

Rebuilding trade unionism



Keep up the good work, keep fighting for your members and keep making a difference, TUC General Secretary **Brendan Barber** told Community delegates.

‘Your union is already leading community trade unionism and modernising to meet the challenges of the 21st century,’ he explained.

He talked of Community’s success – its growth through the mergers with NUDAGO and BUSWE, its expansion into new sectors, its work with Communitas and its ground-breaking pension campaign and £12 billion victory – ‘proof that the interests of individual workers are best advanced through collective action’, he said.

Celebrate these successes, he told delegates, but don’t ignore the challenges posed by globalisation and the decline of the UK manufacturing industry. He urged members to push the Government to develop ‘an intelligent industrial strategy that delivers for manufacturers in key sectors and sustains skilled jobs and the communities they support’.

To secure a historic fourth term, the Labour Party must develop an imaginative policy agenda – and unions have a part in that - based once again on equality, fairness, and social justice, he said. ‘Whatever happens in Westminster, we as trade unionists, must continue to advance our members’ interests, reach out to a new generation of trade unionists and rebuild union organisation where it is needed the most.’

Labour's fate in your hands

'The fate of the Government is in your hands,' **Denis MacShane**, MP for Rotherham, told delegates. Trade unions should work to expose Tory anti-union politics now, not wait until the next general election before supporting Labour.



It was up to trade unions like Community to fight back for the Labour Party, he said, and help the party reconnect with its voters. Otherwise working people, unions and Britain would suffer under a Tory Government. 'The Tories don't have the answers – they have no understanding of the problems facing working people.' He warned delegates that communities in the North, Midlands and Wales 'are not even on the Tories' sat-nav.'

He did admit that the Labour Party needed to reinvent itself for the 21st century, looking at more 'made-to-measure rather than 'one size fits all' policies devised in Whitehall', he explained.

Cheap clothes cost dear



There's no such thing as cheap clothes and footwear,

Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) told delegates. The real cost of record profits and fat-cat bonuses is the abuse of workers in developing countries.

He talked of workers in Bangladesh slaving for 33p per day stitching sport shirts, the 40,000 fingers broken or lost each year in the South China textile industry, and the increasing use of child labour – the results of governments outlawing legitimate union activities to keep wages low.

After two decades of attacks on unions, declining wages and working conditions, workers are starting to fight back, he said, but to support them we need to form global agreements between global union federations and multinational companies that make access to world markets dependent on international labour standards being upheld.

Protecting workers in the UK and across the world won't hinder world trade, Neil said, it will improve living standards worldwide and build global security. 'Globally we want to see the UK Government standing up for workers instead of being laggards in EU and other international institutions,' he said.

For more information on this issue, visit www.community-tu.org (textile and equality sections), www.cleanclothes.org or www.labourbehindthelabel.org.

Working together

Mike Bradley, General Secretary of the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) told delegates of the long-standing relationship

between his organisation and Community, whose officials and members had contributed greatly to its research and education and training work.

Since 1997 the GFTU had accessed more than £2 million in government funding through a range of learning and education funds, he told delegates, and that had been used to benefit representatives from affiliated unions such as Community.

The GFTU was now preparing for Warwick 2 in July, he said, ready to discuss union members' concerns with the Labour Party for its next manifesto and he'd like to see a discussion on tax relief on union contributions, which could help union members and trade union finances.



Thinking internationally

'International work isn't an optional extra for trade unions,' **Rob Johnson** from the International Metalworkers Federation told delegates. 'Globalisation is a real issue that must be dealt with everyday.'



He said that, as trade unionists, we had a duty to go beyond international minimum standards. 'The way transnational companies treat their workers is a disgrace,' he exclaimed. As an example, he spoke of aluminium firm Alcoa, whose Mexican operation announced redundancies so it could take work to Honduras, pay lower wages and exploit non-unionised workers.

On a more positive note he talked of recent gains the IMF had made, such as the global minimum safety standards agreement with German firm Arcelor Mittal which employs 338,000 workers worldwide. He said our role as trade unionists was to ensure that working conditions for future generations continued to improve.

Rob said he wasn't concerned about the future of the trade union movement. 'At the companies and union conferences I visit, I see a passion for trade unionism – and we can build on that.'

Co-operation on climate change

Peter Scherrer, General Secretary of the European Metalworkers' Federation, told delegates that the achievement of European Union's CO₂ emissions targets shouldn't be at the expense of the European steel industry and its jobs.



He told delegates how the EMF is working to support EU and ETUC ambitions to ensure emission targets struck a fair balance between preventing climate change and the competitiveness of EU industry and safeguarding members' jobs .

'The way forward for steel and metal industries is to agree a global approach to climate change,' he explained. 'We need to encourage employers to invest in developing new technology and to build up co-operation between workers in Europe and around the world on this issue so that employers don't try to play us off against each other. We need to aim for an industry that sets an example to others, is responsible to workers and trade union rights, takes care of the environment and is profitable,' he added. For that to happen closer European co-operation was still needed and Community, as a member of the EMF, was playing an active part in that.