THE 158TH ANNUAL TRADES UNION CONGRESS

……..

Held at:

The Brighton Centre, Kings Road, Brighton BN1 2GR

on:

Sunday, 13th September 2026,

Monday, 14th September 2026,

Tuesday, 15th September 2026

and

Wednesday, 16th September 2026

……..

Congress President:

STEVE GILLAN

……

PROCEEDINGS – DAY ONE

(Sunday, 13th September 2026)

…….

Congress proceedings reported by:

Marten Walsh Cheerer Limited,

2nd Floor, Quality House,

6-9 Quality Court, Chancery Lane,

London WC2A 1HP.

Telephone: 020 7067 2900.

email: *info@martenwalshcherer.com*

……..

FIRST DAY'S PROCEEDINGS:

SUNDAY, 13th SEPTEMBER 2026

(Congress assembled at 4.00 p.m.)

The President: Will delegates please take their seats and would Congress come to order.

Congress - I have great pleasure in opening this - the TUC's 158th Congress. Welcome to Brighton.

Congress, please join me in thanking After Violet, a talented seven-piece rock band formed and led by sixth-form students. Thank you for a fantastic performance and for sharing your energy and talent with us today. (*Applause*)

You will have seen on the screen two QR codes. One takes you to the Unity Works campaign and one to the motions website.

As in recent years, we will begin each session of Congress by celebrating the successes of our unions over the last year. We will now show a short video showcasing how unions are delivering real wins for working people. Delegates, please note that some of today's videos may contain flashing and strobe-like effects. If you see your union, do give them a cheer, and feel free to cheer other unions as well!

Video shown to Congress

The President: Congress, I will start with some important housekeeping. If there is an emergency, you will receive instructions on what to do either from me or over the Tannoy. Details of evacuation procedures are posted up on the doors of the hall. There are no fire alarm tests scheduled so if you hear the alarm, it is for real. If any delegate requires first aid, a request should be made in the first instance to any member of the Brighton Centre staff. We will have speech to text and a British Sign Language interpreter for the duration of the Congress. Can I remind delegates that coats and bags should left at the cloakroom on the ground floor. There is also a no photography zone from the hall at the back of block A and photographers are asked to respect that.

The first formal item of business is to ask Congress to approval the Tellers as set out in the General Purposes Committee report within the final agenda. Is that agreed, Congress? (*Agreed*) If any teller has not yet met Helen Bilton of the TUC staff please come to the tellers' table who are located on the floor, to my right. If any union has not received their voting cards, these can be collected from the registration desk after the close of business. If unions have not yet informed the TUC office which motions you would like to speak to, please do so. Requests must be submitted by the nominated union officer through the online speaker request online form. My aim will be to take a good range of speakers while making timely progress through Congress business.

Congress, I would now like to welcome our international visitors to Congress. When I call out your country or organisation, please stand or give us a wave. We have trade union visitors from Argentina, from Brazil, from Colombia, from Cuba, from France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Palestine, Spain, Turkey, USA, Zambia, the ETUC, the ITUC and Arab TUC. (*Applause*) Colleagues, you are very welcome and we thank you for joining us at our Congress this week.

This year's delegate from the Trades Council Conference is Dave Chapple and, again, Dave you are very welcome. During the course of the week, Congress, I will be joined on the platform by the Vice President, Matt Wrack and other members of the General Council, including those with lead responsibilities for the relevant section of the General Council report.

Congress, I now call upon Rab Donnelly, Chair of the General Purposes Committee, to report to us on the programme of business and other Congress arrangements. Rab is feeling a bit downcast today because our team got beat by our arch rivals, but welcome Rab. (*Applause*)

Rab Donnelly (*Chair, GPC*): Thanks, President. Good afternoon, Congress. The General Purposes Committee has approved 15 composite motions to date. Composite Motions 1 to 15 are included in the Final Agenda that you would have received. On behalf of the GPC, I would like to thank all those unions who have co-operated work together to reach an agreement on composite motions. Congress, this year during Congress there will be a ballot for Sections C and D of the General Council. Details of nominations for each session have

been sent by email to those unions eligible to vote in these sections. Eligible unions should have also received an email from Civita Election Services containing a unique link to the ballot. The ballot closes at 12 noon on Monday 14th September and the results will be announced on Tuesday 15th September. I would like to remind Congress of the procedure for the distribution of emergency motions. Any emergency motions accepted on to the Congress agenda by the GPC will be emailed to delegates. A small number of printed copies will be made available in the TUC information stand. The text of any emergency motions will also be shown on the screens either side of the stage.

Congress, can I remind you that only materials approached by the GPC may be distributed or displayed within the Congress hall. Can I also remind delegates that the mover of each motion may speak for up to five minutes and all other speakers for up to three minutes. Thank you for your co-operation. I will report further to you on the progress of business and other GPC decisions when necessary throughout Congress.

On behalf of the General Purposes Committee, I wish you all an enjoyable and successful Congress, thank you.

The President: Thank you, Rab. Congress, I now invite you to formally receive the GPC's report. Is that agreed? (*Agreed*) Thank you very much. As Rab reported, it is very important to respect speaking times: five minutes for moving a motion and three minutes for seconding a motion and all other speakers. It is clearly not compulsory to take the full time but I will

give you advice along the way. We have got prison officers sitting up the front for a reason - and that is in case anybody goes over the time. But the reality is I will be strict. It does not matter how big or how small your trade union is, everybody will be treated to time and you have just passed the GPC report so I expect the mover of motions to do five minutes and all others three minutes.

Delegates, can I just remind you that each delegate credential has a bar code on it. When you are waiting to speak on the front row of seats, a steward will scan the barcode and this will allow us to see your name and union on the main screen during your speech.

Finally Congress, can I remind you of our Statement of Conduct which was circulated to all delegates as part of the registration process and which is now on the screen. The TUC is committed to organising activities at which everyone can participate in an inclusive, respectful and safe environment. The TUC has zero tolerance for any type of harassment. This supports the commitment set out in the TUC's rules to promote equality for all and to eliminate all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment, prejudice and unfair discrimination. This Code of Conduct applies to all events both in person or online and includes all forms of communication including postings on social media. If you have any concerns about breaches of our Code of Conduct during Congress, please speak to your delegation lead or to Kudsia Batool, TUC Director of Equality. The TUC has also established a confidential reporting line in partnership with the Survivors Trust and their telephone number is in your delegates briefing. Colleagues, we will be debating many serious and emotive issues over the course of the next three days. This year's Congress theme is Unity Works. Let's

showcase the best of the trade union movement in this hall: be kind and comradely to each other, respectful to our speakers and leave this Congress a more united and powerful movement.

SECTION 1: A GROWING AND DIVERSE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The President: Congress, we start with Section 1 of the General Council report: A growing and diverse trade union movement, from page 12. I now call Composite Motion 1

Union equality reps

(*Composing Motion 1 plus amendments*)

The President: The General Council supports the motion. It is moved by Unite, seconded by UCU, supported by CSP. I call Unite.

Susan Matthews (*Unite*) moved Composite Motion 1. *She said*: Congress, finally the time is here, from next month we will have statutory paid time off for trade union equality reps. (*Applause*) This has been long and hard fought for, for many many, many, many years, not only for workers but for all in society. We must collectively as a trade union movement work to maximise the success of this legislation and keep pushing at doors for more to meet the challenges we face on a daily basis in the workforce and wider society.

For example, Unite has previously moved a motion at Congress about the impact of all forms of discrimination that have been embedded in AI and already have made a lot of impact in terms of the changes of AI. With this said, the new legislation for equality now is a big part and parcel of our agenda item in the workforce and in the industrial relations power we utilise.

Conference, we are more equipped now to deal with equality. This will be able to push for change using the policy in terms of industrial relations, strategy and power within the workforce. They can identify the patterns that lie behind the individual grievance, disciplinary action, redundancy, reorganisation, equality impact assessment, systemic behaviour and discrimination, to push for action to actually happen: to see the closure of the discrimination pay gap, stop sexual harassment, challenge racist and homophobic attitudes, address the barriers of disabled workers at work, and seek to create a more inclusive workforce. These are just some examples in terms of what we need to be doing, organising and campaigning to achieve for all equality reps, by achieving positive change in the workplace via training.

In this way, the key actions of the motion are set out in the next steps, including a national campaign producing comprehensive equality bargaining guidance and also equality model agreements, and delivering campaigns to make sure the new rights are enforced. With more resources for new equality reps, we can rest assured that all equality reps will be fully trained to push forward and, most importantly, the industrial power that we see and equality streamlined with all industrial matters can push forward to represent us all in the wider trade union movement and the Labour movement.

Conference, we are calling for support, but it would be remiss of me to finish without talking about what happened to Professor Jason Arday on 14th March 2026. Malcolm X stated: "It is only appropriate, therefore, there is no better than adversity that every defeat, every heartbreak we face, every loss we face contains its own lessons on how to improve your performance next time."

With Malcolm X's words, Professor Jason Arday's life has gone and we mourn the loss from 14th August. So, therefore, with our equality reps, let this happen no more with systemic discriminatory behaviour. Many times people say they do not know what systemic behaviour is and it is real. So, please utilise the equality strategy reps that we have now and push back with rogue employers. Please support. I move. (*Applause and cheers*)

The President: Thank you, Susan, great speech.

Mark Pendleton (*Vice-President, UCU*) seconded Composite Motion 1. *He said*: UCU proudly support this composite motion and we thank Unite for bringing it, and for their tireless campaigning on this issue. It is a major step forward for all of this in this room that from next month equality representatives have these new statutory rights. As someone who first became active in my union via our equality work, I strongly believe that equality is not something that happens alongside industrial work; it is our industrial work. It is about who gets access to which opportunities, who is safe at work and whose voice is heard when

employers make decisions. It cuts across every aspect of our trade unionism. Across universities and colleges and many other workplaces, staff have been dealing with the consequences of the deeply flawed Supreme Court judgment and subsequent completely unworkable EHRC Code of Practice. For our trans and non-binary siblings in particular, there is enormous uncertainty and distress.

Let me give you an example. Imagine a trans member working at the university who has used a particular facility for years without any issues. Following the Supreme Court judgment, management decides to review. Perhaps it proposes changing that existing arrangement or introducing a policy without properly consulting the staff affected. For that union member this is not a theoretical question about legal interpretation. It is, "Can I go to work tomorrow and feel safe or actually be safe? Can I use the facilities I have always used? Will my colleagues and students treat me differently? And who is going to stand up for me if management gets this wrong?" The impacts are not felt just by that individual member but on all people that might access that facility.

As union reps, we must be able to say to employers, stop, consult properly, hear from the people affected and then work with us to ensure that what happens next works. Equality reps are often the people in our unions who see patterns of injustice before anybody else and help hold employers to account.

From the day the Supreme Court made this terribly poor decision, we at UCU have been telling branches that employers should not rush into discriminatory changes and that affected staff and their reps need to be involved in decisions. This motion makes the misuse of the EHRC Code of Practice a priority area for collaboration between TUC affiliates. If one university is using the code to justify bad policy, other unions need to know about it. If one college has developed a good approach, we should share it. And if any employer is trying to use the code to discriminate against our trans and non-binary siblings, we must challenge that collectively.

This motion is about making sure that the new statutory rights are not just a line in legislation. They must be tools for organising rights that give equality reps access, time to investigate, time to analyse equality data, time to consult affected workers, time to negotiate with management and, crucially, all if that helps us to build our collective power. When employers misuse uncertainty around employment law, the trade union movement must respond together and say trans rights are human rights and an injury to one is an injury to all. Please support the motion. Thank you. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Mark, for being so disciplined as well - right on the button. Supported by CSP. I have got three other unions who have requested to speak, UNISON, NASUWT and CWU, so if you could please get ready.

Becca Bambridge *(CSP)* spoke in support of Composite Motion 1. *She said:* From October, equality representatives will have a statutory right to paid time off to carry out their rep roles

including participating in collective bargaining. We should be immensely proud of that win. This happened because trade unionists campaigned and organised to ensure that equality at work is a priority and it remains at the heart of trade unions. Now that we have won this right we must put it into practice and improve the lives of working people up and down the country.

In 2021, the CSP, piloted its first ever equality reps network. I am thrilled to say that this network was made permanent in 2024 and we now have CSP equality reps organising in the workplaces across all four UK nations. Our reps have led local campaigns to prevent sexual harassment, give internationally educated physiotherapist support and negotiate flexible working policies for members.

However, our equality reps are not immune to some of those challenges that workplace reps face. The TUC's most recent Equality Audit found that unions are already winning improvements through bargaining on pay and flexible working, but also found that 42% of equality reps said that it has become more difficult to get employers to address equality issues. Equality reps should not have to fight their employers to get the role that they have been elected to do.

We campaign for equality. We fight for the person who was told their caring responsibilities are a problem. We fight for the black worker who knows they are being paid less. We fight for the disabled worker waiting for reasonable adjustment. We fight for the LGBTQIA+ worker

deciding whether it is safe to be themselves at work. And we fight for the young worker who has been told they should be grateful to just have a job.

Conference, let's continue to ensure that equality is at the core of our work, to help us organise, build strong unions and wins at works. Conference, please support this motion. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Becca. I now call UNISON.

Pam Sian (*UNISON*) spoke in support of Composite Motion 1. *She said*: Congress, equality does not just happen by accident or coincidence. It does not appear because employers decide it is the right thing to do. It is fought for, it is organised for and it is won through collective action. And that is why statutory rights for the union equality reps is such a significant victory for our movement. A victory won because we refused to accept that discrimination somehow was separate from pay conditions and bargaining, because equality is not an optional extra. It is a workplace issue, it is an industrial issue, it is a union issue.

And it comes at a critical moment. Across society, women, disabled workers, black workers, LGBTQ+ workers and migrant workers face growing challenges. We have witnessed political attacks on equality. We have seen hard-won rights questioned and undermined. We have seen far-right racist mobs roaming our streets, terrorising our communities and spreading

fear. We face relentless attempts to roll back the progress previous generations have fought for.

That makes equality reps even more important than ever. Because equality reps do more than identify problems. They organise solutions, as UNISON's migrant workers have with their Fair Workers campaign. They train members, as our LGBT+ members have with our member-led Trans Ally training. They challenge discrimination, as black members have, securing employers to sign up to UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter. They negotiate fair policies as our women members have in developing UNISON's Menopause Toolkit and they support workers who might otherwise face injustice alone, as our disabled members do when they are told reasonable adjustments are too expensive.

Congress, securing facility time is not the end of this work, it is the beginning. We know some employers will embrace these changes but others will resist them. That is why rights must be backed by enforcement and why we must organise for these. We must seize the opportunity. We need equality reps fully integrated into bargaining structures. We need to hold employers to account if they have failed to meet their obligations. And we must continue pushing forward because equality bargaining cannot sit alone and be treated as an afterthought. It must be at the heart.

Congress, our movement was built on the simple principle: an injury to one is an injury to all. Equality reps are at the principle of everything we do, every day. So, let us use these rights

not only to defend what we have already won but to win even greater challenges for the workers we represent. Please support this motion, thank you. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much. NASUWT.

Folasade Afolabi (*NASUWT*) spoke in support of Composite Motion 1. *She said*: The new statutory rights for union equality reps introduced through the Employment Rights Act of 2025 represent an important victory for our movement. They recognise a simple truth: if equality is to be made real in our workplaces, equality reps need time, training, recognition and support. NASUWT welcome this creation of equality reps and the accompanying rights to paid time off for training and to carry out their trade union duties in schools and workplaces, where inequality can have profound consequences. Teachers and education staff continue to experience racism, sexism, sexual harassment, homophobia, transphobia, age discrimination and discrimination and discrimination linked to pregnancy, maternity and caring responsibilities.

Congress, as a head teacher and trade unionist, I know the difference between having the support and feeling along which can have immense consequences for anyone who is working. I have spoken to colleagues who have experienced discrimination and who are very unsure who to turn to, whether their concerns will be taken seriously. What they needed was not simply a policy off the shelf but a knowledgeable and trusted rep who could listen, advocate and act. Now at this time this is why NASUWT has always recognised the value of workplace

organisation. Our reps work to promote fair and respectful working environments and to address problems before they escalate. NASUWT has developed a comprehensive programme of training and support to prepare members for the new equality rep rule. Together with our existing reps, equality reps will help ensure equality and diversity issues are embedded in workplaces where discussions can be held and policies and positions can be made.

While we celebrate the progress that we have made, we believe that it is a hard won equality protection and it still remains very vulnerable. The rights that we enjoy today were not simple so that is why we have to be very vigilant. We want employers to recognise that equality reps are not a problem to be managed; they are an asset. Please, I urge Congress to support this motion. Thank you. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Folasade. I call finally CWU.

Tina Holmes (*CWU*) spoke in support of Composite Motion 1 and the amendment. *She said*: Congress, the CWU warmly welcomes the introduction of statutory paid time off for union equality reps from next month. This is a landmark victory for our movement and recognition of something trade unions have always known: equality does not happen by accident. It happens because workers organise, campaign, negotiate and challenge discrimination wherever it exists, because every advance made, every barrier broken down and every

workplace made fairer has been won through collective action. That is why equality reps matter.

Across the CWU, our equality reps make a real difference to people's lives every day. They support disabled members seeking reasonable adjustments. They help to secure fair and flexible working arrangements for parents and carers. They champion the interests of women, black, Asian and minority ethnic workers, LGBT+ workers and other under-represented groups and the stand alongside members facing discrimination when they need support most.

As the CSP amendment recognises, equality reps play a unique role in our workplaces. They provide peer support, raise awareness and help turn policies and commitments into real action. Often their work goes unseen, but one conversation, one intervention, one challenge to unfair treatment can completely change someone's experience of work. That is why these new statutory rights matter, not because they create equality reps, we already have those, but because they finally recognise the value of the work equality reps have been doing for years. Equality reps help drive the changes needed to make workplaces fairer for everyone. In many ways equality reps are becoming for workplace equality what health and safety reps have long been for workplace safety. We would not expect employers to ignore safety risks when they are identified. Neither should employers ignore discrimination, inequality or exclusion when equality reps raise concerns.

But conference, legislation alone will not deliver change the challenge now and making these rights real in every workplace. These rights must be respected, properly resourced and vigorously defended. This legislation is not the end of the journey. It is the start of a new chapter, a chapter where equality reps are empowered to challenge inequality, break down barriers and ensure that fairness, dignity and inclusion are not privileges but rights enjoyed by every worker. The CWU proudly supports this motion, so please support. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Tina, for that contribution. I now call the vote on Composite Motion 1. All those in favour please show? Against? That is carried.

*Composite Motion 1 was **CARRIED**.*

The President: I now call paragraphs 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 1.9, 4.2 and Motion 2. The General Council supports this motion. Moved by the Bakers' Union, seconded by the UCU and I have had one other indicator from USDAW.

The need for a renewal in union learning and education

Sarah Woolley (*General Secretary, BFAWU*) moved Motion 2. *She said*: Congress, we all know what the Union Learning Fund meant. It was a lifeline for working-class people who too often had been told that education, skills and opportunity were not for them. Through their trade

unions, workers gained qualifications, developed confidence, learned new skills and, importantly, became more active and more powerful in their workplaces. So, let's be absolutely clear, the abolition of the Union Learning Fund is not just a funding decision: it is a political attack on working-class people and the ability of trade unions to educate and organise.

But Congress, we also need to be honest with ourselves. If we are given the opportunity to rebuild union education, we cannot re-create the ULF of the past and put a new name on it. We need something different. We need something bigger in ambition because our movement has changed and the challenges facing workers and working-class people have changed too. We need education that develops workers into activists, into workplace representatives who can organise around new technology and climate change, equality, health and safety, insecure work and the changing nature of employment. We need activists who can build collective power, not simply complete a qualification (and I have done a few of them), and that distinction matters. We must not create another system where success is measured by how many courses were delivered, how many people attended or how many boxes were ticked. We should measure success by what happens afterwards. Did a workplace become organised? Did members become more confident in challenging their employer? Did collective bargaining improve? Did someone who had never considered themselves to be a leader discover that, actually, they could. That is what trade union education is all about. Education is organising, it is developing people who make our unions stronger.

And that is why we need to think differently about funding into. Of course we should welcome government investment. If public money is available to support workplace learning (and it most definitely should be) and trade union education, we should campaign for it. But government funding must never be allowed to determine the purpose or direction of our education. We cannot build an education system that is designed around whatever funding stream happens to be available at that time. Our starting point must be the needs of working-class people and the needs of our movement. The funding should support our ambitions and not bind them. We also need to recognise that trade union studies within adult education have also been in decline for years. For generations trade unions played a vital role in adult education, giving working-class people access to learning and creating routes into activism, representation and leadership. That infrastructure has eroded, which impacts union members both directly in terms of jobs and indirectly in terms of our members' education. We need a fundamental overhaul, with sustainable long-term investment, and we need that education to be relevant to the movement we are building now, not simply a movement we had 20 or 30-odd years ago, because if we want to organise the workers of tomorrow we have got to educate the activists of tomorrow, too.

We need young workers, migrant workers, precarious workers, workers in new industries, workers who have never previously seen themselves as trade unionists, to see trade union education as something that belongs to them. We need to develop leaders at every level, in workplaces, branches, regions and nationally, and we need to do that while retaining the very best of what union education has always provided. Solidarity, confidence, critical thinking

and the understanding that workers do not have to face their employers alone, as well as developing that deep political education that we all need.

But Congress, this motion is about investing in something much bigger than just courses. It is about investing in people, democracy at work, organising the capacity of our movement and, ultimately, it is about giving working-class people the knowledge, confidence and collective power to change their workplaces and change their lives even if they don't believe they can do it at the start. We have got to campaign for a fully funded, modern union learning fund fit for 2026 and beyond, renew trade union studies within adult education and secure sustainable public investment in trade union education so it can all happen. But above all, let's make sure that when we get that opportunity we don't simply tick boxes, we build activists, build organisers and we build our movement stronger. I urge you to support this motion, Congress, thank you. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you, Sarah. I now call UCU to second.

Linda Littler (*UCU*) seconded Motion 2. *She said*: UCU is delighted to second this motion on trade union education and would like to thank the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union for bringing this important issue to Congress. As a union which organises the FE college sector, UCU represents many of the teachers who provide education for your reps. Their work is vital is ensuring that unions can continue to educate, organise and empower working-class people.

But it is a sector that is in crisis, suffering from inadequate funding as well as a postcode lottery based on local politics.

To give you some examples from the North West, Stockport College recently announced the proposed closure of the Trade Union Education Unit, which is going to leave another vast area short on provision. There is also a postcode lottery when it comes to funding from the combined authorities. For example, while in Merseyside trade union education gets to keep 100% of funding, in Manchester it is only 50%. This postcode lottery is not just an issue in the North West. Numerous FE colleges up and down the country are operating at a significant loss when it comes to funding and TU education and this is putting further pressure on provision. And even where 100% funding is available, delivery capacity remains constrained by staffing challenges due to inadequate salaries and precarious contracts in the FE sector.

But the main problem is a funding shortfall. Inadequate funding levels are placing pressure on the sustainability of trade union education delivery and additional dedicated funding will be required to maintain provision over the longer term. We therefore call on the TUC and affiliates to lobby regional politicians and combined authorities to fully fund trade union education. But we also want to see the Labour Government taking responsibility for this, stepping in to provide the sustainable dedicated national funding that is needed to guarantee access to trade union education in every part of the country regardless of postcode. As this motion says, sustainable public investment in trade union education is an essential part of developing skills, strengthening democracy at work and building a fairer economy. I urge you to support the motion, thank you. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you Linda. I now call USDAW.

Jane Jones (*President, USDAW*) spoke in support of Motion 2: *She said*: Trade unions have always played a key part in educating our members, improving their confidence and allowing them to progress in all areas of their lives. I am proud that my union still runs an active lifelong learning programme in Wales, helping workers in my stores gain essential skills in areas such as English, maths and ICT, to build their careers through courses on CV writing and interview skills, as well as supporting individuals develop their own interests with access to things such as language courses and arts programmes.

Our lifelong learning programme targets educational support to workers with low-level skills and those from typically disadvantaged groups, helping to deliver equality in the workplace and improve the life chances of those who engage. As a result, lifelong learning benefits not just the individuals but their employers, too. In fact, when the Tory Government made the shameful decision to scrap the fund for England in 2021, many of the employers USDAW works with publicly lobbied the Government to change their decision: a shameful decision that was made against the interests of working people, against the interests of the economy and against the interests of employers. It clear that a reversal of this shameful decision is now long overdue.

This is why USDAW fully supports this motion and fully supports calls not just to reintroduce the Lifelong Learning Fund in England but also to undertake a comprehensive review and renewal of the trade union studies element of adult education. Through providing education to workers, we can all win for workers. Congress, please support the motion. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Jane. I now call the vote on Motion 2. Will all those in favour please show? Will all those against please show? That is carried.

*Composite Motion 2 was **CARRIED**.*

Matt Wrack: Delegates, it now gives me great pleasure to invite our President to the stage to address Congress. Please join me in giving Steve a very warm Congress welcome. (*Applause)*

The President: Congress, delegates, it is an absolute privilege to stand here as President of Trades Union Congress as well as General Secretary of the Prison Officer's Association. It is a privilege I never imagined when I first put on a uniform when I began my career as a prison officer.

I am humbled by your confidence and proud of our movement. I have been determined to serve every union represented at Congress, no matter how big or small those unions were. I hope I have achieved that throughout the year.

But before I say another word, there are people I simply could not have reached this moment without. My family has stood beside me through long hours, the missed family occasions, the endless meetings, the phone calls that never seem to end and the pressures that come with representing working people. My wife has been my greatest support, my strongest critic when I have needed it and my biggest source strength. To my family thank you for your patience and belief as that has carried me to this stage. (*Applause*) This honour belongs to you as much as it belongs to me.

Congress, every trade union leader knows something very important: none of us gets here alone. We stand on the shoulders of our families, we stand on the shoulders of our members and we stand on the shoulders of those trade unionists who came before us and fought battles that many of us now take for granted. I would like to that the POA National Executive Committee, the full-time officers and the fantastic staff at our offices. I could not have done the role of General Secretary without their support, or indeed, the role of TUC President.

I also want to pay tribute to my dear friend and previous Deputy General Secretary who sadly died in 2024, a man that I not only worked with closely but who was a dear friend for over 30 years - Joe Simpson taken from us far too early. (*Applause*) Last year and today are historic.

For the first time in the history of the Trades Union Congress, a General Secretary of the Prison Officers Association has been elected as Chair of Congress. (*Applause*) That is not just a personal achievement. It is recognition of the incredible work carried out every day by POA members across the, United Kingdom. Men and women who work behind our prison walls in secure hospitals and in immigration, often unseen, sometimes forgotten but absolutely essential to keeping the public safe. I hope every prison officer grade, operational support grade, custody officer, secure hospital nurse and every POA member watching today feels that this is your moment too.

I am immensely proud to come from the POA, a union stripped of its basic fundamental human rights, barred from taking any form of industrial action for the last 32 years, a vindictive and pernicious piece of legislation. The POA will always campaign vociferously so that legislation is changed to right that wrong. (*Applause*)

Some may describe our campaign as tubthumping. I describe it as punching above our weight. I have said it before and I will say it again: prison officers are just like any other group of workers and it is time to restore our fundamental right to strike. (*Applause and cheers*)

Congress, the whole trade union movement is at its best when we are together. That is why our Congress theme is Unity Works is and it gives me great pleasure to welcome the parents of Zane Gbangbola to Congress, Kye and Nicole. I am proud of the Fire Brigades Union and every union who campaigned for an inquiry into Zane's death. You will recall Zane tragically

died from spillage from a toxic landfill site. Congress, last year we passed an FBU motion to call for Zane's Law to register toxic landfill sites and I am proud to report that the pressure from Zane's parents and the trade union movement and supporters has resulted in the Government finally announcing an inquiry to uncover the truth about what happened to Zane. Congress, let's not rest until we get the Zane's Law to prevent tragedies like this from ever happening again. (*Applause*)

Congress, Unity Works, two simple words but perhaps the two most important words our movement has ever lived by. Unity gave us weekends. Unity gave us paid holidays. Unity gave us safer workplaces. Unity gave us equal pay. Unity gave us maternity rights. Unity gave us pensions. Unity gave us dignity. Every victory this movement has ever won has begun with ordinary people deciding they would stand together instead of standing alone. Unity has always worked and always will.

Today our country finds itself at another crossroads. I want to congratulate our new Prime Minister Andy Burnham in taking office. He is like a breath of fresh air. With that office though becomes enormous responsibilities. At the last election in 2024 working people voted for hope, they voted for fairness but most of all they voted no are change. We all want to see this country succeed and when government delivers for working people, it will find the trade union movement ready to work constructively.

I also warmly welcome the Employment Rights Act. For years unions campaigned for stronger protection at work. For years too many workers faced insecurity, exploitation and unfair treatment. The Employment Relations Act 2025 marked real progress. It says working people matter. It says fairness matters.

But Conference, let me be clear, passing legislation is the start of the journey, not the destination. Rights must be enforced. Bad employers must be challenged. Workers must know the rights and unions must remain at the heart of every workplace. Because rights only become real when working people can rely on them. The Employment Rights Act 2025 is a foundation, but there is still so much more to do. Too many people still work hard and struggle to make ends meet. Too many families worry every month about paying the mortgage or the rent. Too many workers are exhausted, under-valued and underpaid. Too many public services remain stretched beyond breaking point.

We cannot ignore the challenges facing the next generation. Young people deserve more than warm words. They deserve secure jobs, affordable homes, quality apprenticeships and decent wages, a chance to build a future with confidence rather than anxiety. No young person should believe they will be worse off than their parents, yet for far too many that is exactly how it feels. That should concern every single one of us. While we fight for tomorrow's generation, we must honour yesterday's generation, the people who built our communities, worked all their lives, paid their taxes, raised families, served this country. Older generations deserve dignity. They deserve a social care system that is fit for purpose. They deserve proper healthcare. Growing old should never mean being forgotten.

Congress, the strength of Britain has never been measured by the wealth of the richest. It is measured by how we treat those who need us most: The child starting school, the apprentice beginning work, the nurse working nights, the refuse collector keeping our streets clean, the prison officer working on to a wing, the care worker comforting an elderly resident, the fire fighter, the energy worker, the teacher, the rail worker, the supermarket worker, the paramedic. Every single one of them deserves respect. Every single one deserves safe working conditions. Every single one deserves a union. (*Applause*)

Congress, some will always try to divide us. Public sector against private sector, young against old, north against south, union against union, black against white. We have seen it all before and we know exactly where division lead. Our mantra must always be the same: unity works for everyone because when workers are divided, workers lose but when we stand shoulder to shoulder, there is nothing we cannot achieve. That has been true for over 150 years, it remains true today and will be true long after we have left this Congress.

Congress, I believe passionately this movement. I believe in collective bargaining, I believe solidarity. I believe in fairness and I believe in justice. And above all, I believe in people; ordinary people, working people. As your President, I also believe in internationalism. I am extremely proud of work the trade union movement has done in relation to Cuba, Colombia and the genocide in Palestine. (*Applause*) I am also proud of the work with ordinary Israeli citizens. I am proud of our support for the Ukrainian trade union movement. (*Applause*)

Congress, as President throughout the year it has been important to speak out against those who attempt to create division in our communities. History will never remember those who stood on the sidelines. It remembers those who stood together. So when we leave Congress, we should do so with confidence and we must always remain true to our values. There can be no place in the trade union movement, in workplaces, or indeed society, for any form of discrimination. I have been immensely proud to support the TUC's work to tackle sexual harassment within our own ranks and make our movement a more effective force for racial justice.

Let us organise. Let us campaign. Let us negotiate. Let us build a Britain where every worker is valued, where every young person has hope, where every older person has dignity and where every workplace respects those who make success possible. Let us show our country that the trade union movement remains the greatest force for fairness and let us prove once again that generations of trade unionists have already taught us that when we stand together, when we speak together, we win together. Unity Works. Solidarity forever. Congress, thank you. (*Applause*)

The Vice-President: Congress, I now call on Mick Pimblett to move the vote of thanks to the President.

Mick Pimblett (*Deputy General Secretary, POA*) moved the vote of thanks to the President. *He said*: Congress, as Deputy General Secretary of POA it is both a privilege and a pleasure to rise on behalf of the POA to offer thanks to our outgoing TUC President, Steve Gillan. As you are all aware, serve has spent the last 12 months serving as the President of the TUC whilst also remaining General Secretary of the POA. Many people would struggle with just one of these jobs. In fact, some people struggle opening the conference app. However, Steve has managed to do all three quite surprisingly. Steve's background in prisons has certainly helped him during this year's presidency. After all, both environments occasionally involve people refusing to go stop talking when they have been told their time is up.

Steve has shown extraordinary patience over the last year not because of Ministers, employers or government officials but because he has spent 12 month listening politely to trade union officials who begin with the words, "I will be brief" and, as we all know, those four words are usually the first sign that nobody will be. I have to say that when Steve became TUC President, prison officers across the country were delighted. It was the first time in a long time that someone whose job involves dealing with difficult individuals, unreasonable demands and people who think the rules do not apply to them was promoted to deal with Congress. I will leave delegates to decide which job is harder.

Being General Secretary of the POA and President of the TUC at the same time cannot have been easy. It is a bit like prison food really, you have got to take whatever is put on your plate and somehow make it work.

But in all seriousness, Steve has been a tremendous ambassador for our union and for the wider trade union movement. Over the last year he has brought passion, conviction and authenticity to the role. Most importantly, he has never forgotten where he came from - a working-class lad from a working-class family in Greenock. He has carried the values of his parents, his wider family and the POA into every meeting, every speech and every engagement as President.

Let's be honest, there cannot be many TUC Presidents whose journey to the platform involved years working on prison landings. Steve brought something unique to the role: an ability to stay calm under pressure, stop trouble before it starts and occasionally tell people to behave themselves.

Steve's presidency has come at the time when working people continue to face real challenges. Whether it is the lapping cost of living, pay, public services, health and safety or workplace rights, Steve has been a tireless advocate for working people. He has reminded us all that trade unionism is about solidarity, it is about standing up for people who need a voice and never accepting that things cannot be changed. One thing that Steve has never accepted is being told that something cannot be done. Many of us in the POA have sat through meetings where officials, employers, Ministers or civil servants have explained in great detail why something is impossible. The problem for them is Steve tends to regard the word

"impossible" as the start of a negotiation. That determination has earned him respect throughout the movement.

As Deputy General Secretary of the POA, I have the privilege of working closely with Steve. I have seen firsthand his commitment to our members and to the trade union cause. I have also seen the amount of travel involved in being TUC President. In fact, over the last 12 months Steve has attended so many meetings, conferences, rallies and events, some of our members were beginning to wonder whether we should put him on a prisoner escort contract. Everywhere he went he represented the movement with distinction. He has been a President who listens, a President who united and a President who never lost sight of the people we are here to serve. Most importantly for those of us in the POA, he has shown the entire trade union movement that professionalism, dedication and courage of prison officers and related grades. Steve your year as President has been a source of pride for our union. You have represented the TUC with distinction, represented the POA with pride and shown once again why solidarity remains the most powerful force in our movement.

On behalf of the POA, our members and all those who have worked alongside you thank you for your leadership, your service and your friendship. And whilst your presidency may be ending, I think it is fair to say that nobody expects you to slow down. In fact, the only thing more likely than Steve taking it easy is a prison officer getting an easy shift. After a year as TUC President, Steve has listened patiently to hundreds of speeches from delegates across the movement and if that is not proof of his commitment to the trade union cause, I do not know what is. In fact, after sitting through some of us over the last 12 month a quiet prison

landing probably feels like a holiday. So, Steve, congratulations on a successful year as TUC President. Thank you for everything that you have done for working people, for the trade union people and for the POA.

Conference please join me in showing your appreciation for our outgoing TUC President, Steve Gillan. (*Applause*)

The Vice-President: Thanks, Mick. I now call on Fran Heathcote to second the vote of thanks to the President.

Fran Heathcote (*General Secretary, PCS*) seconded the vote of thanks for Steve Gillan as TUC President. *She said*: As POA General Secretary, Steve is known within his own union and throughout the trade union movement as a diligent, selfless leader, not there to bolster his own ego but to get things done for his members and for our movement, so it is a real pleasure for me to stand here and second the vote of thanks for Steve. Steve and I shared a mutual good friend as mentioned in his former DGS Joe Simpson, who we tragically lost last year. I know he is still missed by so many within the POA and I was delighted to join Steve in Leeds earlier this year to attend a celebration of Joe's life with many of his comrades. Joe was always loyal to his friends and I know Steve he will be looking down this week bursting with pride for you and everything that you have achieved. The POA is one of our sister unions in the Civil Service and it has been a pleasure to work with Steve through the national Civil Service, though the Public Sector Liaison Group and as part of the trade union co-ordinating

group for many years as well as on the TUC. Steve and I are currently incensed about the Capita pensions scandal and we have become a bit of a double act on that issue. At the TUC parliamentary reception this week, which Steve chaired, we took the opportunity to give John Healey a real grilling about Capita. I was asked if I would get my picture taken with the Chancellor. When it came to my turn I told John Healey I said it felt a bit like queuing up to see Santa. He asked what he could do for me then and I said, "Well, you can end the Capital pensions scandal, bring Civil Service pensions back in house and bring about the biggest wave of insourcing in a generation that Labour promised, and that is just for a start." John Healy just said, "Oh God, not you as well."

Talking of scandals, though, the PCS and many other unions today have been proud to stand with the POA in their very simple campaign for the right to strike. Despite a determined battle from POA over many years now and despite Scotland lifting the legislative ban back in 2015, Labour have yet to lift that ban maintaining it has no plans to repeal section 127. It is an absolute disgrace, Steve, and I am sure this Congress stands with you and your members in that continued battle (*Applause*)

Earlier this year I was honoured to address the POA conference in Eastbourne and what was so apparent there is a so well respected Steve is within his own union. Whilst on the face of it his union is quite different from my own it was so clear how many issues we had in common. I received a lovely warm welcome as well as a stick of rock albeit one delegate woke up on the roof of his Eastbourne hotel without his room card or his clothes or any idea how he had got there so maybe our unions are not that different after all. Steve works as a prison officer

at HMP Chelmsford, HMP Bullwood Hall and HMP Pentonville but to show us how fearless he really is, Steve is also a season ticket holder for Celtic. (*Applause*) Dealing with inmates for decades meant that Steve had little trouble chairing the General Council or Congress and we have all got used to his kind but firm style of chairing over the last year. Let's see if that can continue over the next few days, Steve. The large amount of time spent with criminals has given him all the experience he needs to deal with Ministers and MPs in Parliament.

Last year we visited Colombia together to develop solidarity with our sister unions there, as part of a delegation organised by Justice for Colombia, which Steve now chairs having taken over from ASLEF's Mick Wheelan who was with us in Colombia and still the Chair at the time of our visit. It was an amazing but exhausting few days and we all learned a lot from our visit. I have to say that Steve pushed the arguments with Parliament on behalf of JFC at every opportunity, as anybody who knows Steve would expect him to do. And my God they need our support right now. We do not say thank you often enough in our movement but as POA General Secretary for 16 years now and TUC President this past year Steve, you have served our movement with absolute dedication. You are widely known at General Council as one of the most decent people we all know and you continue to do so much to further the interests of our members and of our movement. I hope I speak on behalf of all Congress delegates when I say thank you Steve Gillan. Thank you. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much Mick and Fran for those kind words. I think I will move on swiftly before I cry.

SECTION 2: STRONG RIGHTS AT WORK AND PROTECTION FROM DISCRIMINATION

The President: We now move to section 2 of General Council report, Strong Rights at Work and Protection from Discrimination, from page 22, I now call paragraphs 2.3 to 2.5 and 5.8

Before we begin, I will outline how I intend to take the debate on Composite Motion 5 and Motion 12. I will take this as a group debate. First, I will call the mover and seconder of Composite Motion 5, Countering the far-right attacks and defending education. I will then call the mover and seconder of motion 12, Addressing the rising influence of far-right parties. I will then call unions that have indicated the wish to speak. We will then vote on Composite Motion 5 and Motion 12 in that order. I would like to remind delegates that in a group debate unions may only speak once including movers, seconders and supporters, unless exercising their right reply which I do not anticipate. I now call Composite Motion 5. The General Council support the composite motion moved by NEU, seconded by NAHT, supported by NASUWT, PCS and EIS.

Countering the far right and defending education

(*Composing Motion 10 plus amendments and Motion 11*)

Sarah Kilpatrick (*Deputy General Secretary, National Education Union*) moved Composite Motion 5. *She said*: I started teaching 20 years ago and have spent most of my career in the forgotten post-industrial towns of the north-east. These communities are still suffering from the forced decline of industry, their children having the message reinforced repeatedly that optimism and ambition are not for them. At the start of my career this entrenched poverty as offset by the same financial intervention I benefited from as a student in the late 1990s. Returning to the classroom in the mid-2000s, not much had changed. We still had a Government who believed in the equality of access for working-class children and funded educational opportunities accordingly.

My school was a specialist arts college which built children's confidence and sense of self-worth through the creative arts as well as access to vocational qualifications. As a result, our attendance was good, children's behaviour was good and our standing in the community was excellent. Relationships built on mutual respect allowed for difficult conversations to be held and questions to be asked. In the wider community, Sure Start, public libraries and community centres thrived.

In 2010, the Coalition Government instituted a programme of austerity which, knowingly and brutally, attacked the most vulnerable members of our society, stripping away community support measures, defunding charities and plunging those already living in poverty into destitution.

Not long after schools were placed in a firing line. We lost our specialist arts status and with it the funding required to address inequality of access to the arts. Then came the changes to accountability measures. Our vocational programme ended. Whatever was not counted in the headlines used to pit schools against each other in the league tables was deemed unnecessary and unaffordable. All those children whose sense of self-worth was found outside of the academic programme determined by the Ebacc were brought back into lessons which they struggled to access with no support offered to ease the transition.

Then came the cuts to staffing, the redundancies, the restructures. An ever-growing sense of government control crept into education professional autonomy was eroded critical thinking skills diminished. There was no longer time in the school day for children to ask us those difficult questions let alone time for us to thoughtfully respond. Opinions were formed and went unchallenged fed by the exponential growth in social media and later AI. With the dramatic rise in the privatisation of state education as most schools were forced to become academies having fallen foul of the new accountability measures came a fragmentation of the profession and an ever-increasing sense of control, both of the curriculum itself and those of us delivering it.

You can see, Congress, the perfect storm which has led us to where we are today. When children are not taught how to question, they will accept whatever they are told. When children are not given the opportunity to think, they will merely regurgitate what they hear. When families see their children go hungry, when they cannot afford to heat their homes and their homes are not fit for purpose, and there are no community services left they can turn

to to ask for help, is it any wonder that they are angry, is it any wonder that they feel neglected, let down, cheated?

We are on the precipice here. We are a nation on the brink of crisis and a far-right march on our streets. If we cannot acknowledge the decisions that brought us here and put in place urgent measures to address them, it will be too late.

A glimmer of hope came in March of this year when the Together Alliance brought half a million people out on the streets of London to challenge the hateful rhetoric which has become the daily background noise in all of our lives. Let's keep growing those numbers. Talk to your union members, talk to your colleagues, to your neighbours, your friends, your families. Don't ever allow hate speech to become normalised. Fight back against the billionaire-backed hatemongers who are fuelling this narrative and driving us to the point of no return.

My union, the NEU, has been singled out repeatedly by far-right politicians and that is not surprising. Education is the means by which we counter the far right. Education workers of all unions are embedded in every single community. For all of the attacks we have faced since the early days of the austerity government, we are still held in high regard by the families with serve. That is why they are coming for us and that is why it is more important than ever that we work together and face down this threat. Unity works. Congress, I move. (*Applause*)

The President: Just in the nick of time. I now call NAHT to second.

Dave Woods (*National President, NAHT*) seconded Composite Motion 5. *He said*: I am proud to second this composite on behalf of NAHT, the school leaders' union, and I thank your NEU colleagues for introducing the motion. This motion recognises that education is one of our strongest defences against prejudice, hate and division, and that our schools are vital civic institutions where communities come together in difficult times.

As a serving school leader, I want to speak plainly about what many of us are seeing at our schools. The politics of the far right does not remain online. It does not stay confined to the comments sections of social media feeds. It arrives directly at school gates. It arrives in the fear felt by migrant families who wonder whether they still belong. It arrives in the anxiety of refugee children who have already experienced upheavals, distress and anxiety. And it arrives in the abuse directed at education staff who dare to stand up for inclusion, for dignity and equality. And increasingly, the politics of the far right arrives at the daily work of school leaders, teachers and support staff who find themselves on the front-line standing against divisions they did not create.

Our schools are asked to hold communities together when everything else in society is pulling them apart. That is why schools matter. That is why education matters. Schools are more than places where children sit exams or gain qualifications. They are places where young people learn how to live with one another, places where difference is explored and celebrated

rather than feared, places where democracy, respect and solidarity are not abstract concepts but lived experiences. For many children and families, schools are places of sanctuary: places where a family fleeing conflict can begin to rebuild their lives with a sense of belonging.

The far right understands the importance of schools. That is precisely why educators, inclusive curriculums and public education is targeted. Education workers report increasing intimidation, attacks on their professional autonomy and their ability to offer a safe environment from far-right movements. Defending education from the far right is not a peripheral issue, not an optional extra. It is central to defending workers, defending communities and defending democracy. Thank you. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Dave. This is supported by NASUWT, PCS and EIS. I now call NASUWT. A gentle reminder that when the red light goes, it is not a green light to continue. Thank you.

Wayne Brown (*NASUWT*) spoke in support of Composite Motion 5. *He said*: President, Congress, I am here for the last time. The Battle of Stockton (where I live) took place on 10th September 1933 and was celebrated last week. It was a clash between the British Union of Fascists and anti-fascist demonstrators, who forced them to return to where they came from. They were known as Mosley's Blackshirts. Just this past week we have witnessed individuals in black shirts, balaclavas, black everything, doing exactly the same thing. History is repeating itself and we must defend our British values.

The rise of the far right is not an abstract political issue for teachers. Its consequences are already being felt in our schools, colleges, by the teachers and other workers who challenge racism, hate and division, and also, I am sorry to say, these are even within our own unions. We need to educate them and our students.

Our amendment now accepted in this composite says that no teacher or other worker should fear for their job because they challenged racism, supported a migrant or refugee or stood up for people the far right seeks to scapegoat. (*Applause*) Say it loud and let us make it very clear: refugees are welcome here. (*Applause and cheers*)

Later this autumn NASUWT will publish a report on tackling the far right, racism and hate in UK schools. It identified that more than half of teachers have had pupils express far right extremist views in the classroom, while three-quarters had encountered misogynistic or Islamophobic views. These views were getting to young people through online culture, social media and wider political discourse. During a recent project with German education union GEW, five West Midlands teachers visited Leipzig and Dresden and German teachers visited schools in Birmingham and the Black Country. They found far right and populist narratives had entered the classrooms mainly through social media.

Teachers on the front-line are becoming targets, especially black teachers. If we expect teachers and other workers to challenge racism and the far right, we owe them the

responsibility to stand behind them when they do. Congress, we must defend workers targeted for challenging racism, extremism and discrimination; protect inclusive education and teacher's professional judgment; properly fund schools, youth services and specialist support; hold social media and technology companies accountable for amplifying harmful and extremist content.

Congress, teachers and workers will always continue to challenge racism, misogyny, hate and division. Our movement must and will stand behind them every time. Please support Composite 5. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Wayne. PCS next.

Mark Woodford (*PCS*) spoke in support of Composite Motion 5. *He said*: Congress, as we have heard, there are Blackshirts blockading ports and attacking migrants. Workers and volunteers are being threatened and harassed in the workplace for refusing to let people drown. We are in an ever-escalating state of emergency and we need to wake up. The PCS supports this motion. It calls on the TUC to defend workers against far-right attacks. As we saw last week the far-right tactics are evolving, they are getting better organised and so must we.

National union leaderships have been good at participating in certain anti far right demonstrations. In March this year, the Together Alliance bought out about 100,000 people on the streets, but we are ding nowhere near enough.

Congress, I was in this very room this time last year when we unanimously put up our hands to say that we would back counter-demonstration against Tommy Robinson's Unite the Kingdom's march the following week. What then happened? 5,000 counter-demonstrators and over 100,000 on the far right, with minimal union presence and very poor, dangerous stewarding. That was exactly a year ago today and it is only getting worse. The far right advances(?) nearly every day now. All over the country, dedicated activists are working tirelessly in their communities, workplaces, trades councils and tenants' unions to resist them, but we cannot leave them on their own.

Yesterday in Portsmouth, the far right chased counter-demonstrators through the streets. The TUC needs to be throwing its weight behind rank and file activists on the ground so we can be agile and adapt to the threat as it evolves. This motion goes some way to readdressing that and should be supported for that reason.

Finally, the motion calls on the General Council to link anti far right activity to campaigns against austerity. That is absolutely vital. We have to respond politically to the social anxieties that the far right prey on, turning working-class people against one another, including within our own unions. By failing to mount a sufficiently robust opposition to

austerity in the 2010s, we ceded ground to the far right to exploit. We accepted the dismantling of our of public services while not coming after the rich to pay for their own crisis. In the face of what remains, we need to be bold about the changes that we need to see in our society. We need to make the argument of the intertwined nature of our struggles to working-class people, and build solidarity, winning the ideological fight against racism, transphobia and misogyny. Yes, refugees are welcome, all migrants are welcome, everyone is welcome here.

Love, hope and unity are not enough. It is never too late, it can't be, but we need an energetic fight-back right now. All unions standing shoulder to shoulder against the right, against any attacks against marginalised people and demanding mass public investment in homes, jobs, schools and healthcare. Unions must lead the fight-back against the far right. Working with our affiliates, sure, but leading, mobilising the counter-demonstrations with stewarding recruited from our ranks because we cannot rely on the police for our protection.

On the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street, we need the kind of leadership that defeated Mosley, the National Front, the BNP. We need it now. We needed it ten years ago. Support the motion and, more importantly, go back and organise in your branches, unions and trades councils because no one is going to save us but ourselves. Thank you. Please support the motion. (*Applause*)

The President: I now call EIS.

Susan Quinn (*EIS*) spoke in support of Composite Motion 5. *She said*: I am speaking in particular to the EIS amendment around the importance of human-centred endeavours within our education system: ever more important now, as colleagues have already outlined in this debate.

In March this year, the Scottish Government published the Scottish guidelines and guardrails for the use of AI in schools. This guidance was produced following close collaboration with the EIS and input from other partners. It consists of five key principles or guardrails to underpin the responsible use of AI in education. AI use must ensure the safety and privacy of learners and staff by prioritising children's rights, teachers' judgment, ethical standards and data privacy. If AI is used in schools safety and privacy come first. We need to be absolutely certain that all data and personal information is properly protected and secured. The use of AI needs proper governance and policies at school and employer level that sets out how it is used and where the boundaries are. Those policies need to be developed by teachers and their trade unions. Importantly, these policies must reflect decisions about whether to use AI, and when it is used, and equally, when it is not used are professional judgments that rest with teachers.

The use of AI must be underpinned by equity and fairness. We know there is already a massive digital divide in our schools and AI tools are not all equal. We must make sure that they are used fairly. We are told about the importance of AI in supporting our young people

with additional support needs, but these must be no substitute for teachers who listen to and understand the needs of our children. AI must foster human connection and inclusivity.

Colleagues, we know how important relationships are in education relationships between pupils and pupils and between pupils and staff and between staff themselves, and AI cannot replicate that. AI might be a useful tool but it is not self-intelligent and its outputs contain bias and get things wrong, so we must ensure that it is properly governed by human contact within schools. AI reflects and reproduces the biases and discrimination and disinformation it sees itself online and should only be used where teachers are involved.

To be clear, AI is a tool, but it is only a tool, and it is for teachers working within our school communities and not AI to define the goals of education. Please support the motion. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Susan. I now call Motion 12. The General Council support the motion. Moved by Unite on behalf of the TUC Black Workers' Conference and seconded by GMB. I have other unions indicated as speaker UNISON, RMT and CWU.

Addressing the rising influence of far-right parties

Pritpaul Atwal (*Unite*) moved Motion 12. *He said*: I am moving Motion 12 from the TUC Black Workers' Conference on behalf of my union, Unite. (*Applause*) President, Congress, the gains in electoral support of far- and hard-right parties here and across Europe and the world, which are both feeding and growing off violent street mobilisations, have been horrifying for all of us. Language and beliefs that we all believed and hoped had been consigned to history are now also now spoken aloud by so-called mainstream politicians pandering to this far-right growth.

But history also tells us that pandering does not work. Fear, grievance and hatred need to be met head on and tackled. This motion is one of many we are rightly debating at Congress as we collectively, as a movement, work out how best to respond. A many-headed hydra needs to be attacked in many different directions, with many different tools.

Today we have already spoken about the positive drive that equality reps can add to our workplaces, our movement and our communities. We have heard of the TUC Unity Works campaign, and other motions that urgently raise how the far right are impacting on our workplaces and communities. Coming up on our agenda this week are motions that deal with the real and deep-seated problems of housing, economic insecurity and underinvestment in our public services. And crucially, we know that as a movement we have solutions to these political and economic problems. We know that as a movement we make a real difference to people's lives and do that by taking action collectively to improve lives. Whether that is taking a stand in our workplace or campaigning in our local community, it leads to people recognising they are not powerless.

In Unite, as part of the taking action on racism and hatred being whipped up against black and migrant workers, against disabled, LGBT+ and the weaponisation of women's rights as well as the misogyny of the far right, we are also piloting Union Towns. Union Towns is about rebuilding trade union strength and working to support the connections that exist between industrial organising, community campaigns and political education. We want to build real working-class power across these divides which are being systematically exploited by right-wing political activists, expanding and diversifying our activist base and driving real local positive of change.

Congress, this motion and the other motions we are discussing this week need to be properly considered together, to build and develop the multi-pronged attack to the growth of the far right on the scale and urgency that we must have, taking the far right apart piece by piece at the roots. I cannot be alone in dreading what will happen if we do not do so. Please support this motion. (*Applause*)

The President: That was very well delivered, thank you. Seconded by GMB.

Farzana Jumma (*GMB*) seconded Motion 12. *She said*: Good afternoon, President, Congress. I am from the GMB, seconding Motion 12 on behalf of the TUC Black Workers' Conference.

Congress, the far right is growing and we cannot afford to sit back and watch it happen. They are not waiting for people to come to them, they are going into their homes, on to their phones and into their social media feeds. They are using fear, anger and frustration to recruit and influence people and they are very good at it. They understand the power of short videos, powerful images and simple messages. They understand algorithms and they understand how to make people feel that someone is listening to them. We only have to look at Dover to see how quickly the far right can exploit fear, anger and genuine concerns into intimidation and violence. This is all happening while we are having meetings, writing statements and producing long documents. The far right is producing content every single day, every single hour.

Conference, we need to wake up to this reality, because people are struggling. People are struggling with the cost of living, they are worried about job security, they are facing insecure work, low pay, poor housing and cuts to public services and when people feel ignored, angry or abandoned they can become vulnerable to those offering easy answers. The far right tells working people that their problems are caused by other working people. They point the finger at migrants. They target Black and Asian communities. They attack refugees and minorities. They turn frustration into division. We know the truth. The workers struggling to pay their rent is not the enemy of the worker who has come here from another country. The worker worried about their job is not the enemy of another worker because of the colour of their skin.

Our enemy is exploitation. Our enemy is poverty pay. Our enemy is insecure work and the race to the bottom. That is why this motion matters. We cannot simply tell people that they are wrong. We have to listen and we have to understand. A positive vision built around jobs, decent pay, secure work and strong public services and dignity at work is what we need. Our trade union messages need to be on these platforms where they are actually having these conversations. We need to train our activists. We need a social media task force that gives people the confidence and tools to communicate effectively. Importantly, we need measures that work, and to learn from best practice from this.

Congress, this is not about understanding our values; it is about finding better ways to challenge them. We must challenge racism and hatred by answers based upon hope and solidarity. We need to listen not lecture. We need to organise and not condemn. Let's persuade people whoever before we alienate them. Congress, I second. (*Applause*)

The President: Well done, Farzana. I now call speakers in the group debate. UNISON.

Abiola Olufunlayo Kusoro (*UNISON*): *She said*: Good afternoon, Congress. Good afternoon, President, I am speaking on behalf of UNISON. I do not even know where to start this from but my question is this: these far-right people are not our enemies but they are not our friends either. They are not on our side. My question to Congress is: whose side are they on? Can anybody answer that question? I know definitely they are not on our side. They have tried to expose us and whatever we have put our hands on, they have tried to target us. They are

not standing for what we stand for. They are not standing for our values and they are not standing for what we are standing for. They are attacking the terms and conditions of our members and they are making our job very difficult for us.

So, we urge the Congress to support this motion. It is very difficult at this time. If you look at the demonstrations they had the other day, the political demonstration, the far right did not see anything wrong with it. We are talking about the Reform party. The Reform party are not our friends either. Nigel Farage and his crew have spoken of the belief that the NHS is unfeasible and that it should be replaced by a US-style private insurance system, but of course, Congress, this is not just theoretical. It is about they will do it in future and it is also about what they are doing now. Where they have won power in local authorities, they are already making life difficult for union members and those that rely on the services they provide. Equality, diversity and inclusion have been scaled back to the minimum. The use of rooms for black staff to meet has been stopped. Funding has also been scaled down and entirely removed for refugees and Black History Month. And of course we have seen in the past week the shameful behaviour of far-right politicians in failing to call out the behaviour of the balaclava-wearing thugs who seek to intimidate migrants and other wider communities.

Congress, hopefully things may be beginning to change. Recent months have been difficult for Reform. Their corruption has been put under the spotlight. They are losing momentum in the polls. The biggest change is ---

The President: You are now on a red light, so if you could wind your speech up now, please.

Abiola Olufunlayo Kusoro: Sorry. -- the unlikely way Reform has been winning the battle online. It is very important that we pass the motion and get ---

The President: Abiola, you are over time now.

Abiola Olufunlayo Kusoro: Congress, the stakes could not be higher. Please support the motion. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you. I now call on RMT, please.

Alex Gordon (*RMT*) spoke in support of Motion 12. *He said*: I am supporting Motion 12 from the TUC Black Workers' Conference on the need to address the rising influence of the far right by organising around pay, jobs and conditions.

Congress, we know that the far right and their ideas have a foothold in our society but also in the workplaces where our members work. The transport sector has seen a massive increase in racist abuse and assaults on public transport workers in recent years. The physical threat to our members has intensified by mainstream politicians who parrot far-right narratives, and that includes some Labour politicians. Our trade unions have exposed the real agenda

and the real funders of the far right to our members at work, but we need to be clear that far right parties and politicians directly threaten our members' jobs, pay and conditions. Reform UK politicians said that RMT members taking strike action to defend their jobs should all be sacked. When we called strike action they described us as the "cancer of union extremism". RMT members were told if we did not toe the line we would be written out of history.

Congress, we need to teach the far right that our members make history and will continue to do so. (*Applause*) I hope Congress and all of our unions will join us in three weeks' time on Sunday 4th October in Tower Hamlets in London, where we will march to Cable Street to celebrate our unity and our diversity by commemorating the 99th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street, when in October 1936 workers from the East End of London and from as far away as Teesside and South Wales came together to block Mosley's Blackshirts from marching through Whitechapel and Stepney to intimidate the Jewish community. (*Applause*) That emphatic demonstration of working-class action dealt a blow from which Mosley's fascists never recovered. And Paul, we have invited you to address the Cable Street 90th Anniversary rally. I hope you will be there.

Congress, let's be crystal clear to our members when we have those workplace conversations that Reform UK has an agenda to break our trade unions, destroy our employment rights so their big business mates can profit at the expense of our members' pay, jobs and conditions. We need to stay united, protect our members' livelihoods and safety at work from any Reform Government. Congress, please support, thank you. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Alex. I knew the RMT would not go through a red light! I now call on the CWU.

Adam Alarakhia (*CWU*) spoke in support of Motion 12. *He said*: Good afternoon, everyone. (*Applause*) Come on - a bit of solidarity and support. Brilliant! Every time I come here I feel like a first-time delegate. (*Applause*) Thank you very much. My name is Adam "I belong here" Alarakhia. I am going to change it now, whether people like it or not. I belong to the Communication Workers Union which punches way, way above its weight. I belong to the Communication Workers Union and the reason why I am standing here is to tell literally everyone in this room, because we are all supporting this motion anyway, to send a message out there to those people who are dividing us that we will not be divided at all. We will be united all the time.

Like Mick Lynch said some time ago, and our brother from RMT just confirmed that and I pray for a bit of blessing in these three minutes I will try and be brief, Mick Lynch said, "We fought them in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s and we fight them now as well and we will carry on fighting them because they will never ever divide us." This is a another message for these people who are coming under the influence of these far-right leaders, if you want to call them. I do not like to use that word, but anyway, I am telling you honestly, these people, to keep it halal, they don't care a flying falafel about you. (*Laughter and applause*) Don't listen to these people. Don't do what these people want you to do because they are here to divide us. Please

let us send a strong message that we will never ever be divided. We will strive and work together in order to keep the whole of mankind united and they will never divide us. Thank you very much. I did try to stay brief. (*Applause and cheers*)

The President: Brilliant, Adam, very well done. I now call the vote on Composite Motion 5. All those in favour please show? All those against, please show. That is carried.

*Composite Motion 5 was **CARRIED.***

The President: I now call the vote on Motion 12. All those in favour, please show? All those against? Thank you very much. That is carried as well.

*Motion 12 was **CARRIED**.*

The President: I now call paragraphs 2.7, 2.8m 2.9 NS 5.5 and Motion 13. The General Council support the motion, moved by Unite on behalf of the TUC Women's Conference and seconded by USDAW. Other speakers from UNISON, ASLEF, NUJ, NASUWT, NEU and EIS.

Tackling the far right and weaponisation of women and girls' safety

Faith Kokajara (*Unite*) moved Motion 13. *She said*: This motion from the Women's Conference puts on the agenda in the discussion about how to respond to the challenging rise of the far right; a critical issue in how the far right have sought to justify their violence, hatred and invective against black and migrant people.

At Women's Conference, in the debate, it was clear from delegate after delegate who spoke on the unfolding attack on women's rights themselves, and how the effectiveness of the weaponisation for racist ends is frightening. This is a template being used not just here in Britain but in the US, Hungary, Italy, France and around the world where the far right is growing. Male politicians use the language of protection to gather support and grow movements but when they attain power, cut access to abortion, cut funding for the public services that women depend on, cut women's rights both in law and resources that exercise those rights, and cut services for women escaping violence. We know that many men arrested during the racist riots in the summer of 2024 had been reported to the police for violence against women and girls, including grievous bodily harm, domestic abuse, stalking and coercive control. One in five have been reported against since: in some regions over half. We know that Black, Asian and ethnic-minority women face increased racism and gender-based hatred in the areas surrounding where the riots took place, with women avoiding leaving their homes as a consequence.

As others have spoken about today, we need to counter the hatred, the racism and misogyny and the fundamentals. Our most powerful response to the rise of the far right is the actions we take and the wins we make. We are the movement that delivers real improvements in not just women's lives but everyone's. We need to put our campaign against sexual harassment and sexual violence front and centre of our campaigns for the funding of public services and for women's health, safety and refuge. We are the movement where women's voices are not just heard but acted on. We are the movement with women leaders at every level who deliver real change in our workplaces and for our communities. That is our collective strength and we must use and develop it more. Please support this motion. Thank you. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Faith. This is seconded by USDAW.

Joanne Thomas (*General Secretary, USDAW*) seconded Motion 13. *She said*: I am proud to second this crucial motion on tackling the far right. As the mover of the motion has made it abundantly clear, the far right have never shown any interest in campaigning to end violence against women and girls before, but they have hijacked and weaponised this issue to promote their violently racist and anti-migrant agendas. Far from seeking to protect women and girls, the far right hold and promote extremely sexist notions of family, advocating a return to traditional values, pushing women back into the home and giving men absolute authority over women's bodies and the family. We were horrified at the racist attacks on the hotels housing migrants and refugees that we saw last summer and of course much more recently the

so-called port protests in Dover and Portsmouth where roads were blocked by masked men dressed in black.

These incidents make extremely clear the very real threat the far right pose to people and of course women's lives. As one woman bystander in Dover recalled, there were no banners, there were no slogans, just pure intimidation. And it was a demonstration only in the sense that they wanted to demonstrate their power to intimidate. The far right promote that racist lie that sexual violence is something that has been imported to these shores by foreigners. We know that is glossing over the uncomfortable truth that violence against women and girls is committed overwhelmingly by men who are known to them. We also know, as has previously been said, that two out of every five people arrested for disorder last summer had police histories of violence against women. Two out of every five. And those offences ranging from stalking, to battery, to sexual assault and to coercive control. These men are not protecters of women and girls. Many of them are the perpetrators of violence.

Congress, we stand shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with all women and girls, wherever they are, whatever the circumstances and we welcome the publication of the Government's violence against women and girls strategy last December: an important milestone to build a world where women and girls are free from violence and abuse. I genuinely believe that the Labour Government has the will and the tools to materially improve women's lives. This must remain their focus and the Labour Government must show leadership in responding to the weaponisation of gender-based violence. It must not allow the debate ---

The President: Red light, Joanne.

Joanne Thomas: -- to be distorted by misinformation and for us to be dragged further to the right on the political spectrum. All women and girls deserve to live lives free from violence and abuse. Congress, please support. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you, Joanne. Calling UNISON.

Gamuchirai Chirozva (*UNISON*) spoke in support of Motion 13. *She said*: Congress, I am proud to be speaking in support of Motion 13. Congress, as trade unionists, we know that women's safety is too important to be turned into a political weapon, yet that is exactly what the far right and Reform UK are doing. They claim to speak for women and girls while promoting policies that will weaken many of the protections women rely on.

And Congress, misogyny is not a side issue for the far right. It sits at the heart of their ideology. Whether it is attacks on reproductive rights, the promotion of so-called traditional gender roles or the spread of toxic online narratives that fuel hatred of women, the aim is the same: to divide people and society.

Congress, violence against women is a serious and persistent problem across our society. It is not solved by scapegoating migrants, refugees or ethnic minority communities. It is solved by challenging perpetrators, tackling misogyny wherever it exists, investing in services for survivors: in addressing the root cause of violence.

In UNISON, many of our members work every day supporting survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence and exploitation. We know women need properly funded services, safe workplaces, decent houses and access to justice. They do not need politicians using their traumas to score political points. And while Reform UK talks about protecting women, their policies tell a different story. Attacking equality protections, threatening equality, undermining rights and promoting figures who minimise violence against women. None of this does anything to make women safer.

Congress, trade unions have a vital role to play. We must challenge misinformation and fear wherever it appears. We must organise in our workplaces and communities. We must build solidarity across race, faith, nationality and gender.

Congress, we must be unapologetic in standing up for migrant and refugee women, many of whom themselves are survivors of violence, persecution and exploitation. The answer to division is solidarity. The answer to hatred is unity. The answer to violence against women is not racism but investment in prevention education and justice.

Congress, let us expose the far right's claims to be defenders of women's rights. Let us stand together against misogyny, racism and xenophobia in all their forms. And let us send a clear message that the trade union movement will always fight for a society where every women and girl can live free from violence, discrimination and fear. Congress, thank you and please support the motion. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Gamuchirai. I call ASLEF.

Paula Walters (*ASLEF*) spoke in support of Motion 13. *She said*: President, Congress, I am Paula Walters from ASLEF, a working-class woman, a mum to a young girl and a train driver. This is just my second time speaking so I am very nervous. (*Applause*)

I am done being told that Nigel Farage and Reform UK are on the side of women and girls. They are not. They are a danger to us. If Reform get their way, they will scrap the Equality Act. This is the law that helps us challenge sexual harassment and it is what backs you when you say no to a manager when you are pushed out for being pregnant, when you are punished for speaking up. You only go after that law if you want women quieter and easier to sack. Look at what they do, not what they say. They vote against laws to tackle stalking. They want to tear up the Online Safety Act. Nigel Farage calls abortion limits utterly ludicrous and brings in an adviser who opposes abortion in every case. He has used the trauma of grooming gang survivors as a political football and he calls Andrew Tate an important voice for men. This is not protecting women and girls. This is siding with the same men and same culture that puts

us in danger. And while they do it, they point the finger somewhere else. They blame migrants, they blame illegal immigration and they blame the next group along.

Congress, this motion names the truth and I am asking you to back it. I am asking the TUC and the TUC Women's Committee to go out and say it plainly: Reform UK are not our friends, they are not our protecters: they are a threat to women's safety and a threat to our rights. Please support the motion. (*Applause*)

The President: Paula, you delivered that had brilliantly. NUJ.

Natasha Heard (NUJ) spoke in support of Motion 13. *She said*: I am a survivor of domestic abuse and I know that I am far from alone in this room. Our experiences are as a result of the normalisation of violence against women and girls, underpinned by misogyny and the increasingly mainstream politics of division and hate.

NUJ members are a target of the far right both online and in person, and that is because our members play a vital role in challenging the ideologies and the actions of those who use repression and discrimination as a tool to roll back the rights that we have all spent so long fighting for.

The Journalist Safety Tracker collects reported incidents of abuse which informs our campaigning as a union. The reports are shocking. Black and Asian journalists are especially affected by the rise in targeted abuse, and of course there have also been clear incidents of Islamophobia. The rise of verbal, physical and online abuse, including death threats, has led to doxing, revealing journalists' addresses and personal details. The same people who protest and bellow about free speech and protecting women and girls are actively seeking to silence the voices of diverse women journalists. There are impacts on children too. We have members who have been forced to move homes and change their children's schools to try to stay safe.

Congress, when the plurality of viewpoints in the press is shut down press, it creates an echo chamber of hateful narratives without counterpoints, and that harms every single one of us. As journalists and communications professionals, we bear the responsibility to follow our code of conduct and report ethically, and to scrutinise and challenge the narratives that seek to undermine the rights and safety of women and girls. That is increasingly challenging in the face of mass jobs cuts across our industries.

Supporting our members to do their jobs well and protecting their safety at work is core to the NUJ's mission. We also campaign for the press regulators to take stronger action to prevent discriminatory reporting. We know that we can never be complacent about our rights. Our fight for equality and safety must be an inter-sectional and inclusive one. Solidarity, Congress. Please support. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you, Natasha. I now call on NASUWT.

Ava Verrier (*NASUWT*) spoke in support of Motion 13. *She said*: Conference, for generations women have been at the forefront of the fight against sexual harassment, misogyny and violence against women and girls, and we are not about to give up now. Our struggle for equality and safety has been threatened by the continued rise of the far right and their promotion of racism, division and hate within our communities and workplaces. Reform UK politicians repeatedly link migration to a threat to women and girls and would have us believe that violence against women is perpetrated by illegal migration and illegal migrants flooding the country. You know, those black and brown working-age -- sorry, black and brown fighting-age men coming into the country on small boats. And sadly, colleagues, this fear is also being perpetrated by other women. We have the Pink Ladies who claim to be a grass-roots organisation with a focus of protecting women and children, but in truth, Conference, they are just another far-right group financed by Restore Britain and are actively involved in distorting the truth by spreading fear about migration. Yes, Congress, the far right pitting women against women with impunity and support from certain political parties.

I am a Bajan and, if you do not know, that is someone who comes from Barbados. For those of you that know me, I am a grandma and you don't mess with Bajan grannies. I have also worked in Birmingham for over 50 years. Do I look like I need Rupert Lowe, Nigel Farage, Tommy "Ten Names" or Danny Tommo's Patriot Platform to protect me? Do I? Do I? Are

there any women in here who need the far right to protect them? (*Cries of "No"*) No, we don't. I don't need the protection of the far right.

The far right political parties cannot claim to defend women while promoting politics that fuel misogyny, racism and hate. For black women the effect of these politics are far reaching. The TUC's ground-breaking report "And then it clicked" which looked at black women's experience of sexual harassment in the workplace, exposed misogynoir (the intersection of racism and sexism) and 65% of black women surveyed reported experiencing second harassment at work. The research also exposed racist stereotyping, misogynoir and the various barriers black women face when trying to challenge harassment. This evidence matters because when racist rhetoric is normalised, black women, migrant women and refugee women become more vulnerable: they become unseen.

As a teachers' trade union, NASUWT members have seen how misogyny, toxic masculinity and far right narratives can be ---

The President: The red light has come on.

Ava Verrier: -- into the classroom. Congress, please support the motion. Thank you very much. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you, Ava. Very well delivered. I call on the NEU next.

Carly Slingsby (*NEU*) spoke in support of Motion 13. *She said*: I absolutely support this motion. Over the past year we have heard one phrase repeated again and again: "We are protecting women and girls." Congress, I want us to ask one simple question: who are they protecting? Because I have attended immigrant counter-protests where women, including me, were screamed at, threatened with violence and chased through the streets by men who claimed to be the protecters of women and children. Protectors? I have never felt less protected than standing metres away from men using intimidation and misogyny while wrapping themselves in the language of women's safety. And that is exactly what this motion is about: the weaponisation of women, our experiences, our stories, our pain. Not to make us safer but to divide communities.

Congress, I have another question when they shout "Protect women and children", which women and which children? In May I returned from France after visiting the charity Roots where I saw desperate families and I was not prepared for how many children were in this camps. I have seen babies in tiny orange life jackets. I have met mothers from Afghanistan and other countries where violence and persecution have destroyed their lives. These mothers are women, these babies are girls. When they say protect women and children, are they somehow not included, or does their so called compassion stop at the borders?

Congress, Nigel Farage and those who follow him have made life harder for the brave volunteers of the RNLI. The RNLI rescue women, they rescue children and they rescue families. If your politics attacks the people saving women and children from drowning, don't tell me your movement is about protecting women and children. (*Applause*)

As a teacher, I see another consequence to this poisonous rhetoric. Children are not born hating; they learn it. They hear migrants blamed for society's problems. They hear women used as political props instead of being listened to. We then ask schools to pick up the pieces. We teach children that kindness matters, respect matters, every child belongs and that boys should grow into men who respect women and not fear them, control them or blame others for their failures. That is education and that is everything the far right fears.

Congress, the evidence is overwhelming. Violence against women is overwhelmingly committed by men known to the victim yet instead of confronting misogyny, the far right offers us a scapegoat. Instead of investing in women's services they offer us slogans. Instead of challenging violent men, they point to desperate families crossing the Channel. It is a lie and it is one that makes women less safe.

Congress, the question has never been about whether women and girls are worth protecting. Of course, we do. The question is whether we will allow our stories, our experiences and our trauma to be manipulated in pursuit of racism and division. Well, I refuse to allow that to happen and I know you will, too. Thank you. (*Applause*)

The President: Finally I call EIS.

Julie Chrystal (*EIS*) spoke in support of Motion 13. *She said*: I am a first time delegate, first-time speaker. I want to thank the TUC Women's Conference for putting forward such a comprehensive motion. The hatred of women is a clear far-right policy. They weaponise slogans and pedal the disgusting idea that strangers are the largest risk to women, when we know from crime statistics this is a blatant lie. It is men we love and trust that are most likely to turn against us and hurt us. Reform has made it clear that they plan to defund equality. Why? Because through equality we can work together, we are united, and there are more of us than them when you think about it. They are loud, noisy and scary looking but we have been fighting this fight since 1792 (and before) when "The Vindication of the Rights of Women" was first published. We cannot step back. We must invest in the future, invest in women and girls, both through public services and through our trade union moment. Women and girls is not an abstract concept. We are your daughters, your sisters, your mother, your aunts. We are your teachers, your nurses, your doctors, your representatives. We are your family: past, present and future. We are not going away. Please support the motion. (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Julie, for that. I am now going to take the vote on Motion 13. Will all those in favour please show? All those against? The motion is carried.

*Motion 13 was **CARRIED**.*

The President: I am delighted to invite Esther Lynch to address Congress. A good friend of the ETUC, Esther is General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation representing millions of workers and trade unions across Europe. A lifelong trade unionist, she has been a powerful voice for workers' rights, collective bargaining, fair pay, equality, social justice and peace throughout her career. Before joining the ETUC, Esther spent more than two decades with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and in 2022 became the first Irish General Secretary of the ETUC. You are very welcome, Esther.

Esther Lynch (*General Secretary, ETUC*): Thank you, President. Delegates, I bring solidarity and greetings from 45 million workers and their trade unions from all over Europe, from Ukraine to Turkey, Ireland to Iceland and here in Brighton, working together for our trade union alternative.

That very idea of a trade union alternative is under attack. Across Europe the far right is feeding on the insecurity, the misinformation and trying to create division, so well described by the previous speakers. We know that their real agenda is not to challenge the system because it is failing working people; it is to challenge the system because they want to get even more. They want to reinforce theirs power, they want more wealth and they want the grip of the tech bros to be even stronger. They want to deregulate, they want fewer rights and, most importantly, they do not want active trade unions capable of defending working

people. Because we are a counterweight to their vision. Every time we organise, protect rights and build solidarity, we expose the lie at the centre of their idea: that everybody does better by themselves, or should I say every man does better by himself. We just heard what the plan is for all of our sisters.

And that is exactly why they come after trade unions. Their playbook is pretty similar throughout Europe. They try to shut us up by putting us in prison, by taking our money away from us. They try to discredit us calling us elites. People who have never stood on a picket line in their life calling our trade unions and trade union leaders elites. They try to discredit us by creating fake trade unions and shame on every employer and every employer organisation who reaches out to do a friendly deal with those fake organisations. (*Applause*) When they cannot do that they send thugs in balaclavas, they send them to people's homes, they send them to the communities and on the street.

We also see that they turn up for each other. Whenever there is an election there is some famous far right person to give some kind of a glow to the far right who is standing in that election.

So colleagues, we need to do the same. We need to find a way to show up for each other. We need to make sure that we are using our leverage, our collective action for each other, and that is why at the ETUC Congress next May I have invited a discussion exactly on that: How do we use our collective action so that we can support each other. It will not be easy

because it will be harder for some unions in some countries than others, but I am absolutely certain that if we have the imagination for what we could achieve if there was one collective action we all took on the same day or at a similar time, imagine what that would be like. Imagine the message that would send. I am very much looking forward to that debate at our Congress next May.

I really want to thank the TUC for your commitment to helping us to already build a collective response. Your leadership in helping us put together the Bread & Roses Centre, it was the TUC who championed the idea, the TUC that were there at every meeting making sure that we were thinking about the real issues.

But also you have shown real leadership in social media. What you are managing to do is fight the far right on social media, proving cleverly, and very well, that workers are not on their, own, that we are not defeated, that the argument is not won, and that working people and our trade union agenda is the real solution. I think they are managing to do that so well on social media and a lot of trade unions are taking a lot of encouragement from everything that the TUC is doing there.

We also know from working with our trade unions in Norway, in Spain and in France the absolute importance of our workplace reps, our shop stewards. For all the shop stewards who are here, I thank you, because you are our front-line defenders. You are the people who every day are explaining our policies and our alternative and encouraging working people to

believe that trade unions can deliver. Really our shop stewards are so important and we want to put on a major event to try to encourage and build a community among shop stewards throughout Europe so that they can speak to each other and learn what is working and what is not working, because, as the previous speaker said, the last thing working people need is a lecture. What they need is a trade union movement that is working with them, understanding the problems and coming be up with a delivery.

The message that I have for all progressive governments is that they need to work with trade unions and show delivery. Not five years from now. We need it now. So, I encourage your Government to work closely with the TUC to build a strong sustainable economy built on wages, quality jobs in every sector, in every region, and to have decisive action on the cost of living and, importantly, to have social justice through fairer taxation.

So, together in the ETUC, throughout our unions and in every workplace, working together - that is how we are going to fight the far right, through winning quality jobs, pay and conditions. Our collective demand is a union in every workplace. Our target is 80% of workers covered by a collective agreement. A social contract for the AI age. Investment to protect jobs and to create jobs of the future. Fair taxation so that we can have public services, affordable homes, schools and transport. That is how we will fight the far right. That is the struggle against the far right.

As the President said so well, we have done it before. Our parents and grandparents who created our movement knew that the future belongs to those who have a plan and are willing to use their leverage to win it. When we say *no pasarán*, they shall not pass, that is not a slogan. That is our obligation, that is our duty and that is our commitment. That is the duty of every union member - to fight the far right. So, Colleagues, *no pasarán*. solidarity forever and thank you! (*Applause*)

The President: Thank you very much, Esther, for that. We certainly look forward to continuing our close work with you and the ETUC as we defend workers' rights and grow our movement and by organising the next generation of union members. Thank you so much. (*Applause*)

Thank you, Congress. I am pleased to show you a short video highlighting how solidarity and unity builds real working-class power and how collectively through unions we defeat the far right and their divisive rhetoric. Unity works.

Video shown to Congress

The President: As the video said, Congress, unity works and I think we would all agree with that. Delegates, we invite everyone to hold up the Unity Works card for a full conference photo. Let us show our collective support and solidarity.

The President: Thank you. Congress, a reminder that everyone is invited to spend a few minutes at the interactive Unity Works board by the info stand and the TUC Education stand during Congress. Indeed, we have a brilliant range of exhibiters this year. I encourage you to visit them all, including the POA.

Obituaries

The President: Colleagues, we now come to the Obituary section of the General Council report on page 62, where we remember our trade union colleagues who have died over the past year. On the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, we also extend our thoughts and solidarity to all those who have lost their lives to terrorism and war as well as to natural disasters, and to everyone who has lost loved ones in the last year.

Congress, we wish to offer sincere condolences to their family and friends. There has never been a more important time for unions to stand up for working people, peace and for justice all over the globe. Can those who are able please now stand for a few moments of quiet reflection.

The obituary video was shown

The President: Thank you, Congress I think this was very fitting music to remember our people that have passed. Thank you very much for that, Congress.

Congress is now adjourned until 9.30 am tomorrow morning. I want to make a direct plea to every union and every delegate to please be here on time. Thank you.

(Congress adjourned at 6.36 pm)

……..