

GMB Congress 2015

Sunday 7th June - Thursday 11th June

Delegate's Report to Branch

by Allan Thompson

I'll begin by expressing my gratitude to GMB Milton Keynes City Branch for nominating me to attend as our delegate for this years congress, which was held at the Citywest Hotel and Conference Centre in Dublin, Ireland. This venue enabled all delegates and regions of our union, for the first time I was reliably informed, to share a meal in the same room at the same time. Previous venues have not been large enough to allow this and so this years congress had a real sense of togetherness.

I would like to thank the staff at Citywest for their exemplary service and attention to detail. I have never before experienced staff that are so attentive and helpful, and would definitely recommend staying here if you're planning to visit Ireland. We were told that many of the staff had joined GMB as a result of our stay, and so if you do visit you can now also say that you're going to visit family.

The impact and importance of GMB Annual Congress for workers can be summed up simply. We were told at the end of Congress that the hotel at which we were staying had very recently been on the cusp of going into receivership. The hotel was successfully purchased on the back of GMB's booking, helping to secure people's jobs and an also an excellent facility. Not only this, it is estimated that our visit was worth around €2 million for the city of Dublin.

I had arrived at the venue on the Friday in preparation for the Region's Pre-delegate Congress Meeting the following day. It was unfortunate for our Branch that the London Regional Delegation agreed to withdraw at this late stage two of our Motions (236 and 353). Many motions, across regions, were withdrawn on the same grounds; that specific reference was made to a Labour government, or some words to that effect. This was in light of the recent election and our inability to predict any future result. However Motion 383 'Afghanistan', which was submitted and formally moved by our branch, was passed at Congress with full support from the CEC and, judging by hands raised, the delegates also.

On Sunday, the official start of Congress, motions on Union Organisation were discussed and voted on. Motion 104 'End Compulsory Worship in Schools' required a card vote in order to be passed. The hall was split when voting on this motion,

although the CEC were in support. Our National President, Mary Turner, initially called that the majority of hands shown were in opposition to the motion but delegates then requested a card vote. Once votes were counted we knew just how close it was, with a difference of only 11 votes but nevertheless enough to see it passed.

Awards were also presented to individuals and groups for their work on issues of equality and inclusion. We were lucky enough to have our Young Members Officer at Congress as a visitor and he graciously accepted an award on behalf of the GMB Young London group. This was presented to them in recognition of their successful 'Howl for Housing' campaign.

Monday was perhaps the most inspiring day at Congress this year as we were fortunate enough to hear an exceptional address to congress by the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins. The President was obviously an ardent trade unionist and spoke in support of our work, as well as the importance of the public sector in our society. I cannot do justice in my writing to his remarkable speech, so I encourage you to view a transcript online [here](#). We were also addressed by Brendan Barber, Chair of Acas and former General Secretary of the TUC. This was followed by the 'CEC Report on Fracking', resulting in a quite lively debate on the rostrum, but which was eventually carried. We then ended the day with a talk from Kathleen Walker-Shaw, our European Officer, and a message from Labour MEPs.

Tuesday began positively when GMB General Secretary signed an agreement with Joe Maloney, the Vice President of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers who are based in Canada. The new protocol sets out the terms by which specialists workers in the UK can work in the same industries in Canada, and that they will be afforded the same benefits as Canadian workers should they wish to do so. We also heard the General Secretary's Report and from Gilbert Buermudez, Coordinator of COLSIBA (Banana Link). The main topic of conversation though was the first Labour leadership hustings, the first of many over the coming months I'm sure. All five candidates (before Mary Creagh withdrew) addressed Congress and then answered questions from the delegates before giving their closing speech. The hustings were held before any of the candidates had officially made the ballot but, judging by the delegate's claps and cheers, many will be pleased that Jeremy Corbyn MP reached the required number of nominations.

Following Tuesday's excitement, Wednesday was back to business with a number of motions proposed and carried. Worthy of particular mention was the 'CEC Finance Report on Contributions and Expenses'. It was during this report, presented by Paul Kenny on behalf of the CEC, that the announcement was made to offer free lifetime membership to retired members from 1st July 2015. All that will be required for this is

a minimum of five years contributions before the date of retirement. Congress' 'Local Gift' amounting to £2000 was also bestowed on Wednesday, from the Yorkshire and North Derbyshire Region to the [Real Junk Food Project](#).

Thursday then is when Congress comes to close. The remaining motions are debated and on this occasion were all carried. We ended the day with an address by Monica Smith, GMB RMA National Secretary, which was then followed by the General Secretary's closing speech. It was in this speech that Paul Kenny announced, that after many years of service, he would not be seeking to stand for re-election for another five year term. Paul Kenny was applauded by delegates for his contribution to GMB. Congress then ended with a closing video and singing of 'The Red Flag', led by a local choir group.

END

N.B. I have recorded the outcome of all motions proposed at GMB Congress 2015. I am happy to prepare and distribute a separate document of all decisions if requested by any member of GMB Milton Keynes City Branch.