



GMB Newsletter Q1 2018

GMB Union – Working for You

@gmbbrussels · facebook.com/GMB.Brussels

Dear Members, welcome to our first newsletter of 2018!

This year began with many changes. For us we saw the departure of Charlotte Butterick as our branch president in January, and the election of new committee members, and a new secretary and president in the AGM after that. And for our union as a whole we mourn the loss of our president Mary Turner, a giant of a woman and trade unionist.

Below we introduce many of our committee members and reps. Read on to get to know what makes them feel like trade unionists. We look forward to welcoming you to future meetings and socials. Check out Elspeth’s column to keep up to date!

Kind regards,

Alice Reynolds, GMB Brussels Branch President · president@gmbbrusselsbranch.eu



GMB Brussels branch committee members



Caitlin – Branch Secretary and Women’s Officer

In 2018, there are more women than ever in the boardroom, more women in leadership positions, and more women in politics. More than 37 per cent of MEPs are women compared to 16.6% in 1979 and 34% in 2010. Last year the British House of Commons elected the highest number of women in its history, with 32% women MPs.

However, we must not be complacent. There is not a universal picture of achievement across Europe - women make up less than 25% of the national legislatures in nine of the 28 EU countries. Indeed, it is notable that the House of Commons’ highest level of female representation still means that, in the 21st century, **fewer than 1 in 3 MPs are women.**

More widely, women’s access to education and to healthcare is poorer than that of men while it is estimated that globally at least one in three women will be sexually or physically abused.

2017 was a particularly challenging year for so many of us, with a shocking number of revelations of sexual harassment and assault from women in numerous sectors, including within our own workplaces. Such revelations gave rise to powerful global movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp. In light of these movements, I stood as women’s officer to ensure that women in our branch feel safe and supported at work. I urge you to continue to motivate and unite friends, colleagues and communities to think, act and be gender inclusive. I will continue to work closely with colleagues from other EU countries to ensure the voices of victims within the Brussels EU bubble are not silenced.

Despite periods of darkness over the past year, I believe we are witnessing a significant attitudinal shift in the way society addresses women’s equality and emancipation. Although we are faced with distressing stories in the press, and many barriers remain, we must rally together to break this culture of silence and continue to fight for gender equality in all sectors of our societies. **Together** we must be tenacious, and we must be loud.

secretary@gmbbrusselsbranch.eu



Siobhan – GMB Workplace Organiser I joined the GMB and became a workplace organiser because I believe the most effective workplaces are those where employees are treated fairly. Everyone deserves to have reasonable and agreed working hours, equal and fair pay and to feel safe in a workplace that does not tolerate bullying.

If you have an issue that GMB might be able to help with, even if you would just like a confidential chat and some advice, feel free to contact me by emailing siobhan.dillon@europarl.europa.eu

GMB Newsletter Q1 2018



Jozef – Youth Officer

I have been in Brussels for about one year now having moved here from the Netherlands. My role involves engaging with the younger members of GMB and encouraging them to take an active role within the union, as well as appealing to non-union members to promote union membership.

The **next year** will be a turbulent time with Brexit approaching and young people (who overwhelmingly voted to remain) will feel the effect of Brexit much more severely than other age groups, as those currently in employment will be at risk of losing their jobs as companies move operations on to the continent; when these jobs leave the UK, under-30s will be most vulnerable.

Further studies have shown that graduates who enter the job market during a recession earn less than those who do so in a buoyant economy, and that the differential persists for years. This will have a knock-on effect for years to come with wages depressed, making it even harder in the future for young people to take the first step on the property ladder than it is today.

Even before the **Brexit problems** hit young people there are issues that continue to concern workers under the age of 25: the current UK minimum wage is nothing short of age discrimination as in most companies a 20-year-old will be doing the same job as someone who is over the age of 25, yet the 20-year-old will earn nearly £2 an hour less. This massive disparity flies in the face of the right to equal pay for equal work.

GMB has a ‘Wages Not Based on Ages’ campaign that aims to rectify the problems of the current system and make equal pay for equal work a reality for young people. This is why I am proud to be a GMB member and the youth officer for the Brussels branch as we collectively strive to make the workplace a fairer one and improve the conditions of employment for all, including for young people.

Therefore, with current issues that affect young people in the workplace and the unsettled future that is rapidly approaching, there is a need to strengthen trade unions and for young people to join and take an active role within them to improve the conditions of employment for young people.

jozef.pres@europarl.europa.eu

Emily – Treasurer



Before coming to work in the European Parliament I was a regional official for the Musicians’ Union, and it was there that I developed my appreciation for what membership of the EU has meant to the trade union movement.

In my previous role I undertook a number of qualifications in employment law, working my way up to the Ruskin College diploma. In each module, we were asked to assess specific cases and find the supporting legal framework and remedies.

In nearly every example we were asked to research, it appeared the basis for defending our members were **judgements from the ECJ or implemented European Law**.

Asked to work too many hours? Working time directive. Unequally paid? Equal Pay Directive of 1975. Unequally treated? Equal Treatment Directive of 1976. Finally if you are discriminated against, then the Race Directive or the Framework Directive will be your go-to regulations.

Underpinned by these protections, the GMB has been championing its members in Brussels and will continue to do so.

It only makes me sad to think that in the near future members on the continent might still enjoy these protections, while the majority of members in Britain will be reliant on whatever is eventually transposed into national law.

emilyiona.stewart@europarl.europa.eu



GMB and European Parliamentary Labour Party women standing in solidarity with Polish women for reproductive rights and education, Brussels March 23rd 2018



Shamik – Race Officer

I have worked as the Communications Officer for Labour’s MEPs for nearly five years.

It has been a time of considerable, unimaginable change, change that reminds us how important unions are and how vital our rights are – **hard-won rights we will fight to defend in any Brexit deal**.

My role is to ensure all members feel equally involved, and that the Labour Party and union movement, here in Brussels and more widely, is inclusive, tolerant and open to all, that our actions match our rhetoric.

And these values need to be in evidence not just internally but in society and the workplace; from lower wages to mistreatment by authorities to poor service provision, these issues still abound in Britain in 2018. **This is a national disgrace and must be tackled.**

We must also strive to tackle racism and all discrimination throughout the world, including here in Europe. From the attacks on women’s rights in Poland, to the rise in xenophobia in Hungary, to the spectre of racism that haunts this summer’s World Cup in Russia.

If you have any campaigning, policy or other ideas to help us address these injustices, please do not hesitate to contact me.

shamik.das@europarl.europa.eu



Mary Turner, our President



**Alice – GMB
Brussels Branch
President**

When I first met Mary I had been a GMB member for less than a year.

Picture the GMB annual congress 2016, just before the referendum and two first-time congress delegates turning up from Brussels to represent their branch...

My fellow delegate Gareth already knew much about our President Mary and her legendary turns at conference telling delegates to talk louder and ‘Speak to Mary’ when they were nervous about moving their motions. I don’t think you can understand what an impact she had on the trade union world until you saw her in person and comprehended the appreciation the GMB had for her.

She commanded universal respect at annual congress. The impression she made on Gareth and myself was of a great leader, a woman who knew what she wanted and she was going to take you in that direction no matter what way you wanted to go.

I imagine in one-on-ones with big bosses, managers and politicians alike she always came out on top. **Tim Roache, our General Secretary, rightly called her a “giant of our movement” when speaking of her after her death.**

Mary was famous for her time earlier in her career as a dinner lady when she recruited many colleagues to the trade union cause, encouraging them to fight for better pay and conditions.

One of her campaigns that is still ongoing is for free school meals for all school children, it is one I hope the GMB will cam-

paign successfully for in time and one our UK colleagues are working on.

At a time when some are questioning trade union links, I would like to remind them that Mary was also a staunch Labour Party activist. She was part of the NEC since 1996 and was chair of the Labour Party in 1994. **The Labour Party without Mary would have lacked impetus, a voice and conscience on certain areas.** The GMB and the Labour Party are intertwined here in Brussels too, and that link has been forged to enable us to work together for a better future for working people.

A towering figure of our trade union movement, a woman unafraid to speak out who worked unstintingly until the end for her members. We must not forget the woman as we must not forget the deeds.

president@gmbbrusselsbranch.eu

GMB Newsletter Q1 2018



Elspeth – Social Secretary

My role is to try and bring together our many branch members through various activities and events and try and encourage us to team-build and work together as well as have a bit of well-deserved **fun!**

May, and ends with Belgian Pride on Saturday May 19th. Last year the GMB presence was fantastic, and after marching in the parade we continued on to the street party into the wee hours!

We would again like to **encourage** as many members as possible to come and join us for activities throughout the day on May 19th. We will be beginning as usual with the march and then continuing the celebrations throughout the city, culminating in the main stage event later in the evening.

We will send more information closer to the event so keep your eyes peeled...

We would like to **keep doing regular GMB social events** so if anybody has any suggestions of exhibitions or activities they'd like to include in the upcoming events programme please let us know!

In our upcoming social agenda we will be having one of our semi-regular social gatherings on Wednesday April 11th at 18:00 (venue tbc) and will be circulating further information very shortly.

There are also plans in action to hold the very first GMB-BQ in the summer once the weather has improved! Also please note that our next branch meeting will be on Thursday May 24th at 18:00 (venue tbc).

elspeth.paterson@europarl.europa.eu

Another big celebration heading our way (and my favourite event of last year) is the PRIDE Belgium festival, which runs from 4-20



GMB post-summer meet up, September 2017



GMB members supporting the #MeToo campaign in the European Parliament on International Women's Day 2018

Do you have issues in the workplace or are looking for advice?

Contact our union reps now on:
secretary@gmbbrusselsbranch.eu
president@gmbbrusselsbranch.eu
siobhan.dillon@europarl.europa.eu

Caitlin, Alice and Siobhan are here for you!

Don't forget about UNIONLINE!
UNIONLINE is your
trade union law firm.

Contact them on: +44 3003 330 303

UNIONLINE
YOUR TRADE UNION LAW FIRM