade union to represent our members when they need us, we are glad we have the protection of EU law behind us.
- 3.2 The CEC recognises the concerns raised in so many of the motions to Congress that our members are very worried about the risks to their jobs if we leave the EU, and the wider effect this will have on UK trade and exports, investment and our economy across all sectors. Though no one can predict how many jobs will be at risk, TUC research and the consensus of most respected economists is that the threats to the manufacturing and service sectors alike could be considerable.
- 3.3 The CEC emphasises that the current threat to many of our jobs in Britain is not because of EU action, but because this Conservative Government consistently fails to support and protect British jobs and industry. It is the UK Government that is blocking stronger EU trade anti-dumping measures, and is the cheerleader for China to have Market Economy Status whilst the rest of Europe wants to stop this. It is David Cameron, not the EU, who is robbing our members in Tata Steel, in ceramics and other manufacturing industries of their jobs, and, if we are outside the EU, he will continue to sell our jobs to the highest bidder. The government needs to invest in protecting and promoting our manufacturing, financial and service industries.
- 3.4 The Tory Government is divisively making a scapegoat of migrant workers, attacking the victims of exploitation rather than those who exploit and undercut terms and conditions. It is the Tories who are opposing stronger EU rules to ensure the collectively agreed rate for the job where the work is done, and who give free rein to agencies and employers to actively recruit workers on lower pay and conditions to come to the UK. The Government has the power to stop undercutting in the UK, but is part of the problem not the solution. Its pitiful EU reforms restricting in-work benefits for migrant workers are a distraction from the real issue. If they were paid decent wages they would not require benefits.

- 3.5 Some in the Leave campaign camp argue that if the UK leaves the EU, we will be free of damaging EU trade deals such as the EU-US trade deal (TTIP), and EU Canada deal (CETA) that threaten public services, labour, environmental and product standards. This is true, but sadly, under the current Government, they would be replaced with even worse deals from a desperate, isolated government willing to accept wholesale deregulation and privatisation of public services, and ready to go the whole way with the US on their anti-trade union “*right to work*” agenda. The CEC reminds Congress that UKIP are as pro unfettered free trade as the Tories, and Nigel Farage is a former commodities trader who will never change his spots. GMB has led UK trade union opposition to these trade deals, and is actively involved with EU trade unions in campaigning for the deals to be rejected and for future EU trade deals to put people not corporations first.
- 3.6 GMB has long called for tax dodgers to be taken to task, and commends the European Parliament and Labour MEPs who have been at the forefront of tackling this issue with us. The Luxleaks and Panama scandals show that this Tory Government and the business interests it protects are up to their necks in avoiding paying their fair share whilst the rest of us are squeezed until the pips squeak. Cameron and Boris Johnson are what stands between a ban on tax havens and proper regulation of the banking and financial sector, not the EU.

4. Solidarity v divide and rule

- 4.1 GMB has its roots in international solidarity. Will Thorne and Eleanor Marx knew the importance for workers to unite in their struggle to counter the attempts of employers and governments to divide and rule, and set worker against worker. They helped support trade union organisation across Europe, the United States and across the globe. The CEC emphasises that the importance of that trade union solidarity is no less relevant to our members today than it was over 125 years ago.
- 4.2 The CEC also recognises the vital role that the EU has had in maintaining peace in Europe for over half a century, testament to its purpose when it was borne out of the ashes of the Second World War. Some seek to argue this is no longer a relevant argument for remaining in the EU, but when we see the resurgence of intolerance and far-right parties across Europe we realise how fragile peace remains.
- 4.3 Trade unionists and people across Europe value the bond and solidarity they have long had with British people. Whilst they recognise it is for us to decide our future in the EU, they do not want to lose us. They struggle to understand why so many in the UK believe that Britain is dominated by “Brussels” or the EU, because they know that Britain has wielded major influence and power in defining the direction of the EU.

5. What happens on 24th June if we are outside the EU?

- 5.1 This is sadly a question that the Leave camp are not prepared to answer. With the referendum only a few weeks away, successive polls are showing that the outcome of the vote is too close to call, at 50% neck and neck, but the CEC is concerned that few people are actually thinking about the day after.
- 5.2 The IMF and Bank of England have warned of a recession, rating agencies believe that the UK credit rating would go down, and there are fears that the UK leaving would trigger a wider recession across the EU, begging the question - who will buy our exports regardless of higher trade tariffs? All siren voices are attacked by the Leave campaign, yet no solid arguments are given to counter these predictions. The pound has already significantly decreased in value against the Euro with the threat of leaving.
- 5.3 The CEC has major concerns for the future of the United Kingdom, where our members in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have a high level of trade and economic dependency between them and with the rest of Britain, and maintaining peace and economic security is paramount. The SNP continue to hold the threat of a second independence referendum if a leave vote in England threatens to take them out of the EU, and Wales has voiced similar concerns.
- 5.4 Britain and the rest of Europe is still dealing with the devastation of the economic and social crisis, and the crushing austerity and cuts forced on our members and millions of others across Europe. We want to see an alternative path for a social Europe that puts people first, not a path that leads to further economic and social insecurity.

6. Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above the CEC recommends that:

- Congress supports this CEC Statement, recognising that the jobs, rights and interests of our members and their families are likely to be better protected by remaining a part of the EU.
- Congress agrees that, if the UK votes to remain in the EU, *business as usual* for the EU is not an option, and that urgent measures are necessary to re-establish the social Europe we were promised.
- Congress endorses a GMB “Angry Yes” campaign to remain in a reformed EU that works for our members and puts people before business.