

Here we report back on Community's contributions to this year's TUC Congress and Labour Party Conference

Conference calls

The TUC made a return to the south coast for this year's Congress, taking over the Brighton Centre from 8 September for a week of debate. Community delegates from around the country came to hear fellow trade unionists discuss issues of importance for the workplace and beyond.

Community spoke on five motions, all of which were passed and will now form the agreed policy of the TUC, which represents over 6 million working people.

President Keren Bender spoke passionately about the threats of violence and the abuse of our members in the betting industry.

She told Congress, 'In every shop we visit the story is the same; endless tales of verbal abuse, never ending stories of physical violence.'

'Enough is enough. Every worker is entitled to a safe working environment.'

These are men and women, like you and I, just trying to earn a decent living.'



Following on from Keren's speech Community General Secretary Michael Leahy OBE hosted a fringe meeting (pictured below), Don't Gamble on Health and Safety, focussing on how betting shop companies are maximising their profits while ignoring the safety concerns of their employees.

The event attracted an audience of betting shop workers, concerned trade unionists and political figures, including John Park, MSP for Mid-Scotland and Fife who has worked tirelessly in support of the Community campaign in Scotland. Denis McShane, MP for Rotherham, also played an active role on the discussion panel.

Later in the week and back in the conference hall General Secretary Michael Leahy spoke on the challenge of maintaining a manufacturing base while tackling the problem of climate change. Calling on Congress to support the motion he said, 'The next climate change agreement must be for a Just Transition to a low carbon future. A Just Transition must not abandon union members in steel. A Just Transition must provide a sustainable future for all – blue collar, white collar or green collar.'

Community Vice President Gareth Davies spoke about the need for improved access to work for people with disabilities and also on improving rail transport for the blind. Community NEC member Pat Donnelly spoke on the need to improve maternity leave.

Community member Chris O'Sullivan, who represents our union on the Yorkshire and Humber regional executive of the TUC, was attending Congress for the second time. She describes this year as a refreshing change from her previous visit, with the smaller unions being given plenty of time to raise their issues rather than being overshadowed by bigger unions.

Says Chris, 'The smaller unions may represent less members but the struggle is the same. We're all trying to get a better working life for our members.'

Chris also appreciated the chance to meet face to face with people from Community's head office. She says, 'It was great to be able to put faces to names and have a conversation with the President and other senior members of the union.'

Labour Party Conference

A few weeks later and a couple of hundred miles north Community members convened again; this time for the annual Labour Party conference. With the economy already looking distinctly shaky and a leadership challenge being discussed it was Gordon Brown's chance to prove his strength. And by most accounts that's exactly what he did.

According to Community delegate Paul Mills, Region 4, 'Gordon Brown's speech was excellent just what we needed, he was introduced by his wife Sarah which was a masterstroke, then he spoke passionately about the way forward and what the government were prepared to do to maintain social justice and create fairness for all, he needed to deliver and he did!'

Richard Green, representing Region 2, agreed, 'The Prime Minister came to conference having to really prove himself. The chips were down and many had written him off. It was an excellent speech. The delivery was good and he also talked about what he'd give back. Things like free prescriptions for cancer sufferers and free swimming for children. It felt like he was really drawing on the founding values of the Labour Party; standing up for the working-class and those who are more vulnerable.'

Richard went on to applaud the conference presence of some of the UK's Olympic athletes but said that in his view more could have been made of this. 'I think we should make more out of the fact that the Olympics has been secured under a Labour Government. Sport is a great way of connecting with young people and by talking more about how sport has improved under Labour perhaps we could get more young people interested in politics.'

Community again took the opportunity to bring its Don't Gamble on Health and Safety campaign in the betting industry to wide political attention. A fringe meeting on the subject saw speeches from John Park MSP and Sports Minister Gerry Sutcliffe.

Earlier in the week the union hosted a reception, which Prime Minister Gordon Brown attended. Other guests included Deputy Labour Leader Harriet Harman, Chris Bryant MP, Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, Parmjit Dhander, MP for Gloucester and Mike Bradley of the federation for specialist unions the GFTU.



Harriet Harman MP



Deputy General Secretary, Joe Mann



General Secretary, Michael Leahy with Prime Minister Gordon Brown