

## Working together in the Norwich region

### Welcome...

Issue 7, November 2006

Welcome to the latest addition of the Norwich General Branch Newsletter. For reasons you will see below, this will be the last newsletter I compile personally. Hopefully a new branch secretary will be taking the reigns in December and more newsletters will follow. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to these newsletters over the last couple of years. Dave Chorlton and the Remploy staff have given us a cost effective means of communicating with our members. We hope that the government takes on board the GMB proposals to keep all the Remploy factories and continue to provide meaningful jobs for members with disabilities. Thanks also go to Keith Rowley for his representation of branch at congress over the years, his report is provided at the end of this newsletter. It gives a frank view of how politically charged and difficult it can be to represent our members at a national level.

### December Branch meeting ~ Charles Clarke MP

Our next branch meeting date and venue have been rearranged for **Friday December 15<sup>th</sup>** at the Gas Social Club on Rowntree Way, Norwich. This change has been made to accommodate The Rt. Hon Charles Clarke MP as a guest to our meeting. Charles has recently organised two events at Norwich City Hall ~ Working Together as a response to the Warwick agreement. The Warwick agreement came about as a compromise between the Labour Government and trade unions at the Labour Party's National Policy forum in July 2004. The agreements established at Warwick formed part of the Government's manifesto for the 2005 General Election. Labour was elected on these commitments and now must enact them. In a continuation of this drive to reform ties with the trade unions, Charles has made himself available to attend trade union branch meetings in our area. Previous meetings with our Norwich MPs have given our members opportunity to discuss a whole range of issues from trade union support, community concerns and national policy. We look forward to a well attended, lively debate. The branch meeting will begin at 7.30pm sharp to deal with branch matters with our guest being in attendance from 8pm. Please note the change of date and venue above.



### Election of N24 General Branch Secretary

I will be stepping down from the position of branch secretary at the next branch meeting, December 15<sup>th</sup> following 18 months in the role. I hope to remain active within the branch but recent personal changes have made it difficult for me to fully service the branch with the time needed. We will therefore need to elect a temporary branch secretary to fill the position until the 2007, June AGM. This election will take place at the beginning of the December 15<sup>th</sup> Branch meeting. Please forward your nominations on to me by the branch meeting. If you would like more information about what the current role entails then please do not hesitate in contacting me for details. [secretary@norwichgmb.com](mailto:secretary@norwichgmb.com) or call **07979 684494**.



### Your GMB Learning Projects, Award winning! [www.gmbunion-eastlearning.org](http://www.gmbunion-eastlearning.org)

The ULR Project with Anglian Windows has won the Regional Star Award. Project Coordinator Steve Walker said, "It is a true success story within a great partnership of our members, Learning Providers, The Branch and officers". Take a look at the Union learning website. You can see lots of photos of activities and you may see someone you work with on there! Log on to the site and click on the workplace projects from the home page.

### Membership News

Thanks to all of you who helped recruit new members since the last newsletter. Every new member helps us fight our cause locally and nationally. We are close to 1600 members and we would benefit enormously if we were able to reach 2000. Please consider recruiting new members and we will continue to reward recruiting members until the end of 2006! Just clearly indicate your name and membership number on the new member recruitment form and we will make the payment direct to you, the recruiter.

## Branch Funds Discussions

In direct response to the treasurer's report for 2005/6, branch requested that a sub committee be formed with the purpose of discussing ways in which surplus funds could be used to benefit GMB members, the GMB union as a whole, International Trade Unionism and local or national charities. The following is the agreed criteria which were approved at the June 2006 Branch meeting; These criteria will operate whilst branch funds exceed £5000. When funds fall below £5000, donations will all be considered on an ad hoc basis.

### Donations ~ Hierarchy of donations

1. Organisation or recruiting initiatives for workplaces / individuals in our own branch.
2. Organisation or recruiting initiatives for workplaces / individuals in our own region.
3. Organisation or recruiting initiatives for trade unions and workers progressive organisations struggling against repressive regimes.
4. Support for local charitable activities in which a member of the branch is involved.
5. Support for national/international charitable activities in which a member of branch is involved.
6. Support of any charitable activities in which a member of this or another union is involved.
7. Other charitable requests. I.E. Ad Hoc from larger charities.

Amounts: Items 1-3: £500, Items 4-5: £100, Items 6-7: £50

The following caveats are to be operated:

- Branch would not normally donate any sum of less than £50;
- Donations of £100 or less will be delegated to the offices for 'fast tracking' (Branch Secretary and another, Financial Secretary or Auditor);
- No assumptions can be made that automatic donations are made.

By adopting this strategy it is hoped that branch members would find it easier to make suggestions for donations and that there will be a potential to increase funding of worthy causes.

### Hardship

All hardship claims should be made to the branch secretary and these will be passed on to the Hardship Officer. The Hardship Officer will then arrange a meeting with the claimant and gather information to present the claim to branch. The priority information to gather being:

a) What is the hardship claim for? b) What was the cause of the hardship?

The maximum payment made for any hardship claim would be £250, but members should be informed that they are not limited to one application.

### Retired Members

Branch will pay the £25 Retired Life Membership contribution to all retirees so long as members are no longer employed and are over the age of 60. Please contact the branch secretary and your life time membership will be dealt with direct with London region.

[secretary@norwichgmb.com](mailto:secretary@norwichgmb.com) or call 07979 684494

### Donations made...

The following donations were made by branch in the last quarter: Adil Qurban Appeal ~ £500, FENACLE Appeal ~ £500, Medical Aid for Palestinians ~ £1000



Norwich general branch supports Banana Link, a small and dynamic not-for-profit co-operative, founded in 1996 that campaigns for a fair and sustainable banana trade. They work in close partnership with Latin American banana workers trade unions, small Caribbean farmers and civil society organisations in Europe and the U.S.



**Please have your say... Next Branch Meeting:**  
**15th December 2006, 7:30pm, British Gas Social Club, Rowntree Way, Norwich**

## Report on GMB Congress at Blackpool: 11-15 June, 2006

The most gratifying decision of Congress 2006 was the delegates' near unanimous rejection of the proposed merger with TGWU and AMICUS. The level of feeling of ownership of and pride in GMB that emerged in debate was uplifting and this had much to do with the confirmation of Paul Kenny's selection as General Secretary. The brief and corrupt reign of Kevin Curran was roundly condemned and there was great optimism that Paul's success in turning the London Region round would soon be replicated across all regions of the Union.



There were mixed fortunes for the branch's motions and interests. We have returned to annual congresses: as expected, our motion was one of many calling for their reinstatement. Our motion calling for all guest speakers to be subject to questions from delegates was passed, though with a CEC qualification which called for flexibility. I am not sure where this leaves us exactly, but future delegates to Congress will have to challenge the suits if announcements are made to specify when the decision of Congress does *not* apply.



*Dr Ian Gibson ~ GMB MP*

Our motion calling for the establishment of specific conditions for the granting of financial support to prospective/incumbent Labour MPs was composited with two others. It passed, but I believe that the wording allows for a two-way interpretation. The thrust of the motion was that no one would get support unless they subscribed to the Union's policies, but the final wording included the phrase "all policies" and "general aims" as well as referring to the union both regionally and centrally. I am worried that could mean that if branches in the regions refuse funding, an appeal for support could still be made to the CEC. I am not suggesting that this was done deliberately, but composite motions often throw up such problems and this will have to be followed up and tested.

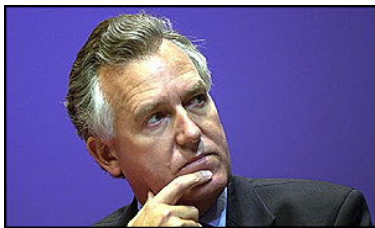
The biggest disappointment was the London Region's mandating of its delegation to support (or at least not vote against) a motion from the Hounslow Branch calling on the Hamas Government in the Palestinian Authority to respond to Israel's 'withdrawal' from Gaza by renouncing violence against and recognising the State of Israel. Of course, I refused to support it and asked how such a motion ever received the Region's support. Several people came up to me and apologised for not having been vigilant enough at the pre-Congress meeting as the motion was clearly against previous regional stances re Israel-Palestine (predominantly due to the work of our branch).

Apparently, at the pre-Congress meeting this motion was the very last one on the agenda and it sneaked through because of lack of attention and the fact that many delegates had already left or were packing their bags to go. Despite my efforts to rally opposition in other delegations – and several comrades did speak against it – the motion received the support of Congress, albeit by a relatively small majority. Since when has our union supported the idea of giving succour to any regime which has been condemned under international law for both the illegal occupation of territory and the building of an Apartheid wall? To make matters worse for me personally, the person who spoke to the motion came up to me outside the hall at the end of Congress and accused me of being anti-Semitic. Naturally, I was furious to be branded a racist, but I am afraid that if you criticise the State of Israel, the Zionist lobby will smear you in this way. I complained to Ed Blissett, but I have yet to receive an apology.

The GMB may still be somewhat schizophrenic in its attitude to the Middle East conflict, but its support for workers and trade unionists in Costa Rica, Columbia and Venezuela is straight-down-the-line socialist and internationalist. In reaction to motions from the floor and the speeches of comrades from these countries, both before Congress and in fringe-meetings, the Union's leadership was wholly supportive of their aims and struggle.

*continued overleaf...*

The biggest surprise at Congress was to be addressed by the Prime Minister and to find him agreeing to answer questions from delegates. Blair is a political chameleon who adapts his colouring to his surroundings. He is not a great speaker in terms of genuine conviction and use of language, but he knows how to present himself, to act the part for the occasion. Indeed he was doing very well – having just promised that the government would work to reverse a recent legal judgement which deprived widows of compensation from employers for the death of husbands from asbestosis – when the inevitable Iraq question was asked. His confidence drained away immediately and he seemed to visibly shrink before us. He blamed everything on the intelligence agencies and tried to change the subject as his eyes darted nervously from side to side. Only two questions were allowed from each delegation during this Q&A and, although Ed Blissett had said that anyone could ask a question, it was pretty clear from the way that they positioned themselves next to the microphone that our region's questioners had been vetted and given the nod in advance.



Peter Hain also gave a speech but we were not given the chance to question him. He was plainly making his first pitch to become Deputy Prime Minister when Blair goes. He did not really speak about policy (and failed to mention Iraq once). Instead he painted himself as a great friend and supporter of the union and the movement in general. I thought that the stage would have to be swabbed down; such was the trail of slime he left in his wake!

Although I remain a loyal and committed GMB member, I have joined UCT because of the organisations I now work in since my recent redundancy. Therefore, I have decided that I will no longer seek election as a delegate for Congress. I hope that future delegates from Norwich General enjoy the experience as much as I (usually) have over the last five years.

KEITH ROWLEY October 2006

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## GMB Safety Policy

The GMB believes that health and safety need not be a complicated process only understood only by 'experts'. Indeed we believe that the people who are most likely to understand the risks associated with a particular job are those who actually do the work. The starting point for the GMB approach to reducing accidents and ill health caused by work is to identify what can cause harm at work. This could be noise, asbestos, lifting heavy boxes, dangerous machinery etc. If we do not know what is causing harm we cannot begin to prevent it. Once the hazards have been identified the next step is to take action to eliminate or reduce as much as possible the risk of these things causing harm.

## GMB Safety Representatives

GMB policy is that all workplace reps are also Safety Representatives and they are accredited as such, however a workplace rep may wish to elect other members of the workforce to take on the role of the safety representative. Health and safety is a priority for the GMB. Not only is it essential that we work to protect our members' health and safety, but also health and safety issues are a good way to recruit other workers into the Union. The GMB has worked with a wide range of employers in the public and private sector. In each case we have been able to demonstrate that employers and the GMB working together can cut accident rates.

## HAZARDS MAGAZINE

To protect members in the workplace, GMB Safety Representatives need to be well informed. One of the best ways to do this is to subscribe to Hazards, the award winning health and safety magazine.

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