

**THE 155<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL TRADES UNION CONGRESS**

.....

**Held at:**

**The ACC Arena,  
Kings Dock,  
Liverpool Waterfront,  
Liverpool L3 4FP**

**on:**

**Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2023,**

**Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023,**

**Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

**and**

**Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

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***Congress President***

**Maria Exall**

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**PROCEEDINGS – DAY FOUR**

**(Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2023)**

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FOURTH DAY: WEDNESDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2023

*(Congress Assembled at 9.30 a.m.)*

**The President:** Congress, many thanks to Cizawa and the band that has been playing for us this morning. Thank you. *(Applause)*

Congress, to begin this morning, as we have done the previous couple of mornings, we are going to have an industrial case study of a dispute and I would now like you to invite Unite members, John Lynch, Phil Clark, John Brown, and Tommy Jennings to join us on the stage. *(Applause)* They are all employed by Peel Ports, as dockworkers here in Liverpool, and they played a key role in the dispute involving 600 dock workers at the end of last year and won an 18% pay rise. *(Applause)* Congress, we will now listen to Tommy, John, Phil, and the other John.

**John Lynch:** Conference, colleagues, good morning. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at the TUC Congress and giving me the time to give you an update on the strike in the last year at the Port of Liverpool, last September. We started to negotiate a pay claim for the membership that would help and support the membership during the cost-of-living crisis. Unfortunately, the company and the shareholders thought very differently. We were left with no other option but to ballot the members for industrial action to oppose the ballot. The results came back 99.9% in favour of industrial action. *(Applause)* From 19<sup>th</sup> September, over a seven-week period we were on strike for five weeks. We had a 24-hour picket line seven days a week. During that industrial action we would like to thank everybody who messaged

their support, videos, and for everybody who attended the picket line during our industrial action.

If anybody was not aware, it is important, this, the last Liverpool Dock strike was in 1995. The sacked Liverpool dockers were let down by the government and the prime minister who was elected at the time. The Liverpool dockers were betrayed by their own unions and the secretary, which cost 500 Liverpool dockers their jobs. It was the longest dispute in the UK lasting 28 months. Mike Arden, one of the sacked Liverpool dockers has, sadly, passed away. Mike Arden has written a fantastic book called, *Betrayal*, it is a book regarding the history of the Liverpool dockers and their dispute. I would fully recommend that everyone reads the book.

You have to be very mindful and not let history repeat itself, especially with the legislation passed by the Tory government, and Grant Shapps, where agency workers can replace striking workers. This is what happened in 1995. We have to be very mindful. We voted for staggered strike action. The big difference for the most recent Liverpool dockers' strike was we were given 100% support from the General Secretary, Sharon Graham, and from the strike fund £350 a week. (*Applause*) It helped the members massively, plus donations from other workplaces and branches of other unions. The Unite the Union leverage department helped us massively.

Peel Port's second biggest shareholder is a company called Australian Super, which is a pension provider in Australia, and we found that Australian Super is part-owned by *Australia News*. I would like to thank Christy Cain, the National Secretary from the CFMMEU, who fought our corner in Australia with the Australian Trades Council

and shareholders of Australian Super. I would also like to thank the international unions for their support, the IDC, the EBC, the ITF, the MUA, and also Ken Riley and Mark Batts from the ILA from the USA, who flew in from America to stand on our picket lines. The ILA also made a donation of \$15,000 to our dispute. I would also like to say a big thank you to local musicians Jamie Webster and Peter Russell, and the Sway, who came to the picket line on 24<sup>th</sup> September and where we had over 200,000 people turn up.

I would also like to thank all the celebrities, actors, sports celebrities, for video messages, Tony Bellew, Stephen Gray, and Peter Dee, plus many more, Jamie Carrick, Paddy the Baddy, who turned up at the picket line more than once. We would also like to thank the politicians who came to the picket line, Ian Byrne, John McDonnell, Frank Carr, Jeremy Corbyn, and many more.

While taking industrial action we were issued with an HR1 notice and threatened with redundancies across all three sections; those that were taking industrial action. In my department alone we were told 137 people would be at risk of losing their job. I am proud to confirm that no redundancies took place across all three sections. (*Applause*)

During the five weeks of industrial action we had nobody cross the picket line from all the three different sections that took industrial action. The two container terminals were brought to a complete standstill during that industrial action taken. We eventually got a new offer from the company that was agreed by the membership. This worked out between 14.5 and 18.5 depending on your skill set.

Since returning to work we have set up Liverpool Dockers in the Community, we have supported many local charities, food banks, and supported workers who have taken industrial action, which is rail workers, NHS workers, postal workers, and many more. We are also sending a donation from our branch.

Liverpool Docks is back on the map for all the correct reasons, it is an organising unionised workplace and a branch with over 1,000 members in the 628 branch. I would like to thank all the members who stood shoulder to shoulder on the picket lines. If we are together it is impossible to fail. Liverpool Dockers are here to stay. Thank you, Conference. (*Applause*)

**Tommy Jennings:** Good morning, everyone. I am a proud Liverpool docker. I am also a proud Unite member. John has touched on our strike but I just want to say a little bit about what it was like on strike. My proudest moment was when our General Secretary, Sharon Graham, said, “You can have whatever you want.” (*Applause*) It was amazing because the last strike, as John said, was 1995 on the docks and we have been fighting ever since, and we will keep fighting because right is on our side, and the lies, the deceit, what the company did, trying to put the fear of God up to our members, when our General Secretary come up to that picket line and addressed us all and gave us that confidence to crack on it meant the world to us. Thank you for that, Sharon. (*Applause*)

I remember one day dashing down rain, dead windy, and we were standing there waving our flags, all of us like we are, and one of the managers went past in a car and rolled his window down, and started laughing. I said, “Do you think we’re scared of

rain. This is our job. This is what we do. You're the one that is scared in the car, lad, not us, and we know what we want. Thank you." Thank you, Congress. *(Applause)*

**The President:** Thank you. Congress, I will be taking unfinished business this morning, that is, Composite 10, Financial Services, Supporting the e-Disadvantaged, Motion 77, Union Support for Trades Councils, Motion 78, Risks – e-Newsletter, and Motion 79, Supporting the Ron Todd Foundation. As previously notified I will take the Emergency Motions at the end of the published business. Can movers and seconders be ready for that unfinished business to be able to move and second. I am intending to take a small number of speakers on Emergency Motion 1, on Ticket Office Closures Consultation.

Delegates, we start this morning with section 2 of the General Council Report, page 18, the Economy and Cost-of-Living Crisis. I call Composite 2, Time to Value Arts, Heritage and Creative Industries. The General Council support the motion. It is to be moved by Prospect, seconded by Artists' Union England, and supported by UCU, and Equity will also be speaking in the debate.

### **C02 Time to value arts, heritage and creative industries**

#### **Motions 07 and amendment and 08**

Congress recognises that arts and heritage make a huge contribution to the UK economy, attracting millions of visitors each year as well as playing an invaluable role in education and well-being for everyone.

Congress also recognises that public funding for arts and heritage is too often seen as an easy target for cost-cutting. Successive rounds of austerity at national and local levels have cut funding to the bone, resulting in the loss of key community venues. This has been echoed by damaging rhetoric about the value of arts education, and drastic funding cuts to arts courses.

Furthermore, for too long world-class arts and heritage have relied on low pay, insecure and precarious work with no opportunities for career progression. For too many people, working in these sectors is becoming unaffordable.

Congress calls for an end to this regime of second class pay. For the UK to continue to be a leading cultural centre, we must safeguard nationally significant institutions and the highly skilled jobs associated with them. We need a new approach to funding for heritage and the arts.

Congress notes:

- i. the importance of the creative arts to the UK economy. (109 Billion contributed to UK economy in 2021)
- ii. continuing changes in work patterns and work and non-working time
- iii. ecological change affecting work and non-work
- iv. the fundamental importance of the creative arts. Its importance in both physical and mental health, for those that participate, for people who create, wish to create and those who enjoy all forms of creative art
- v. TUC policy on lobbying for the provision of community hubs with art studios/rehearsal rooms and teaching spaces rooms
- vi. TUC policy on supporting arts education, at all levels. Ensuring equality of opportunity for all disadvantaged groups and proper funding

Congress calls on the General Council to:

- a. Devise a fair and sustainable funding model for arts and heritage and lobby all relevant government bodies for this to be implemented.
- b. Lobby present and future governments to:
  - reverse cuts to funding for arts education
  - develop a coordinated approach to ensure that different areas of government work together to create an overarching art provision policy for the UK in the 21st century.

**Mover: Prospect Seconder: AUE Supporter: UCU**

**Freddie Brown** (*Prospect*): Good morning, Congress. Last Day. Yippee! Go back to work. My union is proud to represent more than 10,000 professionals and specialists, curators, conservers, archaeologists working in our heritage sector, in our museums and galleries, historic houses and gardens, library collections, and more. They are experts on historical treasures, who direct them into exhibitions, who make sense of them to visitors of all ages and backgrounds, and welcome you and your children into them on a rainy Saturday or on a school holiday. They are skilled and dedicated professionals eager to share their knowledge with us but for too long those politicians who profess to care most about conserving and promoting British culture and heritage have failed to give the sector the funding it needs.

Rhetoric around pride in British history and culture has been accompanied by brutal funding cuts that have led to closures and cutbacks, threatening the ability of future generations to enjoy and learn about our world leading heritage and cultural sites. Our members working in the sector have borne the brunt of these savage cuts and on Monday at our fringe meeting we heard stories of workers unable to afford the petrol they needed to work overtime; others stuck on zero hour contracts, and too many only able to stay in their roles because of financial support from a partner or family member. Their stories are not uncommon, with real term pay cuts since 2011, up to



26% eating into our members' standard of living and leaving their pay far below that of similarly qualified workers in other public services like education. Last year 20% of conservators earned less than £25,000, and 70% of those surveyed had Masters or PhDs.

Their work is not just poorly paid, it is also insecure too, and the opportunities for progression are becoming ever more limited. Too many of our members are looking to leave the profession. They would love to get a job that pays the bills and does not leave them reliant on food banks. Forget the cultural wars, the Government is waging a war on culture itself but it is not one that the public are on board with, with polling showing that 8% of remainers, leavers, Tories, LibDems, and Labour voters believe learning about our heritage through these attractions is important and 71% believing it important to have knowledgeable staff and experts working at them.

The public recognises the value that the sector brings to our economy, contributing a gross value of almost £15bn in a year, more than our agriculture or pharmaceutical manufacturing industries and almost in line with the entire car industry and bringing in 30 million international tourists who spend over £7.4bn a year. But this Government simply risks choking off a sector critical to our regional and national economies. That is why Prospect has been fighting for our sector and its workers through our world class heritage, second class pay campaign, and calling for the experts and specialists who bring so much value to our economy to be properly recognised.

Our motion calls for the General Council to devise a fair and sustainable funding model for arts and heritage in this country. We must end this regime of second class

pay. Congress, I urge you to support this motion and ensure that our heritage sector is not confined to a dustbin of history. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** AUE.

**Lorraine Monk** (*Artists' Union England*): I am speaking about this really important composite. Our communities have been economically ruined by years of so called authority government destroying as you know every aspect of our working lives. We need to rebuild. We know what a challenge that will be. Priorities need to be set. The creative arts and the workers in them need to be part of that priority. Why, why when there are so many priorities: because it is almost impossible in many areas of the arts to live on money earned from creative work. They have to do what everyone does, a second job that pays the rent because the creative arts, all of them, they take us, everyone, from our normal lives and make us fly from our day-to-day existence, time travelling to any place, any century, past or future, any idea. What price can you put on that? What sort of society can live without that?

Here is the economic argument, creative arts are vital to the UK economy, £109bn in 2021. Continued changes in the work patterns will affect everyone's work, films, concerts, performances, exhibitions, they will be important, needed as a part of a new work/life balance, art practices support both the physical and mental health of everyone, for those who participate and those who create, those who wish to learn to create, and those who enjoy all forms of creative art.

The Conservatives have left our position ruined in every area of the arts, in every region, robbing Peter to not pay Paul, the funding the Art Council gives is minimal, provision piecemeal, transparency zero. We need proper funding bodies, its committees truly representative. Artists are left to sink or swim. No support for people starting out, for keeping going, for building the practice, of developing ideas, like everyone else they need money to live and money for materials, money to have spaces for making and paying for exhibition space.

We call on Congress to support our call to develop a coordinated approach to the creative arts in the UK, to ensure that different areas of government work together to create an overarching government art provision for the UK in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one that truly represents everyone, that tells the stories and histories of all and every one of our people, not just the few as it is at the moment. Congress, please support.  
*(Applause)*

**The President:** Thank you. I call UCU.

**Maria Chondrogianni** (*UCU, Vice President*): President, Congress, cuts to arts and heritage are a direct attack to working class people on our collective cultural wealth. In recent months we have seen targeted cuts on arts and humanities education, course closures in Wolverhampton with some 500 employees redundant and 138 courses closing. At Roehampton, classics, anthropology, creative writing, photography, closed. In Chichester, the first African British professor of history is made redundant and the landmark African history course axed. There are cuts in Goldsmiths, in Birkbeck, in Brighton, in Huddersfield, in East Anglia, in Highlands & Islands

universities. Congress, these cuts not only condemn university staff to poverty but also shut down opportunities for working class students. They attack the local community and the regional economy, for example, in Norfolk where the university is the biggest employer. The cuts have hit further education too, adult education cuts by over 40% reducing the opportunities for lifelong art education which has huge social and health benefits. That is part of why our proud further education colleagues are now voting yes to the biggest FE ballot in England with over 100 colleges participating. *(Applause)*

While Tory ministers proudly parade their Oxbridge classic education, working class students and society as a whole are deprived of expanding our horizons, of engaging with literature, film, and music, drama, philosophy, performing arts, and social sciences. Arts and the creative industries are one of the biggest UK success stories. We all have the right to access art courses, to study what it is to be human, to be able to engage in good public debate like here, to learn how to be a good citizen. We must not allow arts to become accessible only to a privileged elite. That is part of why academic and academic related staff across the four nations are in dispute over pay and conditions participating to the UCU Rising campaign.

Arts and heritage is a viable pillar of our society. We must ensure that art education remains available to all learners whether in prisons, colleges, adult education, or universities.

**The President:** Time, delegate, please.

**Maria Chondrogianni (UCU):** Stop the Tory forced cultural suicide. Please support the composite. Solidarity all. (*Applause*)

**The President:** There are no other indications of anyone joining in this debate so I will move to the vote. Vote on Composite 2, all those in favour? Put your hands down. All those against? That is carried.

*Composite 2 was CARRIED.*

**The President:** Congress, I call Motion 9, which is Ending Low Pay/No Pay Culture in Arts and Creative Industries. The General Council supports the motion to be moved by Artists' Union England, seconded by Equity, and NUJ will be part of the debate.

### **09 Ending the low pay/no pay culture in arts and creative industries**

The systematic underfunding of the arts, cultural and creative industries over the last decade, combined with cuts to arts subjects in the education sector, and on top of the widespread effects of the pandemic and cost of living crisis are having a devastating impact on the culture sector and arts workers, with disproportionate impacts on those who already face discrimination and barriers in the sector including people from working-class backgrounds, Black people, women and disabled workers.

Despite the creative industries being one of the drivers of UK GDP, artists and arts workers are often self-employed (approximately a third of the workforce) and experience with low pay, precarious work and poor terms and conditions. This causes elitism and inequality in the sector. Artists' Union England is committed to working with the other creative trade unions and the wider trade union movement to change these working conditions.

Congress agrees to campaign for:

- i. an increase in public funding for the arts
- ii. access to the arts for all
- iii. access to a career in the arts
- iv. fair and equal pay for arts and culture workers
- v. an end to exploitative working conditions
- vi. equal access and rights in the sector.

And work with affiliates to ensure that self-employed workers in the creative industries are properly and fairly paid.

**Artists' Union England**

**Zita Holbourne** (*AUE*): Our arts and culture sector has been attacked and cut due to over a decade of austerity, followed by a global pandemic. Artists have struggled to survive often having to hold down other jobs in order to survive, which are also precarious. For artists who are women, black, and disabled, discrimination in the sector was already there. This has been amplified over the past 10 years because of cuts and the pandemic. The pandemic has led to an over 40% reduction in black women in the creative arts sector. Black women already have the lowest earnings in the sector. There was a £50m cut to arts funding in London. Cuts to arts have an impact in education, on future generations of artists, on students and pupils who are deprived of the wellbeing and benefits of arts on the curriculum but artists also have to compete against each other to fund their own work instead of just being paid for their service and their labour like other workers. Socially engaged artists benefit society and support vulnerable and marginalised people but bear the brunt of cuts to the arts.

There is an attitude towards artists that the work we do is not real labour, that we can live off the air we breathe, like we do not have to pay bills, pay for shelter and support families like everyone else. Artists are constantly asked to do work for free, told it will give us exposure, we are expected to contribute time and materials for free, have commissions renege on, agreements cancelled, work cancelled, and commissioners failing to pay us. Because of the precarious way artists work with a high proportion working freelance or on temporary contracts, we do not have the same protections as

other employees. The no pay/low pay culture artists face needs to stop. Artists are doing skilled work but we also need all communities, including deprived and the poorest, to have access to the arts. We need publicly funded arts. Art should not only be for the wealthy, and the elite, it needs to be accessible to everyone. Artists must receive equal pay, be protected from exploitation, and be able to work with dignity and rights. We need to protect and celebrate the arts and that means adequate funding for the arts and proper pay for artists. We can ensure that as employers unions set positive examples when engaging, employing, or commissioning artists, and that we stand united as a movement against cuts, exploitation, low and unequal pay, and precarious conditions, outsourcing, and privatisation which impact on the ability and freedom to workers, artists, and to access the arts.

I am Co-Chair of Public Services International Education Support and Cultural Workers Network, and during the pandemic we produced a manifesto for cultural workers. It calls for opposition to the commodification of culture, opposition to the policing of borders which prevent artists working internationally, against precarious treatment, and calls for cultural democracy and decolonisation of the culture sector, and legal protection for cultural workers. Unions and individual union members can sign up to the manifesto via the PSI website if you have not already.

In addition, UK Creative Industries unions in the TUC London, Southern, and Eastern Region have, including AUE, produced a discussion document for implementation, Future of the Arts Making Culture Ours, and this was discussed at a fringe meeting at last year's Congress. It states that creativity and culture are not an add-on, that arts run through our lives like the air we breathe, that art has the power to impact

positively on lives, inclusion, enrichment, regeneration, wellbeing, mental health, learning and education, the economy, and skills. Artists are not here to be used, abused, exploited, or discriminated against. We benefit lives, we benefit economies. Work with us as a movement to ensure we are treated with respect, dignity, fair and equal treatment, and pay, and please support the motion. I move. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Equity to second.

**Genevive Say** (*Equity*): Seconding this motion, and I am a first-time delegate. (*Applause*) Many of us in this room know how damaging the Tory cuts have been to our English student services. In the arts, we have had an ideological attack on all sides, from the stripping of creative subjects in schools, to the systematic cut to public funding. Our membership was left by the Government to fall through the gaps without support during the pandemic, and is currently being failed by the social security system in the UK. This Government has consistently squeezed creativity out of public education. Denying creative and cultural experiences to young people, this ideological attack on art subjects means that those who can afford to give their children access to arts and culture do, but those in lower income families are left behind.

When our children come to us saying they want to be a dancer, an actor, a singer, who amongst us is worried for their future in those jobs. I am and I am a dancer. We instinctively know that the entertainments industry is characterised by precarity, a saturated workforce with little or no access to basic benefits like sick pay, maternity or paternity leave, or holiday pay. Many of working in the arts are expected to be



based in London where rental costs are astronomical and yet the average income for a dancer in the UK is £12,500. Who can live off £12,500? No one can.

Cuts to Arts Council funding of 46% in real terms in 2005 has meant that less art and culture is reaching people across England. The result is that even when dancers and actors manage to find work, they are not being offered basic levels of pay, they are not being offered benefits that they are entitled to. The entertainment industry should reflect society in all its technical colour glory but when faced with these realities we do not see an industry accessible to all. We see an industry defined by those who can afford to be there.

Often it is levelled at our members that none of that is good but at least you love what you do and, yes, I do love what I do but that is not going to pay for my childcare costs, it is not going to pay my mortgage, it is not going to put food on the table. I need fair and equal pay to do that. (*Applause*) We need increased public funding to the sector and we need a government that supports its creative work for workers, a functioning social security system, and we need access to arts for all. Congress, I ask you to support this motion. (*Applause*)

**The President:** NUJ.

**Natasha Hirst** (*National Union of Journalists*): I am speaking in support of Motion 9. The NUJ has quite a broad membership and many of our members work in the arts and the creative sectors. Our members are increasingly exploited like you have just been hearing about from other speakers, both in terms of poor pay but also in terms of

breaches of our rights, so breaches of copyright, IP infringements, late payments, and it is a double whammy that really reduces the opportunities for us to make a living.

In another voluntary role I am the Chair of a small arts charity, Disability Arts Cymru, and we learned yesterday that activists are never just involved with one thing. We support the professional development of disabled artists and also advocate for access and inclusion for disabled audiences. The reliance on grant funding in the arts means that there are so many short-term projects, insecure contracts, precarious working conditions for our staff and also for the artists that we support.

Disability arts in all creative endeavours are often used as a tool for achieving political and social change. We use art to tell our stories and giving insight into the challenges that we face and the potential solutions to them. The arts are a conduit for the expression of the human condition, a way for us to share our lived experiences. It gives us space to hope and dream, to use overt authority, and also to challenge the oppression that we are experiencing, and in common with trade unionism the arts sends out a beacon call for solidarity and collective action. So, the expectation that creators will work out of a love for what we do is incredibly damaging. Poor pay makes it so much harder for creators from a minoritised background to make a living.

My work as a photo journalist mostly covers issues of social justice and it gives power to the communities that I work with because I understand the pressure and marginalisation, and am able to represent those challenges without undermining the agency and the dignity of the people whose stories I cover. So, the arts are not a luxury, they are not a plaything for the rich to at best sideline and at worst exploit and

profit from telling the stories of those who most need to be feeling heard on their own terms, and that is why representation matters in journalism and the arts. Please get behind the campaign to end the low pay/no pay culture in the creative industries.

Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Thank you, delegate. Motion 9 is before you, Congress. All those in favour? Put your hands down. All those against? That is carried.

*Motion 9 was CARRIED.*

**The President:** Calling Motion 10, Streaming and Fair Pay for Writers, to be moved by the Writers' Guild, and seconded by Equity. The General Council supports the motion and Prospect and NUJ have indicated to speak.

### **10 Streaming and fair pay for writers**

Congress recognises the global success of subscription video on demand (SVOD) providers such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, Apple TV+ and subscription audio on demand providers such as Audible. These companies have hundreds of millions of subscribers globally, generating tens of billions of pounds.

However, the writers who create the stories which appear on these platforms are not being adequately remunerated for their work.

SVOD providers regularly engage writers on 'buy-out' agreements requiring them to sign away all intellectual property and copyright to their work. Meaning they do not receive any additional remuneration, even if their shows become international hits, and they cannot use their work to create theatre shows, books or audio content based on their creations. This differs from the long-standing collectively bargained agreements the WGGB has in TV, film, audio and theatre, which all contain royalty payments.

Many writers rely on royalty payments to keep afloat when they are not working. The increased use of non-collectively bargained buy-out agreement's risks writing becoming a profession for only those who can afford it. As a result, the writing profession, and stories that are told will become less diverse.

Congress recognises the valuable contribution writers make to the UK economy and cultural and creative sector.

Congress agrees to support the WGGB's collective bargaining efforts, campaign for fairer pay for writers working for streaming providers and end buy-out agreements.

Congress also notes the recent Writers Guild of America strike against streamers, studios and producers, and sends our solidarity to these workers.

**Writers' Guild of Great Britain**

**Sandi Toksvig** (*Writers' Guild of Great Britain*): First-time delegate, first-time speaker. (*Applause*) President, Congress, or as we say in show business, darlings, unaccustomed as I am to public speaking may I say how proud I am to be moving this motion for the Writers' Guild of Great Britain for whom I have the honour of being the President. (*Applause*) It is going to be seconded by Equity, which is my other union; if anybody else would like me to join their gang I am available. We need to stick together, people.

Right, anybody ever watch Netflix, Amazon, Disney+, Apple, or listen to podcasts on audible, however did all those companies think of those fun shows. Well, they didn't. Writers did. Writers sitting in their garrets or whatever, they are the ones that come up with the ideas. They write these ideas down and soon actors are employed, camera operators, prop makers, costumes, make-up, catering, taxi drivers, they all get work and you get entertained after a long day of union business simply because a writer had an idea.

Our motion, like so many motions, is mad: let's make sure people receive fair pay for the work they do! It should not need to be a motion, it should be a given but it is not, and apparently writers are not receiving fair pay when they work for streaming companies or audio services. If one of our members works with a UK broadcaster, BBC, ITV, Channel 4, all the writers are contracted under a collectively bargained agreement which was negotiated. These agreements all contain provisions which

mean that when a writer's work is repeated on TV or sold abroad, they share in the success of the work in the form of royalty payments. It is fair and it is essential.

So, remember that for every famous screen writer there are many, many more unknown or less well known writers just trying to make a living and, trust me, the life of your average jobbing writer is not easy, the hours are long, the work is precarious, sporadic, inconsistent, and royalty payments allow writers to stay afloat through tough times. But when UK writers create shows or produce scripts for a streaming company they are paid what is known as a buy out fee. It is essentially a lump sum payment with no further royalties. They are also required to sign over all their intellectual property rights so they cannot use their ideas again to write books, theatre shows, video games, or produce other forms of entertainment. The companies own all of these rights and profit when they are used again not the writer whose idea it was in the first place.

This new model means that over the life of a show writers are paid less overall and do not share in the success of their work when it does well. So, if you watch a favourite show over and over on a streaming service the chances are that the writer is getting nothing and yet the show, of course, would not exist without them. Because writers do not receive royalties, they are less likely to be able to sustain their careers and think about that, that is a real problem for writers from traditionally under-represented backgrounds, working class, writers of colour, those with disabilities, there is a risk that writing will become less diverse, a profession only for those who can afford it and what you watch will be way less interesting.

One of the great cons of our time is the notion that creating culture, writing, acting, making film and TV, is somehow a privilege, a luxury, when actually it is work, and it is work that generates £108bn a year and employs over two million people, which is how we know we are not asking for something that these companies cannot afford: Netflix, 238 million global subscribers, \$1.5bn in profit last year, in 2022 the co-CEOs, Reed Hastings and Ted Sarandos, received over \$50m each in cash and stocks, up 25% and 31.5% from 2021, respectively. Writers just want a fair share for the work they do creating the shows that you all know and love.

I am sure many of you are aware of the industrial action being taken by our sister organisation, the Writers' Guild of America and the US actors' union, SAG-AFTRA, over these same issues. Like us, they want the streaming platforms to share viewership details and pay royalties, to treat writers and actors well. It is in all our interests to put a stop to these unfair practices which are being used by the streaming platforms, which is why we must end buyouts, get a return to fair collective bargained agreements that include royalties, or residuals, whatever you want to call them, and why we call on Congress to send our solidarity to the Writers' Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA members who are taking action. (*Applause*) If you ever watch TV or movies, or listen to podcasts, then you are all in this with us. Come on, my lovelies, please support the motion. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Equity. Paul Fleming.

**Paul Fleming** (*Equity, General Secretary*): Congress, we stand here at an absolutely historic time for the entertainment industry. Our sister unions in the United States, the

Writers' Guild of America, and SAG-AFTRA are out on strike at the same time. That has not happened since Ronald Regan was President, not President of the United States but President of SAG-AFTRA. The dispute in the 1960s, along with our dispute against ITV was about a new world of TV, a new distribution of cinema, and at the heart of that was how people get paid when the work has stopped but the reel is still turning. Why does that matter, why do royalties matter to artists, why do they matter in the 1960s and why do they matter now: because the bosses want a freelance workforce and they do not want to pay for it.

Our members have to spend significant times at rest so the bosses can have the luxury of asking them to fly around the planet at 48 hours' notice to record the scenes that you watch at home. If they want that flexibility they have to pay for it and the way they pay for it is to a fair and proportionate share in the capital that their labour creates. That is all we are asking for and it is what we won in the 1960s, but the lines that come from Netflix and Disney+, from Pama, and from others, say that our members cannot be accounted for in the way that they have done since the 1930s in film, through the 1960s in TV, is a pernicious argument.

It matters, Congress, it matters to every single person in this room, why, because it is an attack on working people, not just the working people who are in our union but the working people who get to tell your stories on screen. What sort of creative workforce do we want? When your kid is in a school play and they come home with that raw talent, do you think that one of our industries is a good place for them to go, a place full of economic certainty, a world paved with gold. It is not. This is about the right of working class people to be artists, to have voices to tell your stories on

screen. Without the fundamental bedrock of royalties, of streaming payments, and sensible collective agreements, this is but a myth. Congress, stand with this motion, stand with our class, and stand with our sister unions, the Writers' Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Prospect, and NUJ next.

**Ellie Wade** (*Prospect*): If you have seen a British blockbuster fairly recently, it is not just made in Britain, it is made in Bectu, because Prospect/Bectu sector members are the behind-the-scenes crew, they are the camera operators, the costume designers, the sounds engineers, special effects experts, the riggers and the runners. Representing them we stand firmly with the Writers' Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA in their ongoing dispute with the streaming giants. (*Applause*)

We do so at an incredibly challenging time and with the knowledge that many of our members are facing yet another crisis. The knock-on effects of the writers' and actors' disputes in the US have caused UK-based productions to grind to a halt. In our recent survey of almost 4,000 freelance film and TV workers three-quarters of respondents said they were not currently working; 35% are struggling to pay their bills; and almost a quarter do not see themselves working in the industry in five years' time.

This is clearly a period of immense challenge for them but it is symptomatic of an industry where the streaming giants and other employers have exploited the creative workforce while making billions in profits. That is the business model. All Netflix,



no chill. That has to change. Without the creative workforce there is no business. It is their talent, their ingenuity that brings us those unforgettable onscreen moments. Across the Atlantic, and here at home, creative unions must stand together fighting for fair pay, a stable pay structure, fairer deals and contracts, and the protection of writers' rights in the digital environment as artificial intelligence advances. This fight is a global one, with the same employers undervaluing film and TV workers here in the UK and the enormous contribution they make to our economy. It is a fight we must win if we are to raise standards and improve working conditions in both British studios and Hollywood, so the Bectu sector and Prospect is proud to stand with the Writers' Guild of Great Britain in its campaign for a fair pay model and we call upon the employers to bring the US industrial action to an end by giving their workers the fair deal they deserve. Congress, please stand with us in support of this motion. Let us send our wholehearted solidarity to our creative counterparts across the pond, and let's win a future where there is making a show with the sounds that we love and not just surviving but thriving. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** NUJ.

**Steve Bird** (*National Union of Journalists*): President, Congress, thank you. We heard yesterday about the threat that AI poses to actors, to musicians, to film makers, it looks very much like not content with having a low paid casualised workforce, they would quite like to have no workforce at all. This is at the heart of the action that is taking place in the US. As one of our sister unions we have a journalist within the Writers' Guild and so I am very proud to be stood here to offer them our solidarity. It is also extremely heartening that this anger has boiled over, many of you will have

seen on social media the numbers of relatively well known actors taking to the streets and standing on soap boxes in support of the Writers' Guild action. I thought the best thing I could do was to approach some of our fellow members in the US and get a statement, so if you bear with me I would just like to read that out: "Today marks the 134<sup>th</sup> day of the Writers' Guild of America strike against the alliance of motion picture and television producers, the organisation that represents studios and streamers. WGA members are united in our goal to fix a broken system, stop the systematic erosion of our careers, and ensure that we share in the success of the content we create. WGA members have come too far to settle for a contract that does not address streaming residuals to capture the global growth of streaming platforms." I hope you support this motion and join me in expressing our solidarity with our sister unions. Thank you. *(Applause)*

**The President:** Congress, Motion 10, taking the vote, will all those in favour of Motion 10 please show? Put your hands down. All those against? That is carried.

*Motion 10 was CARRIED.*

**The President:** Congress, I am pleased to welcome the Rt. Hon Harriet Harman, who joins us as this year's sororal delegate from the Labour Party. *(Applause)* Harriet has been an MP for over 40 years, representing South London, and has held numerous cabinet and shadow cabinet posts. She was Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and has been acting Leader. I am trying to remember how long she was acting Leader, I cannot quite remember, but it was longer than Liz Truss was Prime Minister. *(Applause)*

Harriet is a lifelong campaigner for women, for human rights, and equality, and a friend of the trade union movement. She is a feminist and one of our most distinguished parliamentarians. Harriet, you are very welcome and I invite you to address Congress. (*Applause*)

**The Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP, Labour Party Sororal Delegate, addressed Congress.**

**Harriet Harman:** Good morning. Thank you for that generous introduction. I thought I would never speak on the same platform as Maria again as last time I pre-emptively announced her forthcoming civil partnership with Angela Eagle which was a big surprise to her friends and family. Sorry about that, Maria. I promise no breach of confidence this time.

Congratulations to Paul who has made a cracking start in his new role as General Secretary to the TUC. (*Applause*) What an important speech we all saw on our TVs about your family, Paul, about migrants who come here to build this country. Thank you for saying that. (*Applause*) It is a pleasure to be here with you in your awesome home city of Liverpool.

I want to add my tribute to your outstanding former General Secretary, Frances O'Grady. She is now chairing our Equal Pay Commission and has been a beacon across the trade union movement, particularly for women. It is inspiring to see here at Congress the women delegates and the new women General Secretaries who are

fearlessly taking your unions forward. You are pioneers. Women used to be shut out of union leadership and now you have pushed the door open. As good as it is to have this, for the men here do not breathe a sigh of relief, you are not off the hook, we used to shut men out of the women's movement but now we are calling on you to step forward and back up your sisters, to be active male allies, and that includes tackling the sexual harassment that for too long has marred our movement. (*Applause*)

It is a huge privilege for me to bring you greetings and solidarity from all your friends, colleagues, and comrades in the Labour Party. From my time giving legal advice to the Trico equal pay strikers in the 1970s and the Grunwick workers in the 1980s, I have always known that employees are powerless without the collective strength of their union.

Labour is deeply proud of you, our brothers and sisters in the trade union movement. We will not forget what you and your members did during the pandemic, the sheer courage of those workers when Covid was spreading like wildfire and there was no vaccination in sight, shop workers, transport workers, cleaners, postal workers, teachers, teaching support workers, delivery workers, utility workers, NHS workers, and many, many more, these people to whom we owe so much, on whom the country depends, and who you in this room represent. We have not forgotten how you fought for those workers to be able to have as much protection as possible while they had to go out to work as many of us stayed safe at home.

As the Government have wrecked the economy and ground down people's living standards and shown themselves to be completely out of touch with the reality that

that means, you in the trade unions have shown you understand the concerns of working people. You have heard their struggles, you have spoken up for them, you have supported them, you have fought for their pay at the negotiating table, and you have delivered. You have shown that you truly are the strong champion at work that people need and you have shown that the trade union movement is as necessary today as it ever was.

The enduring link between the trade unions and Labour is based in our history but it is vital for today and for our future. We share values and hopes, we work together to achieve them. Thank you to those who as affiliate unions serve on our National Executive Committee, who toil on the National Policy Forum, and provide expert advice.

Thank you for your support for our Labour MPs and our Labour councillors, and for campaigning for Labour throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Thank you to your members who choose to pay the political levy to contribute invaluable financial support. You and your members will help us get into government and help us deliver when we are in government, and we never take that for granted.

You heard from Angela Rayner yesterday, what an amazing woman she is. You can see why she terrorises the Tories weekly in the House of Commons and makes me feel like a shrinking violet. (*Applause*) She is a living example of the transformation the trade unions and a Labour government can make to someone's life.

Now, with crumbling schools, endless hospital waiting lists, we are long overdue for the next Labour government and the change that would bring, real transformative change. That will be evident in our New Deal for Working People. (*Applause*) No one can do their best if they are wracked with fear about the future or there is no proper safety net to support them in times of sickness or poor health, and that is what Labour's New Deal for Working People is about, our clear commitment to start improving the lives of working people as soon as we take office.

In the first 100 days of a Labour government we will give workers their rights from day one. We will improve maternity and paternity rights, and rights for pregnant women and new parents returning to work, build on Labour's Equality Act, end fire-and-rehire, and much more.

Congress, the evidence is clear and our argument is in countries that have stronger collective bargaining you get a stronger economy too. (*Applause*) We will strengthen collective bargaining rights, make it easier for trade unions to organise in workplaces, repeal anti-trade union laws including the pernicious minimum standards law, and we will give trade unions a strong voice alongside business in a new industrial strategy council, a partnership to grow our economy.

As Keir Starmer has said, "An economy that is strong for working people cannot weaken the institutions that give working people strength." You do not have to choose between a strong economy and a fair society, economic prosperity and social justice are not opposites; they go hand-in-hand. (*Applause*) To do this we have to win and with you that is what we will work ceaselessly to do.

Before I finish, I would like to mention a dedicated Labour and trade unionist who is no longer with us and who we all dearly miss, that is Jack Dromey. (*Applause*) I want to thank you for the real outpouring of respect and affection so many of you from all around the country showed for him after his death last year. It means so much to me and our family, more than I can say. Thank you. But we know absolutely, don't we, what Jack would be saying to us today. He would be saying, "We are so close now, don't mess it up. Working people are depending on us. Work together. Don't argue. It's within reach. We can do it." To me of whom he was so supportive, he would say, "That was a remarkable speech you just made to the TUC, probably your best yet," but I will leave you to be the judge of that. Congress, let's get that change, let's get that Labour government. Let's do it. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Thank you, Harriet, and thank you for all that you have delivered for working people.

Congress, as I said earlier, we are now going to take our outstanding business so I call, finally, Composite 10, Financial Services – Supporting the e-Disadvantaged. The General Council support this motion to be moved by Aegis, seconded by GMB, supported by CWU, and Unite are going to speak in the debate as well.

**C10 Financial services supporting the e-disadvantaged  
Motion 29 and amendments**

Since 2015, over 5,000 big name banks have disappeared from our high streets. As this trend continues, millions of vulnerable customers are left with little or no access to their cash. Despite the drive to digital not everyone has access to online banking and the loss of face-to-face services throughout the country adversely impacts the e-

disadvantaged. Congress recognises that the decline in the Post Office network means that access to in-person banking services and cash has been limited further. As financial providers continue to prioritise profit over customers' needs it is now almost impossible to operate financial affairs without technology and those with no or limited access to it are in an increasingly vulnerable position.



Parking a car, using a public phone or accessing a secure internet is increasingly difficult without online access to a bank account.

The e-disadvantaged people are more likely to become victims of financial crime due to their technological inexperience. If they have outdated software or hardware due to lack of ability, funds, or access to sufficient services they are not protected by the industry or the government who have shifted the responsibility for security to the user without ensuring that industry advances have been inclusive and considered.

Therefore, Congress resolves to campaign for a level of secure service for the e-disadvantaged, to give protections that place the onus of access and security on service providers and government, not consumers.

This includes the TUC working with affiliate unions to campaign against the decline of the Post Office network and to campaign for:

- i. a legal right to pay for goods and services in person using cash
- ii. a statutory obligation on banks and ATM outlets to provide an appropriate network of free-to-use cash deposit and withdrawal services for public access across the UK
- iii. an expansion in accessible banking services available through the Post Office.

**Mover: AEGIS Seconder: GMB Supporter: CWU**

**Brian Linn** (*AEGIS, General Secretary*): In recent years we have witnessed the mass closure of banks, building societies, Post Office branches, this is just by technology advancements and of course the opportunity for them to make massive costs savings. Congress, we are really concerned about the impact this has on the most vulnerable segments of our society, particularly the digital disadvantaged. When these physical branches shut their doors a multitude of challenges emerge for individuals who lack access to digital banking services. This shift disproportionately affects individuals who lack the necessary digital skills to access the technology. This includes the elderly, low income families, those living in rural areas who have limited internet connectivity, and there is many, many more.

Now, for a young laddie like me it is not a problem, I can just get my phone out and it lets me into the internet and have a wee App, look at it and see who is taking money off me, that is easy, but for many, especially elderly people, some do not even have

mobile phones and refuse to get them, how are they going to do their banking? The high street where I moved to 20 years ago had two banks and three building societies; now it does not have any. The last bank shut in June this year. Any time I would go to that bank or walk past it there was a queue out of the door of elderly people doing their banking. It is their only way and only means of seeking financial advice, making cash withdrawals, putting money in and out, all these institutions have closed their branches and not taken any responsibility whatsoever to cater for their customers, they have just assumed everyone will get on with it, but they do not. They have to go to another town now to do their banking and get someone to take them, maybe. The whole thing has got way out of hand and in actual fact when they started closing all these branches about 10, 13 years ago en masse, legislation should have been brought in then to make sure they looked after these vulnerable customers, but they have not so they need to do something about it.

What they could do now, and especially if Labour get in they need to do it, they need to bring in legislation to make sure that the financial institutions who close their branches should adopt and pay for inclusive strategies that care for the needs of the digital disadvantaged. They need to be responsible and look after their customers, not abandon them.

Second, public and private partnerships also play a crucial role. The Government should be collaborating with the banks to establish community hubs, or pop-up branches in the areas where there is high populations of digitally disadvantaged individuals. These hubs could easily be placed within the Post Office network, for instance. Here is an idea: governed by proper legislation the financial institutions and

government could pay contributions to the Post Office branches and keep them open and maybe even expand them. These hubs could offer basic banking services, free cash withdrawal machines, digital literacy workshops, and technology, and access points.

Additionally, partnership with telecommunications companies could lead to improved internet infrastructure in rural and under-served areas ensuring that everyone has a fair shot at digital access and digital services. Surely, it is not beyond the wit of this Government. I laugh every time I read that. I will say that again. Surely, it is not beyond the wit of this Government. Well, it is. Most things are beyond the wit of this Government, aren't they?

The Government, financial institutions, and Post Offices, could get together and resolve this situation. Pensioners, do they care: No. Do they have the role that they want: No. Have they been pressured into resolving the situation: No. That is where we come in. With TUC led pressure and initiatives to demand concerted efforts from financial institutions, the Post Office, the Government, community organisations, the challenges posed by these closures can be significantly mitigated. Congress, please support. I move. (*Applause*)

**The President:** GMB.

**Tanjit Chana** (GMB): Pronoun she, her. We would like to thank Aegis for bringing this important motion and accepting our amendment and to the CWU we are fully

behind your campaign to keep the Post Office at the heart of our communities.  
Solidarity to you. (*Applause*)

Congress, this is a crucial issue for working people. How can we pay for our everyday needs during the cost-of-living crisis when withdrawing our money becomes too difficult. Lack of access to cash affects those on low incomes, the elderly, and the most vulnerable; even most of us feel its impact as we move in and out of relying on cash during our lives. It impacts any workplace that is public facing. More council services and town centre car parks no longer accept cash. A mass closure of railway station ticket offices will deny rail travel to those who need to purchase tickets in cash.

GMB has long campaigned against this sleep walk to a cashless society. It will be devastating for our members working in the cash in transit sector. Our members know how many livelihoods rely on the skilled work they do making sure the nations cash flow smoothly and securely yet they are faced with looming job losses as more than 16,000 cash machines have closed since 2008 and the number of withdrawals have halved during the Covid pandemic, but our members also know there is nothing inevitable about this decline. In parts of the US lawmakers are reversing it and enforcing cash acceptance requiring businesses to accept cash payments in stores.

The UK government has made a start to legally require banks to maintain a network of cash deposits and withdrawal facilities which our amendment calls for. However, this will not reverse the decline in access to cash. Much more needs to be done. People will not withdraw cash if they cannot spend it. To truly protect access to cash

they also need to promote cash acceptance by stores and other businesses and by investing in an underutilised cash distribution network businesses will be supported back to accepting cash payments. That is why our amendment also calls for the TUC to campaign with affiliates for a legal right to pay for goods and services in person using cash. Comrades, please support GMB's amendment to save our cash machines, and the workers who maintain them. I second. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** The CWU to support.

**Andy Furay (CWU):** We support Composite Motion C10 and urge Congress to get behind the amendment from the CWU. Incredibly, since 2015 a total of 5,632 banks and building societies have closed and this year alone a further 500 have been announced for closure. This is a significant contributing factor impacted on vulnerable customers and particularly the disabled and the elderly, who are less able to move to online banking and effectively digitally disenfranchised. In fact, there is a significant and more pronounced impact in rural and low income areas where people are more likely to need access to cash.

To put the campaign into context, over £3bn worth of cash transactions at Post Office branches per month have been driven by the continued branch bank closures highlighting the importance of the Post Office network within communities. In August alone cash transactions at Post Offices totalled £3.34bn and that included personal cash withdrawals, personal cash deposits, and business cash deposits.

The Post Office network is currently at 11,500 across the UK. It is the biggest retail network in the UK with more branches than all the banks and building societies combined. The Post Office has partnerships with 30 banks, building societies, and credit unions, meaning that 99% of the UK's bank customers can access their accounts via the Post Office. Research has found that visits to Post Offices has helped drive another 400m visitors to shops, restaurants, cafes, and local businesses, equating to an estimated £1.1bn in additional revenue for high street businesses and that 99.7% of the UK's population live within three miles of a Post Office.

As described by the London School of Economic Report, Post Offices are particularly important as economic pillars in rural communities and serving as the last remaining shop in the village supporting as many as 30 million visits each year in these branches. The bad news is the Post Office is also in decline due to a lack of investment by government and gross mismanagement. MPs really hold back in their criticism of branches, for closing branches in their constituencies and the Government has dismantled the Post Office network with years of under-funding and back door privatisation.

Therefore, at a time when we are witnessing the retreat of banks, in the geography of the UK it is clear the Post Office remains as a critical conduit for overcoming the banking gap for local societies and ensure they are not left isolated from vital banking and cash services. Congress, I urge you to get behind this motion, the vulnerability of the Post Office network is acute, and the sustainability is on a knife-edge, and it needs massive investment to protect and secure the cherished national institution that is part of the fabric of communities. Thanks very much, Congress. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Unite.

**Vanessa Reid Williams** (*Unite*): Speaking in support of the composite for finance and the e-disadvantaged. Congress, this is an important motion. The impact on the industry is prioritising profiteering over communities and workers. Ever since the financial crash there has been a steady drum beat of announcements of bank closures. This year alone Lloyds Bank has announced 22 closures following on from 66 last year and 18 more from Halifax. They joined the ever growing casualty list to name but a few: HSBC, 114 branches this year, Barclays, 68 branches, NatWest, 52 branches, all together 5,162 banks and building society branches have closed in the UK since 2015. This is not a retreat from the high street, it is complete abandonment. We face a retail banking industry with unchecked digitalisation. It means work is ever incentivised. AI means of surveillance of workers runs rampant in our workplaces, where large groups of the population are frozen out and forgotten, 65% of UK consumers report needing regular access to cash in ATMs including those over 65 who are more reliant on access to cash to pay for bills and other essentials.

This is why Unite supports calls for universal service obligation which legally obliges banks to provide cash in addition to digital offerings. Congress, finite is not a decline in the industry, the banks are digitally coining it in. Since the pandemic the top banks have made more money than at a point since the financial crash. Congress, our Unite finance workers are fighting back through our combines and in our workplaces we are taking on low pay and digitalisation. This motion is an important next step to return

retail banks as community services for the many and not profiteering for the few.

Please, Congress, support this motion. Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Composite 10 is before you, Congress. Will all those in favour please show? Put your hands down. All those against? That is carried.

*Composite 10 was CARRIED.*

**The President:** I now call paragraph 5.1 to 5.18, and Motion 77, National Trade Unions Support for Trades Councils Solidarity Work. The General Council supports the motion. It is to be moved by Liz Payne Ahmadi on behalf of the Trades Council Conference, seconded by POA. Can NUJ and ASLEF stand by to also participate in debate. Liz.

**77 National trades unions' support for trades councils' solidarity work**

Congress believes that solidarity with workers taking strike action is a fundamental principle of the trade union movement. Therefore, Congress applauds all local trades councils who have been working so hard during 2022 and 2023 to deliver picket line solidarity with strikers from across the spectrum of trade unions - both TUC affiliated and non-affiliated.

However, despite the best efforts of trades councils to reach out to unions, at local level and through regional TUC structures, seeking information on local disputes, their capacity to show solidarity and offer picket line support has in some cases been, limited by less-than-ideal communications between unions and trades councils. Often trades councils are the last to know about disputes, strikes and picket lines in their areas, including when and where the picket lines will be. This makes coordinating public support and inter-union solidarity more difficult and less effective than it should be.

Congress further believes that provision of accurate and timely information is crucial to every aspect of relationship building between trades councils, unions, and their branches. However, many trades councils lack vital information about union branches in their localities.

Congress therefore urges the TUC General Council to encourage all affiliated trade unions to:



- i. ensure that all their media and communications officers and/or general secretaries have up to date contact details for all UK (and as appropriate Republic of Ireland) trades councils
- ii. ensure, as a matter of routine, that relevant information, including media releases, are sent to all trades councils
- iii. ensure that in the run up to and during disputes (whether local, regional, or national), trades councils are sent up-to-date information on strike dates and times, picket lines, how negotiations, if any, are proceeding, and the outcomes of these disputes.
- iv. Congress also asks the General Council to write to all affiliated unions, requesting them to ensure that their regional officers are provided with the contact details of trades council secretaries in their region, and that these officers send the names of the relevant branches of their union to each trades council.

### **Trades Councils Conference**

**Liz Payne Ahmadi** (TUC JCC): From the National Trades Council Conference. Congress, I was not allowed of course by rule to speak on Monday concerning the trades councils and their relations with this body but today I can speak about the work that we do in our localities and our communities in support of every union and of every person living in those places across the country.

It is a great privilege to stand here today, first time here, obviously first-time speaker because of that, but before you clap I want to tell you that it is almost 40 years to the day since I first walked into a trades council meeting in Scarborough representing NATVI, as it was then, in 1983, and of course I walked into that meeting just a few months before the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tolpuddle and before the beginning of the great miners' strike and I learned from both of those what a huge difference the trades councils can make in our communities. (*Applause*) Thank you.

The trades councils have a unique role bringing unions together, looking at the issues that face all of us in our workplaces, creating a picture of our locality and our

community, building an understanding of our huge potential and what we can do together, and then of course getting on and doing just that. We bring our history, the history of working people and our class into our communities. We bring our very, very powerful togetherness into our communities, and our understanding, very deep understanding of the localities. We take our campaigns out on stalls on the streets, leafleting, meetings, we know our area we know our workplaces, we know our issues, we know exactly what needs to be done where we are. We take our campaigns into local government and we take them to our MPs everywhere. It does not matter what the colour of those MPs is. It does not matter about their politics because we take issues to them which say, basically, that you can never stand up in Parliament and say that the working people of your town did not bring those issues to you.

During the strikes last year from 21<sup>st</sup> June my trades council in Taunton stood on 62 picket lines with RMT, CWU, UCU, NEU, Unison, PCS, Prospect, the doctors, the nurses. We brought support to the picket lines, we organised solidarity hours, we organised rallies, marches, demos, in Taunton. Taunton is not a hotbed of revolution but make no mistake it knows what trade unions are and it knows what they want.

*(Applause)*

Now, I have 48 seconds to tell you how you can help and support trades councils. Please communicate with us, put all our secretaries on your mailing list, send us your releases. Please regional secretaries contact trades councils secretaries, let them know in good time what is going on because we can work for you, we can make a difference like you cannot imagine if we have the information from you, and we will. We do not

just talk about unity, we are unity. Solidarity with you all. Please support the trades councils and we support you. Please support the motion. (*Applause*)

**The President:** POA to second.

**Jackie Marshall (POA):** Trades councils are an essential asset of the trade union movement, particularly those who are active. I am an executive member of the Shropshire and Telford Trades Council. Our President, Ash Silverstone, is sat amongst the Unison delegation at Congress. Our trades council is active and in recent times have stood on many picket lines supporting those in dispute with their employers but quite often it is only by chance that we found out about the action. Likewise, we are unfortunate to have Stephen Yaxley-Lennon living in our areas, better known as Tommy Robinson, a British Far Right anti-Islamic activist, convicted criminal, cofounder and former leader of the EDL, and political adviser to UKIP. When he and his supporters plan a march in our area the trades council is always there in opposition. (*Applause*) But other than gathering support from our local unions, we have no avenue to gain support from the wider trade union movement.

If this motion is accepted by Congress, it would provide an avenue for all trades councils to support and partake in any dispute, march, or rally, as they would have the details and be able to organise. I can relate to everything this motion, communication is poor, and it desperately needs to improve. Policy of the POA is that every branch affiliates to their local trades council and on occasions it is has been really difficult to find names and contact numbers. If this motion is passed, it will help to address this

problem and will give trades councils greater opportunity to support those in dispute and support each other. Please support the motion. (*Applause*)

**The President:** NUJ.

**David Nicholson** (NUJ): Morning, Congress, President. I think there might be some regret in the hall over Motion 76 – was it two days ago – after hearing Liz explain what the solidarity trades councils give to us when we are in struggle, and that is why the NUJ want to support this motion, to repay some of that solidarity work that the trades councils have done up and down the country when our members have been out on strike. That is our members in the BBC, in local radio, fighting for their community news to be saved from the cuts that are going across BBC local radio at the moment, and our members at Reach. It is not a toothpaste manufacturer, it is the company that owns the *Daily Express*, the *Mirror*, and in Wales the *Western Mail*.

Now, when our members in Reach went on strike it was a catalyst for the young workers there, the young journalists joined the NUJ in their hundreds so that they could go on strike, and they were bowled over by the support they got on their picket lines, organised by the trades councils, they cajoled and persuaded all the unions to send along representatives to show their support and solidarity when our members were on strike. For those young workers, it was a real lesson in the solidarity that the trade union movement shows each other.

In Wales I am on the general council of the Wales TUC. We actually have two representatives from the trades councils on the General Council so they find out all

the information that is going on about disputes in Wales because they are there in the room and then they go away and work really hard to make sure that our strikes are successful and our actions are well supported. I think we should repay that and show the trades councils a bit of love and pass this motion, please. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** ASLEF.

**Andrew Hudd** (ASLEF): Rising to support. Liz opened up her remarks when she was moving this motion that she was privileged to be giving her speech to us today. I am privileged to be on the platform directly after hers. She is a wonderful woman and has been a real ally to ASLEF in our dispute. ASLEF, like many trade unions have the trades councils written through their rule book and very recently, the last two years, we have reinvigorated that rule and got activists into the local trades councils. That has been paid back in spades. Those young activists that have gone in and they have reinvigorated the councils and the trades councils have been on every single ASLEF picket line since we have been in dispute for the last 18 months.

ASLEF is not a big trade union. We do not have the assets that the larger trade unions have. When we get the trades councils distributing leaflets, turning up on our picket lines to make them bigger as support, literally we have had more supporters on our picket lines from trades councils than we have had pickets sometimes, and that for young members, young strikers, those who have not been on strike before, it is a real boost to their morale. It is so vitally important. We rely also as well because we do not have the boots on the ground about distributing information about our strike and

our activities, and what the strike is about. The trades councils have done a wonderful job about that.

What this motion is asking for, by the way, if you have read it, is about getting trade unions to be more proactive in delivering information to the trades councils because if we have more informed and educated members of movements, and activists, then we can build those supports on the picket lines that are so vital to ASLEF and other trade unions of our size but, of course, every trade union. It is really important we support this today and also important the trade unions get young members into and active in those trades councils. Please support. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Thank you, delegate. Motion 77 is before you. Will all those in favour please show? Put your hands down. All those against? That is carried.

*Motion 77 was CARRIED.*

**The President:** I call paragraph 2.10 and Motion 78, RISKS e-newsletter. The General Council support the motion and I will call on Liz Snape to explain the position on behalf of the General Council after it has been moved by TSSA and seconded by ASLEF.

### **78 RISKS e-newsletter**

For many years the TUC's weekly RISKS e-newsletter has been an invaluable source of information for health and safety reps across the country alongside the quarterly Hazards magazine. RISKS provides information and analysis on what the government, the TUC, trade unions and other relevant organisations are doing, as well as on campaigns, workplace victories on health and safety and on-going struggles, relevant scientific and technical information on all aspects of health, safety, environment and just transition.

On 23 June, the Hazards Campaign was informed – without any warning or consultation - that TUC had cancelled RISKS with immediate effect, apparently following the withdrawal of funding by Thompson’s Solicitors. This is a major blow to health and safety reps, especially those working in smaller unions without a dedicated health and safety department and to union health and safety officers at all levels within our unions.

This conference registers our concern and disapproval at the abrupt manner in which RISKS has been cancelled and call upon the TUC to reconsider the decision, including seeking alternative sources of financial support.

This conference instructs the TUC to:

- i. consult with Hazards magazine with a view to urgently maximising and increasing support and additional funding to ensure the security and sustainability of the magazine
- ii. urge all trade councils, union branches and safety reps to ensure they are subscribed to Hazards magazine and encourage others to do so immediately.

### **Transport Salaried Staffs’ Association**

**Frank Ellis (TSSA):** This is a simple motion so I will be very brief. On June 6<sup>th</sup> the TUC wrote to unions to say that the TUC was no longer able to continue with the weekly RISKS newsletter. That e-newsletter goes out to an audience of thousands of health and safety reps with union and other news, and on health and safety matters, campaigns, and legal updates. The TUC email stated that Thompsons Solicitors had made the decision to terminate its sponsorship so that the TUC was no longer able to fund it. In our discussions with Thompsons it seems this is not quite the case and they are keen to continue to support health and safety in some form or other. We consider that the e-newsletter and Hazards magazine are essential to our members and call for it, or something similar, to be reinstated. Congress, please support the motion.

*(Applause)*

**The President:** Seconded by ASLEF.

**Dawn Stewart** (*ASLEF*): Congress, health and safety reps in our regions do incredible work. They are the front line supporting our members and keeping them safe in their workplaces. They are an invaluable asset to the union movement and they deserve so much credit. The RISKS e-newsletter is key to supporting those reps. In all the work that they do it provides some information on a wide variety of topics, it keeps health and safety reps up to date and informed. It also provides very needed self-esteem, uplift of sharing good practice and union victories across our movement. The cancellation of RISK is a huge loss to our movement and to the reps. Congress, we need publications like this desperately; without them health and safety reps will lose an incredible tool and for some it is the only source of support that they have. Please support this motion and its aims. I second. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Before I take the vote I call on Liz Snape to give the General Council's explanation, please.

**Liz Snape:** Speaking on behalf of the General Council who support the motion with this explanation. The motion draws attention to the decision to cease publication of the RISKS newsletter following funding pressures. It also calls upon the TUC to consult with Hazards magazine to maximise support for the magazine. It also urges trades councils, union branches, and safety reps to subscribe to Hazards magazine. A need for additional funding for RISKS was identified back in 2018 and generous support was given by Thompsons, valued supporters of the TUC and to many unions. The TUC is grateful for that continued and generous contribution from Thompsons.



Since then, however, efforts have been made to secure additional funding that is needed, and these efforts will continue. In the meantime, later this year, the TUC will be launching a new trade union website for reps. This will provide a one-stop shop and a source of information for all union reps but, in particular, our incredible health and safety reps, and with this explanation the General Council supports the motion. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Thank you, Liz. Moving to the vote on Motion 78, will all those in favour please show? Put your hands down. All those against? That is carried.

*Motion 78 was CARRIED.*

**The President:** I call Motion 79, Supporting the Ron Todd Foundation as a Movement. The General Council support the motion and I will be calling on Kate Bell to explain the position on behalf of the General Council after it has been moved by the Bakers' Union and seconded by POA. Sarah.

### **79 Supporting the Ron Todd Foundation as a movement**

The Ron Todd Foundation has supported 34,733 trade union members over a 12-month period (2021–22) through practical solidarity, Ron Todd House and solidarity education workshops.

The cost-of-living crisis means that working people are struggling with everyday living costs, thus pushing them further into poverty.

Congress agrees that the trade union movement needs to support organisations who offer practical solidarity rather than traditional charity.

Congress therefore resolves:

- i. that the TUC becomes a member by affiliating to the Ron Todd Foundation.
- ii. to call on trades councils to officially support the Ron Todd Foundation by becoming a member by affiliating.
- iii. to call on all TUC-affiliated trade unions to officially support the Ron Todd Foundation by ensuring that their union nationally supports the charity by becoming a member by affiliating and that members, branches, regions, sectors are proactively encouraged to do the same.

- iv. to support the work of the Ron Todd Foundation by publicising the activities of the organisation throughout the networks available to the TUC.
- v. to propose to TUC-affiliated trade unions that they publicise the activities of the Ron Todd Foundation as widely as possible.
- vi. to request that TUC-affiliated trade unions support the 'Looking Back to Fight Forward' campaign by calling on their branches to become part of the Five Hundred Solidarity Network\*.

\*The Ron Todd Foundation are looking for 500 branches, regions, sectors, unions to donate £500 a year for five years, to enable the Foundation to increase capacity, creating additional solidarity hubs across the regions

### **Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union**

**Sarah Woolley** (*Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, General Secretary*): For the final time this week. President, Congress, solidarity is more than just words, it is action and the Ron Todd Foundation is no stranger to acting to support our members throughout the movement by offering solidarity during their time of need, whether that is to have a brew and a chat, a bed for the night, the ability to wash clothes, have a hot meal or a shower, or just a friendly face to talk to. The Ron Todd House is currently providing future hubs that will be possible by voting this motion through and acting on it as branches and regions by being part of the 500, could provide much needed community space at a time when significant numbers of our members and the wider community are impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, poverty, and inequality. Nowhere else in our movement offers this type of solidarity. Nowhere else in our movement have their doors opened 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for real practical hands-on support for our members during their time of need.

Congress, solidarity is not something that happens in isolation. It begins to develop in authentic relationships, in conversations, with upskilling and power, to motivate and mobilise, sparking movements, doing things with people, not for people, the Ron Todd Foundation built on the foundations of and to remember a

fantastic past leader of our movement is an integral part of our movement, and it is our responsibility to support its work, increase the possibilities for the future of it, and ensure that our members now, and in the future, have a place to turn to for practical solidarity when they need it. Its mission is the prevention or relief of poverty and the promotion of equality and diversity and they strive to achieve this through building the Ron Todd network, the solidarity education programme, and the annual Ron Todd lecture and awards.

To finish, Congress, in 2022 the foundation, led by the amazing Bianca Todd, supported over 20,000 – 20,000 – trade union members, nearly 2,000 of those were from our union. Just think how many more of our members could be supported by the movement really getting behind the foundation and helping to build it. Solidarity in action. Please support. (*Applause*)

**The President:** POA to second.

**Steve Gillan** (*POA*): President, Congress, pleased to be back up with my new found confidence and moving this. I hope it is not the kiss of death seconding this motion. The reality is we invested in the Ron Todd Foundation many years ago, actually, and I think Sarah said about Bianca leading on this particular issue. I went and visited Bianca in Northampton and I have to say I saw firsthand how well this was run and Sarah mentioned about many trade union members going through for a shower, for help with rent, and different things. Whilst I was there I saw trade union members coming through the door and being helped, whether it was a shower as Sarah said, or whether it was getting assistance with rent.

The POA, like many unions I suppose, has their own welfare fund but not every trade union member wants to come forward to their own trade union or employer for that assistance because they may be embarrassed, but I have to say 2,000 of our members passed through the doors of the Ron Todd Foundation in one way or another for that assistance. Please support this motion because I think it is vitally important, as Sarah said, 20,000 people going through their doors in one year. That is why we invested in it and very proud to invest in it over the past five or six years. It is so worthwhile. Please do not neglect it because the great Ron Todd, of the Transport & General Workers Union, would be ever so proud of what his granddaughter has actually achieved in doing this. Support the motion. Thank you, Congress. (*Applause*)

**The President:** I now call Kate Bell, Asst. General Secretary, to give the General Council's explanation.

**Kate Bell** (*Asst. General Secretary of the TUC*): Thank you, President. Speaking on behalf of the General Council, which supports the motion with this explanation. The Ron Todd Foundation works to tackle poverty and as we have heard this week that work is more important than ever. To support efforts to tackle poverty the TUC affiliates to the End Child Poverty coalition which brings together a wide range of anti-poverty campaign organisations. This helps us to deal with the many requests we receive to affiliate to individual campaigns.

The TUC is happy to circulate information about the Ron Todd Foundation but would want to respect individual unions' own democratic processes about affiliation to any organisation, including this one. With this explanation please support the motion. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Congress, Motion 79 is before you. Will all those in favour please show? Put your hands down. All those against? That is carried.

*Motion 79 was CARRIED.*

**The President:** Congress, you will see we have been joined on the platform by our final guest speaker. Luc Triangle has been the International TUC's Acting General Secretary since April this year and is a powerful advocate of international trade unionism. He spent almost 30 years in his native Belgian's biggest union federation where he was heavily involved in the foundation of the European Works Councils, allowing thousands of workers' representatives to challenge companies at a transnational level. He then moved on to the European level and was instrumental in the creation of the IndustriAll European Trade Union of which he became the leader in 2016. He is a strong and indispensable advocate for workers' rights, together with IndustriAll Europe in 39 European countries. In one month at the Special Congress he will be confirmed as the full General Secretary of the International TUC having stood for election on a platform of revitalising democracy and representation in our global movement as the best response to the many challenges that we all face. Luc, you are very welcome and I invite you to address Congress. *(Applause)*

**Luc Triangle, the International TUC's Acting General Secretary, addressed Congress.**

**Luc Triangle:** Good Morning. Thank you, Maria, for the introduction. Thank you Paul for inviting me to this important TUC Congress. Dear delegates, dear

friends, dear comrades, the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) represents all together 200 million workers in 167 countries and territories. It is great to be here with you today in Liverpool, a city with a long history of workers and trade union fights and wins. The world, dear comrades, is at a crossroads of conversion crisis. Global shocks to economies and societies upset by the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine have worsened pre-existing vulnerabilities and undermined the slow progress that we had seen at global level in the fight against poverty and inequality.

Across the world we see social regression rather than progress in the last years. Also, European government responses to the different crises are on the rise and the interests of companies continue to dominate over the wellbeing of the majority of the population in the world. Besides the direct and indirect consequences of war in a difficult geopolitical context workers have also suffered from the climate crisis, the food and energy crisis, and high inflation which has undermined their purchasing power and pushing many of them further into poverty. Interest rate rises have further worsened the debt crisis in many countries around the world and threatening public services and the much needed social spending for a human centred recovery.

The state of social justice in the world should shame us all. The top 1% has taken 38% of all wealth accumulated since the '90s whereas the bottom 50% has gained only 2% and 685 million people live in extreme poverty. Over 50 million workers are in modern slavery still today and at least 160 million children remain in child labour with numbers going up again after decades of decline. Every year three million workers die and hundreds of millions are injured or made ill because of work. More than 60% is working in the informal economy without any labour

protection and four billion are excluded from social protection. The pay gap between men and women is still today 20%. These sobering numbers can surely leave none of us untouched. It is an unacceptable reality. We have to do better and we have to do much better and we have to fight for that in unity, in solidarity, across the world.

The converging crisis that we are facing needs an all-encompassing response that we build more sustainable and resilient societies and an agenda with social justice at the centre. The ITUC Congress last year launched our global trade union demand for a new social contract with jobs, rights, living wages, social protection, equality, and inclusion for all at the centre. This global new social contract is our programme to create decent and climate friendly jobs for all with just transition at the centre. This new social contract is about our global demands on workers' rights and social protection, living wages, and equal pay policies. This contract is also about inclusion, equality, and our opposition against any form of discrimination.

World military expenditure grew by 19% over the last decade to reach a record high of over US \$2 trillion. We are putting all our money into war and destruction, worsening division rather than building a shared common global security system based on social justice for all.

Well, dear friends, we need to fight for this better world all together. Attacks on workers' rights are on the rise, everywhere in the world, and there are no regions any more where we can take workers' rights for granted. The ITUC, we, launched in June this year our 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the ITUC Global Rights Index. The index shows us clearly that the problem of attacks on workers' rights is big and getting

bigger. The 2023 index provides shocking evidence that the foundations of democracy are under attack with a clear link between workers' rights being upheld and the strength of our democracy. The erosion of one amounts to the degradation of the other.

Europe has long considered itself as a bastion of democracy and workers' rights. However, the index shows that this is changing. Workers in Belarus and Turkey, and they are here, face surveillance, imprisonment, and brutality from regimes that share autocratic practices. Working people in the Netherlands and Belgium have seen a tightening of restrictions and refusal by governments and employers to negotiate with trade union representatives. In France, lawful protests demanding dialogue with trade unions on an alternative for the Macron pension reform were met with vicious police beatings and indiscriminated arrests and tear gas. Also, in this country, the United Kingdom, union busting, attempts to introduce legislation curtailing the right to strike and protest, and violations of equality bargaining agreements have become systematic and led to the country's rating dropping to four on a scale of five: four means systematic violation of rights.

The right to strike is part of our fight for a real democratic society. Your fight is also our fight. (*Applause*) Across the world in both high income and low income countries even though working people have faced an historic cost-of-living crisis and spiralling inflation driven by corporate greed, governments have cracked down on the right to collectively negotiate wage rises and take strike action. Nine out of ten countries violated the right to strike in the world. It is a global fight for maintaining this right. Eight out of ten countries violated the right of collective bargaining. Three out of four countries excluded working people from the right to establish or join a trade union. As an example, Burundi, Haiti, India, Turkey,



and Emirates, were among those countries that excluded working people from union representation.

The right to free speech and assembly was restricted in nearly one out of two countries, often resulting in protesting workers facing police brutality. In Iran, teachers were arrested and beaten by the police for taking part in this year's May Day demonstrations. Three out of four countries impeded registration of unions and...bantam..., including again in Belarus, Myanmar, Hong Kong, and Guatemala. Workers were arrested and detained in 69 countries and in two out of three countries working people had no or restricted access to justice. Workers experienced violence in 44 countries and, unfortunately, we have evidence of killed trade unionists in at least eight countries.

We see the line between autocracies and democracies blurring. When dialogue between states and citizens breaks down, when nations flirt with autocracy to pass unpopular laws, when parliaments are put aside when governments deploy state forces to quell lawful resistance, democracy is on the line and working people suffer the consequences. To reinforce the fabric of our societies, to renew an established democracy, and to support working people, we need that new social contract. It will be more crucial as ever to restore democracy, equality, decency, and to give workers their fair share of economic growth. In many countries we notice that trust in governments is broken and that the Far Right is stepping into the breach to seek division and further threaten fundamental liberties. This can only be stopped by a new social contract that can rebuild trust and ensure that our democracies are fit for purpose to meet the needs of working people today.

It also means international trade union solidarity, dear colleagues, in a world where capital and companies are global, where our income and rights are systematically attacked by governments and employers the way forward for trade unionists is not to return back to isolation. We must strengthen our international cooperation and action and that is what our members expect from us. Workers of the world unite. Workers of the world unite. That was nearly 200 years ago the slogan of the first trade unions. The global trade union movement led by the ITUC will act in solidarity: an attack on one of us is an attack on all. The voice of the ITUC will be loud and clear against any violation. The TUC is one of the strongest trade union confederations in the world. I, we, count on the TUC to be part of this international solidarity. Long live the TUC. Long live the ITUC. Long live solidarity. Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Thank you for that speech, Luc. It was very good of you to address our Congress and we look forward to working closely with you and all our global international colleagues in the International TUC. Workers of the world unite indeed. Now, Congress, we are on to Emergency Motions, we have two, and I am going to take Emergency Motion 1 first, which is about urgent steps following the unprecedented public response to railway ticket office closures consultation. The General Council support the motion. It is going to be moved by RMT and seconded by TSSA, and as I indicated earlier I will be taking several unions to speak in this debate as people will remember this was also a subject of the Disability Conference motion that came to Congress earlier on this week, and we did not have a lot of time to discuss it then so there are going to be some additional speakers who indicated under that motion. First of all, it is to be moved by RMT.

*(To be inserted)*

**Emergency Motion 1 - Urgent steps following the unprecedented public response to railway ticket office closures consultation.**

**John Leach** (*National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers*): We have the responsibility this morning of moving this emergency resolution and an emergency it very much is. Quite rightly on Monday earlier this week we were able to take the TUC Disabled Members Conference resolution on this matter, and this is not a case of two bites of the same cherry. This is a situation that warrants our attention twice this week. This is a live moving situation which is happening right now as we are in here at this Congress. Not only am I moving this resolution with you this morning but our General Secretary, Mick Lynch, is down in London at the Transport Select Committee that has already met this morning, giving clear and precise evidence that this has to stop and cannot be allowed to happen. There has been an adjournment debate this morning in the House of Commons in Parliament as well on this matter which is very well attended, with cross-party support now against this diabolical proposal to close every single ticket office in this country. (*Applause*)

Over 100,000 people have now signed a petition calling for another debate in Parliament and on top of that we have had nearly 700,000, heading towards a million, contributions in the public consultation against it. (*Applause*) Not only that, and I shall make absolutely no apology for this and why would I, I salute our membership, the 20,000 RMT members who have been on strike over 20 times this year against these cuts. (*Applause*) We will be on strike again if we need to, you better believe it.

Let's just have a little look about what this is all about and let's remember what Harriet said earlier about that pre-vaccine period, going back to the pandemic because this is where this all comes from. What we have is a government on a revenge power trip seeking to redress and carry out a smash-and-grab raid against the railway, my members' terms and conditions, and a safe accessible railway service for the travelling public, only they are not going to get away with it. At that time my members, our members, in the RMT kept Britain moving with a disproportionately high impact of the pandemic upon us and this is not saying anything about anyone else that went through the national emergency that took place but we lost a lot of people and now, as I say, we have a smash-and-grab raid against our T&Cs and a polling proposal to close every single ticket office in this country, 948 of them. They are not going to get away with it. (*Applause*) This is a spiteful, vengeful attack on my union, and the other railway unions that have been involved in this fightback.

What is the real story, and this is why the TUC Disabled Members Conference very correctly picked this up, this is not just about new technology, if it was we probably would not even be on strike. As we have often said in the media, RMT and the other railway unions have delivered new technology, we always have from the day of steam trains and top hats. Why wouldn't we? The most modern signalling technology, we deliver it, our members operate it every single day. No, this is actually about getting rid of 2,500 front line uniformed men and women who provide a first-class service to the people who need it. That is why we are not going to give up until it's done.

The resolution and an emergency, as is always the case with us, is a practical proposal, a list of tasks that we are asking the TUC to support. It talks about an

urgent meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup> of passenger watchdogs, a lobby of Parliament, coordination with affiliates who explore options for providing legal support to challenges to the closures and to seek an urgent meeting with the Government demanding the withdrawal of the closures, and I am sure everyone in here will get behind that. We have the consultation process extended to 31<sup>st</sup> October.

The real message on top of all of that is this, they have completely and utterly underestimated the opposition to this, led by our union in the first and forefront at the beginning of last year when we balloted our membership. As I said before from the rostrum, this is the biggest fight my union has been involved in, not just ticket offices but the fight for a pay rise and the attacks against our terms and conditions and our jobs since time began, the biggest dispute since the RMT and its forerunner unions were set up in 1872, and we are in it till we win it. They have totally underestimated what we are about. *(Applause)*

We have re-balloted our membership three times and we will do it again if needs be. This is a fight for all of us. We ask for your complete support in this emergency resolution, we are sure we will get it, and that way we can continue to take the fight to the enemy. What an absolute disgraceful proposal to deny disabled access, to attack people's jobs, only this is it: they ain't gonna get away with it. We're in it to win it. Solidarity. *(Applause)*

**The President:** To be seconded by TSSA, and I am also going to be taking in the debate ASLEFE, CWU, NUJ, NEU, and Unison. TSSA.

**Peter Pendle** *(Transport Salaried Staff Association):* I am delighted to be seconding the RMT's emergency motion. First of all, I want to thank all of you for

the support you have given the transport unions during the campaign and for responding to the consultation. Almost 700,000 responses to the consultation is incredible, more than double of any other consultation. It is an indication of how cross the travelling public are about the proposals to close almost every ticket office. Now, as has just been said, over 100,000 people have signed the petition against the closures and demanding a debate in Parliament.

Now, we have to look against the background of the attacks by the Tory government on the rail industry. Sunak hates trains. He would rather fly from London to Southampton than get the train and on Monday he was quoted in the *London Evening Standard* saying: "It is right to close ticket offices," despite almost 700,000 responses opposing the closure in the consultation. Now, I am not sure a lot of Tory MPs in marginal constituencies will think that is such a good idea so please, if you have not already done so, send them a note. It is, as has just been said, all part of a longer term strategy to run down the rail industry, cut costs, sack staff, and move passengers onto roads.

Some of the figures: you may have heard much about only 13% of our tickets are sold from ticket offices. Maybe nationally but not in Manchester, not in Liverpool where the figure is much closer to 50% and, as you have already heard, not for those with disabilities. You heard earlier in Congress how much they rely on ticket offices. Are those 13% of passengers not important, well, even WH Smiths on railway stations has staff tills next to the automatic checkouts. What does 13% actually equate to – 150 million rail journeys in the past year, 150 million tickets sold from ticket offices. In addition, many passengers purchase their season tickets at ticket offices as well meaning that as many as another 210 million

journeys stem from dedicated offices. That is up to 360 rail journeys that come from sales in ticket offices.

Moving staff out of ticket offices and into multi-skilled customer help roles, the number of overall staff will be reduced by 2,000 jobs, meaning there will actually be many fewer staff about on stations: almost 2,000 job losses. That is why some of the train operators are intending to replace existing staff with mobile teams who will provide limited cover at certain hours of the day, so no one at many stations most of the time.

Congress, we do not trust the Government, they call the tune to the rail delivery group and the train operating companies, and they will move all of the people onto concourses now and in two or three years' time they will come back and they will take them away with even more job losses. Congress, thank you again for your support during the consultation. Now, please, back the emergency motion. Let's stop these ticket office closures. *(Applause)*

**The President:** ASLEF.

**Simon Weller (ASLEF):** Thank you, President. Congress, this is a deliberate and corrosive attack by this Government, empty and unstaffed stations will not save money, all they will deliver is a hostile environment to the most vulnerable people in our travelling public. We will see stations when they are unstaffed become pretty desolate places and those stations then become an attraction for criminal activity. The Tories do not care about that. As a train driver, a former train driver for 20 years, I know that when you take away staff you import more risk and the risk here is to the most vulnerable. I would commend what the RMT

and the TSSA, and the disability campaigning groups have managed to achieve with this astonishing level of public engagement. The reality is people are fed up with the continual attacks on our national infrastructure, and this is it again. *(Applause)* It is time we are going to have to defend our own. Please support. *(Applause)*

**The President:** CWU.

**Rob Wotherspoon** (*Communication Workers Union*): We stand in solidarity with the RMT in opposition to these ticket office closures. When we see employers with the Government backing them spending billions to prolong disputes whilst slashing jobs and services, we know this is not about efficiency, it is about trying to break unions, it is about cutting services to the bone, and degrading provision to the disabled. This is part of a coordinated attack on our national infrastructure by people who know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

In our postal industries we face the same problems. You have already heard about the decimation of our Post Office network due to a two-thirds funding cut over a decade. In Royal Mail failed privatisation and gross financial mismanagement has led to billions being paid out to shareholders which has led to a very similar attempt to close the majority of customer service points which are vital for parcel collection and other postal services. A call for the public to lobby against that and that plan was halted, it returned as a plan to close them by stealth by reducing hours to the bare minimum. This also threatens employment to longstanding employees many of whom can no longer perform postal deliveries and have disabilities of their own so it is a double attack on the disabled.



Across society as a whole, Congress, we must finally bury this permanent austerity mindset that makes us all poorer and tears apart the fabric of our society. We stand with the RMT. We stand with the TSSA. We stand with the railway workers, disabled people, the elderly, and passengers opposing these ticket office closures and against the managed decline of our public services. Congress, please support. (*Applause*)

**The President:** NUJ.

**Natasha Hirst** (*National Union of Journalists*): There is still a fundamental message that many people just do not understand disabled people have the same human rights as everybody else and our lives are every bit as valuable as anybody else's. (*Applause*) It should not need saying. It is genuinely frightening that we live in a society where those in power do not agree with that. The inequalities and injustices that disabled people face are systemic. We live and work in a world that is designed to exclude us. It is designed to take power away from us and to put it in the hands of those who believe that we are nothing but a burden on society. As a result, our human rights and our lives are seen as dispensable.

The closure of the ticket offices is an example of back ableism in practice. Learn that word, Congress, and use it, call it out when you see it: ableism. (*Applause*) Under the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People, Article 19 sets out our right to independent living and that means that disabled people should have the access and the assistance to go about our daily lives with the same freedom as anybody else, and what everybody else can take for granted. Any disabled person should be able to just turn up and travel as they wish whenever they wish,

and this applies to people with invisible impairments as well as visible impairments. Closing ticket offices, we have heard, makes rail travel inaccessible and less safe and it is a clear breach of our human rights.

Now, we know this and we have made our opposition absolutely clear the transport bosses know this, the Government knows this, and they do not care. Congress, we have to make them care. (*Applause*) Accessible travel is vital to disabled people and to so many others it is an intersectional issue and solidarity with our comrades who have been fighting so hard to protect those services. Thank you for ensuring that the barriers facing disabled people and other minoritised groups have gone to the core of your campaign. As a movement we know that when one group comes under attack all of our rights are at risk and nobody is safe from a government that is willing to gleefully abuse its power in this way. We have to stop them. We cannot let them win. Congress, please support. (*Applause*)

**The President:** NEU.

**Coleen Johnson** (NEU): President, Congress, more than 680,000 individuals who responded to the consultation on the proposed closure of the ticket offices a proposal that would see more than 2,200 jobs being lost and a lack of any staff presence at many stations. The consultation period, which had been extended to September 1<sup>st</sup>, gave the public a chance to show their total objection to a plan that if it were to go ahead would unfairly discriminate against both disabled and elderly people. In Worcestershire NUM members have worked together with RMT and the trades council to raise awareness of the plan that if it were enacted it would likely cause multiple infringements of the Equality Act very quickly.

We know that so many disabled people at the moment are thoughtfully and carefully assisted by rail staff to get on and off their trains safely but did you know that the 13 rail companies have had to produce equality impact assessments, the details of which are very alarming. They talk of increased personal security and safety concerns, relating to the lack of tactile services at stations. This could result in more serious accidents, if not deaths. The assessments talk about the possibility of increased hate speech and hate crime at stations and on trains at busy times. Mention was made of ticketing machines that are inaccessible to blind and partially sighted people and wheelchair users. It was noted also that if ticket machines are closed so will be the waiting rooms and the toilets.

Recently there was an excellent cartoon in *Private Eye* that showed an elderly person attempting to buy a ticket from an info hub. The text read: “OK, one more time, go home and log on to our website from your computer, create an account, and purchase your ticket with your credit or debit card. Download the ticket onto your Smartphone and then come back at the allocated time. Just what part of this easier and more convenient message don’t you get?”

Disabled trade unionists uphold the social model of disability which is all about the barriers faced by people with impairment. This plan to close the ticket offices is an additional barrier and a big one at that. Disabled people’s organisations should be consulted and listened to when they say that disabled people will not be able to travel confidently due to lack of support and access, and their lives will be hugely impacted.

On my way to Congress, travelling on a very crowded train to Birmingham New Street, with a large case, an RMT member asked me if I needed support to change trains later. Now, that will all go if we have less staff on trains and on platforms, and in ticket offices. We must do everything we can to block the proposed changes as they are discriminatory and ultimately motivated by profit. Congress, support the motion. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Unison.

**Angela Hamilton** (*Unison*): Congress, as a disabled person I face difficulties every time I leave the house. These difficulties are not because I am disabled but because of barriers that society puts in our way, everything from stairs to colour contrast makes life harder for disabled people than it is for non-disabled people, and don't get me started on the prejudicial attitudes we face in the workplace and in education, and by this Tory government every single day of our lives, a government that would rather we sat in the corner and just waited to die.

For decades we have been fighting for a fairer society, more equal for disabled people, and we have had some success but, Congress, this Government have set the progress back years and this plan is just another way of isolating and excluding disabled people. Unison has around 350,000 disabled members and not one of them support this. Wheelchair users, blind and visually impaired people, people with a learning disability, and people like me who often get told, "You don't look disabled." We are not just angry but we are frightened about what will happen when ticket offices close.

My son Joe works for HMRC. His job means he can be sent anywhere in the world to any department. So far he has been to York and Sheffield. He is active in his union. He is an intelligent and hardworking young man, he even ran the Great North Run last weekend. He also has autism but his autism does not define him but it does mean he has to be prepared if something goes wrong. He knows that if there is a problem when he is travelling to work he can go to the ticket office. He even checks where the ticket office is at the train stations before he leaves. If they close the ticket offices he and thousands of others like him will struggle to travel by train. If they close the ticket offices he and thousands of others like him will lose their independence and become increasingly isolated and secluded. His mental health will suffer and he could even lose his job.

Congress, closing ticket offices is not just another cynical attack on jobs by the Tory government. It is an attack on the safety of women, older people, and disabled people. Unison is 100% opposed to these plans and 100% behind the campaign to keep ticket offices open and that campaign is not over yet. We have to keep on fighting. Please, for people like me, for people like Joe, the hundreds of thousands of disabled members in my union and the millions of disabled people in this country, oppose the attacks on our services and support this motion. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Congress, I will now take the vote on Emergency Motion 1. All those in favour? Put your hands down. All those against? That is passed unanimously. TUC Congress has spoken, stop the ticket office closures, support the services to all the travelling public. (*Applause*)

*Emergency Motion 1 was CARRIED.*

**The President:** Right, moving on to the next emergency motion, the important issue of the collapse of Wilko, Save the High Street. The General Council supports the motion, to be moved by GMB, seconded by Usdaw.

*(Insert Emergency Motion 2)*

**Emergency Motion 2 – Collapse of Wilko, Save the High Street**

**Carol Robertson** (GMB): President, Congress, I am a Wilko rep and I have been a Wilko worker for more than 20 years. I did not want to have to make this speech. Wilko said that it was a family firm. That meant it was run by a family. But it is the workers that really feel like a family and yesterday the family heard the worst possible news, every Wilko store would close by the end of the month and our distribution centres would close at the end of the week. *(Applause)* You will have read that 12,500 jobs will be lost. To me that is 12,500 colleagues, friends, GMB sisters and brothers. 12,500 people will be asking themselves how will they make ends meet.

Congress, we know the customers will suffer too. They are losing a budget retailer at the height of a cost-of-living crisis. Wilko is part of our communities and the loss of Wilko from the high street will make these communities poorer. The blame lies at one door, Wilko senior management ran the company into the ground. They ignored warnings that a serious turnaround plan was needed and, Congress, they let shareholders take dividends of £77m out of the company over the last 10 years. £77m, while they told us there was no money for a decent pay claim. Congress, I am heartbroken but I am also angry that they have stolen our future. Do you know who will pay for the collapse of Wilko, you will, I will, we all

will. It is the taxpayer that will pay the costs of making Wilko workers redundant and thousands of Wilko workers who have under two years' service will not even get statutory redundancy. The GMB estimates that more than £25m will be paid by the public, by you and me, in redundancy costs. The system is subsidised job losses. TUPE does not even apply to employees of a company in liquidation.

If anything comes out of the ashes then we need change. There will come a time to demand these changes and we will be asking you to support. Wilko is not the first and it will not be the last. We must all come together to save the high street. For now I am focused on our members. We tried so hard to find a future for Wilko. *(Applause)* We are representing our members individually and collectively, and we are still working to make sure they are paid what they are due, and try to find future employment; we owe them that much. I want to say to the TUC, thank you for accepting this emergency motion. To our sister retail union, Usdaw, thank you for supporting it, and to all delegates in this hall, please show your support for Wilko workers and support this motion. Thank you.  
*(Applause)*

**The President:** Paddy Lillis from Usdaw to second.

**Paddy Lillis** *(Udaw)*: President, Congress, seconding this important emergency motion on the Collapse of Wilko, Save our High Streets. Congress, first, on behalf of all Usdaw members I want to start with a message to the 12,500 Wilko workers: Carol, you and your union GMB have our absolute support and unwavering solidarity as you face the devastating outcome from Wilko. We stand with you and we stand with every worker who fears that their workplace, their job, will be next on the line. Congress, there are three million retail workers in the UK, three

million people serving our communities, working hard to feed their families, and pay their bills every day, and three million who worked during the pandemic to ensure the country had food on the table. Too often, they and their jobs are treated as disposable by employers, by administrators, and by this despicable government.

Congress, none of us in Usdaw will not ever forget the collapse of Woolworths in 2009, 27,000 jobs overnight lost, absolute devastation for our members, just like in Wilko they were loyal, hardworking, and many of them with long service. Usdaw fought for our members all the way to the European Court of Justice. We fought against a loophole that cheated our members out of proper consultation and I am pleased to say that Labour has pledged to close that loophole in government, but it sickens me that here we are nearly 15 years later and workers are still being put through hell, and time and time again an employment rights framework that fails to protect them, with administration law that puts them at the back of the queue, with a government that fails to act and fails to care as the high streets dwindle and die, but it does not have to be this way. We do have a choice.

Ushaw has proposed a comprehensive plan for the future of retail work, a new economic framework replacing the outdated business rate system to level the playing field for online and high street businesses, proper funding for our local authorities to make the high streets places that people can access and that people want to visit, and better pay and secure work for retail workers with a new deal, including stronger redundancy protections, sustained investment with skills and safeguards on automation. All of this can be done and all of this, colleagues, must be done. It is time to act, it is time to protect jobs, it is time to protect workers,



and protect our communities. Please support this important emergency motion.

*(Applause)*

**The President:** Taking the vote on Emergency Motion 2, all those in favour put your hands up? Hands down. All those against? Another unanimous vote. We send our TUC solidarity to the Wilko workers. *(Applause)*

*Emergency Motion 2 was CARRIED.*

**The President:** Congress, now I have to draw your attention to appendix 3, from page 74 of the General Council Report, that is, the TUC accounts. Unfortunately, the auditor is not able to be present today because of ill health, but she has provided assurances to the Executive Committee Finance Working Group. Does Congress accept the accounts as set out in the appendix?

I understand that CWU would like to raise a point of order. Can they come to the stage now?

#### **Point of order**

**Tony Cairns** (*Communication Workers Union*): We are going to go away from here as a united movement but I wanted to raise a serious matter. We have been made aware this morning that the TUC gave accreditation to *The Sun* journalists to attend this Congress. Now, *The Sun* for decades has been an enemy of the working class, a racist paper that did irreparable damage to the people of this city *(Applause)* and we think it is pretty insensitive to invite them to what is a private event, pretty insensitive to invite them to a private event in this city. We

would like an explanation which we will follow up in writing as to who made that decision and why, and make sure it does not happen again. (*Applause*)

**The President:** I ask the General Secretary to respond.

**The General Secretary:** Thank you for the question and making the point, Tony, and the opportunity to clarify the issue, although I have to say in the spirit of comradeship I am disappointed it was tweeted before I had the opportunity to provide that clarity, but I want to set out that clarity at this Congress. One *Sun* journalist was accredited for this year's Congress. That has been the case at successive Congresses because in line with policy from the National Union of Journalists we do not have standing policy to refuse accreditation to journalists. However, and this is the important point and I want Congress to be absolutely clear, that journalist did not attend Congress. I suspect part of the reason they did not attend Congress was that I made it clear, I have made it publicly clear, I have made it clear on the broadcast media, I would not do interviews with *The Sun*, I would refuse to take questions at the press conference from *The Sun*, and the TUC would provide no content to *The Sun* in any way, shape or form. That will always be the case while I am General Secretary of this organisation; in fact, it was the case when Frances was General Secretary of this organisation and that will be the case going forward at the TUC.

I am more than happy to review the policy around press accreditation, I think it is right to do that in consultation with the NUJ but I want Congress to be assured that I will never forget the 97, this city will never forget the 97, Congress will never forget the 97, and I hope that provides assurance. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Delegates, we are moving to the end of Congress. There are a few things to do before but I just want to say at this point it is important to send our solidarity to the victims of the terrible floods in Libya where we understand over 5,000 people have now died due to the terrible impact of climate change. I know Congress will join with me in sending our solidarity. Thank you. *(Applause)*

Delegates, that completes the final business of Congress. I now ask Congress to adopt the General Council Report. Is that agreed? *(Applause)*

*The General Council Report was ADOPTED.*

**The President:** We really, really are nearly finished. I just ask for your attention for a little bit longer. I now wish to make a couple of votes of thanks to those who have contributed to the smooth running of Congress. It will be brief but they are sincere.

I would like to start by thanking Sue Ferns for her role as Vice President. Thank you, Sue. *(Applause)* Also, to all the other General Council members for helping to keep our speakers on time and contributing on behalf of the General Council. Thank you. *(Applause)*

I would like to move a vote of thanks to all the staff here at the ACC for all they have done to ensure that Congress was run smoothly and to all the wonderful stewards for their assistance during the week. *(Applause)* And the people behind the scenes, the verbatim reporters, the tellers, the stage crew from QED, and the musicians who have worked so hard throughout this week. *(Applause)*

## **Presentation of the Gold Badge**

**The President:** Congress, it is now time to say farewell to colleagues leaving the General Council. First of all, retiring from the General Council is Kevin Courtney of the NEU, Kevin please come up and accept your Gold Badge. (*Applause*) Kevin, I invite you to say a few words.

**Kevin Courtney (NEU):** President, Congress, I started tutoring in September 1983 and retiring in September 2023, 40 years later, and this is my last speech to Congress. I have never retired before and it is a bit weird but I am very pleased to be getting that Gold Badge. Thank you very much, Congress. Trade unionism and the struggle for the working class education have been load stars throughout my life. Both my granddads were coalminers, NUM members in the South Wales coalfield. My Mum's Dad, Snowy, died of emphysema and pneumoconiosis aged 51, and my Mum and Dad fought for compensation as an honour to him when they were introduced to the scheme in 1997. My Dad's Mum fought for him not to work underground. She got him an apprenticeship at a garage in Talbot Green, he became a lorry mechanic, and a member of the AEU, now Unite. My Mum left school at 14 worked as a seamstress, then after me and my brother arrived she worked as a school cleaner and a dinner lady. She was a member of NUPE, now Unison. My Mum spent so much time on flash cards and reading skills with me as a child I was the first person in my wider family to go to university. I loved my Mum and Dad. (*Applause*) They did so much for me and my brother, and for the wider community. They were the salt of the earth.

We all know in this room working class people of all races, all faiths, all nationalities, are also the salt of the earth. They have aspiration and talent, and

love, but the privileged, the billionaires, they really do not see that working class people matter, no real person involved, as they said in succession.

I spent my life as you have in a fight for our class, through politics, through trades unionism, and through education, and I feel so lucky to have been able to do it and so lucky to have you as my trades union comrades. I have enjoyed it at every level as a workplace rep at my school, Camden School for Girls, as a branch secretary working with other unions in Camden and across London, as Vice Chair of SOGAT when that was the TUC region, senior roles in the NEU, and on the General Council. Like you, I am ambitious for our movement. Like you, I always want us to be able to do more. I always want to plan to do more and to do better, but saying we want to do better is not saying we have not done well. In the last year our movement has done so well to fight for working class living standards. *(Applause)* We all did so well during Covid, keeping our members and our communities much safer than if we had just left it in the hands of the Tories. These are victories for our movement, they are victories for you, and I know you are going to score many more victories in the future. Up the workers! Down with this Government that has so failed working people. Long live the TUC and the workers movement! Thank you very much. *(Applause)*

**The President:** Thank you, Kevin. Also retiring from the General Council is Diana Holland, from Unite. Diana, please come up. *(Applause)* I will ask Diana to address us.

**Diana Holland (Unite):** Thank you, President, Congress. It has been a great honour but after more than 30 years as a representative in the TUC, though just one year on the General Council, I was first from the T&G and then Unite. I know

the time does come for all of us to pass on the baton so three very short messages from me: One, thank you, to my union, to my family, to the TUC, and to all trade union members and reps. Two, never forget to celebrate our achievements. However hard it gets, trade unions transform people's lives every day. Finally, and you would expect this, keep equality for all, including statutory rights for union equality reps, right at the forefront of our agenda. Please, don't forget justice for migrant domestic workers. Unity is strength. Let's stick together. Stay strong, safe, and all of us we can win. Thank you. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Also leaving the General Council is Gail Cartmail from Unite. Gail, please come up and address Congress.

**Gail Cartmail** (*Unite*): I will keep this brief. Thank you, President. I was the first woman 40 years ago to be elected by my union, the National Graphical Association, now a part of Unite. That was 1983. I said the other day, 1883. It was 40 years ago and so much has changed. The General Council top table no longer looks like a replica of the casting couch for Reservoir Dogs. No longer do we work in smoke-filled rooms, and no longer have packed bars adjacent to the hall; they can be found elsewhere. It has been a privilege to serve on the General Council and the Executive Committee. Who would have thought this kid would have ever made it, leaving school at 15. So, I want to thank my union, a terrific union, Unite. I want to thank all of the lay members I have worked alongside during this period, and I really want to thank our brilliant General Secretary, Sharon Graham, one of the foremost leaders, if not the foremost leader, showing that women can really shake things up. Thank you, Sharon. (*Applause*) As has been said by other speakers, we stand in solidarity with all workers in struggle.

I am going to close by saying that in 1983 I was a mere anorak, I pored over every word of the agenda, and I had a great mentor, a man called Solly Kaye, a Communist, East End councillor that stood against the fascists in the East End of London, and to his dying breath. (*Applause*) He said to me, "I tell you what, sister and comrade, there's a motion on that 1983 agenda and it's seeking to undo the support that the 1982 Congress gave to the Palestinian people following the massacres of Sabra and Shatila," and he said, "Convince your delegation to come in on that debate, defend the rights of Palestinian people, their inalienable right to freedom and to live within secure borders." I had the privilege of speaking forcefully at that conference. We defended the 1982 policy. We have defended it every year since and as a last time speaker to this Congress, free Palestine. (*Applause*)

**The President:** Thank you, Gail. Also leaving the General Council is Andrea Egan, Amerit Rait from Unison, Jane Stewart and Dave Allan from Unite, Heather McKenzie from NEU, and Janet Farrar from UCU. Thank you for what you have done in your time on the General Council. You will all be missed. (*Applause*)

Finally, I can announce the next President of the TUC who takes office from the close of Congress is Matt Wrack from FBU. (*Applause*) I wish him well and know that he is more than up to the challenges of the year ahead. Good luck to you, Matt.

**The General Secretary:** I now call on Barbara Plant to move the vote of thanks to the President. Barbara.

**Barbara Plant:** President, Maria, I am hugely honoured to be asked to do this final vote of thanks at the end of what has been a really successful Congress. You have been so supportive of me since I joined the General Council two years ago and, Maria, I have come to regard you as a dear friend. As someone who chairs GMB Congress I know how nerve-wracking it can be and how tiring it is to chair for four days in a row as well as attending all the fringe meetings and receptions. They are long days.

I hope that my advice was useful but you really did not need it, you have been brilliant. Your values have shone through, you have been inclusive, patient, respectful, and fair, and we have seen those same values in the amazing TUC staff and volunteers who have worked so hard, many behind the scenes, to make everyone feel so welcome. (*Applause*) You have chaired with your lovely sense of humour which I saw in that twinkle of your eye when you called the card votes.

Things may not always have gone to time but you have remained calm steering our good ship with a trusty hand and we got there in the end. I know, though, you were disappointed not to take more delegates in some debates; that will have disappointed you.

On behalf of all delegates, thank you for how you chaired our Congress (*Applause*) and for your leadership throughout your whole presidency during a hugely turbulent time for our trade union movement. Maria, put your feet up tonight, relax, and be as proud of yourself as we are of you. (*Standing ovation*)

**The President:** Thank you so much, Barabara. Thank you. Congress, we are nearly there. Thank you to you, delegates, for all your contributions this week



and also thank you for all you do for our movement throughout the year and all you will do in the future. I have nothing more to say, comrades, so let's go forward in unity, in solidarity, to victory. I now declare the 155<sup>th</sup> Congress closed.

*(Applause)*

*Congress concluded.*