

Belgium stands up to corporate trade deals

At press time, Belgium's Wallonia region was doing a sterling job in ensuring the **EU-Canada** trade deal's days are numbered. **CETA** was due to be officially signed off by all EU national parliaments this month, paving the way for the deal to enter into force in early 2017. With Germany, Austria and France all dropping their initial opposition, it increasingly looked like a done deal. The negotiators didn't count on Wallonia, however, which continues to block Belgium's national government from endorsing the agreement – which needs the unanimous approval of all 28 Member States. GMB was dismayed at Germany, Austria and France caving in and that not more EU Member States opposed the deal.

The EU Commission furiously tried to convince Belgium of the supposed benefits of the deal, including through a new interpretative declaration to be annexed to the agreement. The declaration, however, went nowhere near addressing the serious trade union concerns on the threats to workers' rights, labour and social standards, public services and the right to regulate. It only showed how desperate the negotiators were to get their deal through despite growing public disapproval. Liam Fox and the Tory government

wholeheartedly support CETA and refuse to accept the serious concerns GMB and TUC have raised on this and other trade deals. We can expect even worse terms in any future UK-negotiated trade deal as regards privatisation of public services, derogation of standards and undermining of social, employment and other fundamental rights.



The European Public Service Union federation (EPSU) co-signed a [statement](#) expressing its doubts and concerns on the interpretative declaration. More details and insight can also be read in articles by [Scott Sinclair](#) of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and [Peter Rossman](#) of the international trade union federation IUF.

Meanwhile, the future is also looking bleak for the **EU-US TTIP** trade deal, with negotiators finally forced to concede that they will not be able to conclude the deal by the end of 2016. With tough elections ahead in the USA, France and Germany, appetite for the deal is quickly disappearing.

Leaked texts from the global **Trade in**

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Services Agreement (TiSA),

which the EU is currently negotiating with over 20 other countries, have revealed the huge corporate power grab the deal will allow. Deregulation will be the order of the day, with governments' right to regulate in the public interest seriously undermined.

Further information is available [here](#).

GMB continues to actively oppose all corporate-driven trade deals that are putting business interests rather than people first.

The 'take controllers' now hopelessly out of control on EU exit



In her maiden speech at the Conservative Party Conference earlier this month, Prime Minister Theresa May began to reveal when Britain's EU exit negotiations will start, promising officially

to trigger the process by the end of March 2017. She also confirmed Tory plans for the 'Great Repeal Act' to transpose EU legislation into UK law, and then amend and repeal it as they see fit. GMB has expressed serious concerns about any moves to deregulate workers' rights, labour standards, and health and safety protections – which, together with trade unions from across Europe, we worked so hard to introduce at UK and EU level over the last 40 years.

Theresa May also insisted that she would be seeking an EU exit deal that would give Britain "maximum freedom" to remain in the EU Single Market whilst opting out of free movement of labour rights. EU leaders have categorically ruled out any such arrangement, however, warning that they will not be "held hostage" by British demands.

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Tories out of control on EU exit – continued from page 1

EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker cautioned that Britain “can’t have one foot in and one foot out” of the EU, as this would risk “trampling everything that has been built” over the past sixty years of European integration, and that the EU will only agree a deal that is in the best interests of the remaining 27 Member States.

Frustrations are also growing in Britain – particularly its devolved governments following a meeting with the PM on 24 October – and in the rest of Europe at the continued lack of clarity on what Britain’s exit strategy will be. Theresa May is not listening to the trade unions nor the wider community. Many EU leaders are incredulous that British politicians who campaigned for months for Britain to leave the EU still have no coherent negotiation plan. The Tory government is pushing for a ‘hard’ Brexit – this is not a position of strength, however, but one of chaos, with British workers and their families likely to suffer the consequences of Tory lack of control and plans in deciding the way forward.

Theresa May has spectacularly backtracked on MP Amber Rudd’s proposals for UK companies to list all foreign employees, after strong condemnation from the business community and serious warnings

about the populist witch hunts that would follow. The Council of Europe has [expressed serious concerns](#) at the rise in “anti-foreigner” feeling, hate-speech and racist violence in Britain fuelled by the Brexit campaign.

Spain has announced it intends to make the UK cover the healthcare costs of the 1mn British people living there, which could amount to over £250mn a year. The pound has already reached a record low and inflation concerns are growing.

For a government that led a campaign to leave the EU based on the strapline ‘take control’, it seems they are hopelessly out of control in steering the British ship through the EU exit waters – risking jobs, economic security and the financial stability of our country.

Theresa May attended her first European Council meeting this month, giving a short speech on Britain’s EU exit. EU leaders are keeping their lips sealed until she formalises the exit process.

Scottish Parliament wants say in Brexit deal

The Scottish Parliament will put forward proposals in the coming weeks on its priorities and demands on Britain’s EU exit.

EU Social Rights Pillar must be part of Brexit deal


GMB has been working with the TUC and [ETUC](#) to contribute to the EU Commission’s proposals for a [European Pillar on Social Rights](#) (EPSR), published last March. Its stated aim is to reaffirm, promote and improve employment and social rights and protections across the EU.


GMB believes it is important to work to influence the content and shape of the EPSR towards promoting a much needed strengthening of the Social dimension of Europe. Together with the ETUC, we submitted amendments to the EU


Parliament report and EU Economic and Social Committee opinion, and will be formally responding to the EU’s [public consultation](#). GMB hopes that if EU leaders show commitment to a strong and binding EPSR, with fully protected and enforceable employment and social rights, they will also work to ensure these principles are included in the negotiations for Britain’s future relationship with the EU.


A more detailed GMB briefing on the EPSR is available on our [website](#).


EU Trade Union Action Update


 **Italy:** Trade unions have signed an agreement with the employers’ association to end **harassment and violence** at work.


 **Czech Republic:** **Civil servants** and **school employees** are to receive a 4% pay increase whilst **teachers’** salaries will go up by 6% and **doctors’ and nurses’** pay by 10%, thanks to trade union campaigning. There has also been a significant increase in the number of collective agreements containing commitments to wage increases. Tripartite talks on raising the minimum wage, however, have failed.


 **Sweden:** **Public sector** union **Kommunal** is calling for a reduction in **fixed-term contracts** in local government, demanding employers justify their use and commit to offering permanent contracts to temporary workers. The **ST** trade union has negotiated a new collective agreement for public sector workers, including a 2.2% pay rise and action to deal with **stress and violence** at work.

 **Spain:** **Public sector** trade unions have called for government negotiations to increase employment and pay in the public sector, re-establish collective bargaining, and return to the 35-hour working week.

 **Netherlands:** The **FNV** trade union has set out its main bargaining aims for 2017, including a general 2.5% pay increase, 8,000 new jobs for **young people** linked to reduced hours for older workers, and action to tackle **excessive workloads** and increasing flexibility – particularly as related to **zero-hour** contracts.

 **Greece:** Athens and Thessaloniki **water workers** went on strike last month in protest at the privatisation of the cities’ water companies – which the Greek government was obliged to sign off on under pressure from EU and international creditors. **Health workers** held a protest march on 6 October calling for an urgent increase in health sector funding, which has been crippled by cuts and other austerity measures.

 **Germany:** Trade union **Ver.di** has demanded that workers and works councils be given a say on any planned **digitalisation of public services**, and more investment to train public sector staff in this area. Trade union confederation **DGB** is calling for a 6% pay increase for **agency workers**.

 **Finland:** The Helsinki District Court has ruled that **Uber** is an unauthorised form of entrepreneurship and that as Uber drivers provide professional transportation, they must be in possession of a taxi operating license.

European Works Councils examine digitalisation challenge

In an increasingly digitalised world, European Works Council (EWC) representatives are at the forefront of changes in the workplace and employers must actively collaborate with them to try to ensure workers reap the benefits of growing technological advances whilst ensuring they are protected from the risks. This was the conclusion of the annual ETUC conference for EWC reps, held in Brussels on 12-13 October.

Four GMB EWC reps from across various sectors took part in the conference and are already preparing to put into action what they learned.

“The conference was a great success and we were given a lot of information on how digitalisation has improved many aspects of the modern workplace. We were also given examples of the misuse of digital monitoring.”

Robert Welham – GMB convenor at Crown Paints and former Akzo Nobel EWC Chair

“The conference was very educational and I have a better understanding going forward, especially on the effect of Brexit on EWCs. The presentation on the work of online platforms was very interesting as it has a wider implication on society as we know it.”

Kamran Ali – GMB deputy EWC rep, McBride



GMB reps Bob, Clive, Kamran and Mick at the conference

“Before the event, I did not realise the vast area that digitalisation covers. Individuals will be working harder and longer will the extra stress of constant monitoring – another headache. We also need to ensure that our employers do not use the new technologies to the detriment of the workers.”

Michael Hinchliffe – GMB deputy EWC rep, Veolia

“I was devastated when we voted to Brexit and I am concerned that all we have campaigned and negotiated on will now be eroded. I am hopeful that many of us will be able to remain part of the EWC community and know that our colleagues in Europe will support us.”

Clive Broutta - GMB SE rep, E.ON

Defending the right to strike

A new Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [report](#) warns of the growing violations across the world of workers' right to strike. The study shows that this fundamental right is under attack in 117 of the 119 surveyed countries, with 89 of these – including Britain – having introduced new restrictive rules over the past 5 years alone.



EU must face up to undeclared work

With growing rates of undeclared work across Europe, notably linked to the rise of online platforms such as Uber, the ETUC is demanding strong and immediate action from the EU to ban these abusive work models and ensure all employers fully respect workers' rights, social security and tax obligations. European trade unions are actively involved in the new EU Platform on Undeclared Work, where they are pushing for full enforcement of workers' and trade union rights.

Marking World Day for Decent Work

GMB joined trade unions across the globe in marking the World Day for Decent Work on 7 October. We are calling for EU and national action to raise salaries, introduce mandatory supply chain liability, guarantee decent pay and conditions in public procurement rules, and put an end to precarious work once and for all.

Only 59% of Europeans are currently employed on a full-time permanent contract, whereas this type of contract was the norm just a few years ago.

“Flexible contracts cannot be an excuse for depriving people of basic labour rights and excluding them from social insurance schemes,” stated EU Socialist MEPs, adding that “we can only defend labour rights and the welfare state by acting together at the European level.” GMB is calling on the EU to ensure such social commitments are a central part of Britain's EU exit negotiations.

Take part in the ETUC poll on supply chain liability [here](#).

Protecting outdoor workers from skin cancer

The EU trade union federations for agriculture, tourism, building, forestry, parks, gardens and horticulture workers, EFFAT and EFBWW, have called on the EU to take strong and immediate action to protect these workers, who spend most of their working days outdoors, from exposure to UV radiations, which can lead to skin cancer.

Back pain crippling Europe

Back, shoulder, neck, elbow, hand and knee pain are now the number one cause of occupational sickness in Europe, costing workers severe loss of quality of life and millions of days off work, the ETUC has warned. The problem will only get worse with Europe's rapidly ageing workforce and the EU must urgently issue mandatory measures on workplace health and safety and ergonomics. Workers in the food, metal, car, building, agriculture, transport and health sectors are the most at risk from musculoskeletal disorders.

EU action to protect steel



On 9 November, GMB will join over 10,000 steel workers from across Europe on the streets of Brussels to demand immediate EU action to protect their industry.

The EU Commission is expected to release proposals next month aimed at strengthening EU trade defence instruments to better protect Europe's industries from

cheap product dumping, particularly from China. However, the Tory government continues to be a thorn in the EU's side on the issue – keen to cosy up to Chinese investors, it has been blocking the introduction of tougher measures since 2013.

The EU Commission has this month imposed provisional anti-dumping duties on imports of Chinese hot-rolled flat steel and heavy steel plates, following an investigation which revealed that Chinese products had been sold in Europe at heavily reduced prices.

UK can't afford to give in to tax dodgers

Labour MEPs have warned that Theresa May's tough talk on tax dodging at Tory Party Conference will be meaningless if she decides to withdraw Britain from EU anti-tax avoidance measures. "While the EU is taking real action on new laws to tackle tax avoidance, the UK government has failed to take a lead," stated Labour's EU taxation spokeswoman Anneliese Dodds MEP. "As well as her failure to specify what her government will do to tackle tax dodging, Theresa May's comments in her speech on Single Market access are deeply worrying," Anneliese added, with a new report warning that 71,000 jobs and £10bn in tax revenue could be lost in the financial sector alone in the event of a 'hard Brexit' deal. GMB is demanding this money be urgently reinvested in the public sector where it belongs, to reverse the painful damage of years of Tory cuts and austerity policies.

UK erects wall as Calais refugee camp dismantled

Britain is building a £1.9mn wall along the main road to Calais' port whilst French authorities will soon start dismantling the 'Jungle' refugee and migrant camp there. The fate of the more than 1,300 unaccompanied children hangs in the balance, with aid workers criticising Britain and France for their slow processing pace. Britain has accepted some of the children whilst many of the adults are being taken to other parts of France to apply for asylum from there.

EU must do more for its industries

Socialist MEPs have led the EU Parliament call for a new EU investment strategy to reindustrialise Europe, including socially responsible restructuring and penalties for companies which make redundancies based only on the value of their stocks. Multinationals wishing to close a site would also need to seek a new buyer first, and support measures should be introduced to help affected workers and boost the local economy.

EU trade union federation IndustriAll has welcomed the proposals, and has itself been demanding stronger rights and new EU instruments in order better to anticipate change in multinational companies and deliver binding and long-lasting solutions for every worker affected by restructuring.

Tory government jeopardising EU climate deal

The UK government must uphold its commitment to last year's UN COP 21 climate change deal, Labour MEPs are demanding. Current uncertainty over whether the EU would have to recalibrate its pledges across 27 rather than 28 Member States risks putting the entire deal in jeopardy. The EU Parliament has backed the ratification of the deal, calling for its swift implementation (only 7 Member States have ratified it so far) and concrete investments in clean technology, energy efficiency, re-skilling, training and social protection.

The ETUC has welcomed these proposals, adding that a just transition for workers must also be guaranteed for those in sectors that will be affected by policies aiming to mitigate the effects of climate change. The ETUC has also published a [report](#) calling for a socially-just transition to a low-carbon economy in industrial regions, with more investment in skills and full trade union involvement.

OTHER NEWS IN BRIEF:

Cancer: The ETUC has supported the launch of a new [website](#) providing information on the risks of occupational cancer, the dangers of exposure to carcinogens and best practice examples on health and safety at work.

Corporate takeovers: A new ETUC [report](#) argues that EU rules on company takeovers must be revised to ensure better protection for workers and full enforcement of information and consultation rights.

Basic income: Finland is preparing to launch a pilot scheme in which it will give a tax-free basic income of €560 a month to 2,000 unemployed people, paid by the Social Insurance Institution.

Energy efficiency: The EU has met its energy efficiency targets 6 years early, with targets to improve energy efficiency by 20% by 2020 already met in 2014. Socialist MEPs have called on the EU Commission to set even more ambitious goals in its upcoming proposals on energy efficiency and energy performance of buildings – which account for up to 40% of Europe's energy consumption.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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