

Delegates: Jim Hiom, Allan Thompson

Visitor: Pauline Wallis

Congress Report 2012

10/06/12-14/06/12

There were a number of highlights at this year's GMB National Congress, motions covering all aspects of our union's work, and also some points for concern and debate.

From day one it was clear that a major point of contention would be the GMB's links to the Labour Party. The central part in discussions was that of GMB affiliation. Some regions attempted to forward motions calling for disaffiliation, but as Congress 2012 was not a rule change year these were unable to be considered; they did however cause a lot of debate. While many delegates voiced the concerns of a number of GMB members in relation to our strong Labour links, the general consensus was that we should seek to alter the party line from the inside. The CEC Political Special Report further strengthened this argument and outlined 14 recommendations for GMB to take forward to attempt change.

Paul Kenny, GMB General Secretary, gave a rousing keynote speech in which he promised that the union would deliver on the CEC's recommendations. Kenny also challenged the existence of 'Progress', a private organisation operating within the Labour Party to select candidates suited to their own agenda (not necessarily an agenda in line with that of GMB).

There was much condemnation of the policies of the current coalition government, something that was again addressed by Paul Kenny in his report to congress. Mary Turner, GMB National President, also did very well in portraying members concerns at the Public Sector Conference, challenging Danny Alexander (Chief Secretary to the Treasury) on a number of issues. The government's failings were highlighted by a great many people at congress now that the impact of their policies is becoming clearer.

Labour MP and Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls also visited the Public Sector Conference at this year's congress. Balls reception by congress was rather muted as his speech deferred from making any real commitment to fight on behalf of GMB's working members. Milton Keynes Branch Secretary Jim Hiom questioned Balls as to whether he was minded to restore the 50p tax rate for high earners. The response was typically that of a politician and indeed it was difficult to draw any real answer from it.

Other highlights of congress included the speaker Tom Watson MP, a key player in exposing the faults of the Murdoch Empire. Watson noted that he was "...moved by the solidarity and support of the GMB". In addition Carillion employees visited congress on the 20th day of strike action to much applause and the trials of their dispute were highlighted. There were also many new delegates to congress this year which provided an exciting atmosphere and only served to show how important every member truly is.

Many motions were put forward, ranging from support for striking members to the introduction of a national GMB mascot. In summary GMB Congress 2012 can be seen as a great success as our union continues to be a driving force for change, seeking to secure the rights of our members at work and home.



Allan Thompson at Brighton Congress 2012