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European News

July & August 2016

GMB priority is to protect our members' interests as UK votes to leave EU

On 23 June, 51.9% of the British electorate voted in the referendum to leave the EU. Following the outcome of the vote, GMB confirms our number one priority remains to protect and promote the interests of our members through the uncharted waters that lie ahead.

GMB and our trade union colleagues from across the EU worked hard over many years to secure the social and employment rights we all now enjoy, and we are demanding the British government take immediate action to protect our jobs, guarantee our rights at work, and keep the economy moving.

We are also calling for urgent action from the government and business to tackle the rise in hate crimes, racism and the undercutting and exploitation of workers, to guarantee that employers ensure equal pay for equal work, and to give assurances to the thousands of EU migrants in the UK – and British workers living elsewhere in Europe –

that their jobs and residency status aren't at risk.

GMB is also concerned about the impact of the EU referendum result on the future of the United Kingdom, in particular the situation in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and is ensuring our members' voices are heard at every level in the forthcoming debates.

"There will be a lot of uncertainty in the coming weeks and months about Britain's role in the world, about the economy and jobs and trade," GMB General Secretary Tim Roache said. "Our place in the world cannot be one based on a Tory Party free-for-all, free market philosophy. A race to the bottom which prioritises the removal of trade barriers and the flexible labour market above all else will fail working people and the very voters who made their decision". There has never been a more important time to be in a union.

ETUC committed to protecting UK workers

The European Trade Union Confederation has stated its ongoing commitment to protecting British workers, and will work closely with British and EU trade unions during the UK's withdrawal negotiations to promote and protect workers' rights across Europe – not only out of solidarity with UK workers but also to avoid the risk of any reduction in British employment rights creating further unfair competition on the EU's doorstep.

The ETUC has urged EU leaders to

see the UK referendum vote as a "wake-up call" to offer a better deal for workers across Europe, who have become increasingly disillusioned by the continued policies of cuts and austerity and governments' failure to meet people's basic needs and demands.

Messages of solidarity with UK workers were also sent from all the European sectoral trade union federations following the referendum result.

In this issue:

GMB priorities after the EU referendum **P.1**

ETUC will protect UK workers **P.1**

What next for UK/EU? **P.2**

Defending EU workers' rights in Britain **P.2**

GMB condemns hate crimes **P.2**

UK must not turn its back on tax justice **P.3**

EU to reform posted workers rules **P.3**

EU agrees glyphosate ban **P.3**

Situation in Turkey **P.3**

Fighting letterbox companies **P.3**

What the referendum result means for GMB Members

The EU referendum result has been a catalyst for major political and economic upheaval in Britain, and we know that a lot of our members are feeling unsure about what happens now. GMB has produced a briefing on what the referendum result means for our members, which you can download and read on our [website](#).

GMB has also prepared a briefing to help **European Works Council** reps in the UK in relation to their position following the referendum. The briefing is also available on our [website](#).

After the referendum – What happens next?

The result of the referendum on its own is not officially binding, and Britain will need to trigger Article 50 of the EU Treaty (on Member State withdrawal from the EU) in order to legally begin the withdrawal procedure. We would then have up to two years in which to reach an agreement.

New Prime Minister Theresa May has announced she requires time to prepare for any negotiations with the EU, which will not be launched before the start of 2017. Many EU leaders had called on Britain to trigger the negotiations straightaway and have vowed not to enter into any formal or informal discussions with the British government until

then.

The key issue for Theresa May will be to decide what kind of future relationship Britain should have with the EU. The ‘Norway model’ has been touted as one of the preferred options, as it would allow Britain to maintain access to the EU’s single market (the EU is Britain’s biggest trading partner) by joining Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein in the European Economic Area (EEA). However, it would also mean Britain accepting free movement of people – one of the main issues of contention during the referendum campaign. Another option would be to negotiate a

bilateral deal with the EU, as Switzerland has done, though this would take much more time and Britain is less likely to get an advantageous deal.

TUC is demanding to be fully involved in both the preparations for the talks and the negotiations themselves, to ensure the best possible deal for UK workers and their families. GMB will be working closely with TUC and trade union colleagues from across Europe on this.

Until the negotiations are concluded, Britain remains an EU Member State and EU law, rights, and obligations will continue to apply.

GMB defends rights of EU workers in Britain and British workers in Europe

GMB is committed to supporting and defending the interests of all our members, British and foreign nationals, and we are calling on the UK government to take immediate action to end the uncertainty faced by both European workers living in the UK and British workers living elsewhere in Europe following the outcome of the EU referendum. Their rights must be guaranteed and it is wrong – and dangerous for the economy – for the government to keep these workers and their

families in limbo.

The arrangements Britain will reach as it withdraws from the EU are still unclear, but until the end of the negotiations, existing residence and free movement rights will continue to be guaranteed under EU law.

In the meantime, GMB will continue to be very vocal in this debate, and will continue to fight to protect all our members’ rights.

EU Commission Brexit negotiator announced



Former French minister and European Commission Vice-president Michel Barnier has been appointed chief negotiator of the EU Commission taskforce on Britain’s withdrawal from the EU. He is a seasoned politician with experience of working on complex and high-profile issues both at national and EU level. Barnier has already crossed swords with Britain when he pushed, whilst EU Commissioner, for strict financial regulations and caps on bankers’ bonuses. GMB has worked with him in the past, notably on public procurement, and found him one of the more reasonable EU Commissioners to deal with.

GMB condemns wave of hate crimes

GMB has strongly condemned the wave of hate crimes and racial abuse that has taken place across the UK in the wake of the EU referendum. GMB will continue to support all GMB members and people of all ethnicities and is calling on the government to take immediate action to stop this outrageous and unacceptable behaviour.



UK must not turn its back on tax justice

Labour MEPs have urged the Tory government to continue to enforce EU anti-tax dodging laws as part of the UK settlement for EU withdrawal. Following April’s Panama Papers scandal, the EU has recently introduced new measures to sanction tax havens, enhance corporate tax transparency and protect whistle-blowers. GMB believes it is vital that the UK applies these stricter regulations.

EU to press ahead with posted workers reforms

Despite being given a 'yellow card' by Eastern European Member States, the EU Commission has vowed to press ahead with urgent reforms to EU posted worker rules, including stricter enforcement of the fundamental principle of equal pay for equal work in the same place. The Eastern countries had tried to block these crucial improvements, claiming they would reduce their 'competitive

advantage', even though their posted workers would stand to benefit the most from loopholes in the rules being closed.

The undercutting of wages, terms and conditions was a major issue during Britain's EU referendum campaign and GMB will continue to fight for an end to exploitation and for equal rights and conditions for all workers across Britain, Europe and the world.

EU agrees glyphosate ban



After months of toing and froing, EU Member States have finally agreed to limit the use of glyphosate across Europe and issue an outright ban on one of its components. GMB has joined growing demands for the weed-killer to be banned following reports that it is potentially carcinogenic. Hundreds of GMB members are exposed to the substance in their work in roads, gardens, parks and leisure. GMB will be putting pressure on the UK government to stick to this EU decision even as Britain prepares to leave the EU.

GMB condemns situation in Turkey

The failed military coup in Turkey has been used by President Erdogan to justify further repressive measures against anybody who dares to question his authoritarian regime. Lawyers, journalists, academics, teachers and, of course, trade unionists have lost their jobs, been arrested and in some cases tortured. The undeclared war on the Kurdish population continues unabated with thousands of men, women and children maimed or killed in the southeast. GMB has joined the international condemnation of Erdogan's actions and is at the forefront of the campaign to free Kurdish leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who has been imprisoned by the Turkish authorities for over 17 years.

Fighting letterbox companies

GMB has welcomed a new ETUC [report](#) highlighting the growing practice of businesses using letterbox companies in order to pay less tax, lower wages and impose bad working conditions. GMB has long been fighting against the use of such corporate loopholes and we continue to demand businesses pay their fair share and contribute what they owe to the public purse. Such

corporate practices also lead to increased worker exploitation and unfair competition for law-abiding companies.



EU Trade Union Action Update

Electricity: A landmark social partner [agreement](#) on **traineeships** in Europe's **electricity sector** has been signed by the ETUC and employers Eurelectric. Trainees in the sector will now benefit from collective agreements and are guaranteed quality traineeships, good working conditions, proper compensation and educational support.

Germany: After three rounds of negotiations and a series of warning strikes, **public sector** unions have agreed a two-year deal, including pay increases for over 2 million workers and apprentices in **national and local government**. Germany's labour court has ruled that the **minimum hourly wage** must also be paid for time spent **on-call**. **Chemical industry** workers have agreed a new pay deal after intensive negotiations.

Czech Republic: A government bill allowing early retirement for **miners** has been signed into law, with those who have worked a minimum number of shifts now able to retire at 56 rather than 63.

Hungary: Thousands of **public sector** workers went on strike in June to demand higher wages, following an 8 year pay freeze.

Netherlands: A new report highlights the exploitation of Polish **migrant workers** due to their reliance on recruitment agencies – including poor pay, unpaid overtime, discrimination, sexual intimidation, social isolation, health concerns and no insurance.

Italy: **Waste sector** workers have gone on strike in their continuing campaign over pay, conditions, health and safety. Unions have been calling for a new collective agreement since the previous one expired in 2013. Italy's constitutional court has approved a multiple manslaughter trial for Swiss tycoon Stephan Schmidheiny, accused of causing 258 **asbestos-related deaths** for workers at 4 **Eternit cement** plants he owned.

France: **Public sector** workers have received their first pay increase in 6 years though trade unions argue the small increase won't go nearly far enough to cover the workers' loss of purchasing power since the start of the crisis.

Austria: One third of workers have a **non-standard contract** – working part-time, on a temporary or on a service contract – according to new data.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For further details on any of the items in this issue of the European News, please contact the GMB Brussels office:

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