

**GENERAL FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS**

**104th BIENNIAL GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING REPORT**

held:

Online via Zoom

on

Monday and Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021

President: Oshor Williams

Vice-President: Ronnie Draper

General Secretary: Doug Nicholls

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**MONDAY 17<sup>th</sup> MAY 2021**

*The Meeting assembled at 10.00 am*

**WELCOME**

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning, everybody. A very warm welcome to all delegates, observers and partners for this important Biennial General Council Meeting. Of course, we would all rather be together in the physical world at Quorn Grange Hotel, our face to face conferences are very special, but thanks for your forbearance. We have all attended a number of virtual conferences and we have got a few backups to ensure that everything goes smoothly. If there are any technical problems, please contact Ian Richards. Ian is on the call. He is keeping a vigilant eye on things and if anybody has got any problems put it in the chat and we will get assistance out to you as quickly as possible.

Could I particularly welcome our verbatim minute taker, Jane. You will see what a tremendous job she does from the minutes from the last BGCM which were part of your pack.

We have got a lot of business to squeeze in, obviously, in three two hour sessions. I will be moving at a pace and sticking to the agreed timetable. Please consider five minutes the optimum for a proposing contribution and three minutes for a seconder. I will try and warn you if you are exceeding these and I do have the power to mute you and I will use it. That is not me being exacting. Don't I sound authoritative? In the interests of making sure that things move smoothly, we will have to stick religiously to times.

For health and safety and equality purposes and good practice I will take a short ten minute break after each hour, irrespective of where we are up to on the agenda. Please indicate if you would like to speak by raising your electronic hand. If you are not overfamiliar with that or you have problems, then by any means necessary, use the chat, waving hands tends to get the job done and somebody will indicate that you wish to come in. Page numbering is on page 4 of the report. Some, I know, of you are working off electronic devices. I know it can be a little bit tricky, but try and keep up with us.

I would like to extend a particularly warm welcome to first time delegates. Please make yourself at home in our virtual environment and feel free to contribute. Theresa Easton, one of our three trustees, will be joining us, work permitting, throughout the BGCM. Theresa has, I believe, attended all the Finance and General Purposes Committee meetings over the last period. These, because of our situation, have been weekly. We thank Theresa greatly and think it has been really appropriate having a trustee taking this active vigilant role.

## **IN MEMORY**

THE PRESIDENT: Could I now come to the next item which is in memory. Could I ask you now to observe a brief silence for all those in every country who have died as a result of covid and in many cases because of failings of highly privatised depleted health services. As you know from the Executive Report, we, the GFTU, has lost two valued colleagues to covid, Surjeet Dhillon and Lesley Simons, both wonderful friends and members of the team. Please think of them and their families especially.

(A short period of silence was observed)

## **APOLOGIES**

THE PRESIDENT: On to apologies. We have just had apologies in from Steve Gillan of the POA. Sadly, Steve has suffered a bereavement and cannot be with us. Naturally, our sympathies and condolences go out to Steve and his family. Aside from that, I am not aware of any other apologies.

CLAIRE RYAN: Fiona from Aegis will be joining at 10.30, just slightly late, due to a meeting.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Claire.

## **ADOPTION OF STANDING ORDERS**

THE PRESIDENT: Now we move on to the adoption of the standing orders. The standing orders which govern the conduct of this meeting on page 7 of the Executive Report we believe were written in 1899, so they have served us well

for a lengthy period of time. Could I propose that I move the adoption of the standing orders from the chair? Would that be acceptable?

ANGELA PRATTEN: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: All good? Can we record the standing orders have been adopted.

### **VOTING PROCEDURES. UK ENGAGE**

THE PRESIDENT: I will now hand over to Andy from UK Engage who is going to go through the voting procedures. It should be fairly straight forward and Andy or Stuart is going to give us the run through.

ANDY TYE: Thank you, Chair. It is Andy. I am the General Manager at UK Engage, so I will be stepping that through the voting procedures now. Everybody that has received a voting link, and there are 19 of you, if I could now invite you to access the voting platform. For those of you that do not have voting codes, I believe Ian is going to share a screen to show you what is going on from an observer perspective. So we will just wait for the delegates to join. We have got five out of 19 that have joined so far. I can tell from the back end of the system who has not joined, so if you are struggling, just let me know. I did send another email a few minutes ago to give you access into the system. *(Pause)* Nine of 19 are in now, which is great. I am assuming that all 19 are attending, but we will check that in a moment. *(Delegates were assisted to access the voting system)*

THE PRESIDENT: We are going to move on and I have just been notified by Claire that only those who head up the delegations have received the link, so there may be other delegates that have not received the link. Andy, could I leave it to you, can you check the chat and, Ian, that we have had one or two people who have not received it have put their email in and we can then sort it out from there.

IAN RICHARDS: Yes, okay.

THE PRESIDENT: Because we are going to have to move on.

ANDY TYE: Perfect.

THE PRESIDENT: Andy, are you going to go through----

ANDY TYE: Yes, I will do that now. Yes, of course.

THE PRESIDENT: --because we have already lost time.

ANDY TYE: Thank you very much. The system we are using is a web-based system. You have all been given links. You have all got a weighted vote based on the votes weighting that the GFTU have allocated, so when you vote all of your weightings will automatically be applied. So what we are going to do now, we have got 18 out of 19 people in, which is great. Ian, if you could move over to the next slide, please, you should see your screen move past and what we are going to do is run a test vote. So, Ian, can I ask you to open up the vote, please. I would invite everybody that has got voting rights now to vote if you prefer cats or dogs. We are just doing a silly one to start with just to get people aware and those observing should be able to see how many people have voted so far. *(A test vote was undertaken)* Ian can actually put a timer on the vote as well, if he so chooses, so the vote can be timed and it will automatically close at the end of that time or he can override that and end the vote at any time. If you have voted you will see that there is a redo button and while the voting is still open you can go in and review your vote and change it, but you will not be able to do that as soon as the vote is closed. I will invite everybody that has got voting rights to vote, please. We have got 12 out of 18 at the moment. We can see the progress going up. . *(Delegates were assisted to access the voting system)*

THE PRESIDENT: For those who may be struggling with the technology, which it seems like there are only four or five, could we ask that once the voting goes in, if they are unable to go in electronically they need to physically indicate which way they are voting. We do not want to exclude anybody from the vote.

ANDY TYE: That is perfect. Ian has closed the vote now, we can see the results. This is a weighted vote based on the weightings that were submitted, so, luckily, dogs have it, because that is my dog Chester there, so he will be very

pleased to hear about that over the cats. Okay, so no abstentions on that one. We are using the system to vote on. The results will appear straight after the voting period has closed and Ian will bring those up straight away. If you have got that weighted vote they are automatically going to be applied which is fine. You can use that redo vote to go in and review or change your vote, maybe you hear something else while the vote is open and you change your mind and please be aware that there is a timeout. After 90 minutes of inactivity the system will log you out, so if you are going to be voting later in the day you might need to log back into the system to access it and just use the link you have been given to get you access back into the system.

Then we will just do a final vote, Ian, please, and just have another go. This is very similar to what you will see later. You will get a for, against or abstain on a motion. There will not be pictures or other such things of candidates, it will just literally be a vote for, against, abstain. We will just do a final test. (*A test vote was undertaken*) Hopefully, everybody is getting a little bit familiar with it. If you are not getting familiar with it, like we said, there are a few of you that are not, we can probably help you in the breaks and get you set up and running. That is great. We are seeing votes coming through. There are 17 people that are active at the minute, 13 have voted. Are you going to be using timers, Ian? If you are, can you just put a timer on so that people can see what that looks like. You see in the bottom right hand corner that Ian has put on a timer so that the vote will automatically close at the end of that or Ian could override that and close it on the Chair's request. Ian, if you just close that, please, that will be great and we show the results. We got 13 out of 17 that voted and we can show the results. It is obviously being calculated and the results will come up. There we go.

THE PRESIDENT: Andy, conscious of time, any anomalies we will just have to resolve during the break and I am sure we can address that once we have a little bit of time to identify exactly what the problem is.

ANDY TYE: Perfect.



THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Please keep checking the chat facility. As I say, people have indicated the problems that they have had and I am sure you will be able to resolve them at the breaks. Thank you, Andy.

## **PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

THE PRESIDENT: After the excitement of the technology, whatever can go wrong will go wrong, I would now like to make a short outgoing President's address to delegates. Dear friends, firstly, as I prepare to deliver my address and conscious of the time constraints, I deliver this address under explicit instructions from both Doug and our esteemed Vice President to remain strictly within the allocated ten minutes, which we have allocated for this particular speech. As ever, when I am faced with threats of censure or sanction from Ronnie 'the rottweiler' Draper, I invariably comply, so I will attempt to conduct this microwave review without hesitation, deviation or repetition.

From the outset, I would like to say what a privilege it has been to serve the GFTU as President over the last two years. To say that the role has been at times challenging would be something of an understatement, but I have found the experience extremely fulfilling and rewarding.

When I first joined the EC I did so with limited knowledge of the rich history and tradition of the GFTU. I was solely interested, if I am perfectly honest, in the material benefit of affiliation to members of my union, the PFA, but I quickly began to appreciate that serving on the Executive Committee carried great responsibility in helping to shape the direction of travel of the Federation. Over the years there is no doubt that we have had to make some difficult and bold decisions in the best interests of the long term future of the GFTU. Since Doug became General Secretary in 2010 he has had a transformative effect on the Federation, which I have been able to witness first hand, in sourcing new services, new ways for affiliates to support each other, new education programmes, expansive opportunities for members and affiliates in an environment in which the Executive progressed the aims of the GFTU in a spirit of genuine cooperation with every affiliate valued and encouraged to contribute

to the decision-making process, something that you do not see at other organisations.

I have enjoyed some wonderful experiences and witnessed the growth and development of some of our young Committee members, but particularly some of our younger Committee members, and I have seen them develop through their association with the Executive of the GFTU into leaders in their own right and we have one amongst us in Sarah Woolley, the General Secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union who joined around about the same time as myself. Through my association with the Executive I have made lifelong friends, including my predecessor as President, John Smith, who I see is with us and welcome, John, it is really good to see you. John just missed out on holding the 2019 BGCM at Quorn Grange Hotel because the refurbishments had not been completed. Of course, I fully expected to be chairing this BGCM in the extended Goodacre Suite, but covid-19 robbed us of that pleasure. Nevertheless, it has not prevented the GFTU from continuing to support affiliates, albeit under straitened circumstances. When the pandemic led to the closure of the GFTU offices, Doug and his team moved immediately to provide a suite of online learning and training for staff and affiliates and the hotel directors and the Finance and General Purposes Committee have worked absolutely tirelessly, meeting on a regular basis to protect the asset and to maintain oversight of the finances of the Federation.

Throughout this crisis you, the affiliates and the wider trade union movement have also worked tirelessly to safeguard workers and protect jobs, demonstrating that a unionised workplace is a safe workplace and we know that when the furlough scheme ends there is going to be another battle to ensure thousands of workers do not get laid off.

Over my long service on the Executive, I have witnessed many welcome and important changes under the stewardship of the current General Secretary. He has been instrumental in ensuring that the Executive evolved to encompass greater diversity and representation, something which I am passionate about.

It was, therefore, with particular pride that I became the first black President of the GFTU in its 120 year history. Twelve months later this country witnessed the largest demonstration of anti-racist solidarity since the slave abolition movement. George Floyd's death inspired people, thousands of miles away to join the fight for institutional change in society under the banner of "Black Lives Matter". Instead of looking outwards and pretending that this was an exclusively US problem, people have begun to look inwards at the structures and institutions within our own country, structures which create and perpetuate profound inequalities affecting every aspect of life for black people in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. Contrary to the Sewell report's findings, the UK does still have a problem with racism. It is simply in denial. It has, therefore, been so encouraging to see trade unions show solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and encouraging to see union activists joining protests and campaigns across the UK. I recently read an article by Dave Ward in the Tribune in which he says: "Trade unions cross every divide in society and our battle against all forms of exploitation makes us best placed to unify people against racism" and he is, of course, absolutely right, which is why we must encourage union membership and wider unionisation in the workplace. As Doug says in his report, the GFTU is ideally positioned to support and develop union growth and as such we must continue to attract new affiliates.

Anyway, as the clock ticks and I conclude my address, I would like to thank the Executive and all its committees together with the GFTU staff for all their hard work and endeavours throughout what has been a particularly difficult year. I would like also to thank our hotel manager Andrea O'Dwyer. She was appointed in July and she has successfully navigated us through the pandemic thus far and I wish her and the hotel staff the best of luck as she leads us on the regrowth of the hotel business.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Doug and Vice President Ronnie Draper for all their support and friendship. We have been in constant contact over the last 14 months and it will be quite strange to be uncoupled from this triumvirate. Doug, I look forward to continuing to support the work of the GFTU as an EC member. As for you, Ronnie, we joined the EC at around

the same time and have been virtually joined at the hip ever since. I still have vivid memories of you calling out a redneck racist in a bar in New York during our international study visit and have had the utmost respect for you ever since. We may bicker like a married couple and you call me Dad just to annoy me, but I love you like a brother and although our time on the EC together has come to an end, our friendship, I know, will endure.

Concluding, may I wish the incoming President, Roy, and Vice President, Sarah, all the very best for their next two years in office. Thank you.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: Thanks very much, Osher.

### **VOTE OF THANKS TO THE PRESIDENT**

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: I would like to call on Sarah Woolley to move the vote of thanks on behalf of the Executive.

SARAH WOOLLEY (Executive Committee): Thanks, Doug. It is truly a privilege to be the one to give the vote of thanks to Osher, the first black President the GFTU has ever had, and I remember what feels like decades ago now when I attended my very first GFTU Executive meeting back when we were holding them at the NUJ offices in London and, I will be honest, I was feeling a little bit nervous. I only really knew Ronnie and I had met Doug a couple of times, but I was there with all these General Secretaries and union officials at a time where I was just a shop manager at Greggs, a shop steward within the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union. Osher, closely followed by Lynne Ambler, was the first person to approach me to say hello and introduce himself and he instantly made me feel at ease as he welcomed me into the fold of the GFTU and told me I would be fine and not to worry about being just a shop steward, I was not just a shop steward and that role was as important, if not more so, than the General Secretary's one. Since then, whenever we meet, he always asks about the family, how the union is going and he is available with words of wisdom, whether that be individually during conversation or during Executive meetings where he has a knack of rounding up what sometimes can be really

long discussions eloquently and accurately and I now firmly class him not just as a brother in the movement or a comrade, but as a good friend.

It has not been an easy presidency, has it, Osh? I can't imagine the thought of a global pandemic crossed any of our minds two years ago when you stepped into the role, having to deal with the impact of the pandemic on the PFA and its members and having to adapt to this new digital life is one thing, it has certainly been a learning curve for us at the Bakers, but dealing with the impact of the pandemic on the GFTU and the hotel in particular has made for a turbulent second half of the two year role and that is probably putting it mildly and definitely not something that you had signed up for. But I know that you have ploughed on regardless, working closer with Doug and Ronnie to ensure that the GFTU and the hotel come out of the other side of this horrific pandemic with the foundations in place to grow in the future.

What the pandemic has done though is given Osher a few firsts. You now probably hold the title for the most Executive meetings chaired and definitely the one for the first ever digital Executive meeting and BGCM. I am not sure Roy is going to be able to top that. But, unfortunately, you also hold the title of being the first President not to have the privilege of leading the Executive on an international study trip thanks to covid. But I know, Osh, that when you took on the role that privilege was the last thing on your mind and certainly when covid arrived, making sure the GFTU survived was far more important to you than a study trip, because if the GFTU did not survive and thrive there would be no more to have.

Osher, thank you on behalf of myself and the Executive and the GFTU for everything that you have done for the GFTU over the last two years. It is great that you are staying on the Executive on behalf of the PFA so that your contribution and wisdom will continue. Roy is going to have some very big boots to fill, but knowing you, Osh, you will help and guide him if and when that is needed.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ronnie as well who has stepped up over the last 12 months to support Osh when his PFA workload

exploded, to chair the F&GP meetings and for the dedication he has also shown over the many years he has sat on the GFTU Executive. Ronnie, as you know, retired from the Bakers last year and will not be moving into the President's role as a result and he is going to be a great loss to the Executive, but I know we will still see him at Quorn Grange and he will continue to advocate for the GFTU and the great work it does.

In order to bring back some time that we have lost with the voting hiccups, I will leave it there, but thank you ever so much, Osher. I look forward to working with you in future and thank you, Ronnie, enjoy your retirement to the full.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Sarah.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: Okay. We have had a secret little plan going, Osher. We have got a little gift for you which has been sent to Linda and Linda is going to present you with a little gift on behalf of the GFTU for all of your work. So have a look at the little gift and we will just tell you what it is.

LINDA WILLIAMS: Okay, it is my honour to present you with your special badge from the GFTU. Congratulations. (*The presentation was made*)

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: This was, in the best spirit of the GFTU, a home grown badge. It was, of course, designed by Zita for us and it is a very, very precious badge. Let's hope it will make us a few quid in the future when we start selling them! Thanks a lot, Osh, and thanks, Zita, for doing such a lovely badge.

THE PRESIDENT: For once I am speechless and I am overwhelmed. Wow! Can you see this?

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: We've all got ours on, Osher!

THE PRESIDENT: Zita knows how much I admire her artwork and the way that she expresses important cultural and political issues through the medium of work and honestly I am rather overwhelmed. All I can say is thank you and let's get on with the meeting.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: Could we call on Roy to give a vote of thanks for Ronnie, please.

THE PRESIDENT: Indeed, please. Thanks, Doug. Over to you, Roy.

ROY RICKHUSS (Executive Committee): Thanks, Osh. Can I just before I do that say everything that Sarah said in buckets about you, Osh, we all agree with that. We all think you are a fantastic guy, you have been a brilliant President and you have been a fantastic friend to all of us, so I just add my full support to everything that Sarah said about you.

Turning to Ronnie, well, when Doug said to me could I think of a few nice things to say about Ronnie for a few minutes I hesitated, because, to be honest, it was a bit of a tough question. I have known Ronnie for many years and he has become a bit of a grandfather figure to me over the years. I do remember the first time we met. I am sure Ronnie will remember this. We were at Quorn Grange and my predecessor, a guy called Mick Leahy, managed to spill a full glass of red wine all over Ronnie's new suit and, quite naturally, Ronnie was really upset and distraught, because he knew it was not going to be easy to get a replacement as Primark had discontinued that line. It was also the same meeting when I first met Sarah and I am sure she will remember this as well. We quickly realised that Sarah was the brains of the Bakers and we tried to poach her. Mick Leahy offered her a job to come and work for us and she turned us down, sadly for us, and later I did say to her, "Why did you turn down such a fantastic offer?" and she said, "Well, Roy, to tell you the truth, I took one look at Ronnie and I took one look at you and I realised I had more chance of becoming General Secretary of the Bakers a lot sooner!"

How can you say a few words about Ronnie without mentioning his now famous conference speech of 2017 just before the General Election? Doug stole my thunder slightly by quite rightly putting this in his report, but for those of us who were there, and I am sure those of us who were not there, we will

never tire of hearing about it. So at the end of this really passionate speech Ronnie finished off by urging everybody to get out there and vote Conservative and then he took his seat. Then he rushed back up to the rostrum all apologetic and said, "Ignore everything I just said and vote Labour!" I am not saying this is linked in any way, but we know Ronnie is a bit of a leader and a trendsetter, where Ronnie goes others go, and not long after that he managed to get himself suspended by the Labour Party, long before it became popular.

You will notice I have resisted the temptation to throw in a few baking puns, like Ronnie has always been there for us in our hour of "knead", we know he has got plenty of "dough", he always "rises" to the occasion and anybody who has worked with him on the Finance Committee will know that he has got plenty of "half baked" ideas. But, Ronnie, seriously, mate, you are a fantastic guy, a true trade unionist and socialist. Ronnie has been a member of the Bakers for 47 years, 33 of them as a fulltime officer, then General Secretary and during his time leading the Bakers Union he has fought tooth and nail for his members, he has taken on companies like McDonalds and Wetherspoons, he has campaigned for the Living Wage and £10 an hour and during his time leading the union he has turned the Bakers into a really well-respected campaigning union and it is fantastic to see that Sarah has carried on with the Right to Food campaign, which is a fantastic campaign. He joined the NEC of the GFTU in 2011 and we are all really pleased, Ronnie, that you are not leaving us entirely, as you have agreed to stay on as a hotel director and we are certainly going to need all of your experience and guidance over the next period.

So thanks for everything you have done for the GFTU over the years. It has been an absolute pleasure to work with you and to call you a friend, so I would move the vote of thanks. (*Applause*)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Roy, and I am glad that at conference I get the last say as well. That gives me time to maybe, don't call it retaliation, but we will see!

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Roy. You should be grateful, Ronnie, because Roy had to redact quite a lot of that vote of thanks and take out some of the really,



really juicy stories about you. We will save that for either Roy's biography or your autobiography. Thank you, Roy.

## **ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE EXECUTIVE REPORT**

THE PRESIDENT: Now may I call upon Paul Day from the Executive to propose how we would like to deal with the Executive Report. Could I ask that delegates give approval for that proposal. Yes. Thumbs up. The good old physical thumbs up always works! Excellent. Thank you. Could I call upon Paul to take the floor and address conference, please.

PAUL DAY (Executive Committee): Thank you, President. Delegates will have had the 66 page Executive Report which if they have not read every detail yet they have still got until tomorrow to do so. It is circulated in advance. Questions or comments are encouraged, but none yet received. In a face to face longer conference we would address this piece by piece through the proceedings, but for this year the proposal is that we take the Executive Report in its entirety at item 20 tomorrow, but the strategy paper comes under item 16 this afternoon where discussion about future strategy can happen. It has clearly been a challenging year for working people, for trade unions and, indeed, for the GFTU and much of the work, but, of course, not all of the achievements of our affiliates are detailed in that report. So that is the proposal from the Executive, President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Paul. Once again, just to confirm that we accept that proposal as outlined by Paul. Yes. I think that is unanimous. Thank you and thank you, Paul.

## **WELCOME TO NEW AFFILIATE - HCSA**

THE PRESIDENT: Now we move on to new affiliates. One of our great traditions each BGCM is to ask the latest affiliate to join the Executive to say a little bit about themselves. We are extremely fortunate to have the Health(sic) Consultants Staff(sic) Association as members over this last period at a particular time when we have been bombarded with contradictory information and data and statistics. Dr Paul Donaldson, their General Secretary and an EC member, is himself a microbiologist, an expert in viruses. His regular reports of

life inside the NHS on the frontline and on the emerging science and vaccine have been absolutely invaluable to us and I would now call upon Paul to address conference. Paul, the floor is yours.

PAUL DONALDSON (HCSA): Thank you very much, Osh. May I just correct you. The name is Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association.

THE PRESIDENT: Ah!

PAUL DONALDSON (HCSA): In the report it uses both forms. That is the proper name. We are the HCSA.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you, Paul.

PAUL DONALDSON (HCSA): Okay. I will try and keep this fairly brief. We started in 1948 with the onset of the NHS. Certainly at the time the BMA were against the formation of the NHS. We started originally as the Regional Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association to combat the then problems where everything was decided by all the teaching hospital staff, so as a voice of the common everyday working consultant, if you like. That then became more universal. We dropped the Regional bit in the 1970s, affiliated to the TUC in 1973 and continued to deal with consultants and specialists, so those who had finished their training. A few years ago we expanded to include all hospital doctors, so all the junior doctors, all the trainees, all the foundation year doctors now can belong to the HCSA and we have changed our name, although the certification officer needs to be told, to HCSA the Hospital Doctors Union. So we are just a set of initials, like the FDA and others. So we represent the interests of hospital doctors which also includes a degree of issues related to private practice and private firms running private hospitals, which again in the pandemic has been very useful, because a lot of the NHS work has been done in private establishments as well. We look after the needs of all salaried staff, so that is the trainees, the consultants and specialists, it includes what are called SAS doctors which are associate specialist doctors, so those who have finished their training and have not become consultants. We are also now

getting some members who are medical students as associate members. So our intention is to look after things all the way through.

For those who know anything about healthcare, they will know that we have got a long term ongoing battle with the British Medical Association who tend to wear blinkers and like to pretend we are not there, so we have significant issues, and we do call on other unions involved with healthcare to try and assist us with getting recognition in places where we kept getting blocked by the BMA. But we are there to look after all our members in hospital medicine, not only from the trade union perspective, but also as a professional association. We obviously have views about how the NHS is reformed. Obviously there is the potential proposed bill coming up about reform and obviously we will have a lot of input into that. Hopefully our views and our thoughts are of assistance to others. I am not so sure how helpful I have really been, I think Osher lays it on rather thickly in that sense, but I am very grateful for his kind comments. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Paul. Honestly, it may be a personal view, but at every Executive Committee meeting you have given me some clarity amongst, as I say, all the fuzz of facts, data, information and misinformation so thank you.

## **FINANCES**

THE PRESIDENT: We move on now to item 10 which is the finances and may I now call upon our General Secretary and Treasurer, Doug, to comment on the financial position of the Federation.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: Thanks, Osh. Good morning, everyone. This will be a brief headline contribution on, I hope, the main issues and we will have to try and remember these or some of them when we discuss the strategy documents, so it is trying to just simply touch on the governance of finances and the main thrust of our financial position.

Firstly, it is the Executive Committee which approves the accounts and the accounts for the last two year period that we are looking at at this meeting have been approved by the Executive. They include making an accounting

transaction to the Educational Trust to fund their work as the main funder. But the main direction of travel over the last few years has been to try and find a way of replacing the 100% subsidy that the GFTU has given to the Educational Trust to provide free education, free travel, free subsistence, free overnights, free course materials, free awards. It has been trying to replace that subsidy by asking the Educational Trust to generate alternative sources of income. Those subsidies that we were giving year on year were eating into the GFTU's family silver and our reserves at a rate which would have meant that the GFTU would not have survived much more than next year or the year after, so we have had to find alternative sources of income to the trust and, as you know, the way in which we have done that is to invest everything in the hotel and the new housing developments. Of course, we have been hit badly by covid, because the main source of income, the hotel, obviously closed down. The housing rental went very well and remains going very well. It is generating about £100,000 a year and all of the rental accommodation is full, because there is quite a demand for high end rental properties in the area where our houses are just next to the hotel.

So we have been hit hard. We had a triple whammy in that there was a huge cybercrime against the GFTU, £350k disappeared. £93k is still outstanding and we are in battle with the ombudsman and others about trying to get that £93k back. We had another whammy unexpectedly in that the building works, as they always seem to do, despite a very tight contract, did cost us much more than we expected, so things like a massive cache of asbestos were found underground on the site and, of course, that cost a fortune to dispose of safely. So we have had a difficult time which has meant that we have had to manage things extremely carefully. Massive thanks to all members of the Finance Committee – Osh, Ronnie, Roy, Sarah and Theresa, our trustee – who have met practically weekly for about a year on the basis of new cashflow projections and so on that our new Head of Finance had to produce for us on a weekly basis, which is no tall order.

We have managed a difficult situation and the EC agreed on a number of occasions to subsidise the hotel to see it through the difficult period and we

have now just got to the point where we are coming out of it and all of the projections for the hotel look as though they are going to be what the original projections which we based the rebuilding of the hotel on said that we should achieve. So cashflow will be tight, but if the hotel resurrects it should be okay. However, even if the hotel gets the maximum profit and reinvests that into the Educational Trust to replace the GFTU subsidy, it is not going to be enough to do the kind of educational work and other support work for affiliates that we think is necessary in this post covid period. So we have asked the Educational Trust to appoint a fundraiser, which obviously most charities do, and she is underway, full steam ahead at trying to get independent sustainable sources of additional funding into the trust for our education provision and you will hear tomorrow that we are looking at some partnerships particularly with the WEA, Workers Educational Association, which we hope will help that as well. We were developing fantastic partnerships with HE and FE colleges, but, of course, the situation has now transformed their fortunes significantly as well.

I hope that is a brief snapshot, but there is always one thing to bear in mind and that is that the GFTU runs the legacy pension scheme for former officials of affiliated unions. It was the only way of many of those unions providing pensions for their officials years ago. I remain the only member of that scheme and to run that scheme every year costs us about £100k, which is equivalent to the amount that we get in from the housing, so we are actively looking to see what we can do about that. The Executive would much rather spend £100k on other things if there could be a solution to continuing to manage the pension scheme. I will leave it there, Osh.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Doug. In the interests of time before we move on to the motions and in accordance with the information which I gave at the start of the conference I am going to suggest that we take a break. Instead of a ten minute break can we take a five minute break, because we are just approaching the hour and that means that we can reclaim five minutes and go back and commence with the motions immediately after the break. Is that okay?

IAN RICHARDS: Yes, that is fine, Osh. Could I just ask anybody that was not able to join the voting system earlier to stay online and Andy is going to beaver away and get everybody online.

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks, Ian. Five minutes. We will resume at 10 o'clock.

*The meeting adjourned for a short time*

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome back.

## **MORRISH LAWYERS**

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: We thought we would take a contribution at this point from one of our key legal partners; that is, Morrish's who have done a great deal of work with affiliates and with the GFTU itself over many years. I think Paul, a senior partner at Morrish's, is with us this morning, so it is a big welcome to Paul Scholey to just let us know what work Morrish's is doing and can do and so on, so a big welcome to Paul.

PAUL SCHOLEY: Thanks, Doug, Osh. Fantastic to see you all. I was thinking just this morning when I first got online how few of you I knew when I first started working with the GFTU back in 2015 at the old BT Conference Centre over in Stone, I think it was. I was very much the new kid on the block. I think I had two clients amongst the affiliates and I saw the pictures today with considerable satisfaction knowing how many of you now I am working with as colleagues, clients and in many cases friends too. So many thanks for giving me a few minutes to say a word or two about the legal services we are offering for GFTU affiliates. I know some of you have heard this before, so I will try and keep it short. I have got a screen to share. With the technology working hopefully I will go through it quickly.

For those of you who do not know us, we have been around a long time. In 1882 we began and occasionally it feels like I was one of the founding partners of the firm, but in fact I have been working with unions since 1988. Over the last ten years in particular we have helped our union clients overcome a lot of challenging times, including all the changes to personal injury work, as the

Government has caved in to routine lobbying by the insurance industry to make it harder for injured people to make sensible claims for compensation and the introduction, of course, of tribunal fees, fortunately not too long lived, but, again, a massive impact on access to justice and only really the unions on behalf of their members kept that system working over the couple of years that tribunal fees were in place.

We are doing a lot of work across the movement and especially now with GFTU and its affiliates. We do not act for organisations other than trade unions and we employ over 60 staff now across four offices. We do all the work that you would expect us to do in personal injury and the employment law fields and I am not going to through that stuff in detail. You all know what trade union lawyers have historically provided, but perhaps what is less well-known is that we also deal with lots of what I call head office work - HR advice for unions; advice about industrial action; protecting the union's own interests, not just the interests of their members; GDPR advice; we work with the certification officer in relation to complaints, which, of course, no GFTU affiliate ever gets from their members; electoral and similar issues under the 1992 TULRA legislation.

We also offer to members discounted services in relation to family and property law, litigation, wills, estate, contested probate. It is a full service provision for unions and their members. All GFTU affiliate members get a 10% discount on our rates, but our rates are already, we say, amongst the most competitive out there and the fact that we are West Yorkshire based I hope makes no difference at all for our clients. You can ask them. We have got many affiliates now who we work with and one of my favourite quotes from a London based union was to say once they started to use us that they could get an appointment with me more quickly than they could with their previous London based lawyers.

We are very glad to work with the GFTU. We are part of the Win Win scheme that Doug and Ian have been operating. I now contribute to the Emplaw employment law update service that GFTU operates and I was very proud to be invited to become one of the hotel directors earlier this year and I am finding my feet now in what have so far unfortunately been digital meetings of the Board. I

am very pleased to say that hopefully in June we will be getting face to face and I can get stuck in a little bit more there too.

We also donate for new affiliates a percentage of our fees direct to the GFTU's Educational Trust. As Doug might not yet know, but I know that Ian does, we sent a cheque just last week for nearly £4,000 which will be another donation towards the trust's funds. So let me encourage everybody if you have not spoken to us yet, please do, either direct to me or through Doug or Ian. With that, I will just thank you all for listening and have an extremely good conference and thanks for giving me the chance to speak. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Paul. You can see the support that Morrish's provide the GFTU and the services that they provide and I would encourage those who are renegotiating their legal services or in need of some of the services that Paul and his firm provide to have a conversation. Thank you again, Paul.

Now I intend to bring the debate on the motions. I will go through them in the order in which they appear in your report. They can be found from page 59 onwards and encompass three pages. Could I ask all speakers to bear in mind our tight timetable and try to take no more than five minutes for their proposing speeches. I will call a proposer for each motion, then a seconder. I will then call for speeches against the motion. If there is more than one indication I will call two in a row. I will then ask if there are any other speakers for the motion and then if there are any speakers on a motion we will hear those and then I will call for the vote. When you come to move could you, please, identify yourself and your union just for clarity and for recording in the verbatim minutes.

The Executive supports all the motions submitted in the emergency motion. We have received no amendments to motions and there are no rule changes proposed. If pressed, I will allow amendments to the emergency motion if these have been demonstrably from the affiliate's own meeting. I will now go through the motions in the order in which they appear from page 59 onwards. We will take, first of all, motion 1 and this is to be moved by the Association of Educational Psychologists.



## **MOTION 1 – REVIEW OF EDUCATION**

ANGELA PRATTEN (AEP) moved the following motion:

- 1 *The Coronavirus lockdown has had an impact upon many children and young people (CYP); exacerbating food insecurity and safeguarding vulnerabilities, leading to increased physical and mental health risks.*
- 2 *Many CYP have also faced challenges in learning at home whilst some CYP with special educational needs have had limited or no access to their special provision and support, whereas others are reported to have thrived through following different educational programmes and approaches and maintaining regular contact with staff from their settings.*
- 3 *The significance of the role of education settings and staff within the lives of CYP and communities is much wider than ensuring that they follow the national curriculum. Yet, much of the reported discussion around the return of all CYP to full time education has focussed upon “catch-up” without any consideration of the need to review and learn from the lockdown and the wider role that education plays in the overall nurturing and development of CYP and families.*

### **Conference calls upon the Government to:**

*Commission an independent review into the education available for CYP within England to include:*

- a *Comparison with other nations and countries with different educational philosophies to those favoured within England;*
- b *A move to prioritise relationships within learning as the most effective contributor to educational achievement;*
- c *A focus upon the professional expertise of educators in shaping learning experiences for CYP informed by robust psychological evidence and knowledge;*

*d Specific lessons learned from experiences within lockdown.*

She said: Hello. I am Angela Pratten. I represent the Association of Educational Psychologists on the EC. This motion is about reviewing education in the future. We know that the coronavirus has affected every child in the UK and we know from research by the Children's Society and others that children and young people are experiencing heightened levels of anxiety and increased emotional well-being and mental health challenges. There are safeguarding vulnerabilities and increased exposure to harm, feelings of isolation and reduced access to education. The pandemic has exacerbated food insecurities, it has been harder for families to meet their energy bills and there has been a digital divide with access to equipment and connectivity.

Some children and young people have faced challenges in learning at home. AEP members support many children and young people with special educational needs and there is a mixed experience. Some children and young people with special educational needs have had limited or no access to their special provision and support, whereas others are reported to have thrived through following different educational programmes and approaches and maintaining regular contact with staff from their familiar centres. For an educational psychologist, the pandemic experience has been very opposite to the prevailing top down approach in UK education in recent decades. The architecture of centrally driven educational policies dictating what must be taught and how it must be taught, assessed and inspected has necessarily given way to much more flexibility during the pandemic. That includes flexibility in what is taught and how it is taught, flexibility that required responding to circumstances and the learning needs of each child, including those with special educational needs, and in relation to older children a flexibility to find new ways of assessment relying on the judgment and expertise of teachers. Despite the fact that this has been a difficult time for children and young people and for educators, it has also been a period of potential for incredible innovation and dedication.

The AEP is proud to work as part of the group of educational unions and, conference, we pay tribute to them and all the members they represent. We hopefully now move to a new phase of recovery from the pandemic over the coming months and years. It is vital that we learn the lessons from the experience of the past year. Conference, we can do better than trying to return to the way everything was before. My members are concerned that the focus on catch up is as though all we need to do is plug gaps in learning of the National Curriculum when what the pandemic has shown us is that we need a much more fundamental rethink to strengthen how we provide education that meets the needs of every child. Schools will continue to be incredibly important, but what the pandemic has so clearly shown is that education is a much wider responsibility of families, of communities and that every child has unique needs that need to be met.

So we call for an independent review into the education available for children and young people to include a comparison across other nations and countries with different educational philosophies and pedagogies and move to prioritise relationships within learning as an effective contributor to educational achievement, to focus on the professional expertise of educators in shaping learning experiences for children and young people and to learn specific lessons from experiences during the pandemic. So, conference, I ask you to make the AEP's call to rethink our education system a collective call from all members of the GFTU. It is to look forward and reimagine our education system for the world as it is now and will be in the future and not the world as it once was. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Angela, with 30 seconds to spare. Is there a seconder to the motion?

ZITA HOLBOURNE (AUE): Formally----

THE PRESIDENT: Was that Deborah?

DEBORAH LAWSON (Voice Community): Yes, please, if I may.

THE PRESIDENT: If we could record Deborah has formally seconded.

ZITA HOLBOURNE (AUE): I seconded it formally, Zita.

THE PRESIDENT: Sorry, Zita. I am having screen issues. I need to expand it.  
Thanks, Zita. If we can record that.

DEBORAH LAWSON (Voice Community): Am I able to speak in favour of it?

THE PRESIDENT: I was going to say is there anybody, first of all, that wishes to speak against the motion? No. Dewi.

DEWI HUGHES (AEP): Actually I want to speak in favour, Chair.

THE PRESIDENT: Very well. Can I take Deborah first, please. Nobody wants to speak against the motion and I will invite Deborah to speak to the motion.

DEBORAH LAWSON (Voice Community): Thank you very much, President. I want to speak in favour of this motion. Obviously, as the Voice section of Community Union we are very much in favour of not returning to what we had, but to be looking forward to something that is futured and something that is going to do credit not only to our education system, but actually to those young people within it and those young people who will be going into it in the future. I think we have to be very careful about the terminology we use and it is highly unfortunate that Ministers continue to talk about “catch up”. It is not about catch up, it is about recovery. Actually using the term “catch up” is not helping young people with the crisis that they are currently facing, especially those who are going through the process of assessment at the moment.

In relation to assessment, I think what I want to say is that for years teacher agency has been robbed from them and that we have been told within the education system that only exams and tests will actually tell us what children are doing and we have seen through the pandemic the need to return to the professional judgment of those within education and it makes my heart sing that teachers are again being recognised and their judgment is being recognised for what is quite right. I am not saying we need to get rid of exams, but, as Angela has said, we need to be looking at what is most appropriate for all children and if we had not moved away from the process of modular assessment there would

have been far more evidence on which to base assessments last year and we would not have had the debacle that we had then. I formally want to support this motion on behalf of Voice section.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Deborah. I think Dewi wanted to come in.

DEWI HUGHES (AEP): Chair, thank you. Speaking in favour of the motion, Dewi Hughes, Vice President of the AEP. I think Angela and Deborah have put the case very well. The need now is for a recovery phase and a renewal phase rather than a catch up focus for children and young people. It has been a very challenging time for them and the teachers, but now is an opportunity for us to innovate to actually renew the curriculum and expand it to include the creative arts and music and drama which many young people find helpful and interesting for their learning and will tend to engage them in the school curriculum rather than an excessive focus on the EBacc and narrow curriculum. We need more things like nature study and environmental education as pioneered by Robert Owen, one of the founders of this movement, enabling children to engage with their environment and, therefore, with their school and feel more positive about it.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Dewi. Very briefly I think, John, you wanted to speak for the motion also.

JOHN MCGOWAN (SWU): John McGowan, General Secretary of the Social Workers Union. Just to clarify, this is in support of the motion. Our social work members tell us that our children are going to school cold, hungry, they are also embarrassed because their parents and guardians just cannot afford food and to buy winter clothes and normal clothing, so it is wider than just education and, of course, our view is that the Government is out of touch with the distress and new reality of children's daily lives and also what it means not to have enough money for the basics, such as food, shoes and adequate clothing. In our view, the Government has failed to recognise the human cost of its cuts to schools and other children's services and, of course, to the wider social security system. The Government must stop hiding from the facts and commission an

independent review, as proposed by the Association of Educational Psychologists, so we are happy to support that meaningful motion. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, John, and thank you all the speakers.

*Motion 1 was CARRIED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: I would now like to call upon the Artists' Union England to move Motion 2, please.

## **MOTION 2**

ZITA HOLBOURNE (AUE) moved the following motion:

- 1 *The coronavirus pandemic has had devastating impacts on the culture sector and workers within it which are current, but will also have effects across the industry that will be lasting and deep.*
- 2 *This conference agrees to campaign against the economic impacts of the pandemic on artists and other cultural sector workers, and to work with other unions, civil society and anti-austerity organisations to campaign for an urgent cultural recover programme across the nation, including a focus on the adverse equality impacts on workers, audiences and the sector at large.*
- 3 *Any recovery must address the fragile employment status of many workers in the cultural industries, so that building back better can begin to address the systemic insecurity of employment within a sector vital to the well-being and quality of life of the whole nation, as well as its significant contribution to the economy.*

She said: Good morning, everyone. Zita Holbourne, Joint National Chair for Artists' Union England moving Motion 2. The coronavirus pandemic has had a devastating impact obviously on all of us, but it has impacted particularly badly on the creative industries and members of Artists' Union England. Our members saw their work cancelled with immediate effect at the beginning of the pandemic and for the foreseeable future. They already faced not a really good situation in the workplace, because our members are socially engaged artists

and they work in the communities, they are low paid, their work precarious, most of them have to do another job as well, so they fell between the gaps when it came to Government measures with little support for them. We have lobbied and campaigned over the last year for a better response to the immediate impact. We set up an artists solidarity fund to try and help our members struggling through hard times, encouraged people to support us with any initiatives they can to donate or raise funds for that. Because it was so bad before and because discrimination was there, so black artists, women, disabled artists in particular face discrimination, there is institutional racism, systemic racism in the sector, which meant that black artists and people from other equality groups are less likely to get opportunities, they are more likely to be low paid, underpaid and exploited as artists, actually what we need is a recovery plan going forward that takes us forward, not takes us back to how it was before.

Artists' Union England have been involved in developing culture sector recovery plans internationally and in the UK and we are developing a specific one of our own. I offered one for Public Services International which is there on the PSI website, which anybody can sign, any union can sign up to, so I would strongly encourage you to sign that. Really what we need is to work together not just across the union movement but with the host of organisations that are campaigning on these issues. Art should be for everybody. We are not just talking about the impact on workers and those working in the profession, but also audiences, because research has shown that during the pandemic, again, black, disabled and women communities are less likely to be able to access arts and access culture and entertainment, because, of course, they have also been hit disproportionately by the pandemic in terms of contracting coronavirus, but also in the labour market and the impact on their jobs and, therefore, driven into poverty like our members have, having to rely on food banks to survive.

So we need to look at art being accessible, but being public, not being a commodity and being available for everybody at every level whoever you are, whether you are a participating artist, whether you are producing art, whether you are working in arts administration or you just want to enjoy some art. Art is

really important for the recovery, for healing anyway. So I urge you to support the motion, because what we need going forward is that our sector is available to the next generation. Young people starting their careers have little opportunity, little chance at the moment and we need to create a positive legacy for them. Please support the motion. I move.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Zita. Is there a seconder for the motion?

TIFFANY GILLIES (Community): Tiffany Gillies, Community Union. Conference, Community are happy to second the motion on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the workers in the cultural sector. It is evident that the cultural sector has been one of the very hardest hit by this pandemic. Venues have been closed for months due to social distancing and lockdowns and there have been significantly reduced earnings resulting in lower wages and layoffs. Museums, live music, performing arts, festivals and cinemas have gone from thriving to barely surviving. Conference, this motion calls for a campaign against the economic effects of the pandemic on artists and other culture sector workers. We need to campaign for an urgent cultural recovery programme across the nation. To be effective it must be a recovery programme which focuses on the adverse equality impact. The recovery must recognise that many workers in the sector face fragile employment. As we build back better we must address the systematic insecurity.

Community is proud to represent self-employed workers, including many in the cultural sector, and we believe that the rights of these workers should be protected and strengthened, in particular workers who have access to sick pay at a rate which allows them to stay away from work when ill, protecting themselves and others. The OECD reports that the culture and creative sectors are drivers of innovation across the economy as well as having significant positive social impacts. Conference, it is easy when faced with a crisis to forget how important culture is to our lives as human beings. Art, culture and creative endeavours have a power beyond their economic importance. Cultural institutions are an important source of pleasure and leisure for people across the country. Attending cultural events brings us



together with our fellow citizens, but they also contribute to our health, well-being, education, they widen inclusion and have many other benefits. We must recognise that the people who work in the cultural sector make a massive contribution to our national economy and national well-being. At the very least, they deserve in return our support as they face the deepest and most significant shocks of anyone in the economy. Conference, please support this motion.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Would anybody else like to speak for the motion.  
Julia.

JULIA GEORGIU (NHBC): Thanks, Osh. I would like to speak on behalf of the NHBC Staff Association in favour of this motion. I am proud to serve on the TUC LGBT+ National Committee and I would have to say that not only is the artists' world and performing arts extremely valuable to the nation, it is also extremely valuable to those in the LGBT+ community who would form quite a proportion, I believe, of the workers in the art and cultural areas, so I would simply support the motion on their behalf and on behalf of LGBT+ communities across the country and the artists within them. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Julia. Would anybody else like to speak to the motion? Would anybody like to speak against the motion?

*Motion 2 was CARRIED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: Can I now call upon the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union to move Motion 3.

### **MOTION 3 - SSP**

SARAH WOOLLEY (BFAWU) moved the following motion:

- 1 The recent pandemic has exposed without doubt that SSP is not fit for purpose and is insufficient for people to survive on. We ask that the GFTU leads a campaign working with the TUC and the Labour Party that calls for the Government to legislate for full rights to at least 6 weeks of contractual sick pay for all workers from day 1 at 100% of wages.*

- 2 *The scheme would be funded by those employers not currently paying company sick pay for the first 6 weeks so there is no extra burden on the tax payer.*
- 3 *After 6 weeks statutory sick pay would kick in for 28 weeks at an increased rate in line with, for example, statutory maternity pay and would cover all workers.*
- 4 *Those on zero hours contracts or short contracted hours would receive pay based on an average of the last 12 weeks.*

She said: President, Council members, Sarah Woolley, General Secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union moving Motion 3 on SSP. Statutory sick pay is not fit for purpose. Currently around 2 million workers, mostly women, are excluded from receiving SSP because they earn below the lower earnings threshold. Around one third of workers on zero hours contracts do not meet the threshold either and those who are self employed are excluded from receiving it at all. According to the TUC, UK statutory sick pay is equivalent to only 29% of average pay. This compares unfavourably to countries like Germany who pay 100%, Belgium who pay 93%, Spain where it is 63%, 56% in the Netherlands and 42% in Spain. £96.35 is not anywhere near enough to live on, let alone in a global pandemic. As a union we have seen situations where whole households have tried to survive on £96.35 a week whilst isolating. Even on a 40 hour week on minimum wage that is around a £260 drop per person. It is little wonder then that people are explaining symptoms away or trying to hide them, because being able to pay your bills and feed your family are vital to surviving and £96.35 statutory sick pay does not even cover the basics, especially for many of our members who are not British nationals and, therefore, cannot access the full range of benefits British nationals can, such as housing benefit, for example. The flaws in universal credit mean even those that can claim it receive it far too late, leaving them with this paltry £96.35 a week to survive on or not if they are unfortunate to be one of the 2 million I mentioned earlier. How is that even right in 2021?

We are asking that the Council agrees to the GFTU helping us to call for the Government to legislate for full rights to at least six weeks of contractual sick pay from day one at 100% of wages. The scheme would be funded in a similar way to the apprenticeship levy by employers who are not doing the right thing and paying company sick pay already, contributing to it for the first six weeks so there would be no extra burden on the taxpayer and this is where our call is different from others. After six weeks SSP would kick in for 28 weeks at an increased rate in line with, for example, statutory maternity pay and would cover all workers, because we know people do not just miraculously get better after six weeks. Those on zero hours contracts or short contracted hours would receive pay based on an average of the last 12 weeks.

Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union believes that this would not only allow 2 million people have access to support when they are ill who do not currently receive it, it would also remove the stress and pressure people feel when experiencing their wages being slashed at a time when they are likely to need more support than ever and do not need the extra worry of how they are supposed to pay the bills. Please support.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Sarah. Do I have a seconder for the motion?

PAUL DAY (PDA): I will formally, if I may.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Paul. Do we have a speaker against the motion?  
Unsurprisingly not.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: Just a question, Osh. If we have no speakers against a motion, that seems to imply to me that everyone or most people will be voting in favour and it will get carried.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, that is logical.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: Would it be helpful timewise, because it is taking a minute or two minutes to do the vote and that overall would be 10 or 20 minutes just voting, to suggest that if there is no speaker against we do not go through the voting?

THE PRESIDENT: If that would be acceptable I would be happy to propose that, because, quite clearly, it is an indication that the motion is going to be unanimously carried. That is a good suggestion, Doug. Do we have approval to do that?

ANGELA PRATTEN (AEP): The only thing with that, Osh, is that people might want to abstain.

THE PRESIDENT: True, yes.

IAN RICHARDS: I could open the vote as it finishes being put, so as the discussion goes people could then vote either way.

THE PRESIDENT: The important thing is that we have got all eyes on proceedings and I think we need to take a common sense approach to this, but it is an important point, Angela. If you can keep an eye on abstentions, Ian, and just indicate so that that can be recorded.

IAN RICHARDS: Yes.

*Motion 3 was CARRIED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: If we move on to Motion 4, again can I call upon the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union to move Motion 4.

SARAH WOOLLEY (BFAWU): You can, Osh, and, apologies, you have got me for the next couple.

THE PRESIDENT: Not a hardship, Sarah, not a hardship.

#### **MOTION 4 – Right to Food**

SARAH WOOLLEY (BFAWU) moved the following motion:

- 1 *The right to adequate food is a fundamental human right firmly established in international law. Yet many in the UK find themselves in a position where due to the lack of income this is not the case. We call on the GFTU to support the campaign for the right to be able to access and enjoy decent, nutritious food.*

She said: President, Council members, Sarah Woolley, General Secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union moving Motion 4 on the right to food. We know hunger in the UK is not a new problem and we also know that Tory austerity policies have fuelled the rise of food banks in Britain as living costs soar whilst pay has been cut and the social security safety net has been dismantled. The last 12 months dealing with the pandemic has brought into the public domain the hidden daily struggles of many people and although we know the true scale of the issue is not definitely known, we do know that it is rising at an alarming rate and more and more working people are reliant on food charities to feed themselves and their families.

This is why we need to enshrine the right to food into law, to make decent nutritious food truly accessible. We need to make it affordable, healthy, safe to eat and fairly produced by well paid unionised protected staff throughout the food industry, because some of the findings of our right to food survey are, quite frankly, shocking. 40% of respondents have eaten less than they thought they should during the pandemic due to a lack of money. 19% told us there had been a time during the pandemic where their household has actually run out of food due to a lack of money. 35% said they had gone without enough food to make sure others in the household could be fed properly and one in five relied on food from a friend or relative to provide meals and even more report that they were concerned about running out of food. These are the people who have worked throughout the pandemic feeding the nation, yet our survey suggests that food insecurity is a significant issue for workers in our industry. Worrying about being able to feed yourself and your family should not be something anyone has to go through, let alone through a global pandemic where there has been more than enough to worry about, including covid risk to individuals and their families when having to work throughout, the uncertainty of work and wages because of the impact of the pandemic, the wider impact of lockdown measures and also mental health concerns.

The report's findings are based on people in the main who have not been working from home for the past year, they are from workers who are going out every day to ensure shelves can be stocked and fridges can be filled, workers

who feel, and I quote: “The pay is terrible everywhere in these roles, but to be honest it is not enough to cover bills and food, it is just not good enough”; “I am frightened for my job security and it is hard to juggle work and home schooling, it has taken its toll on me mentally”; “The public does not seem to be aware how many people even now don’t wear masks, don’t distance, don’t sanitise their hands and we workers don’t feel safe serving them”.

No one should go without food in the sixth richest country in the world, yet, shamefully, too many food workers are struggling to earn enough to purchase the very food that they produce. The pandemic has shone a real light on the real keyworkers in this country, not the bosses, the shareholders or the millionaires, but the people on the frontline, those struggling to make ends meet whilst propping up our country through the toughest year any of us have ever experienced. We cannot allow them to be failed any longer. If you have not seen the report, I will put it in the chat so you can access it, but we call on the GFTU to support our campaign. Please support the motion.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Sarah. Is there a seconder for the motion?

IAN LAWRENCE (NAPO): I am happy to second the motion unless somebody is lined up to say anything. I formally second.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Ian. Do we have any speakers for the motion? I saw John McGowan’s hand go up.

JOHN MCGOWAN (SWU): It was just to second the motion, but Ian jumped in there and put his hand up.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. We have nobody to speak against the motion. We have a speaker for the motion and that is Dewi. The floor is yours, Dewi.

DEWI HUGHES (AEP): Thank you, Chair. I would like to support the motion very much. Dewi Hughes from the AEP. As well as the health and security aspects which have already been explained very clearly, we now know that a healthy balanced diet is actually basic to children’s cognitive development, supporting their learning and also supporting their ability to self-regulate, so that means

their capacity to behave in a fair and reasonable way when they are in school, for example. To have a poor or limited diet as well as having clear physical negative effects, we now know it has actual negative effects on the children's mental development and, therefore, on their educational achievement, so it has knock on effects all down the line. So I am very pleased to support this motion.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Dewi. Would anybody else like to speak for the motion before we go to the vote?

*Motion 4 was CARRIED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: Now we have got another motion from the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union and it is a great pleasure to invite Sarah to take the floor once again.

#### **MOTION 5 – Union-Coops:UK**

SARAH WOOLLEY (BFAWU) moved the following motion:

- 1 The pandemic has created mass unemployment at the highest levels since records began. This gives us an opportunity like never before to utilise the skills people already have, but create new unionised worker cooperatives in which workers share the wealth of the business rather than continue to rely on private companies, who pay out dividends to shareholders on the back of workers' hard work. We ask that the General Council work with Union-Coops:UK to unionise them and support new workers going forwards.*

She said: Thanks, Osh, and thanks for the support for the last two motions. President, Council Members, Sarah Woolley, General Secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union moving Motion 5 around supporting Union-Coops:UK. As outlined in the motion, we are now seeing unemployment levels at an all time high. The pandemic has not just had a devastating effect on our lives, but the economy too. In my own city, Wakefield, there are more empty shops than I can ever remember there being before and millions of skilled workers are out of work. As you know from previous BGCM's we have had a

branch in Halifax, Suma, that is a worker cooperative and we have historically supported motions from the likes of the MU on forming cooperatives within the music sector. We have been working with Union-Coops:UK for the last six months or so to look at how we can encourage and support worker co-ops in our industry, to unionise and support those that have found themselves out of work due to the pandemic, form worker co-ops to utilise their skills and make money for themselves and their community as well, rather than line the pockets of shareholders and CEOs. We have even bandied the idea around a co-operative McDonalds franchise. Can you even imagine that? That would be phenomenal.

We believe that the ethos of the GFTU works hand in hand with the ethos of Union-Coops:UK and together we can unionise and educate the co-operative movement, increasing affiliates membership and potentially GFTU's too.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Sarah. Do we have a seconder for the motion?

CLAIRE JONES (SUE): I will formally second it, Osher.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Can we record that Claire has formally seconded it. I am now going to ask if there is anybody that wishes to speak against the motion. Is there anyone who would like to speak for the motion? We have Julia and Dewi. Take the floor, please, Julia.

JULIA GEORGIU (NHBC): Thanks, Osh, thanks, conference. Sarah, this motion is particularly close to my heart, having grown up and worked with the Co-Operative Insurance Society for 20 years in my formative time in the insurance world. I can only say that the whole co-operative movement is in need of not only our support, but certainly the unions within the co-operative movement are also worthy and those workers must be supported. Thank you for moving.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Julia. Dewi.

DEWI HUGHES (AEP): Chair, this is a very apt motion. This weekend and this month we are celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Robert Owen, the founder of the co-operative and union movements. Trade unions and co-



operatives go together in terms of both representing different aspects of workers' rights and well-being and if they can mesh together then it makes the movement to improve the life of working people that much stronger, so I am very happy to support this motion.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Dewi.

*Motion 5 was CARRIED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: If this was in the physical world, Sarah, you would be getting some serious exercise, because the next motion, Motion 6, is Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union. Please take the floor again.

SARAH WOOLLEY (BFAWU): I would, but I would also be looking at enjoying the rest of the session without worrying about having to move any more motions so, you know, it is six of one and half a dozen of the other!

#### **MOTION 6 – Minimum basic wage**

SARAH WOOLLEY (BFAWU) moved the following motion:

- 1 *The BFAWU's call for £10 per hour for all workers regardless of age was originally made in 2014 and did not pick up until 2017. If we take into account inflation between then and now, as well as the rising cost of living, £10 per hour is drastically behind where we need to be.*
- 2 *We need to ensure that working people are able to live and not simply survive. Therefore we ask the General Council to join the BFAWU and call for £15 per hour for all workers, regardless of age.*

She said: President, Council members, Sarah Woolley, General Secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union moving Motion 6 on the move to £15 an hour as a minimum basic wage. As the motion says, the BFAWU's call for £10 an hour was originally made back in 2014, although it did not really pick up pace until 2017. Taking into consideration inflation since then and the rising cost of living, we recognised towards the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 that £10 an hour is drastically behind where we need to be. As trade unions we have a duty to ensure that working people are able to live and not scrape to

survive. We are working on negotiating with employers in our sector to get to £15 an hour as a basic minimum wage as soon as possible and we ask that the General Council and GFTU join us to fight for £15 per hour basic wage for all workers, regardless of age. Please support.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Sarah. Do we have a seconder for the motion?

ZITA HOLBOURNE (AUE): Formally.

THE PRESIDENT: Formally, Zita, thank you. Can we record Zita Holbourne formally seconded. Do we have any speaker against the motion? That would be very popular, wouldn't it? Do we have any speaker for the motion?

*Motion 6 was CARRIED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Conscious of time, with your permission I am going to halt proceedings at this point and suggest that we break for lunch. The next motion will be actually taken tomorrow as part of the education debate. As we were going to take ten minutes for any breaks, we are moving into lunch now. We have allocated two hours for lunch. Are we happy to take two hours? I will put that to the floor. Would you like to resume a little bit earlier so that it gives us a little bit more wiggle room in terms of time?

IAN LAWRENCE (NAPO): 1.30.

THE PRESIDENT: 1.30. Okay then. At this point I will close the Council meeting and we will resume at 1.30. Thank you.

*The meeting adjourned for lunch*

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome back, everybody. So, dear friends, let's resume this afternoon's proceedings.

### **REBUILDING THE BRITISH ECONOMY – LARRY ELLIOTT**

THE PRESIDENT: We are now on to item 13 and it is one I am looking forward to a great deal, rebuilding the British economy. I would like to welcome Larry Elliott, the Economics Editor of the Guardian. Larry is a great friend of the GFTU. He

has been a regular speaker at our BGCMs. Is this your third or fourth, Larry, I am losing count?

LARRY ELLIOTT: I have lost count, but it has been a few.

THE PRESIDENT: You are always welcome, as you know. As I said earlier, he has been contributing to our debates for, I am led to believe, ten years. Wow! Doug says that Larry is our best economics journalist because he is not an economist and speaks the language and common sense of working people. Larry is going to speak for about 15 minutes, Larry, to stimulate some ideas, and I am sure you will, for discussion.

LARRY ELLIOTT: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: After which we will welcome delegates' contributions and questions. Larry, the floor is yours.

LARRY ELLIOTT: Thanks very much, Osh. It is a real pleasure to be here. As I say, I cannot remember how many times I have spoken here and I cannot actually remember when the last time was, but certainly a lot of water has passed under the bridge since I last spoke to you. We have had three big changes. We have had the Tories winning a fourth election, we have had Britain finally leaving the EU and we have had covid, so quite a lot has happened. There are plenty of reasons to be miserable, aren't there, if you think about it? There are reasons to be pessimistic. It looks like we are in for quite a prolonged period of one party rule. No one really thought that Labour was going to win the Hartlepool by-election and the Red Wall was being dismantled piece by piece and the two halves of Labour's coalition have, seemingly, stopped talking to each other, the old working class blue collar part and the white collar intellectual part, the two pieces of the coalition which are badly needed to form a Labour Government. So there are reasons to be a bit gloomy.

I want to tell you reasons to be cheerful. There are reasons to be cheerful and I think everybody needs to think about those rather than the reasons to be miserable. The first one is we should not mistake Labour's internal problems for a repudiation of all that the party and the trade union movement once stood for.

Economic policy has moved in a leftward direction here and elsewhere in the past 18 months or two years. You can say that Boris Johnson's Government has cherry picked policies as and where it has seen fit, but this is not 2010. In 2010 after the financial crisis the assumption was that we would have a rethink of everything that neoliberalism stood for, but that did not happen, but it is happening this time, I think. We are seeing policy moving in a more progressive direction. In part that is because we are past peak globalisation. Countries are seeing the need to have shorter supply chains. In part it is a function of the crisis itself and the Government here has been forced, perhaps against its better judgment, to embrace what would have been called once social democratic policies – spending money on infrastructure, renationalising the railways, running big budget deficits in order to keep the economy going. While it is tempting to say these are the same old Tories and, obviously, in some senses that is true in terms of what they are doing with public sector pay and the stench of sleaze that affects them, it is not totally true. It is a mistake to think of this as just the old Tories, because the Tories are being forced to adapt to the new circumstances. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that the past year has seen a return to the saliency and the importance of a big State. Effectively, we have been back into wartime conditions since February 2020 where the State has had to become a much more important actor in the economy. Whether it likes it or not, the State has actually been pushed forward and essentially run a wartime economy where the only thing that really matters is victory over covid, in the same way that in the Second World War or the First World War the aim was victory in the military campaign and so all other principles went out of the window. Similarly, here we are seeing every one of the old precepts of Government policy thrown out of the window in pursuit of victory – furlough scheme, higher universal credit payments, help for self-employed people, more State investment. It is just such a marked change with the Tory Government of the early 2010s and that is moving policy into an area that the Left is and should be much more comfortable with and it is interesting the parallels with 1939/45. There would not really have been a 1945 Labour Government had there not been the

experience of running an economy on wartime principles during between 1939 and 1945. So that is the second reason.

The third reason is that the past year/18 months have shown the importance of an industrial strategy. I have been banging the drum for industrial strategy for as long as I have been an economic journalist, talking about why is it that Britain has not run a balance of payments surplus in manufactured goods since the early 1980s. The reason is we have lacked the right sort of policy for rebuilding our industrial base which has been eroded in recession after recession since the 1970s. What we have seen in the last year has been convincing proof of the need and the importance of an industrial strategy. The vaccine rollout has only really been possible because of a collaboration between the public and the private sector, between AstraZeneca and Oxford University and the research that has been going on there. AstraZeneca would not have been in the position to act as the manufacturer of UK drugs had it been allowed to be taken over by Pfizer some years ago. It was one of the better things the Government did to stand in the way of that merger. What we have seen is that we need the sufficient industrial capacity in order to generate the vaccine rollout and it is significant, I think, that the two sectors of the economy where Britain retains a world class standing – pharmaceuticals and defence – are two sectors which have been shown to have very strong links with the State over the last 40 or 50 years where the Ministry of Defence has acted as the main customer for British Aerospace, for example, and the pharma companies have had a ready made customer in the NHS. So what we have seen in the last year/18 months is policy moving in a leftwards direction and one symbol of that, the need for industrial strategy, being brought front and centre to the economic debate. So that is the third reason.

The fourth reason I am kind of optimistic, and I know not everybody is optimistic about this, but we have now finally left the European Union and that has brought to an end the sort of period of uncertainty that lasted between the Referendum in June 2016 and really the 2019 General Election brought an end to the debate, but the Is were dotted and the Ts were crossed when the trade agreement was signed at the end of 2020 and the interim period ended. Yes,

there are people I know who see leaving the EU as the biggest mistake that the UK has ever made, a massive blunder from which we will never recover, but I was one of the people on the left who voted for Brexit, saw Brexit as a potential for good and it would be the catalyst for the sorts of change that I was talking about earlier. I think what the past year has shown us is that the economy did not collapse as some of the more lurid Project Fear people thought it would. Having a nationally determined procurement strategy paid dividends. I remember the people on the Guardian last year were saying what a disaster it would be if Britain did not join in the EU procurement of vaccines policy and that proved to be a very, very good call by the Government to have its own national run strategy. The European system was dogged by mistakes and blunders and has proved to be a bit of a fiasco. Seen from my left wing perspective, quite a lot of what the EU has been trying to do in its big centralised projects over the last 20/30 years have not worked. The euro did not work, the procurement policy did not work, even the attempt to reflate the economy through a sort of joint fiscal policy. Not one euro of that has yet been spent as opposed to the UK and the US where fiscal policy has acted in a much more speedy and meaningful manner.

Brexit, I think, provides the opportunity to do things differently. We can do things differently with State aid, we can provide support for new green industries, if that is what we want to do, and I think that is probably what we do want to do. So if we want to build back better and build back greener we need to actually provide the stimulus for some of those growth industries, not just green industries, but biotech, new materials, all the areas where we can harness science and jobs. Procurement policies are going to be important, State aid is going to be important, ownership is going to be important, tax is going to be important, all those areas where the UK now has freedom, if it so chooses, to mould policy to its own national interest rather than have those policies determined at a central level and I think that is going to be important. The motivation now has to be there, because we are on our own and we have to actually do things differently or we will stagnate. So that is the fourth reason.

The fifth and final reason is that on the left we have a choice. We can either just pull the duvet over our heads and say it is all going to be a disaster or we can accept the following basic principles. One is that Britain has deep structural economic problems. The productivity growth in the 2010s was the weakest it has been for 120 years. We have the worst record for inequality of any EU country other than Bulgaria, we have seen living standards stagnate during that period, we have seen very weak levels of growth and there is a report out tomorrow from the Resolution Foundation and the LSE which says that this is going to be a decisive decade where the UK faces five simultaneous challenges of the aftermath of covid, Brexit, net carbon zero, moving to a greener economy, automation and an ageing population. All those things are going to make this a very, very big decade indeed and so it is important that we actually meet those challenges head on. It is clear to me and I am sure clear to everybody on this call that 40 years of neoliberal policies did not solve those problem. In fact most of those problems were made worse by neoliberal economics. We have had years and years and years of the degrading of our industrial base and the rise of a pre-eminent and overpowerful financial sector, we have seen a widening of the gap between north and south and between rich and poor. 40 years of low tax trickle down policy have clearly not worked and so we are now in a position where not only do we have the opportunity to do things differently, but we have to do things differently or we will face a period of stagnation and relative economic decline.

At the moment what we are seeing is a watered down version of what is really needed from the Government, because the Government is being forced into this probably against its better judgment and has no real desire to do what it is doing or at least large parts of it do not. This should be fertile territory for a party of the social democratic of the left and for the trade union movement to build a much better economy and I think what we are seeing in the US is that it is possible to actually reshape the left of centre politics and actually move it in a more progressive direction. I was one of the people who was quite sceptical of Biden before he became President, but I have actually been pleasantly surprised by the changes that he has wrought in the US, both in terms of

stimulus policies where he has not actually kowtowed to the idea that budget deficits have to be repaid and that debt is a problem. He has just gone for it and provided support for working people, both directly through their pay packets and through big infrastructure plans and for plans to rebuild and improve education and health. In the US you can see the potential for what life could be in the UK.

Unfortunately, what has happened here, I think, is that, having stopped talking about economics in the 1990s, because it thought that the market economy was going to last forever and had all the answers, the left just moved on to talk about other things. It stopped talking about the economy, even when the economic fundamentals moved in a left wing direction. It is talking about anything other than the economy and until it starts talking about the economy it is going to carry on losing and, I am afraid, it will deserve to carry on losing. That is how I see things.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Larry, and if you would like to either use your reactions to give your virtual applause or just a thumbs up, any gesture, whooping and hollering is allowed at this moment on this one occasion in conference. (*Applause*) Thank you, Larry. Thank you for your regular biennial overview of the economy. Some interesting thoughts and there were quite a lot of things that I am sure delegates would like to discuss and unpack. Hands are going up straight away. I am being bombarded by a sea of virtual hands and thumbs up. The first hand that I can see raised as I open up to the floor is Dewi, quick off the mark. Do you have a question or an observation for Larry, please?

DEWI HUGHES (AEP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Larry, very interesting indeed. This is the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Robert Owen, Larry, as you may be aware, and I am wondering what you would say about the role of cooperatives in a new economy. The cooperative principle is, of course, entirely compatible with trade unionism. Indeed, the two originated at the same time. Is there an opportunity now as we move on to develop cooperatives, both producer and consumer cooperatives?



LARRY ELLIOTT: Yes, I think there probably is. There were not that many encouraging things about the recent election result, but one of them was where Labour has been in power at a local level and has been doing things at a local level and been doing things at a grass roots level people have responded to that. I think there is a big difference between the way in which Labour is perceived nationally and the way it is often perceived locally and allowing people to do things for themselves and develop their own coping mechanisms and own support mechanisms is proving to be quite fruitful. Preston is an example of that, of grass roots Labour action. I think the cooperatives are a way of harnessing that grass roots bottom up approach and I think to an extent that is how the trade union movement began, by friendly societies, self help groups and I think maybe we are going to have to start thinking about first principles again, rather than assuming that everything is going to be done centrally on a top down basis, start on a bottom up basis and rebuild local economies and rebuild local political support. So, yes, I am a big fan of cooperatives. I think it is a very fruitful area.

DEWI HUGHES (AEP): Thank you.

PAUL DAY (PDA): I wondered on your comments. For those that can work from home it appears to me that increasingly the Cornwall recruitment market is now the London recruitment market and I wondered on that hand of convergence what effect you think that might have on the broader economy and then, on the flip side of that, the election results show us that people voted for their Government, be that Labour in Wales, SNP in Scotland or Tories in England. What degree is there convergence or divergence of different economic circumstances across the UK, do you think?

LARRY ELLIOTT: I think, Paul, that is absolutely right. I think there was a big incumbency factor in these elections, that is for sure, and I think that is another reason for not getting too gloomy about the election results last week, because the vaccine programme is proving to be remarkably successful and remarkably popular, so the Governments that are responsible for it, be they in Scotland, England or Wales are reaping the reward for that. These are very, very special

circumstances which will not last forever. That is the point. Going back to my wartime analogy, Churchill was very popular in 1942 and 1943 but still got booted out in 1945, because people wanted a different sort of Britain and saw that a different sort of Britain was possibly during wartime, by mobilisation of labour and nationalisation of industry and there was a demand for things like the Beveridge Report.

Your first point about the bifurcation of the labour market, I think that is absolutely true. What has happened is that white collar workers who can work from home, apart from the sort of boredom factor, which is a very small price to pay, have done okay. I have been working at home for the last 15 months and I am a bit fed up with it, but actually I have been on full pay, I can work from home quite easily, my health has not been put in jeopardy in any way, whereas low paid frontline workers have had it differently. Young people, people on the frontline have had it differently. Either they have had their health put at risk or in a lot of cases they have been furloughed on 80% of their pay or they have been made unemployed, so the inequality and the gap between rich and poor, between white collar and blue collar has been accentuated by 15 months of covid, definitely.

IAN LAWRENCE (NAPO): Hi, Larry. A very interesting account you gave, as always. A quick question. Do you think the recent set of election results hastened the possibility of a split in the Labour Party? When I say "split", I mean people forming their own party as a result.

LARRY ELLIOTT: The honest answer is I do not know. There is obviously at the moment a deep divide between Labour's metropolitan, big city heartlands, as they now are, and its old heartlands in the industrial North and Midlands and Scotland. If you look at the political map of Britain it has been changing for 15 or 20 years and if Labour wants to form a majority Government again, it has to do what Wilson did and Blair did, which is to piece together that coalition. The alternative, I think, is to accept that the Red Wall has gone forever and to set up a new party of graduates and white collar workers and the public sector, but I do not see that as having much of a future in a first past the post electoral system.

The only way I could see that working would be under a form of proportional representation. Otherwise splitting the party and going down that route would seem to me to be (1) betraying large parts of Labour's heritage and (2) running the risk that Labour ends up like the French Socialist Party, a mere shadow of what it used to be. I would not rule it out that there is a formal split, but I am not sure that that would do anything other than turn Britain into a form of Japan, a perpetual one party State where the Tories are in power for election after election.

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks, Ian. I am going to bring Roy in, but just before I do, Roy, if you will just indulge me a moment, Larry, and it leads on from Ian's question, whether there would be a split in the party. In Europe the socialist left to get any foothold in power has had to develop coalitions with other parties like the Greens. Is that something that you see might emerge until or unless Labour finds its identity?

LARRY ELLIOTT: It is one possibility, but the record of Labour in forging coalitions with other parties is not that impressive, is it? If you take the idea of Scotland, in Scotland the idea that Labour would form a coalition with the SNP is kind of improbable, given its completely different views about the future of the Union. Labour is fairly tribal traditionally. I would not rule it out, but it does not seem as though there is much appetite at the top of the party for that sort of anti-Tory coalition. I think where it is happening is amongst individuals. I think voters may well decide to use their vote in a tactical way with or without formal coalition talks or groupings, if you live in an area where the Liberal Democrats have got the best chance. If I lived in Brighton in Caroline Lucas's constituency, I could see why a potential Labour voter would vote Green there. I think that people do do that. Whether or not there is a formal pact between progressive parts of the left may not matter in the end. I think if Labour continues to not win then people will start to do their own thing.

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks, Larry.

ROY RICKHUSS (Community): Larry, you made some comments about industrial strategy and, if I am honest with you, I am not entirely optimistic about the

direction of travel now, because we saw the Industrial Strategy Council which did have influence or members of the left, myself was on it as a trade unionist, and we had the opportunity to influence and to input and to actually criticise the Government work in this area. The Industrial Strategy Council was disbanded, because Boris has gone down this route now of Build Back Better. If you look at the council that he has put together, if you like, the Board of that, there are no people of the left. In fact it is a coalition of right wing corporations, big business, Tory donors. I am just nervous now about where is our opportunity to influence, where are trade unionists going to get the opportunity to input. During the pandemic they wanted to work with us, we were all getting phone calls, probably daily, about needing our help and support. We were involved in a number of working groups looking at people returning to work and guidelines etc. My fear is they will ditch us as quick as anything when this is finally over. They will put us back in our box, so to speak, and we will have no opportunity to influence.

If you look at BEIS, I cannot see how BEIS continues in the form that it is and you may want to comment on that, because it was not just the disbanding of the Industrial Strategy Council, the entire team, the entire Industrial Strategy team within BEIS was disbanded and they were all having to find new positions, if they could, across Whitehall.

Finally, I just make a comment that the big challenge for a lot of our members in heavy industry is net zero and decarbonisation and my fear is that Government and employers collectively will run for the cheapest option. We know that it is going to need massive investment and there are technologies out there such as blue and green hydrogen that can green our heavy industries. We are desperate to be part of the solution. We do not want to be the problem, we know we have to deal with those issues, but that is going to need massive investment. No employer is going to be able to do that without significant Government support and it is just what your thoughts are on that, because my fear is we are already seeing a rush to the cheapest option. That will not help the environment, it will not help the planet. All we will do is offshore carbon and it will carry on damaging the environment.

LARRY ELLIOTT: There is quite a lot there and I pretty much agree with everything you say, Roy. I think the scrapping of the Industrial Strategy Council backs up what I said earlier, that the Tories are producing a watered down version of policies that are needed, because they do not really have their heart in it and there is a sort of tug of war between the remaining Thatcherite free marketeers in the Tory Party and those who would like to move in a more, for want of a better word, social democratic direction and in terms of the Industrial Strategy Council that battle was won convincingly by the free marketeers. It is a very, very retrogressive step, but it does provide the opportunity for a Labour Party to say, that if you want this done properly, you need to go back to the principles which lay behind the Industrial Strategy Council in the first place, that the Government's industrial strategy would be scrutinised. That was the point of actually having Andy Haldane in charge of it, someone with a great reputation and whose findings would carry some real weight. So that is the first thing. Yes, it is a bad move, but it provides them an opportunity.

I think in terms of BEIS, what actually needs to happen is BEIS to be scrapped entirely by a Labour Government and for a new economic ministry to be set up which would take some of the power away from the Treasury. I have thought this for a long time, that BEIS lives completely in the shadow of the Treasury and its Ministers have no real power and all important decisions are taken by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and those decisions are quite often based around financial imperatives rather than economic imperatives.

That brings me on to the third point about the green agenda. I have been banging the drum for a green new deal for at least a decade and there is a risk, I think, that you just go for the lowest common denominator. I think that is, again, sort of where the Government is coming from. It talks a very good game, but actually is it prepared to invest the money that is needed to completely transform the economy and to do the sort of things that are necessary to provide the investment for retrofitting homes, for example, and providing good well paid jobs for trade unionists in every area. Is it prepared to establish the networks between universities and the private sector and the State to generate the new green industries? I do not think it is, but those are areas where a party

of the Left and the trade union movement needs to get really active and highlight (a) what the flaws in the Government's current strategy are and (b) where the opportunities lie and there are real opportunities there, I think.

ROY RICKHUSS (Community): Can I just dive back in, sorry. Larry, you are absolutely right, mate. We have all seen it in our day in pay work that you have meetings with BEIS, you have even constructive meetings with BEIS and then it is a case of "Uh oh, Treasury says no!" It was always the case and now obviously it is almost as if there was some sort of internal battle between BEIS or the Business Department and the Treasury and the Treasury have come out on top, because now the Build Back Better stuff is clearly being controlled by the Chancellor and BEIS have been totally marginalised.

LARRY ELLIOTT: Yes and the Chancellor will go for the cheapest option, because he is worried about the budget deficit. A lot of other countries have completely independent economic ministries, so the Finance Minister is the Finance Minister, but there is also an Economics Minister who has equal clout. Unfortunately, every attempt here to create a self standing economics ministry has been strangled at birth by the Treasury. The only time it really worked was when Gordon Brown decided he would take over every other ministry and bring them into the Treasury, so he ran an economic ministry and a welfare ministry and a regional government ministry from the Treasury. He just became complete overlord of domestic economic policy. So that is one way of doing it, if you have got a Chancellor who wants to do stuff, but actually for the most part having an industrial strategy run by the Treasury means you do not have an industrial strategy. It is as simple as that. You have a financial strategy with a few crumbs tossed to industrial strategy along the way.

THE PRESIDENT: Again, I am conscious of time. I know that Doug wanted to come in, but just a couple of things. We were speaking about voting for electoral coalitions and independent parties. Carys, I think, in the chat has mentioned about the trade unionists and the socialists coalition. I do not know whether you want to say a few words on that, Carys.

CARYS PHILLIPS: Yes. I stood in the Welsh Senedd elections as an independent socialist with TUSC and it is a coalition of the left standing very strongly on an anti-austerity note. I have to say everybody was very thoughtful and agreeable with the message. However, the votes did not tally, so, again, I think a coalition is not the way to go really.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Carys. They also stood in some of the Scottish constituencies, I believe.

CARYS PHILLIPS: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: I will bring Doug in very quickly, because then I want to bring in Paul Donaldson who has not had access to his virtual hand. I am sorry to hear that. Doug.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: Okay. We have got a number of colleagues from Scotland with us, so I thought I would just see if I could raise the temperature a bit. Can Scotland really be an independent economy, Larry? Secondly, I thought the key to the destruction of industry was very much around Thatcher removing exchange controls on the export of capital which was the basis of the development of the global market, speculating on the financial casinos with the wealth created in Britain. Are we going to be able to ever get back controls on capital?

LARRY ELLIOTT: Two very big questions there. I think in theory Scotland can go it alone. There is no reason why a small country cannot run its own economy. There are lots of examples of small countries which run their own economies – Switzerland, Norway, Singapore, Sweden, Iceland. They are all small, but they have all made it. That is not to say that Scotland would not face some very, very big choices were it to be independent. It would have to set up its own central bank. At the moment it seems to want to have its cake and eat it by saying that it would in the short term use sterling as a currency, but it would eventually have to run its own monetary policy and have its own fiscal policy and I think that would certainly be difficult in the short term, because at the moment effectively it runs a very big budget deficit which is subsumed into the

wider UK deficit and if it went alone it would have to take responsibility for its own budget deficit and the new central bank would have to have much higher interest rates in order to attract capital in Scotland. I think it is definitely possible, but it would be much, much harder than the SNP is currently making it out to be. It is not going to be a bed of roses, that is for sure.

Exchange controls. It is interesting. That was the first thing Thatcher did in 1979, even before they put up Income Tax and raised VAT. The first thing they actually did in 1979 was exchange controls. Is it possible to run your own economic policy without exchange controls? It is possible, although having exchange controls make it easier, I think. To run a full employment pro industrial strategy policy with some form of capital controls is easier than without capital controls, that is for sure, although having a floating exchange rate does mitigate the impact somewhat. So, yes, I have always been in favour of exchange controls, but again I would not minimise the difficulty of re-imposing them and the opposition that that would generate. Back in the 1950s and 1960s when we had much higher levels of growth and much more egalitarian society economic policy was governed by a system of managing capital and since capital has been let off the leash all sorts of unfortunate things have happened. Manufacturing has been destroyed, the housing market has gone ballistic four or five times with disastrous results.

Would capital controls help us to run the economy in a more socialistic way? Yes, definitely. Is it going to be difficult to actually get that through? Yes, definitely.

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks, Larry. Larry, Paul Donaldson from the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association made a valid point about the success of the vaccine rollout was kind of achieved largely without the involvement of the Government, although they are taking great credit. Paul, would you like to come in, because you wanted to ask Larry something about the proposed centralised concept of NHS reforms.

PAUL DONALDSON (HCSA): You will be glad to know it was my virtual hands that I have lost, I have got my real ones still!



THE PRESIDENT: Good man!

PAUL DONALDSON (HCSA): Localisation has its merits, but that has happened with NHS trusts all over England and has been a bit of a disaster. There have been some quite good ones and some bad ones and they sort of become autonomous little fiefdoms and you get lots of postcode lottery between them all. There were proposals to make things more central, give the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care more legal responsibility of running it all, a lot of which is a good idea, but there are also suggestions that this may also open the doors to greater ability to privatise and to increase foreign companies being involved. There is a whole group of GPs somewhere which are owned and run by an American healthcare company at the moment. How do you see that side of things possibly going in an extended Conservative Government?

LARRY ELLIOTT: Forgive me for not being an expert on the intricacies of the health system. I am not an expert, although if you want my full penn'orth, it would be that the longer we have a Tory Government the more chance there is of the Health Service being splintered into various bits and sold off to the highest bidder. You do not need a crystal ball when you can read the book, do you, really? That would be my sense, that just as in the 1980s the longer the Tories were in power the more weird and whacky their ideas became, culminating in the Poll Tax. In the first term when they were in they did not do that much. In the second term they got rid of all local government, the GLC and the other metropolitan councils, and privatised everything that was not nailed down and in the third term they went for the Poll Tax. The longer they go on the more they will think that they have got carte blanche to do what they like and one of the things that they, I am sure, would like to do is to hive off and sell the NHS to some of their mates. But, as I say, I am speaking here from a position of prejudice rather than from any intimate knowledge of what is going on. That is just my political understanding of where we are.

PAUL DONALDSON (HCSA): Do you feel they may have a model of trying to set up various institutions like the NHS to appear not to be financially viable and

successful and the only way is, in their mantra, to get the private sector to run it in a successful way?

LARRY ELLIOTT: I think they have got to be pretty careful, because public trust in and love of the NHS is pretty profound. Even Mrs Thatcher was pretty careful when it came to the NHS, because I think although she had no love for it and did not use it herself, she understood the political dynamics of it. I suspect that they will go fairly cautiously and fairly quietly, but the direction of travel, I think, will definitely be in the form of fragmentation and privatisation, yes, as much as they can get away with.

PAUL DONALDSON (HCSA): Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Paul. Thank you, Larry. I am being electrocuted by the virtual cattle prodder by our General Secretary and Vice President now, Larry, because, as I expected, we ran on slightly longer than we had anticipated. That was not you, that was because we knew that it always stimulates a really excellent discussion. Before I thank you I am going to indulge myself and take a few more shocks from the GS and VP. I could not go without mentioning the great article that you did on the European Super League. I represent the Professional Footballers' Association. You described it as a metaphor for capitalism. I have shared that article with so many people I know within the game and outside the game and, you know what footballers can be like, they can be a little bit insular, but people who were not interested in politics, not interested in the economy all of a sudden are getting a deeper understanding of how it all works. I will distribute it to delegates just for their interest.

But on that note, Larry, it has been a pleasure having you again after another two years. The two year gap seems to get shorter and shorter as I get older and older and more forgetful, but it has been fantastic seeing you and thank you again and if you would all like to show your virtual or actual or vocal appreciation, please do for Larry Elliott. *(Applause)*

LARRY ELLIOTT: See you in two years' time, face to face!

THE PRESIDENT: Face to face, absolutely.

LARRY ELLIOTT: Good to see you.

THE PRESIDENT: Bye bye.

LARRY ELLIOTT: Bye bye.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, delegates, and thank you for your contributions to the discussion.

## **PG MUTUAL**

THE PRESIDENT: At this point I would like to welcome another one of our partners in our Win Win services, PG Mutual. They have got some really fantastic offers for members and they are keen to support our Educational Trust. I am delighted to say that we have Mo Shaikh who is the Account Manager of PG Mutual and he is going to say a few words. Welcome, Mo. Good to see you.

MO SHAIKH: Thank you very much, Chair. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Mo Shaikh, Account Manager at PG Mutual. Ian kindly offered the opportunity for me to introduce PG Mutual and what we do. As I only have a few minutes I will get straight into it and keep it short and sweet, so thank you.

Let's just have a look at some of the facts. I am not going to go through each one of these facts, as I am sure you have seen these before. The Department of Work and Pensions stated that 118.6 million days were lost last year due to sickness absence in the UK. Employers have over time reduced the company sick pay benefit paid to employees. I am sure Paul from the PDA, who we already work with, would agree with this, as we see more and more people coming to us because of the poor sick pay provided by employers or even no company sick pay, just statutory sick pay.

So what is the solution? One solution could be PG Mutual. We have been trading since 1928 providing income protection for our members and this is true to today. We are proud of our mutuality and our not for profit status which is a big reason why members prefer us over other providers. Being a mutual and a friendly society we share our profit with our members. Each year we make a

profit our members get a share of that profit which goes into their share account. This part builds up each year they are with us and when they leave PG Mutual at the end they can access this pot regardless of whether they have claimed or not. If a member cannot work due to an accident or illness we can protect up to 70% of their income. We will pay it until the individual returns to their occupation or reaches the age of 65, whichever is sooner. So it is not just short term protection that we provide, but also long term insurance.

Customer service is at the heart of what we do. Unlike other organisations, PG Mutual have always ensured that any calls received into the office are answered by a member of staff and not a menu driven system, especially important if you are a claimant and not feeling well and need to speak to somebody straight away. This has also been the case throughout the pandemic, especially as our head office has been closed since March last year and we are all still working from home. We have also made our customer journey as easy and straight forward as possible with a quick online quotation that takes less than 60 seconds to get an idea of costs. Individual can then continue to an online application if they so desire or contact us for further information.

Even though our pricing is very competitive, it is not always about price. We are very proud of our 94% claims paid rate over the last five years. This should give assurance to members that PG Mutual always look at reasons to pay a claim rather than not and we assess each claim on an individual basis.

So how do we work with our partners? Whether it is an existing partnership or a new partnership, we understand that you know your members better than we do. We listen and work with you to look at the best way of promoting that income protection benefit to your members. We do 95% of the work and are happy to provide any relevant marketing material from social media posts, e-newsletter entry, direct emails to informative articles. We generally work with an annual marketing plan but are flexible to fit with our partner's requirements.

When working with a third party reputational risk is always a concern. As a mutual we have a light handed approach when dealing with enquiries with no heavy handed sales tactics. All staff within the business are salaried with no

commission payments, which should also give you more assurance. If a member is interested in PG Mutual, we will make contact, offer further information, answer any questions or queries they may have or provide additional quotations if required with the majority appreciative of the call. If they are not interested we will close the enquiry and not call them again.

Income protection will add benefit to your members' offering. As mentioned previously, 9% of the working population have some form of cover. Income protection is the one benefit that most people should have, but most do not, because it is not talked about enough. Members would receive a discount off our standard price using a unique discount code which would also be noted on all marketing. This would also help us with preparing MI. We also encourage meetings two to three times a year to discuss the partnership, marketing and provide management information etc.

I do know that we do work with a few unions within the GFTU who have used a partnership we have with Parliament Hill who we also have a good relationship with. If you do work with Parliament Hill you probably have seen us before. I am very keen to work with everybody here today, so please do contact me. Speak to Ian or pass my details to the relevant person within the union to discuss our offering further. Please do remember, if anything, 2020 has shown us that we do not know what is around the corner.

One question before I end. As a union, have you had to speak to a member who has requested financial help because of accident or illness? Thank you very much. I said I would keep it short. Any questions from anybody?

IAN RICHARDS: You must have bottled it up really well, Mo, to get away with it that lightly! Mo does a great job in communicating and their foundations are in the pharmacist sector, so PDA already have a good relationship. Paul, is there anything you want to say about what PDA do?

PAUL DAY (PDA): Thanks, Ian. It is a great product. Obviously, it is a product which members may be able to purchase or not, but it is a mutual and it is a good product and it has helped members and we know cases where our

members have relied on PG Mutual and it has been really, really beneficial for them. So we recommend it to colleagues to look at certainly.

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks, Paul. Thank you, Mo. All the details and much of the information that Mo has provided is on our website. Just remember, the more affiliates and the more people that use the services and the offers such as those provided by PG Mutual, the more we save and also it generates additional funding for the Educational Trust. So have those conversations. If you are unsure of anything that Mo has presented on, then you can get in touch with him directly or you can get all the full details from Ian or from the website. Thanks again, Mo. I really appreciate it.

MO SHAIKH: Thank you very much. The slides are also available if anybody wants them. I am sure Ian will send them out.

IAN RICHARDS: We will circulate them round, Mo.

MO SHAIKH: Thank you very much.

IAN RICHARDS: Thanks a lot.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mo. Thanks, Ian. We will now return to the motions. If you are referring to your pack, the motions are on p.60. As we said earlier, the Community motion will be taken tomorrow before the education debate. Could I call upon the Social Workers Union to move Motion 8.

## **MOTION 8**

CARYS PHILLIPS (SWU) moved the following motion:

- 1 All nations of the UK have seen unjustified cuts and difficulties in the retention of social work jobs as a direct impact of the neoliberal austerity that chose to diminish/dismantle the welfare state. The COVID-19 pandemic has increase the stresses and losses society is facing; whilst exposing the pre-existing inequalities that social workers are all too aware of.*

- 2 *The extent of the devastation is now evident as the preventable death toll numbers continue to increase. Insecure employment, food poverty, poor housing, and the unequal impact on women, the BAME community, older and disabled adults need collective responses and action.*
- 3 *SWU's research during the initial lockdown highlighted the impact on frontline services with almost a third (29%) of social workers saying they were unable to reach the most vulnerable. Social workers continue to witness those most vulnerable in society going without. Social work is a on a precipice following the devastating impact of COVID-19 on working conditions and morale among social workers.*
- 4 *Urgent action is required by social work employers to support front line social workers and ensure services are fit for purpose as lockdown eases*

***Therefore, this BGCM calls upon the GFTU Executive Committee to:***

- a *Assist SWU with their campaign against any reduction in social work funding. The Government must make certain that all social work employers provide adequate counselling and support for social workers experiencing the heightened stresses caused by this pandemic.*
- b *Assist with campaigning to support social workers in their efforts to end child poverty, fuel poverty and support the most vulnerable through the benefits and welfare system.*
- c *acknowledge that there must be urgent and major investment within and beyond local authorities if social work is to play its fullest, necessary leading part in the recovery in communities across the country.*

She said: I am Carys Phillips. I am the Chair of the Social Workers Union, SWU, and we are seeking conference support for investment in social work, social care and our campaign for social workers and for the people that we work

with. As conference knows, all nations of the UK have seen unjustified cuts and difficulties in the retention of social work jobs and that has been as a direct impact of the neoliberal austerity that chooses to diminish and dismantle the welfare state. The covid-19 pandemic has increased the stresses and losses society is facing, whilst exposing the pre-existing inequalities that social workers work with.

The extent of the devastation is now evident and the preventable death toll numbers, although slowing, continue to increase. Insecure employment, food poverty, poor housing and the unequal impact on women, people from black and ethnic minorities, older people, disabled adults need collective action and responses.

SWU's own research during the initial lockdown highlighted the impact on frontline services and almost a third, so 29% of social workers, said they were unable to reach the most vulnerable. Social workers continue to witness the most vulnerable in society going without. Social work is on a precipice following the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our working conditions and on the morale of social workers.

So SWU wants urgent action that is required by social work employers to support frontline social workers and ensure services are fit for purpose as the lockdown begins to ease. So, therefore, this BGCM calls upon the GFTU Executive Committee to (a) assist SWU in their campaign against the reduction of social work funding. The Government must take action to make certain that social work employers provide adequate counselling and support for social workers experiencing heightened stresses caused by this pandemic. It is called moral distress that affects social workers.

(b) Assist with campaigning and support social workers in their efforts to end child poverty, end fuel poverty and support the most vulnerable through the benefits and the welfare system. Finally (c), acknowledge that there must be an urgent and major investment within and beyond local authorities if social work is to play its fullest, necessary leading part in the recovery of the communities across the four nations of the UK. Thank you, conference.



THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Carys. Before I ask for a seconder, Carys, are you a first time speaker at conference?

CARYS PHILLIPS (SWU): Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: Well done and perhaps a little show of appreciation in the reactions. (*Applause*) Thank you very much, Carys. Could I call for a seconder.

JOHN MCGOWAN (SWU): Thank you and well done, Carys. Carys is our new Chair, she was elected in at the end of the year. John McGowan, I am General Secretary of the Social Workers Union and, as you would expect, I would support this motion and hopefully all the delegates will support it too. Our recent research with our members actually highlighted that the UK social work system is facing collapse as a third of social workers are actually looking to leave our profession. Our survey of our union members found that all areas of the UK face an avalanche of social work referrals as this lockdown eases. As you can imagine, they are all on hold, particularly in the younger areas, the safeguarding and also adult protection, but, interestingly, our research also found that the Government and employers have neglected social workers' concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic and they have failed to safeguard our members' physical and mental health. Key findings from our recent research reinforced the issues identified in the increasing number of calls to our Social Workers Union helpline for members, but also the risk of hidden tragedies, with, I think it was, 49% of social workers frightened that the most vulnerable people have been unable to be reached. Two thirds of social workers reported deteriorating mental health as an impact of dealing, and that is dealing constantly, with the sick and elderly which takes its toll on our members. Many of our members have witnessed significant death rates amongst their clients and they are receiving inadequate support in dealing with grief and I think there are over 30 of our members who have died during the pandemic as a result of covid.

Also they expected a deluge of demand and referrals from social services, from other organisations and these will cause more pressure. So the Government and social work employers must take immediate short term steps to support our

members. Further, this includes increased mental health support and a social worker recruitment drive and a pledge not to reintroduce austerity measures. Thanks for listening.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, John. Would anybody like to speak against the motion? Unsurprisingly not. Would anybody like to speak for the motion? I have got Ian from NAPO. Ian.

IAN LAWRENCE (NAPO): Thank you, Chair and conference. Ian Lawrence, General Secretary, NAPO, standing four square with our colleagues in support of the motion obviously, but just by way of a quick update that, of course, money does not solve all the problems. We have just heard this week that CAFCASS, the Child and Family Court Advisory Service, the biggest employer of social workers in the UK, by the way, has with the help of the unions been able to pressure the Government to release an additional £8.4 million, but that is hardly going to scratch the surface of the problems that exist in that sector. There is a case backlog, certainly of public law cases, of some 48,000 and staff are reporting that they are at their wit's end. Even though they are not having to travel into the office and home visits are infrequent, stress and workload are at an all time high. So we are continuing to campaign for some sensible approaches. As I think John said, you have got to recruit new social workers into all the sectors where they operate and train these people and make sure they are able to cope with the myriad of challenges. So money is not in itself going to deal with the issues.

The other thing, which I suppose is common with our brothers and sisters in the local authorities social work sector, is the expectation of what is a normal caseload. A big ticket issue for us at the moment is that you have senior CAFCASS management talking about 25 cases being the new norm for a caseworker. That is absolutely ridiculous and people are absolutely just flabbergasted by this and that is a big campaigning point for us and I hope other unions as well where the expectation of an employer is unrealistic. So obviously this will be supported and just to express and record our sentiments with the aims of the motion. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Ian. Just before we move to the vote I would just like to commend John and the Social Workers Union for the wider support, not only in the research, John, which you have been informing us right throughout the year at the EC's, but also for the wider attention to supporting workers, your wellbeing at work, which you shared with us, which was excellent.

*Motion 8 was CARRIED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: If we can now move on to Motion 9 on corporal punishment of children in England and this will be moved by the Social Workers Union and the Association of Educational Psychologists.

KATE FALLON (AEP): Thanks, Chair. I think I am proposing it and John is going second.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Kate.

### **MOTION 9 – Corporal punishment of children in England**

KATE FALLON (AEP) moved the following motion:

- 1 *This conference notes the actions taken by both the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the introduction of legislation in Scotland. 2020 saw the Children (Equal Protection from Assault) Act 2019 coming into force in Scotland. The legislation, which gives children the same protection from assault as adults, was passed by the Scottish Parliament last year. A law banning people in Wales from smacking their children was passed by the Welsh Assembly in January 2020. The ban in Wales will begin in 2022.*
- 2 *SWU and AEP believe that there are many other more effective ways of teaching children right from wrong than by hitting them. More than 50 countries already have full bans, including Sweden, Ireland, Spain, Germany and Portugal, and it is time to make violence against children illegal in the UK in all settings, including the home. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was signed by the UK in 1990, requires the prohibition of all corporal punishment in all settings.*

- 3 *SWU and AEP accepts that the legislation removes the defence of reasonable chastisement and is introduced with the aim of changing attitude to the acceptance of smacking children.*
- 4 *This conference further notes that the physical punishment has no place in 21<sup>st</sup> century England. The international evidence tells us that it can have serious impacts on children and that it is not effective.*

***This conference calls upon:***

- a *The Children's Commissioner in England to support such a ban in England and to acknowledge that corporal punishment leads to a lower quality of the parent and child relationship, poorer mental health in childhood and adulthood, higher levels of aggression and antisocial behaviour and an increased risk of being a victim of physical abuse.*
- b *The UK Government to express its intentions to draft proposals for the removal of the defence of "reasonable punishment" in criminal law regarding the use of corporal punishment of children in England.*

She said: Nice to see you, comrades and President. I am General Secretary of the Association of Educational Psychologists. I am very pleased to be proposing this joint motion with the Social Workers Union which is to protect children in England from corporal punishment in the home.

Educational psychologists spend their working lives helping and supporting children to achieve their potential. Some of the children that they work with have very difficult home lives which can include violence and abuse. The AEP strongly believes that all children should be protected by the law from violence, yet our current laws still allow it in the home by permitting a parent or care giver to smack or otherwise hit and hurt a child. Corporal punishment was banned in State schools in England in 1986 with a full ban in all schools in all parts of the UK by 2003. Restrictions on corporal punishment by a parent or care giver were introduced in the Children Act 2004, but it still allows a defence of "reasonable punishment".

Research shows us that corporal punishment is not effective and can frequently lead to a lower quality of the parent and child relationship, poorer mental health in childhood and adulthood, higher levels of aggression and antisocial behaviour and an increased risk of being a victim of physical abuse. A recent major review of the evidence on physical punishment by Barnardo's, the NSPCC and other related organisations concluded: "There is strong and consistent evidence from good quality research that physical punishment is associated with increased childhood aggression and antisocial behaviour". They found that parents who are using physical punishment in response to perceived problem behaviour are likely to make it worse and there is fairly consistent evidence for a link between childhood physical punishment and adult aggression or antisocial behaviour, suggesting that the effects of increased aggression among children who were subject to physical punishment carries over into adulthood.

Conference, England's law is behind the times. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child which was signed by the UK in 1990 requires the prohibition of all corporal punishment in all settings, because it is a breach of children's rights to protection from assault. Article 19 requires the State to take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence. England's continued acceptance of the physical punishment of children is completely out of line with the good practice demonstrated within other parts of the UK and many other countries. 60 countries already have full bans, including Ireland, Spain, Germany, Portugal and Sweden. Scotland and Wales have both recently legislated to ban the physical punishment of children and the Northern Ireland Assembly is currently considering the same issue.

The AEP has been working closely with the Government of Wales on implementing the changes, developing new advice and guidance that supports parents to use positive parenting strategies and members of the Social Workers Union and the AEP are supporting parents with positive measures in Scotland. Those opposed to a ban, including the current Government, say it would criminalise parents. The intention of legal change is not to criminalise parents, but to help

to redefine what is acceptable in how we treat our children and each other and what we teach them through our own behaviour. Legal reform to protect all children fully against assault is a simple but fundamental preventative measure. Parents will still be able to physically interact with their child, such as to pull them away from a potentially dangerous situation where needed, and there is no evidence from other nations that have enacted a ban that this has led to increased criminalisation of parents.

Conference, we are actively campaigning, along with the Social Workers Union and other unions, for a ban in England. A recent attempt was made in the House of Lords throughout the debate on the Domestic Abuse Bill to introduce an amendment to achieve a ban and there is a growing band of Parliamentary supporters who want to push this over the coming months. We will do everything we can to support them and we would like them to know that the GFTU supports the campaign too. Conference, please join us in calling time on hitting children and giving them the same level of protection as is given to adults. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Kate. Could I call upon John to second the motion, please.

JOHN MCGOWAN (SWU): John McGowan, General Secretary of the Social Workers Union. As you would expect, we fully support this motion and we have the support of our members. Sometimes working in the actual domain of a social worker can be really clouded when you are dealing with safeguarding, particularly when you have a law that allows you to smack in England and obviously it is not the case in other parts of the UK for our members. I suppose we believe that all people, either adults or children, should be protected from violence in any setting, including their home, and we welcome the activity around this campaign and we would urge better protection for children from violence in the home by repelling the legal defence, and it is used quite a lot, of reasonable punishment against a child. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, John. Would anybody like to speak against the motion? Would anybody like to speak for the motion? Dewi.

DEWI HUGHES (AEP): Thank you, Chair. Dewi Hughes, Association of Educational Psychologists, supporting the motion. As Kate and John have indicated, smacking or slapping a child is actually a form of assault. Nobody would defend one adult assaulting another adult under the law, so why should we have a defence in law of an adult actually assaulting a child who is even more vulnerable and sensitive than an adult? It is completely illogical and a legal anomaly that has to be changed.

In terms of the psychological evidence, Kate has pointed out great consensus across the professions in terms of the three traditions of psychology, of humanism, psychodynamic behaviour traditions. On this matter they are completely united and opposed to the practice. There are no benefits to it and plenty of negatives.

Also, it is not as if we are going to say to parents and carers, "You have to stop smacking and don't do anything at all". There are, of course, alternatives, positive alternatives, such as encouragement and modelling and reinforcement of good behaviour which are better than punishment. So, yes, indeed, it is time for England to catch up with the other 60 countries that have already banned this outmoded practice. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Dewi. It is that old kind of thing that people will often say about the most outrageous things, well, it did not do them any harm, it does not do them any harm, but the point is it does not do any good and we have evidence to suggest that it does do some great harm. As somebody from a particular generation I can probably testify to that.

*Motion 9 was CARRIED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: At this point, apologies from the Chair, I did say that we would take a break on the hour every hour and I missed my break, because we were making such good time. May I propose that we take a ten minute now and we will reconvene at 3 o'clock. I am going to give an extra two minutes and receive admonishing words from the General Secretary and the VP.

*The meeting adjourned for a short time*

THE PRESIDENT: Okay. Welcome back, everybody. We resume. If I can refer you to page 61, Motion 10. Could I ask Community to move the motion.

DEBORAH LAWSON (Voice Community): Actually, Osher, it is Voice Community, so I am actually moving that motion.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Deborah.

## **MOTION 10**

DEBORAH LAWSON (Voice Community) moved the following motion:

- 1 *Conference welcomes the recognition of the role that education plays in advancing equality, but believes that the Government's Race and Ethnic Disparities Commission Report fails to acknowledge the reality of systemic racism in the UK.*
  
- 2 *Conference notes that while the report asserts that the educational attainment gap for all groups has closed or reduced, it fails to acknowledge challenges in the world of employment and disparities in long term wealth. Furthermore, whilst the report correctly identifies COVID-19 disparities as being rooted in socioeconomic factors, it fails to recognise that systemic racism causes these differences through disparities in access to jobs and housing.*
  
- 3 *Conference believes that the Government has dishonestly and deliberately misrepresented the data in order to promote their agenda and to pitch workers against each other, as a deliberate tactic to sow division and to prevent working class people of all races and ethnicities from coming together to build a better working world.*



4 *Conference further believes the report fails to properly recognise the intersections of race, class, sexuality, disability and other factors in determining individuals' life outcomes. Conference notes the Macpherson Report in the wake of the murder of Stephen Lawrence and that the findings of the Sewell Report contradict the findings of this and other work.*

**Conference calls upon the GFTU to:**

- a *Support staff in education settings to mark Stephen Lawrence day on 22<sup>nd</sup> April each year and support the work of the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation to share Stephen's story and work to educate all pupils about the part they can play in creating a fair society where everyone can flourish.*
- b *Support member unions to campaign against racism.*
- c *Call upon the Government to end its divisive rhetoric that seeks to deny the reality of racism in the UK.*
- d *Call on employers to advance anti-racism work and to improve their strategies for recruiting and retaining workers from diverse backgrounds.*

She said: Colleagues, education is the most powerful tool in the fight for equality. It has the ability to transform lives of individuals and society. It is a force for good, encouraging the values of openness, tolerance and respect. It was right of the Government to acknowledge the power of education in its report on race and ethnic disparities, but they were wrong in much else that they said in the report. It is not job done and there is no place for self-congratulations and we and society must not become complacent. Conference, the Government

denied the reality of racism in the UK and failed to acknowledge the real work that needs to be done to deliver a fairer society. It wrongly focused on the educational attainment gaps which staff in the sector work hard to close and not on the disparities between different groups in the world of work and the clear evidence of differences in long term wealth. The Government claim that the shocking ethnic disparities in COVID-19 deaths are caused by socioeconomic factors, the increased risk that faces people living in cramped homes in close quarters, working in risky public facing roles and not having the freedom to work from home or the economic power to say no to employers.

But, conference, the evidence shows that one of the biggest reasons that people from ethnic minority groups in the UK are in these situations is the effect of racism on our society. The report sought to divide us, to send a message to white working class voters that black, Asian and ethnic minority workers are getting special treatment to divide and conquer. We must resist this and recognise that the challenges of insecure work, poor housing and poverty affect working class people across the country who have more in common than divide us. We must also recognise that the realities of racism in the UK are affecting people's life outcomes. Race, class, age, gender, disability and more intersect, creating unique forms of disadvantage.

At Voice Community we are proud to work with the Stephen Lawrence Foundation to advance the cause of a fairer society where everyone can flourish. This motion calls for us to support Stephen's message and help create a legacy of change which enables young people of all backgrounds and crucially ensures a national curriculum that reflects all backgrounds, to include the black perspective in events through history. It calls upon the GFTU to support all members' unions as we continue to fight against racism and we call upon employers to do their part in ensuring that workers from all backgrounds get decent work and to ensure that discrimination and racism are combatted at all turns.

Finally, we call upon the Government to step away from the divisive and harmful rhetoric that featured in this report and instead seek to combat racism and

discrimination in all its forms. There is no doubt that education is pivotal for young people and it is through education that we can lay the foundations for the future and create a legacy of change. Colleagues, please support this motion.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Deborah. (*Applause*)

JOY ROWLEY (Voice Community): Can I formally second the motion, please. Joy Rowley.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Thank you, Joy. Would anybody like to speak against the motion? Do we have speakers for the motion?

IAN LAWRENCE (NAPO): Thank you, Osher. Conference, I am very pleased to be able to make a contribution in support of the motion which I know will be overwhelmingly carried and in doing so to say how proud I am to be a member of the TUC's anti-racism task force where I have to say the Sewell Report which is referenced in the motion was given pretty short shrift. I could not even repeat some of the words that were used to describe it. Let's just call it disgraceful as a common denominator, because what that report sought to do is effectively spread division between people who are not racist, spread doubt within society in a society that refuses to accept by and large that racism exists, when we know it does, and it was a particularly Tory tactic that was used to spread that division. So it is right that we should call it out and oppose it and that is exactly what unions belonging to the anti-racism task force have done.

Of course, the motion rightly refers to the fact that any number of reports in recent years have laid the foundations for a comprehensive fightback against racism in society, but those recommendations remain largely ignored and we could spend minutes going through all of them, you know what they are. So it falls on the trade union movement to do what it has always done traditionally and really shown itself in a good light in this past year or so when we have been looking at the terrible events in America that gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement and demonstrations, but let's not kid ourselves when it comes to things like systemic racism and state murder. There have been over 1,000 people who have died in custody, either in prisons or in police custody, over the

last decade. The majority of those have been black, Asian, minority ethnic victims, but not all, and if there is an area there where we can find common ground in society exposing this absolute disgrace that this has gone on for years without the conviction or very rarely the conviction of any police officers. So it is not just a problem in the USA, it is here and it is alive and it is well.

So I am pleased to say that the anti-racism task force is doing some really, really good work across all policy areas and we will be reporting incrementally. I just want to finish by saying that here is a lot that unions can do, relatively modest things that unions can do to play a part in the wider campaign. In NAPO, for example, we created an anti-racism officer in every single one of our branches across England and Wales, someone who will be a champion for that important area of our work who will be another source to be confided in, often from members that do not want to raise their head when encountering racism, and it will help us to bring about a joined up approach in our work against anti-racism and we have also created a race action plan for NAPO which, as I say, is being lauded in other circles as being very useful. So there are things that can be done. We are also working with the employer as well across a number of those areas or the areas where we are represented, because if employers maintain that they are not racist and that they have fully diverse policies and there is no issue around recruitment and retention, they ought to have no issue signing up to joint action plans and demonstrating quite clearly what steps they are going to put in place to remove discrimination where it exists and to stop it happening in the first place and we are making good progress with senior leaders across employers in that regard. These are things that we can all do. We do not need legislation, we need to do it ourselves to add to the impetus of the wider campaign. I am obviously delighted this motion is before us and will be supported and pleased to be able to just bring you up to speed with some of the things we have been doing of late. Thank you, Chair.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Ian. Would anybody else like to speak for the motion?

IAN RICHARDS: Osher, can I just clarify, are we on Emergency Motion 1 or Motion 10?

THE PRESIDENT: Motion 10, sorry, Ian.

IAN RICHARDS: Apologies, I got ahead of myself.

THE PRESIDENT: Not at all. Would anybody else like to speak on the motion or to the motion? Zita, welcome back. The floor is yours.

ZITA HOLBOURNE (AUE): Thank you. I fully support the motion and I just really wanted to say some things about the Sewell Report. It has caused, quite rightly, a public outcry against it. It is an outrageous report. I think a lot of trade unions did not respond to it, because they knew what was going to come, but not quite as bad as we ended up with. I think it is really important that this group, the GFTU, are very vocal about our opposition to racism. Obviously, we are a trade union movement so we oppose racism, but it is really important to speak out and to use the platforms that we have to speak out, because the production of this report which effectively gaslights black communities, trivialises the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the racism that we have experienced there and the legacies of colonialism and how that impacts on us is absolutely disgraceful in the report. It seeks to divide communities and to play down our lived experiences of racism, as well as institutional racism. It is important that we tackle racism in education, but every aspect of the curriculum includes the history and the achievements and contributions of black people in the UK and globally, but we also need to fight racism in every aspect of life and currently racism is deepening, fuelled by the pandemic.

In terms of the Sewell Report, it is now with the Government, with the Cabinet Office to consider what happens going forward in terms of whether or not they take forward any of those recommendations and how, so I think at that stage we need to be prepared to respond then as well. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Zita. The Sewell Report, how long have we got? But with the time constraints I think the speakers have all made perfectly clear what our thoughts are. Just one small point, people and the press have been saying police brutality is a specific problem for the United States. Well, tell that to the families of Mark Duggan, people like Rashan Charles who suffered a cardiac

arrest and obstructed airway due to restraint in 2017 and a former member of ours, a talented footballer, Dalain Atkinson, who was restrained and tasered and sadly lost his life. Thank you.

*Motion 10 was CARRIED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: Doug, I think we have now Emergency Motion 1.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: No, we have just done it. It was reconfigured as Motion 10, as far as I am aware. That is the one we have taken.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. Apologies. In my flurry of paperwork I had another note, hence the confusion. Thank you and thank you to all the speakers on that particular motion.

ZITA HOLBOURNE (AUE): Sorry, can I ask a question of clarification of what has just been said?

THE PRESIDENT: By all means.

ZITA HOLBOURNE (AUE): So we have just voted on Motion 10, but not on Emergency Motion 1, but you are saying that Emergency Motion 1 became Motion 10.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: That is as I understand it, yes. We just incorporated it in the report. There is not a separate Emergency Motion 1. We made it Motion 10. That is as I recall it.

ZITA HOLBOURNE (AUE): Not the other way round? Was there any difference between the two motions? It was not composited, was it?

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: No, they were not composited or anything like that. Emergency Motion 1, for ease, because the EC had accepted it as an emergency motion went on the order paper and we called it Motion 10, because it had been accepted as an emergency motion by the EC.

IAN RICHARDS: It calls for the same actions as well, Zita.

THE PRESIDENT: It is effectively the same motion. That, Zita, was the cause of my own confusion. I was joining you in that rather confused state, but we have clarification, it has been voted on and it has been unanimously voted for. Now, if we can turn to p.62 of the report we will take now the Executive Committee Strategy Paper and Proposals. Thank you, Ian, for sharing that. It contains really important proposals for considerations which the EC believes taken together will lead to a GFTU revival. May I now ask the General Secretary to introduce the debate and then the Vice President to make any further comment. Once done then the floor is open to delegates.

### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE STRATEGY PAPER AND PROPOSALS**

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: Thank you, Osher. Firstly, colleagues, it is our tradition when there is a struggle on during our conference to just express some support to it, so I hope you will not mind if I just mention the fact that the Bakers Union members in Belfast in the Hovis plant are actually on strike. They have got a pay offer worse this year than last, despite significant profits that the company has made over the last year because of their efforts and despite the fact that other Hovis workers in England have been offered quite a bit more, as I understand it. These are not a group of highly paid workers. I hope you will support us. If Sarah puts round a note as to who we can contact and lobby about that, we should do so.

On to the main big debate. I think the GFTU is an absolutely fantastic organisation and it is more needed now than ever before and we have got to take it forward. That is our main reason for having this meeting. In this debate there are numbers and you can see some of them on the screen, but there are also a lot of organisational politics. This is not an emergency paper or a crisis paper. It is a strategy paper about the future following a lot of deliberation by the Executive as to what we could best do to strengthen and build the GFTU for the future as previous generations have done. It is about growth and it is about finding solidarities in a new way.

Looking at the numbers, these two boxes are what is going to happen to our finances this year, our best guess, and what is going to happen to our finances

next year, best guess. In summary, we are an asset rich organisation, but we have now become cash poor. I will not go into all the history of that, but basically everyone knows that we decided to disinvest from the banks who have been doing what the banks have been doing for the last period and not benefitting anyone except themselves particularly much and we have decided to invest in our own social enterprise, our own co-operative, our own mutual project which is the hotel and the housing and the classrooms and all of that to create real jobs for real people and generate income for ourselves alongside all of the Win Win services that we offer to affiliates and others more widely.

Investments was due to leave us £1 million in the bank cash, but it has not, because of the reasons I outlined at the start of the day. There have been some obviously very unpredictable draws on our cash. Rather than selling the hotel the EC agreed to keep investing in it, because too many labour movement organisations have disposed of assets and we have always wanted to get a great place for unions to meet and to do their education, their development and their meetings and we still think that that is an important thing to do.

So if we look down the income column for the rest of this year, of course, there will not be any more subscriptions money, we have paid all that, and thanks to those unions who were kind enough to pay that early. There will be income from the housing and the two big figures you will see in this report are the income from the hotel, because we cannot reliably set down any of the income we think we might generate from the fundraising officer and so on. We have tested the figures with the hotel many times and the directors have examined them closely and we are still assured, and I sought reassurance this morning from the hotel General Manager, that the profit figure (these are profit figures, by the way, not total income) into the GFTU pot, into the Educational Trust, will be £150,000. We provide financial services for unions and others and they are at the moment our best form of income, so please help us with those. The Win Win services could do more. They could do more if people took them up more.

The total income for this year is £289,000, but if you then look across at the next column that is the expenditure and there is a big gap between the two, so



we are this year going to have raid the family silver again. We have still got £185,000 final completion fee to pay on the buildings and that will leave us at the end of this year, we think, with £238,000 cash. We then look down to next year and I will not go through the detail, because I think the pattern is obvious, although next year if we keep all of our current affiliates at the current affiliation rate it is £160,000 income and the hotel will be £300,000 and a full year of the housing would be £105,000. That takes by the end of next year the total cash reserves of the GFTU down to its lowest ever and then you just flip across to the expenditure column and you see that on current leaner and meaner wages bills for the GFTU we are still in a precarious position if that is all we have got at the end of the next year.

Hence the proposals in the strategy document which Ronnie will outline and Roy will come in on in a second, which the EC has agreed unanimously. These figures do not take into account the growth from the fundraiser, growth in affiliations or any other Win Win growth or financial services growth, so all of that will be to our benefit. But at the heart of this whole proposal, for me, is a simple recognition that now is the time to grow the GFTU. There are 26 million workers in Britain. I know we keep saying it, but it is no disadvantage to keep saying it. 26 million workers in Britain not in unions and when you look at where many of those workers are they are in proto unions, they are in community organisations. So this strategy, if you take it in conjunction with the paper we have done on New Deal for Workers, New Deal for the Communities is about finding new ways of growing the GFTU at this critical hour to reorganise and re-engage the trade union movement. We have identified 42 unions that we think are particularly worthy of opening discussions with about the benefits of joining us and within this we are trying to target a £200,000 increase in subscriptions through that.

A couple of years ago someone came to us and said, "I have found a load of old books or accounts records from a thing called the GFTU, do you want them?" There were piles of books which were the accounts, beautifully handwritten accounts of the GFTU, because we started as an organisation where the unions pooled their resources to support each other by creating a huge hardship fund

to look after workers who then did not have all the advantages of the welfare state. So as well as pooling resources to support workers and their families in need, the GFTU was one of the key campaigners, as you will see from our history, in creating the welfare state. So much so in fact that when the welfare state was created the GFTU did not know what to do. It had kind of fulfilled its purpose of arguing that the State should make welfare provisions after all that sacrifice the unions had made of donating hard earned cash to the GFTU to create this big pool of supported money. We are kind of at a situation like that now. We are asking unions to express solidarity with each other and the future of the movement with a few more pennies in the GFTU coffer so that we can offer more and better to more affiliates, so it is a time for raising our sights high and rebuilding the kind of unity and commonality of purpose that led to the GFTU in the first place. Thanks.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Doug. Can I now invite the Vice President to make any further comment before the floor is opened to delegates.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Chair. Ronnie Draper, Vice President of the GFTU and lifelong member of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union. First of all, colleagues, I make no apology for repeating some of the messages that Doug has given, because I think they really are critical to our organisation. This document is not meant to appear to be a begging bowl that we are sending round to people. This is part of a dynamic strategy that is going to take us forward as an organisation that will represent our members fully. This question that we are cash poor and asset rich is one that the Finance Committee have become very well versed with, because we debate it probably every two weeks when we have our meetings and it is a sad reality. We could sell the hotel if we wanted to, we could sell the houses off or part of them. We could get rid of our state of the art classrooms. All those sort of things we could do to raise money. We could change terms and conditions of employees to try and generate income. But that is not what the GFTU is about. The GFTU took a choice a number of years ago that we were going to move away from the banks, move away from our exposure rate hikes, fraud, although we have had fraud, moving away from where we were controlled by the finance houses and banks into

where we have property where we take control of our own future. The fact that we are not cash rich now is not about bad decisions that have been taken. This is about circumstances that have happened to us. I believe that this document can, with your support, drive us to the sustainability that we were looking for prior to covid.

Like the vast majority of organisations, we have a pension fund and that is a millstone round our neck. We cannot do anything overnight to change that deficit, but please be assured that the Finance Committee is working daily to look to see how we can alter the pension fund so it does not become such a drain on resources. We are also looking at the services we offer and you will see in the document that included are our Win Win projects that Doug has talked about. Among them is the Emplaw scheme that we took on. It is a relatively new benefit. It needs to be taken up more, but it also needs a modest increase if it is to become sustainable and to a small profit in the future. It is something that is a really good benefit if we only use it and if we uptake it. I know from past experiences where we used outside companies like XpertHR which cost an absolute fortune. This does a realistic job for much less and I think it is something that affiliates should look at. The Win Win services are comprehensive and I thank Manuel in particular and Ian Richards for the work that they put in to making sure that they are, but again the take up has not been fantastic on them.

Lots of unions show loyalty to their accountants and to their lawyers just on the basis that they have build friendships up over years. We are looking at what becomes an economic strategy for unions. This is cheaper ways of doing things with a service that will be second to none and will not be beholden to business in any way. So I think that unions looking to get their accountancy and legal stuff down consistently should not really be looking much further away from the GFTU. I ask you to think about this.

I have to say that it is to the credit of the Executive that we have protected the jobs of our staff throughout the pandemic. The easy option would have been what Wetherspoons wanted to do, just say "Bye bye, we will see you when we

get back to work". We have done everything that we can as an organisation to protect that and, I have got to say, we are about sustaining those levels of jobs as well. It is highlighted within the documents and it is going to be something that the Executive will be debating in future that when we get our new General Secretary we will not be able to afford the same sort of pension coverages that we have now and so we need to re-evaluate where the pension fund goes for the new General Secretary, although we will have to make provisions.

One of the largest debates the Finance Committee has taken on has concerned the level of contributions and I think this is at the crux of this document that has gone out and the value and money, both financially and beneficially that affiliates get. £1 per year is what it costs now or 1.9 pence per week. It is neither a burden nor a sacrifice. Indeed, in the past rises of 1 pence per year have not met ongoing costs or enabled us to promote the dynamic strategy that we envisage, although we have maintained educational standards. With the extreme effects of covid being felt across the globe, organisations like the GFTU are affected disproportionately, not just financially but (inaudible). The Finance Committee have recommended to the Executive an increase of 25 pence per member per year. In the cold light of day, and we have had some of the debate in the Executive, 25% seems to be quite a mega increase, but when you look at what it is of, 25 pence of £1, it is less than a quarter, 0.25, of a penny per week and for the benefit of Roy Rickhuss who left school way before decimalisation came in, that is equivalent to a farthing. We sincerely hope that you will agree that it is not a life changing increase, but it would collectively bring an extra £40,000 per year into the GFTU which you will all benefit from.

For those who are affiliated to the TUC, consider the cost of affiliation and, more to the point, what small unions get out of it. We, the GFTU, can make a major difference, particularly within the realms of education. Indeed, that has been the catalyst to the fantastic army of shop stewards, health and safety reps, learner reps that our affiliates enjoy. But just as important is the future role that we take on, particularly with the demise of the likes of the Union Learning Fund and the cuts to the FE colleges.

Over the years education has been at the cost of the GFTU. One of the major cost impacts on us has been non-attendance on courses. We still have to pay the bills, but we have to bear the burden as well. So, again, the F&GP has asked the EC to look and to consider a nominal charge for our courses. You cannot put a price on quality education or measure the benefits that it brings to members, families and societies in general, but can by deed and by the results demonstrate the incredible difference that GFTU education has made over the years. Whilst looking at nominal increases to affiliations and course costs we have not taken our eye off the ball when it comes to recruiting organisational affiliates and I am glad that Doug made the point right at the end of his introduction. I have to pay tribute to the remarkable job that Doug has done in bringing in new affiliates and affiliates that we have all benefitted from when we come to Executive meetings and I am glad that that is his dynamic going forward. Both Doug and any future General Secretary are charged with growing the GFTU and that will continue to be the focus of the Executive going forward. Support is the signpost to progress, innovation and quality benefits.

I take pleasure in putting forward this strategy document on behalf of the BGCM and I hope it gets your wholehearted support. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Ronnie. Just before I open it up to the floor, there is a simple message there. It does not matter whether you are a co-operative or a federation. You have heard all of the work that has been undertaken by the F&GP, the Executive, by Doug and his staff. If you are part of something such as this then to be a true beneficiary you have got to also be a contributor and a participant. The services are there, we have got to start using them. As far as the education is concerned, if we are using them we have got to make sure that we have full attendance so that money is not wasted. On that point, I will open it up to the floor. Would anybody like to come in?

IAN LAWRENCE (NAPO): Thank you, Doug, and also thanks to Ronnie as well for the excellent exposition of the situation. Insofar as I have been able to take part in Executive meetings as I would like this year, I have certainly been tracking progress of the strategy paper and would commend it to this conference. It is

unfortunate in some regard, because some of the things that have now emerged as strategy have post dated some earlier decisions that NAPO has taken; for example, in respect of our arrangements with Morrish and also the helpline arrangement that we are going to put online with them, but we are open to consideration of all sorts of other new initiatives. We are particularly interested in developing the training packages with the GFTU, particularly in the field of personal representation where we think GFTU has an awful lot to offer there to supplement NAPO's own training material. So there is a lot of things we can do. We already use your payroll provider and that is working out to be really good. So I would absolutely commend the idea of a collaborative approach.

Just a couple of quick points. I certainly as an individual would not advocate the selling of the relatively new housing, because I see that it does bring in an annual income which is extraordinarily useful and there is a commitment to social housing, quite rightly in terms of the GFTU's intent. One issue though that I would not mind just a snapshot reply on is that some time back, two or three years ago, we did look at the prospect of a third building being put on Quorn. I am not suggesting we would do that now, but the point was could we franchise out that land or the opportunity for a new income generating enterprise there and I just wonder if Doug or Ronnie might be able to respond to that point. Thank you.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: I can respond immediately on that point before we lose it, if you want me to, Osh.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, please, Doug, take this opportunity, yes.

THE GENERAL SECRETARY: For everyone's benefit, we got planning permission on a large field area of the site for a nursery and we put in the infrastructure for that and we had the nursery designed. When we did the very final cost benefit analysis I think about no.5 due largely to the Government's changes in the voucher scheme and also because of the fact that our site has only got one point of access, we decided not to go for a nursery. If we wanted to go for redesignation of the use of that land, we would just have to get planning

permission changed. I cannot see a particular problem with that, to be honest. As it happens, there has been a discussion with one union about some potential on that land, but I think certainly we would have to keep our ears and eyes open quickly in the coming period to see what productive thing we could do there. I think Ian is very right, that as we have got planning permission we might as well try and exploit it.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Doug. Roy, you wanted to come in on the discussion.

ROY RICKHUSS (Executive Committee): Yes, just briefly, because it is obviously following Doug, Ronnie and Ian in particular and we have covered a lot of the things and I do not necessarily want to waste time by just repeating what has already been said, but I think it is important that we do support this paper. I do not necessarily see the strategy as a negative. I think what Ronnie said about the circumstances, that is what we really have to understand here, that for the last 12 months or more we have really been up against it and I have got to commend the work that Heather and the finance team have done. At times they have been literally juggling and keeping the balls in the air in terms of how we can keep going and it has been tough and as a consequence of that we have been meeting almost initially on a weekly basis and then more latterly on a fortnightly basis.

I think the decisions that were taken in the past, probably before my time, were the right decisions. We have got an absolute first class facility at Quorn Grange and there is no doubt about that and we should be hopefully getting other unions to support it more. It is a brilliant facility and we cannot afford to lose that to the trade union movement. It almost does feel at times that it was at a bit of a crossroads whether the GFTU was going to survive or not and I do not want to be overdramatic, but clearly everybody on this call wants to see the GFTU not only survive but flourish and prosper and I think this paper strikes the right balance between growth, encouraging new affiliates, having an offer to new affiliates that is attractive to get those new affiliates in, but also recognising where we are. We need to make some savings and acknowledging that. It is

tough, putting up subscriptions to affiliates, because it is just never an easy thing to do and we know that in our own unions when we have to address these issues, but I think it really is needed at this point to get us through this period.

My final point, and I hope nobody takes this in the wrong way and accepts it in the spirit that it is meant, but if we are going to do this and we are all going to buy into this and we all want this to succeed then we have got to accept that that is what is needed, because I have seen in the past, and Ronnie is right, when other organisations that we affiliate to as unions put the subs up, so what do you do, you do a little bit of a calculation, you play about with the figures, you drop your numbers that you are affiliating to more or less bring it in line with what you were already paying. If we do that, we are kidding ourselves, because there will be no benefit to the GFTU and we will not be helping the GFTU get through this. So I hope people accept that in the spirit that it is meant and that we look seriously at making that additional contribution so that we can help the GFTU through the next period.

Finally, I am not here to knock any organisation, I would not do that, but when Ronnie mentions the TUC, as a relatively small affiliate to the TUC I know how frustrating it feels at times with a situation of how you feel as a small affiliate in the TUC and we paid £3 per member for the pleasure of being affiliated to the TUC. So even at £1.25 or whatever it will be, it is excellent value for money and I think the paper is the right balance and I would strongly urge that we all support the paper and we all support the GFTU.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Roy. There are some other speakers. I will take Julia and then Brian and then John.

JULIA GEORGIU (NHBC): Thanks, Osh. I just thought I would join the debate here. We as the National House Building Council Staff Association are one of the newer affiliates to the GFTU, having joined in 2019, and we are a relatively small organisation with only 650 odd members, but the use of the GFTU services and the Win Win services have been a massive benefit to us and has helped us reduce our costs over the last year by about 35% just solely through moving our financial auditing and also moving our legal services across to



Morrish's. It has saved us shed loads of money comparatively. It is not a huge amount when you think about the larger budgets, but comparatively it is a big saving.

I have been on the Executive Committee meetings over the last year, 2020 onwards, and have seen how this strategy has developed and I would fully support the strategy and would fully support the value of both the GFTU and the services to smaller unions and smaller organisations. Not only that, I would like to offer our help as a smaller new affiliate to the organisation to talk to any prospective affiliates on behalf of GFTU or along with you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Julia.

BRIAN LINN (Aegis the Union): Thanks, Osh. I would like to echo the comments of all the speakers so far. Aegis the Union are a small union. We do not have a lot of money, but I cannot imagine how much it would have cost to train the hundred or so new reps that we have had trained at the GFTU over the last five years if it was not for the GFTU subsidising it. To not wade in with some extra cash now when it really needs it and it only needs it because of this covid pandemic that nobody saw coming-- If we remember, we all as an Executive were fully behind all the plans to build ten houses, to build an extra 24 rooms, to build the bigger training rooms so that the GFTU was the best training facility for unions, union reps and union members probably in the UK or the world, I do not know, but for me it is the best training facility. Like Roy, I know we pay far more to be in the TUC and the STUC and the ICTU and these affiliations and direct bang for your buck you do not get it from these bigger affiliations. I can say I know I have had nearly 100 reps trained at the GFTU, but I cannot say that about any of these other organisations and they certainly would not pay for it.

The investment that we have all agreed to put in here and let's remember that the 25 pence extra and one off levy is 25 pence a year per member. It is not a month or a week, it is a year. For Aegis that is about an extra £1,000 and the levy is about an extra £600, but if we were not to do that and we were to lose the facilities, and it is not just the facilities, it is everything about the GFTU and what it stands for and what it represents and what it can give to unions, you are

never going to be able to afford that for £1,600 this year or an extra £1,000 a year next year, so we absolutely fully support this new strategy and hopefully next year the hotel can start earning, get the weddings back on, get the training courses back on, start earning the money that it was earning prior to covid kicking in last March and things can get back to normal, but we have full support of all the affiliates helping out at this time of need. It is absolutely necessary. Thanks for that.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Brian. The final speaker on this is John McGowan.

JOHN MCGOWAN (SWU): Good afternoon. Just to emphasise that obviously the strategy paper looks at the strength of the GFTU and I think we all need to reflect on (inaudible). I personally recognise (inaudible) affiliation to the TUC just how the TUC is run by the big boys and that is certainly not the case with the GFTU. It is a welcoming organisation for affiliates as trade unions. The strategy paper for us is a strength really, because it also focuses on new affiliates and I think that if we can all achieve even one new union or look at our own networks to see is there one union that we think could possibly join, I think we have got the making of so many new affiliates from our own networks. That was just my comments, but I think as a specialist union we can reflect on all the things that we have got and (inaudible) so thanks.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, John, and thank you to all the speakers on the paper. I am now going to propose the paper for adoption and can I now take that to the vote, please, to adopt the strategy paper in totality.

*The strategy paper was APPROVED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: If I am not missing anything, that brings us to the conclusion of business for the day. Thank you to all the speakers, to those that have moved and second the motions. Thank you to all our guests and to our partners and observers and a special shout out to my good friend and mentor when I was Vice President, John Smith. Get yourselves rested, get yourselves fed and watered and we shall resume business at 10 o'clock promptly tomorrow.

*The Meeting adjourned until 10.00 a.m. the following morning.*

**TUESDAY, 18<sup>th</sup> MAY 2021**

The Meeting re-assembled at 10.00 a.m.

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome, everybody. I hope you are all rested and I hope your screen eyes are all rested and you have used your eyewash and we are ready to have an excellent morning for this final session of the BGCM.

## **ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

### **PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT**

THE PRESIDENT: I am delighted to report that the Executive has elected a new President and Vice President. Roy Rickhuss will assume the role of President at the close of business today and Sarah Woolley the role of Vice President. If you can show your virtual or actual appreciation for our new President and VP.  
*(Applause)*

ROY RIKHUSS (Executive Committee): Thank you very much.

SARAH WOOLLEY (Executive Committee): Thank you.

## **INSTITUTE OF EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS UPDATE**

THE PRESIDENT: It is now a very great pleasure to introduce Carolyn Jones, the Director of the Institute of Employment Rights. Carolyn has worked closely with the GFTU for many years and, of course, is one of our affiliates. Indeed, Carolyn used to edit the GFTU's journal, Federation News. The GFTU supports the IER's manifesto for labour law and all of its work to introduce progressive legislation and oppose regressive laws. Carolyn has been an absolute rock and a tireless campaigner for workers' rights all of her life and it is a great pleasure to have you with us, Carolyn.

CAROLYN JONES: Thank you very much and thank you for that wonderful introduction and thank you for the invitation to come and speak to you all today. I am very proud to be invited to your General Council Meeting and thanks for the plug for our work as well just then, but also all the contact links that are on

p.17 of your report. You see, I have looked earlier. I did want to see what it was that you were doing. You are quite right, the IER's relationship with the GFTU goes back many, many years. Here is a quiz for you. How many of you can remember this journal or this look of the journal? This was the GFTU journal Federation News. This one was published in the summer of 2000 and carries an article from me on the future of employment law, so, yes, I am definitely showing my age. Or perhaps you can remember this version of Federation News which IER produced for the GFTU between 2001 and 2011. Each edition was based around a theme and we invited contributors from our network, whether they were General Secretaries, lawyers or academics, the three parts of our network to write articles. This one had wonderful Roger Seifert who, I am sure, has done lots of work for you before, Len McCluskey, Frances O'Grady, Billy Hayes and the wonderful Bob Crowe. So that was good doing that work.

Some of you might also recognise our Labour Law Highlights report. This is produced annually to update trade unions on important judicial and statutory changes to employment law. I have to say the authors of this report, all barristers working from Old Square Chambers, spoke at many a GFTU school and I have to admit that they all said that they loved the experience, so if you have not had them for a while get them back, because they really enjoyed it. The Institute also benefits from your inhouse financial support services with the GFTU overseeing our payroll system and our audited accounts, so, yes, our relationship is close and that is why I am grateful for this opportunity to join you today and to update you on the recent work of the Institute of Employment Rights. Special thanks to Doug for continuing that close relationship over so many years.

I have only got ten minutes and I know time is precious and you have got lots to discuss, so I want to highlight just three of our current projects. The first one I want to highlight is our work on health and safety. That started last March. It was prompted by listening to Boris Johnson standing up and saying that we all had to go back to work, that places would be covid secure and that the HSE, the body that oversees and monitors health and safety at work would be making

spot checks to ensure everyone was safe. Well, in reality, according to our figures, employers can expect a visit from the HSE inspector about once in a little over 200 years, so cuts in funding, cuts in staffing levels, downgrading of what constitutes a risk at work have all stripped the HSE bare and covid has exposed the impact of those cuts on working people.

We published our report in March 2021 on the anniversary of the announcement of the pandemic and I dare you all to read it. I am glad to see it is reported, as I say, in your General Council Report. We are now on to stage 2 of our health and safety project and the aim of that is to assess whether our framework of health and safety laws and enforcement mechanisms are actually fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As you will probably know, current laws are based on the report of a committee of inquiry that met nearly 50 years ago. That was called the Robens Report. But the world of work has changed, it has changed dramatically, and so, we think, must our protections. So we will be taking evidence from across the labour movement, from experts and from enforcers to seek views on how things can and should be done better and we very much hope that the GFTU and your affiliates will take part in that project and share your experiences with us. Our second report will be published in July 2022, which is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Robens Report, so watch out for that one.

Our second major piece of research and one that continues a health and safety theme look at how we can best organise the redistribution of working time. It is a sad feature of the current UK labour force that while some people work excessive hours just to make ends meet, others are denied access to suitable employment. In fact, it is more than sad, it is actually killing us. Too often overwork and underemployment can both lead to poor mental health and even to suicide, but, more, a recent report from the World Health Organisation and the ILL said that the culture of long working hours is killing hundreds of thousands of people across the globe. The report went on to say that long working hours are now responsible for about a third of all occupational disease, making it the biggest single hazard to worker health. So policy proposals to change the long working hours culture in the UK are essential.

We often see demands for a four day working week. They catch the headlines, but a more detailed and nuanced approach is required if we are to win the hearts and minds of workers and achieve policy changes. So I am pleased to say that the IER has successfully attracted funding for year one of this three year project. We have also attracted the assistance of an expert academic who is experienced in the study of the intensification of work and the decline in work/life balance, so stage one of that project will be published at the end of this year.

The final project I want to discuss is IER's May Day Manifesto and I call it that, because it was launched at a massive May Day event organised by the IER, an event that attracted over 7,000 viewers. It is one of the platforms that Sarah very kindly joined us on. That manifesto called A New Deal for Workers is a reminder of the kind of laws IER believes should be front and centre of any Labour Party plan moving forward. Kier Starmer likes to say that he is listening to what people want. I am absolutely confident that if Labour want to promote positive policies to win back working class communities they should look no further than (inaudible) re-nationalisation of main utilities, agreeing a new deal, ending zero hour contracts, implementing our Manifesto for Labour Law, as mentioned in the introduction. That is what people wanted to hear, a manifesto with meaning. Yes, I know that we lost the 2019 General Election, but poll after poll after poll confirms that that defeat was more about personalities and Brexit and not about the progressive policies in the 2017 manifesto. Indeed, both membership of and support for the Labour Party grew massively between 2015 and 2018. Our New Deal for Workers provides the economic, the democratic and the industrial arguments for improved rights at work, increased pay levels and a louder voice for workers at work, around the negotiating table and in Government.

So they are what I would see as our three main projects at the moment. Of course there is lots of other stuff bubbling away under the surface. Our Chairman, for instance, Lord John Hendy, will be introducing a private members bill into the House of Lords on 26 May. That bill is called the Status of Workers Bill. It deals with the issue raised in the recent Uber case where the GMB

claimed that drivers are workers, whilst Uber classified them as “self-employed”, a classification that the Supreme Court said was “faintly ridiculous”, as we all know. Plus we also expected to be dealing with the long promised Employment Bill in the Queen’s Speech last week. It did not happen, but whenever it hits us the IER will not only be resisting any attacks it brings, but we will also be drafting positive proposals on what we want to see in the bill, including changes to the National Minimum Wage, changes to how working time is calculated, so that those care workers in the Mencap case who were denied working time during sleep insurance and, of course, to try and hold back the increasing practice of fire and rehire tactics currently being used by employers.

We are also working on a piece of commissioned work for the FBU to look at Government attacks on their collective bargaining structures and the possible implementation of a pay review body. We have been working with Wales on their fair work agenda and, of course, with the recent success of Labour in Wales we hope to further influence their Social Partnership and Public Procurement Bill. If that passes through the Senod in the form that we hope it will pass, that promises to offer a real alternative on how things could be done if the political will is there.

We have got a project on race equality at work. Yvette Williams has agreed to lead on this project. She drafted an IER response to the Doreen Lawrence review on the disproportionate impact of covid on the black community.

So we have got loads going on as well as our regular supply of publications and conferences, so we very much hope that members of the GFTU will continue working with the IER and support our work. You know that at IER we are keen to continue working with you, not least on the many excellent educational programmes that you continue to develop. I can see the institute’s treasurer, Geoff Shears, is in the room. He never fails to mention the great work that Doug and the GFTU are doing, both with Ruskin and with Birkbeck. Long may that continue.

I have been told I can actually stay to listen to your debate on education. So thank you for listening to me, thank you for supporting the institute and carry on your good work. Thanks a lot. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Carolyn, and, yes, you have received our warm virtual applause and thanks for your delivery to Council. Clearly, the IER undertakes such a lot of important work and provides information and I would strongly, strongly suggest that if you are not already affiliated, then you consider doing so. As Carolyn said, there is information in our report. If anybody needs to contact either Carolyn or the IER then they can come through us, but, as I say, I strongly suggest that you affiliate if you have not already done so. Thank you again, Carolyn.

### **EDUCATION DEBATE INCLUDING COMMUNITY MOTION ON SKILLS**

THE PRESIDENT: Now we move on to agenda item no. 19 which is our education debate. It is our tradition as a major education provider to have a debate on education at every BGCM. We have had some fantastic debates and, indeed, some of those have led to the publication of our book about transforming trade union education. We are now in a situation in which we are witnessing those elements of the education system of particular importance to working people -- nurseries, play work, youth work, community development, adult education and adult residential education in our colleges, like Ruskin, like Northern -- under attack. If you have not had the chance to have a look at the General Secretary's piece called Lifelong Learning RIP on p.35 of the report, I would strongly suggest that you do so. That formed the basis of an excellent article that was published also in the Morning Star. We also have a huge skills gap to bridge to provide a new generation of high tech manufacturing, communications, transport and construction.

So, the debate. How I would like to handle this, I would first like to call upon Community to move their motion on education. We will debate and vote on this and then I would like to go on to take some contributions to this debate. We have observers for the debate who I hope will contribute to the discussion. One of our observers is Oscar Guardiola. Oscar is the award winning author of two



critically acclaimed books, *What if Latin America Ruled the World*, which won the Frantz Fanon Award and *Story of a Death Foretold*, the Coup against Salvador Allende which was shortlisted for the 2014 Bread and Roses Award. His more recent works include *In Defence of Armed/Art Struggle* and the poetic novel *Night of the World*. Oscar teaches human rights and political philosophy at Birkbeck College, University of London, where he has served as Assistant Dean during the challenging period in which colleges providing a critical education to the community, specifically working people, have come under mounting pressure, a familiar tale.

We also have, as Carolyn mentioned, Geoff Shears. Geoff, who may already be known to many of you, was the former Chief Executive of Thompsons, the labour movement law firm. He opened their Newcastle office in 1980, staying for the duration of the Thatcher era. He returned to London in 1991 where his last legal case was to represent NUPE during the Unison merger. Since then he has had a relaxing time since his retirement. He has relaxed into supporting various campaigns, including Justice for Grenfell, the Matchgirls Memorial, Freedom for Öcalan, just to name a few. He is a long time officer of the Institute of Employment Rights, I think treasurer at this particular moment in time, a Vice Chair of the Centre for Labour and Social Studies and now also a member of the Ruskin College Board of Trustees. I do not know what you do in your spare time, Geoff, but I suggest you take up gardening.

We were scheduled to have Yvette Williams MBE, as a guest. Unfortunately Yvette is unable to join us today, but Yvette is a community leader, activist and coordinator of the Justice for Grenfell campaign. Colleagues, the memory of that terrible day will never fade and justice still needs to be done so can I urge you all, please, to consider the urgent appeal which Yvette sent out to all of us for funding to enable them to continue their campaign and their important work.

We usually have a number of international guests at the BGCM, but on this occasion we have one, but it is a very distinguished colleague, Dr Stefan Berger from the University of Bochum in Germany. Stefan works closely with unions and social movements, both in Germany and internationally and has been

working with us on our history work. You are all very, very welcome and if we could have just a little round of virtual applause, please. (*Applause*) I shall now go on to introduce our speakers. We have Lewis Cooper from the Association of Colleges and Director of the Independent Commission on the College of the Future. We have Simon Parkinson, Chief Executive of the Workers Educational Association.

We also have Dr Sharon Clancy. Sharon is an Assistant Professor in Educational Leadership and Management. From 2016 to 2019 she was a Senior Research Fellow in adult education and lifelong learning on the ENLIVEN Project at the University of Nottingham.

You are all very, very welcome. Could I now call upon Community to move motion 7.

## **MOTION 7 – SKILLS IN THE UK**

BEN RICHARDS (Community) moved the following motion:

- 1 *Conference notes that without action 7 million extra workers will have insufficient skills for their jobs by 2030. Conference further notes that in the UK adult participation in further education fell by 39% between 2012-13 and 2018-19.*
- 2 *Conference notes that 11.3 million people in the UK lack the basic digital skills to use the internet effectively, presenting a barrier to these workers accessing jobs that require digital skills. Conference further notes that digital exclusion is also a barrier to accessing training, particularly during the current pandemic.*
- 3 *Conference believes that other barriers facing workers who wish to access training are experiencing difficulties getting time away from work, the cost of training, and lack of understanding about what skills will be needed.*
- 4 *Conference believe that it is essential that workers in the UK have the skills for the jobs of tomorrow.*

**Conference calls upon the GFTU to:**

- a Support union campaigns to publicise training opportunities, and the importance of skills.*
- b Call upon the Government to create an improved integrated adult skills system in the UK.*
- c Call on employers to provide additional support to workers at risk of digital exclusion.*
- d Call upon employers to pre-emptively retrain workers and provide information about the key skills their workforce will require in the future.*

He said: Ben Richards, Community Union. Conference, Community Union moving Motion 7 on skills in the UK. Conference, it is no exaggeration to say that the skills gap in the UK is the biggest problem facing our economy as we look towards 2030. Without action now more than 7 million people will not have the sufficient skills for their jobs by 2030. That means 7 million people unable to advance in their careers, unable to put money in their pockets and unable to thrive in the modern world. Employers are responsible for this damning statistic. Employees do not fund inadequate training for their employees and the UK has one of the lowest levels of employer provided training in Europe and under this Government participation in adult education has fallen by a shocking 39% between 2013 and 2019. This is simply wrong. Even if training is available, workers are unable to take up the opportunities, because they simply cannot afford it, they cannot afford not to be at work or even to pay the high costs of training in the first place.

All of you here today will share my frustration at the cuts to the Union Learning Fund. Before it was slashed by the Government in England, Union Learning provided a fantastic pathway to encourage reluctant learners to gain new skills. It helped people who may have had poor experiences at school or thought that learning was not for them. Conference, learning is for everyone and we must do more to make that vision a reality. This motion also highlights the problem of the digital divide, thousands of workers unable to participate fully in the

economy, because they do not have sufficient skills to use the internet, people unable to access training or jobs without these skills. We call upon the GFTU to support unions as they share opportunities for training with their members and spread the word about the importance of this issue. We call for the reversal of the cuts to the Union Learning Fund. We call for employers to provide extra support to workers who are at risk of digital exclusion and to take steps to think about the roles of the future and help their existing workforce to retrain for those roles and, most importantly, we call for the movement to come together to call for a total overhaul of the adult education centre in the UK, providing quality courses to workers in every stage of their lives. Conference, please support this motion.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Ben. Do we have a seconder?

JOY ROWLEY (Voice Community): Yes. Joy Rowley, Voice, Section President and Community NEC formally second.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Joy. Do we have any speaker against the motion? Would anybody else like to speak for the motion?

*Motion 7 was CARRIED unanimously*

THE PRESIDENT: May I now call upon our first speaker, Lewis Cooper of the Association of Colleges.

LEWIS COOPER: Thanks very much, it is really great to be with you all, I am really looking forward to the discussion and great to see such a strong and important motion passed just now. I am going to speak briefly just picking up on you have all just affirmed, something which I strongly endorse, that we need to be putting adult education, adult skills right at the centre of public policy, right at the centre of our not just economic recovery, but also ambitions for building a fairer and more sustainable society.

I begin by picking up on four particular points. Firstly, why is this important? Why are we talking about this? Why is lifelong learning such a critical element of public policy? Secondly, where are we in fact? If lifelong learning should be a

the centre of things, actually how do things stack up, where is investment? Thirdly, some green shoots which suggests that we do have a renewed focus on lifelong learning and the massive opportunity that this offers us. Fourthly, just some initial reflections on the task ahead. So I will rattle through those and, of course, right throughout very much endorsing and picking up on points set out in Motion 7.

Firstly, what are the big challenges facing the world? Clearly, as the motion recognises, we have got longstanding megatrend shifts across the world and more immediate challenges which together suggest, as the motion and Ben has just argued, mean that a focus on adult education and skills is one of the biggest priorities we have or the biggest priority we have over the next ten years. Why is this? I would say there is an alphabet of challenges at the centre of public policy. Firstly, (a) an ageing population. As has been noted, a demographic time bomb with replacement demand far outstripping supply of young people entering the labour market and by 2030 the UK population of those aged 65 and above is projected to increase by 42% whilst the percentage of those aged 14 to 64 is forecast to grow by just 3%. So we have got a massive aging population which means we have to think about replacement demand. It is going to be a massive challenge and we cannot just have young people filling jobs, we are going to have to have older people reskilled to meet labour market challenges of the future.

Secondly, (b) Brexit. Brexit is impacting on the labour market and regions across the UK. Reverse migration is likely to occur in areas across the UK and Brexit and changing global relationships are going to put pressure on particular industries in particular sectors. Again, this is going to massively impact on the world of work and, again, points to the need to reskill and retrain people to meet these challenges.

Thirdly, (c) climate change. Climate change is a major existential threat facing us, arguably the biggest public policy challenge ahead of us and as the Committee on Climate Change has argued just last year, this means that Governments need to be looking at the role of skills in the transition to a net

zero carbon economy, integrating sustainability into education frameworks and means that lots of jobs are going to be changing and changing at pace and we need to support people to keep up with that.

Fourthly, (d) digital revolution. The motion speaks about this in some detail, but we have got digital revolution, industrial revolution 4.0 happening at pace, which is changing the world of work dramatically and, as Ben has noted, there is a real risk that people are left behind here, a large number of people without the required digital skills to keep up, large numbers of people suffering from digital exclusion. There is a real risk that digitalisation and ongoing digital revolution exacerbates inequalities. On that, (e) equalities. We have to think about how we are using education to redress longstanding social and regional inequalities and again all these changes in the world of work really risk amplifying and magnifying the impact on the most vulnerable and we are certainly seeing that through the pandemic.

So all of this taken together means that we need to look at reskilling people and developing a system of lifelong learning across the four nations of the UK and the motion refers to numbers here. There is Learning and Work Institute research out today which talks about the severe risk of youth unemployment and long term scarring impacts of that and, as ever, already marginalised young people being hit hardest, they are people on low pay, insecure work, black and minority ethnic communities being hit hardest here. Taken together, we clearly need a focus on lifelong learning. Your motion talks about the millions of people that will need to be reskilled. CBI research out in December has argued that actually nine in ten employees will need to be reskilled by 2030 and they say at an additional cost of £13 billion a year. Of course, at this point it is worth stating, and the motion is clear on this, this is not just an economic argument, as important as that is, this is also about the kind of society that we want to live in. So through the work of the Independent Commission on the College of the Future we have argued fundamentally that this altogether requires a new vision for education for the role of colleges to play for people, productivity and place, for people that college has become a genuine touchpoint for people right throughout their lives and it is a genuine point of interaction. This is not just for

when things go wrong or when the world of work impacts on us. This is an ongoing relationship we are all going to have to have with education. Secondly, for productivity we need to think about how we much better align skills policy with economic industrial strategy and, thirdly, we have to think much more about the role of education in place making, in building healthy, connected, cohesive, sustainable communities.

I am sure we would agree on all that. As the motion says then, where are we? Rather than putting a focus on lifelong learning, we have had a massive decline in education funding. The motion talked about a 39% fall in adult education budget, some others put that at 50%. Research that the IPPR has undertaken for AOC has found that if investment in adult education had kept pace with inflation and demographic pressures over the past ten years we would be spending an extra £2.1 billion a year just keeping pace with where we would have been. The motion talks about the scrapping of the Union Learning programme with a clear and established record in adult education. We have had the clawback of adult education budget which is going to cause lots of adult education providers to cut back on adult education just at the time that we need it most. Ultimately, we have a system that provides competition between providers as a focus on short term delivery of qualifications rather than long term strategic priorities and it is really poorly aligned with other areas of public policy.

So, so far so bad. Just concluding then, turning to some of the green shoots. We do clearly seem to be in a moment where the arguments that lots of us have been making for a very long time are being heard. We have had a Queen's Speech last week that put skills policy, lifelong learning right at the centre of the Government's agenda. That is significant. We have got the Prime Minister say that this will have to be backed up as a priority and as part of the comprehensive spending review, so that is very significant. We have got the Skills Bill today going before Parliament which is going to put a new duty on colleges to collaborate, so recognition that a marketized system is not delivering for people, is not delivering for society. We have got a lifelong loan entitlement,

a lifetime skills guarantee and whatever their limitations it again is about a focus on lifelong learning and opening that up to people.

These are really significant steps and, just concluding, what does that mean for the task ahead? How do we seize the moment that we have? How do we properly capture the opportunity? Firstly, now is not the time to sit back and assume that it will fail. Then it really will. We have got a real responsibility across sectors to be able to build on the position we are at and make it better and I think there are two key elements to that. Firstly, as the motion says that you have just passed, we need to work actively to make sure that we are building a properly whole systems approach, an integrated adult skills system. We need to help Government and we need to push Government to go further. That means building new networks of collaboration right across the education and skills system, resisting any divide and rule, resisting the creation of new silos. That is critical. We have to be thinking more imaginatively and more creatively about the alignment between skills policy and other areas of Government policy. We need to be talking about the alignment of welfare strategies. The Skills for Jobs White Paper mentions unemployment twice. We need to do better than that. We need to talk about alignment to industrial strategy. We need to be thinking about the role of education and health policy. We need to talk about the role it can play in a sustainable and net zero carbon economy and more. So we need to be building those linkages and be really active, assertive and confident in that role.

Secondly, we need to be working from the bottom up and I see the agenda is basically an affirmation of stuff that we have been saying for a very long time, so from the bottom up we need to be working with local government, with devolved mayoral combined authorities to get cracking and to build new partnerships in new ways, showing the opportunities from a more integrated adult education skills system. The Independent Commission on the College of the Future argued that we need to be making the case as we talk about a more collaborative system, we need to be really assertive in making the case for embedding social partnership at the heart of the adult skill system and across the education skill system, so we are looking at staff leaders, trade unions,



students, employers and other partners all coming together to look at the long term challenges we face and embed that at all levels of the system. The motion says that also involves putting pressure on employers to think about the role and their responsibilities here. It is not just employers demanding, it is what we need employers to do with us.

Finally, we need to ensure this is backed up ultimately with the required long term funding, so redressing the very stark underfunding of the system for a very long time. So ultimately this is a massive opportunity for us. The motion absolutely sets the right trajectory for us and I think the task ahead is to ensure that the rhetoric that we are seeing from Government for the first time in a very long time is matched by the right policy and that we work together to build the pressure that will be required to drive meaningful change.

I will stop there. I am looking forward to the debate.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Lewis. (*Applause*) Can I now invite our second speaker, Simon Parkinson, Chief Executive of the Workers Educational Association.

SIMON PARKINSON: Thanks, Osher. Good morning, everyone. It is a delight to be with you. Thank you for making the time. I will try and keep this brief so that there is plenty of time for richness in the debate which it will be good to take part in. In many ways we have spent the last 12 months with support from Doug and Osher, the WEA, the Workers Educational Association, rebuilding and renewing its shared history with the trade union movement. We are cut from the same cloth. We are a membership organisation, both individual members and organisational members, so feel free to have a look at our website for details on that. We have really tried hard through the last 12 months, so this notion that somehow schools and colleges were closed, that just was not the case for the WEA. We were more open than ever really. All of it had to go online and Ben has already pointed to the digital divide, digital poverty issues that that causes. But actually we were really proud that even through this period we supported 36,000 adult learners. That is a massive achievement to move that all online so quickly, over 6,000 online courses. So

we have really proved the passion and commitment of the organisation and also the determination of adult learners to keep learning. This is not something that we have to force on people. There is a desire to want to carry on learning, so we are pleased with what we have managed to do over the last 12 months.

I guess the catalyst for trying to renew our relationship with the union movement in general was the disgraceful decision around Union Learn and defunding Union Learn at a time when all of the political rhetoric is around investment in skills and lifelong learning and adult education, so it just does not make any sense whatsoever. We have campaigned with union colleagues on that. We have given evidence to the Education Select Committee on why we thought that that was the wrong decision. Then, as important, probably more important, we have picked up the baton with unions, with individual member unions of the GFTU and the GFTU itself as the umbrella organisation and starting to really think about how we can fill some of that gap, the courses that we can put on together, the way that we can work together going forward. So we are looking at ways with Doug of how we can formalise the relationship between the WEA and the GFTU and we are committed to working with you. We are having our first away day back to face to face meetings, we are coming down to the hotel in Quorn so, again, showing our commitment to the GFTU by spending our money with you, although we have got a very good rate, so thank you for that, Doug, that is generous.

I want to come back to that starting point about Union Learn, because, as Ben said and as Lewis has picked up on as well, member education and adult learning is as critical now as it has been forever really, certainly the last 20/30 years and as we see that cut to Union Learn, as we see devolution to the mayoral authorities which, on the face of it, you could argue would improve local decision making and improve the delivery of adult education at a local level, actually is not without its problems and as a national provider we see that. We are starting to see this postcode lottery effect of devolution where some mayoral authorities are heavily and entirely basing their decisions around the skills they think are needed in their area. No consultation with workers, no consultation

with organisations, small consultation with business, but actually missing the bigger piece about lifelong learning and adult education generally.

So I think we have got a massive challenge to make sure that whilst it is on the political agenda and Lewis is right to talk to the Queen's Speech, right to talk about the White Paper being published today, I think there is something wider for us. I understand why the entire focus almost is on skills and employability as part of the economic recovery and you will know from your members, and Ben was passionate about it, the need to reskill and upskill so that people and workers can progress their career, can earn the income that they need to provide for themselves and their families. I get that, I understand that, it is massively important and I do welcome the focus that is on that. I think a narrow focus on level 3 skills in technical qualifications is a mistake. I think it misses the point that there is a massive journey that people need to go on in terms of their engagement with adult learning, particularly if they have had a poor experience in formal education. So I think we all have to push hard to make sure that this not just about level 3 qualifications and a loan to be able to complete those qualifications. It has got to be much wider than that.

I think it is partly the point that Doug makes as well. It is a great read, so you should have a read. We are almost returning, I feel, to the stage where somehow workers are only encouraged to do skills based education that might help them with their job or might help the business be more productive and actually what we are missing out on is that whole notion that the WEA was founded on that actually you can expand people's knowledge and passion and energies through a diverse range of learning. More and more community learning, adult learning that people will recognise is being cut in the UK, either directly with defunding Union Learn, but also indirectly through devolution. A really good example of that for us is in Sheffield City Region. Our entire £1.5 million worth of provision was community learning. It was our cultural learning, arts, history, heritage, languages. We have had to tender to be a provider on their new framework and the tender is all skills based. So even if we are successful, there is the transfer of £1.5 million away from community learning and into the skills agenda. So I think there is something for the GFTU, the

union movement to realise that yes, we will work hard to give workers the skills that they need to succeed, but actually lifelong learning is much, much wider than that, and encouraging people to be interested in and active in communities, understanding political discourse, understanding their local and national history and heritage, taking on arts and crafts challenges. All have benefit, all have direct benefit, we know that, to mental health and wellbeing. We know that it drives societal renewal as well as economic renewal.

I will finish at that point just with a story that I think proves the point. We get told by Government that non-accredited learning or low level learning is not economically viable. That is the language that they are using. It is the language that they are using to form the very narrow list of qualifications that qualify for national skills funding. I attended a virtual event, but it was with the Scottish Trade Union Congress and Unison up in Scotland and it was working with frontline NHS workers that had been absolutely at the end of their tether working through the pandemic and it was a creative writing class, that traditional creative writing class on a Wednesday evening and actually I was part of the showcasing, people showing their work. I think I laughed and cried in equal measure. It was incredibly moving and what every single one of those frontline NHS workers said was that by attending that creative writing class on a Wednesday evening it had given them the resilience to go back into work the next day. It had been the space that they needed. It had been the collaboration and the meeting of other people, like minded people with the same experiences away from the workplace. You cannot tell me that is not economically valuable. So I will leave it there and thank you for inviting me.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Simon. (*Applause*) Thank you so much for that, Simon. Can I now call upon our third speaker, Dr Sharon Clancy.

SHARON CLANCY: Thank you very much. I am delighted to be here. Thanks very much to Doug as well for talking to me about this event. Just to say a little bit really of the main reason I think I am here today, apart from the fact that my research focuses on the transformative potential of adult education and I am absolutely passionate about it. My father went to Ruskin as a miner, so I am

the product of that kind of educational pathway and experience and I wear that very close to my heart. I think the important point is to say that Doug has asked me to speak about the Centenary Commission on Adult Education which people may be aware of and you may have seen our report which came out at the end of 2019. I was a Centenary Commission member, not as a University of Nottingham employee, but as the Chair of the Raymond Williams Foundation, which is my other big love and big commitment in life. So I am passionate about informal life wide and community based education and that motivates all of my work. I think it is important to go back to the 1919 report just to say briefly that this was an absolutely ground breaking piece of work that took place at a time of great trauma and national crisis immediately after the First World War, as I am sure people will have appreciated, and it made the case for life wide education of a permanent national kind for all people across the whole of the community. The themes that I would probably pick on most crucially is that it made the case for humane and civic education and I think this is testimony to what Simon has just been talking about. It was focused on non technical adult education as being essential to individuals and communities, an inseparable aspect of citizenship that should be there for both universal and lifelong, and it ushered in legislation which enabled local authorities to provide adult education, along with adult education offered by trade unions, university extramural departments, organisations like the WEA and the co-operative movement and it was about transformation, community, aspiration, experiences of working class people who had little access to education of this kind. I am arguing that we need that just as critically as we ever did in the past, particularly with the rampant destruction of adult education infrastructure that we have heard about this morning.

The Centenary Commission produced its report at the end of 2019. The timing was lousy in that it was November just before the General Election and it kind of got bombed for a while, particularly as it grows out of a particular form of education that I do associate with a more radical spirit in that it is a sense of collective action, collectivism and the 1919 report was really clear that we need, as I said, humane and civic education and its understanding of civic education

is really important, I think and critical, in the sense of humane education being about the satisfaction of intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual needs which I think we have heard about, particularly from Simon, but also they crucially understood that civic was about enabling people to understand and help in the solution of the common problems of society, rendering themselves better fitted for the responsibilities of membership in political, social and industrial organisations, so this strong sense of civic in a much broader perspective than we think of it now, in these sense of people's engagement at citizenship level with their own communities.

We are still continuing our work on the Centenary Commission. We have had a big research project going from January to March, which has been looking at how we can promote these critical messages at the moment. We have had a big media campaign, which you may or may not have caught sight of, of various articles in critical journals and in the press, trying to promote this message at a time where we see a plethora of commissions coming out, but no funding and no real action. My big contribution towards it as far as I can personally has been developing a research circle which Doug has been part of which grew out of the Centenary Commission and that is looking at fostering community, debate, dialogue and democracy and it is about that incredibly important aspect of social transformational change that adult education can bring. We have brought together people. We had our first event on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 50 people. We have another 75 people coming to an event on July 2<sup>nd</sup> to follow on from the first event looking at examples of activism and practice at community level, people still managing to work through this plethora of the barriers that we are seeing at the moment, the destruction of infrastructure and I think it is really crucial if people are interested that you might come along. I can provide details of that. So we are trying to foster that debate. We are trying to argue for informal community based, activist based education and the spirit of the event was so positive. I used a quote from Raymond Williams from *The Long Revolution*: "Resources for a journey of hope", trying to say that at this moment most crucially we need to come together collectively, work together and keep promoting this crucial message at a time when the Union Learning Fund has

been decimated, we are seeing destruction in FE and so we are trying to create a sense of optimism and hope in the fact of a lot of destruction in the sense of trying to bring people together to celebrate what they are still doing and still managing to achieve at community level and it was an incredibly powerful first event, so I do hope people might join in our July and September events.

I think, finally, just to reinforce Doug's point and his excellent article about adult residential education, obviously I have great personal conviction in the power and importance of places like Ruskin, Fircroft and others, but since I wrote my report in 2017/18 when I did a big study on then four remaining adult residential colleges one has merged and is now part of effectively an FE organisation. It has lost entirely its unique focus and potential. Ruskin no longer is able to provide residential education, as Doug says in his article. I think we are seeing the destruction of something incredibly important historically that was a pathway for individuals from working class backgrounds in particular, so thinking of my dad as a miner who transformed his life entirely through his scholarship and his sponsorship. So I just want to really reinforce that we need to fight hard now for those adult residential organisations to remain in some form or another. It is really great that you are lending your support to this incredibly important piece of work and I am trying to write a book about it right at the moment. It is really hard with everything else I am trying to do, but if people want to talk to me about that at any point I would be absolutely delighted.

Thank you very much. That is all I really wanted to say, but keep on fighting is all I can say at the moment. Thank you. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Sharon, and thank you to our three excellent speakers. We have a lot to unpack from that and I am sure that delegates will want to make contributions to the debate as well as the observers. On that note, welcome to Mike Sanders from the University of Manchester who is also a member of our Educational Trust. I will open the debate to the floor. Just indicate either with your virtual hand or by waving to me or by any other means and I have got Tiffany who immediately wants to come in.

TIFFANY GILLIES (Community): Thanks, Oshor, and thanks to the speakers. I just wanted to mention a couple of points. With the provision of the Union Learning Fund in England ceasing, I think it is more important now than it ever has been before that trade unions and the GFTU in particular take the lead on encouraging people to upskill, but I think we really do need to consider how we can appeal upskilling to younger people and keep that connection between trade unions and further education in upskilling. I think when you consider some of the aspirations that young people have got nowadays, they want to be bloggers, vloggers, You Tubers. I think we need to expand some of the skills that maybe we have not looked at in the past and I think there is real opportunity for trade unions to take a role in doing that.

I think something else we should never forget is within the next 10 to 15 years over half of the entire trade union movement's reps will have retired, so it is about taking the people who are interested in upskilling and want to get involved in the trade union movement and promoting them to become active within the movement so we can have a new tranche of reps moving forward. Thank you.

JULIET LYONS (PCU): Mine is an observation and a question maybe to the speakers. I am from the Psychotherapy and Counselling Union and noticed that all the speakers were talking about a movement towards skills based learning and a loss of community learning and noticing the parallel in the psychotherapy and counselling world where a lot of the education is adult education and further education to become a counsellor and psychotherapist. There is also a parallel movement in the learning becoming skills based and a loss in the relational base approaches. What I notice is that it is really difficult to evidence the kind of community and relational learning and it is much easier to evidence the skills based learning, so I wanted to kind of raise that and maybe ask the speakers something about that. How do you evidence community and relational learning? That is my question and observation.

THE PRESIDENT: Could I invite the speakers to respond. Perhaps, Simon, if you could take that initially, please.



SIMON PARKINSON: It is a great question, Juliet, and there may be others on this call far more qualified to talk about it. I think you are right. The whole focus, whether we like it or not, at the moment on the language of the Government is: Is it economically valuable? So actually I think we have got to be a little bit smarter at the way we try and do this, so we like to tell and they do resonate. We have an impact report, Juliet, that you can find on our website and that starts to break down some of the positive impacts on mental health and well-being, positive impacts on combatting isolation and loneliness, but almost we stopped there and actually what I think we have got to do, even though we do not like to do it, because we do not like to devalue adult education by always talking about the money, but I think we have got to put an economic value against all that, so it is the social prescribing route, that actually if people attending community based adult learning classes are less frequently attending their GP, then there is a positive economic impact about that. So I think we have got to play them at their own game at the moment and we are looking to try and do that ahead of the comprehensive spending review. I think Sue Pember Tweeted something out this morning that even the Government's own figures say that Level 2 and below qualifications have a net present value of £29 for every one £1 spent. We know the economic data was strong around the Union Learning Fund as well. So whether we like it or not, I think we have just got to be a bit smarter at putting some hard cash numbers against this, because it is the Treasury who we have got to convince really, not DFE. I think DFE get it, but it is Treasury we have got to convince.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Simon. If I can come in there, without wishing to lose the momentum of the debate, I know we have got Angela, Michael and Oscar (welcome, Oscar) wishing to come in, we made a policy decision at the outset that for virtual meetings we would always take a five minute break in every hour. That is not just for comfort reasons. For some people it is for health and safety reasons. So may I propose that we take literally a five minute break and come back just before ten past eleven. Angela, Oscar, Michael and anybody else, please write down your questions that you have for the panel or just your contributions to the debate and we will resume immediately after the break.

*The meeting adjourned for a short time*

THE PRESIDENT: Welcome back, everybody. Thank you for your forbearance.

We can now resume the debate. This is the beauty of virtual hands, you can keep them raised without getting tired! Could I bring in Angela Pratten.

ANGELA PRATTEN (AEP): Hi. Angela Pratten from the Association of Educational Psychologists. This is just an observation really, because I know this is not the focus of the debate at the moment. We have talked a lot about lifelong learning and we must not forget the early learning of children and young people. We need to be able to promote the development of creativity and enquiry into their learning in both primary and secondary schools in order to promote the motivation and the love of successful lifelong learning. I think it starts there, so we ought not to be forgetting that. The Government, of course, do not really want schools to look at any issues like race, slavery, colonialization etc at the primary and secondary stage for children. They just want to engage schools in what are more testable elements of learning, like reciting kings and queens, but that element of enquiry and learning is really important and that goes on to both secondary stage and on to learning post school.

When I first started to teach in the early 70s I worked in a school where it was open plan, it had an integrated day, the children were dependent completely on their own learning, so all the learning was child centred etc and I look back at that and I think what a long way we have come since then. Maybe there were things in there that were not liked or perhaps were not the kind of model that people might want, but the whole idea at that time, the mantra, if you like, was about the fact that in 20 years' time or 30 years' time there will be no work, because the robots will be doing it and we need to be educating not just for jobs, but for lifelong learning. So I just want to remind us, this all starts in primary education. It is not something that starts post 18 or 21, whatever that might be. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Angela. I think we now have Mike Sanders.

Welcome, Mike.

MIKE SANDERS: Hello and thank you for inviting me for this chance. I just wanted to bring a brief kind of historical perspective to some of this debate, because I think it is important to remember that the post-War period really, one of expanding educational opportunities by and large for working people, is actually a historical anomaly, so in a sense the sort of policies we are seeing enacted by the Government now or being proposed by the Government now we might think of as a return to the historical norm rather than departure, because prior to 1945 the history of education for working people is essentially a history of the minimum possible provision that the rulers think they need to provide or think they can get away with and there has always been this uneasy tussle between conceptions of education as basically indoctrination, telling people what to think, a slightly broader conception of education as training, training workers to do their jobs more efficiently and, lastly, that development of view of education as part of a process of self and wider social emancipation which is what we are trying to speak to today. I think it is important that we remind ourselves that pretty much every stage of the workers movement has developed its own educational programme, beginning back in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with newspapers designed to convey knowledge, real knowledge to workers through Chartism's vision of a totally independent worker controlled educational system which, sadly, never came to fruition to the countless kinds of informal educational activities – the reading groups, the discussion groups – set up by workers up and down the length and breadth of the country throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century which kind of fed into those union education programmes which have been so important. That has always been part of a struggle to move beyond the 3 Rs, to include history and art and culture. A Chartist poet who is dear to my heart, Gerald Massey, wrote a poem in the 1850s entitled 'I was not made merely for money making' which kind of sums up the whole of the debate we have just been having, the view of an education which sees working people as more than simply economic agents in that way.

But I would also like to say that there is not always a contradiction here, because one of the major areas of economic growth over the past decade and it looks like continuing into the future is, of course, precisely in the so-called

creative sector, so arts and culture actually if we make our case carefully, that can be made integral to a basic technical education of the kind that the Treasury might look to. So I think it is worth thinking about ways and an earlier speaker talked about how vlogging and blogging is part of a young activist activity now that we can also speak to. That also involves creative and aesthetic decision making.

I will end if I may, Sharon Clancy mentioned the great Raymond Williams and I think no discussion of education is complete without reference to Raymond Williams. Raymond Williams's definition of education which I use as my email signature is one which I think is really important here. In 'Culture is Ordinary' Williams wrote: "Education is before everything else, the process of giving to the ordinary members of society its full common meanings and the skills that will enable them to amend those meanings in the light of their personal and common experience"; in other words, there is no contradiction between a technical education of skills and an education of the whole person which is necessary to make us good citizens as well as productive units in society. Thank you, Osh.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mike. Well said. With Angela's contribution regarding fostering a love of education in children and what Mike said about the way it has been reduced to a functional need rather than something that enriches, no wonder within our unions when we talk about education people's eyes roll in their head. Whatever happened to the joy of education? Oscar and then Deborah.

OSCAR GUARDIOLA: Thanks very much, Osh. It is a real pleasure to be here and I am very thankful to all of you for allowing me to join you. As I am Columbian, I must begin by making a call for solidarity with the young men and women and the workers who are now in the streets of Columbia facing huge brutality in the hands of a murderous Government, precisely because they are asking for the things that we are asking as well, so thank you very much for your solidarity.

Second, I would like to emphasise what many of the speakers have said before me, that in spite of the fact that we face a hostile environment, it is also the case

that this is a moment of huge opportunity. It is a moment of huge opportunity precisely because we can now call the bluff of the Government. When the Government includes in the Queen's Speech the matter of adult learning, it is doing something much more important than simply making a point of policy. Why? Because it gives us an opportunity. It gives us an opportunity to come together – the unions, those of us in higher education who have been working on adult learning for a very long time and here I bring the experience of Birkbeck College, I bring the experience of Ruskin College and also the fact that they now, because of their own political interest, must be seen to deliver to their constituencies.

So let me just point out three things why Birkbeck, for instance, is having to face difficult times. (1) Organisation. We need different partnerships. We are ready, the colleges, colleges with infrastructure, colleges with the knowhow, colleges with historical experience on adult learning. We are ready to enter into partnerships with the trade unions and with other education institutions in order to put it to Government that we need to enhance adult learning for all the reasons you have pointed out before. (2) This comes with a bit of a story. When I joined Birkbeck our then President, Eric Hobsbawm (and let me add Eric to that list of amazing names we have heard before – Raymond Williams and, of course, Gerald Massey) told me that we needed sometimes to learn to talk their talk in order to get our way. So it is true that we can begin to talk to the talk of transferrable skills, for instance, which is what employers want, but also point out that transferable skills involve basic things such as negotiation, organisation and even the basic skills for learning how to read images in a digital environment. Once you emphasise those three very basic skills, you are already opening the way for the kind of wider, rounder education that we think we are losing. So we can actually also transform ourselves and by presenting these things in a smarter way, as one of our previous speakers put it, we can actually make headway.

(3) and finally, if we organise together as a block and take this opportunity and the opportunity of the fact that this is now about partisan agenda, we can go to Parliament and we not only need to talk to the Treasury, but also to every single

Member of Parliament and lobby each one and all of them in order to make sure that they propose amendments at the various stages of the reading of the Bill that is coming so that we can also design or participate in the design of this new architecture of adult learning. Let me finish with a very simple message. Yes, we must demand from Government that they put their money where their mouth is, but we must also realise that we need to gain more self sufficiency and that we can be self sufficient if only we organise and join together and pool our existing resources. We at colleges already have the infrastructure, the knowhow and the designs. The trade unions have the people. We can get together and begin to create our own programmes for adult learning and lifelong learning education. Thanks very much. It was a very simple contribution, but hopefully a helpful one. Thank you. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Oscar, and, of course, we send our solidarity to those protesting against the oppressive Government. Thank you again for your contribution, Oscar. Could I now bring in Deborah and then Stefan.

DEBORAH LAWSON (Voice Community): Thank you very much, Osh. Deborah Lawson from Community Union, Voice section. I want to echo some of the things that Angela has said, but also some of the things that Simon has said. Most certainly I wholeheartedly agree with what Angela has said about the beginning of education and how that actually influences how people will continue their lifelong learning. However, I think we have to look at the early years. I think anybody who has had any sort of connection with adult learning, however tenuous, in the past realises that we actually have to start with where the adults are, whether that is physically or from a learning perspective and, therefore, the early years is critical, not only for our children and how they learn, but actually there is something called family learning and that is often the first stepping stone for parents on to some form of education. As Simon has said, we need to be putting some sort of economic value on this and, again, in years gone by my involvement with various Sure Start schemes over the years, we know that the changes to those schemes were driven by the Treasury, because they wanted to see results. I think what we need to see is how that family learning, how the adult learning is actually going to contribute to a whole range

of community services. I think Simon gave the example of perhaps fewer visits to GPs and this sort of thing. It is that sort of community and the health learning, but also one of the ideas behind Sure Start was there was more community cohesion, there was more ownership within the community, not only for education but a whole range of social and welfare things that actually meant that the support services in those communities were more focused on greater levels of need and that, I think, is where the economic value is.

I accept what was also said earlier about the work force getting older and not of child bearing age and their children are older, but actually family learning does not have to start in the early years, there should be family learning throughout all phases of education to enable parents to come in and that may well be the route into upskilling them and giving them greater employment opportunities.

Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Deborah. Can I now bring in Stefan, our distinguished overseas visitor.

STEFAN BERGER: Thank you very much and thank you very much for inviting me. I found this debate really fascinating. Let me, first of all, also bring greetings from the German Trade Union Federation, the Deutch Gewerkschaftsbund, the DGB, and its Chairman Reiner Hoffmann who has always been very interested in questions of education ever since his time at the European Trade Union Federation in Brussels. Of course, in Germany the trade union movement has been trying to strengthen training for workers and it has been behind attempts to link that training to creating a more humane situation at work for many workers. Many of you will be familiar with the German apprenticeship system, the dual education system that we have here that pays a lot of attention to questions of skills and also the various schemes at work which are about reskilling and about upskilling, so we have a situation, I would say, in Germany where in large companies with strong trade union representation in the works councils the situation is pretty impressive, but at the same time I think we also have many employers in Germany who are falling behind the standards that trade unions are calling for and, of course, we also have long term

unemployment in particular of unskilled workers, so there are many also in Germany who are failed, I think, by the system and where the trade unions have to think very hard on how to get those people back into the system where they can benefit from the various schemes that are in place.

In many respects I think the strong trade union movement in Germany has been successful in defending workers' rights in many areas, including those of education, but, of course, one of the biggest problems is that also in Germany the trade unions have become weaker and it has become far more difficult for them to recruit members, so we see falling membership figures also. So I think there is also a role for education in making unions more attractive and in telling workers what unions are for in society, because especially many young workers have no idea what unions are for. The DGB in Saxony has recently gone into these special schools for young apprentices and they have asked them about unions and it was very clear that many of these young people who are working in factories, who are being apprenticed, who would be a natural resource for unions, they do not know what unions are really. I remember one answering to the question "What are unions for?", he paused for a moment and he thought he said, "Unions, isn't that something for professors?" So the notion what a union is for needs also education in order to strengthen trade unions in our societies, because those who are opposed to trade unionism do not tire to emphasise that unions are a thing of the past, that they are dinosaurs from an industrial age which are no longer needed. So in order to counter that and to show that unions continue to be relevant in the contemporary age in defending workers' rights and in defending the aspiration of workers in society, I think we also need more memory work, more history work in order to show that many of the things that young people are taking for granted today are the product of a long struggle of trade unions in society. So in that sense I think we need education in the practical sense of reskilling, of upskilling, but we also need education and several of your speakers have emphasised that we need a form of civic education that provides the basis for a better understanding of what unions are for, but that also provides the basis for building alliances in civic society with a variety of different progressive social movements so that unions in alliance with



those other progressive social movements can provide answers that are relevant to contemporary society in a variety of different fields. In Germany, of course, I am thinking of battling the right wing populism that we have seen resurging in Germany through the AFD, the Alternative für Deutschland, recently, but I am also thinking of providing answers that can square the circle between the demands for climate policies and the demands for social justice. So there are a variety of different areas, I would argue, where education is important and I very much, again, want to come back to my initial thanks for inviting me, because I think that an international debate, an international dialogue about how different union movements respond to the need for education is very important in learning from each other. Thank you very much. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Stefan. Some fantastic contributions to an excellent debate which I must now bring to a close. I would just like to thank all those that contributed and, once again, I would like to say a special thanks to all our speakers and if we can give them, finally, a last round of virtual or actual applause, please. *(Applause)* Thank you.

### **ADOPTION OF THE EXECUTIVE REPORT**

THE PRESIDENT: If we can now go to the adoption of the Executive Report, could I now call, firstly, on Brian Linn and then afterwards Garry Elliott to move the Executive Report with some remarks, please.

BRIAN LINN (Executive Committee): Thank you very much, Osher. It is very interesting that you ask the most unqualified and uneducated guy to follow that debate. I left school with no qualifications. I got kicked out for playing truant, but 16 jobs later and after 20 years of trade union education I found myself running a union in the finance sector for 11 years now and it is all down to education that I learned once I left school. It is nothing to do with being a bad school, it was not, it was me, I was a bad boy.

I would like to move adoption of the EC report and specifically around the hotel and education. Before I do that, I would like to thank the excellent speakers for

that debate from brilliant qualified minds and if you read the EC report you will have no doubt what the GFTU is all about. I will come back to that in a second, but the first thing I wanted to do was really thank Osh and praise Osh for the way he has conducted himself as President over the last two years, especially in the last year where there has been no halting the wave of anomalies that Osh has had to deal with as President of the GFTU. If there are three words I could describe Osh for the way he has conducted the last two days and, of course, his full presidency, then it would be with grace, with professionalism and with warmth. I am absolutely in awe of you, Osh, the way you conduct yourself and the way you can manage these situations. A two day online conference really is probably everyone's worst nightmare, but you have done it with grace, professionalism and warmth and for me I have learned so much from you that I will take forward the next time I have to do one of these. You have been quite an inspiration, mate, so thank you for that.

The hotel and education speak for itself. It is an amazing dream of Doug Nicholls and his team. When Aegis joined the GFTU I think seven or eight years ago, maybe longer, we were promised education and, "Hey, we have bought this hotel, we are going to do it up". What we got was far, far more than that. What we got was entered into a family. Anyone who goes and learns at Quorn Grange or any of the other institutions, Ruskin College or the other one, is not just learning, they become part of the GFTU and everyone on the Executive, I am sure, can vouch for this. It is the spirit and the way things are conducted and the way everyone's opinions are important and listened to. You feel part of a family if you are on the Executive Committee, you feel part of a family when you are down there as a rep or as a union member learning and that is so important and it is fun and the fun bit in education, for me, has always been the most important part of it, because you learn so much when it is fun. The GFTU have managed to do that, but the family bit is the most important bit and they could almost change their name to the General Family of Trade Unions and that would not be wrong, that would be absolutely correct.

I would also like to just thank Doug Nicholls for his remarkable drive and ambition and leadership that I have seen over the last few years developing the

education side and the hotel side to having a first class facility. Probably nowhere else in Britain is as good as that. I stayed in hotels every week up until covid and the facilities at Quorn Grange are second to none, absolutely fantastic. For reps and members to go there and learn and get this first class facility at a remarkably cheap price it is absolutely fantastic. So I would like to thank Doug, the Presidents of the past and present, Vice Presidents, including Ronnie, the EC members past and present, the hotel management and staff and all the GFTU staff, especially Ian Richards for all the work he does tirelessly promoting the GFTU. This is what we end up with. We end up with a report that is really quite a remarkable report. If you read it and see what it has to offer for everyone, the last two days, all the motions that have been passed, all the hard work by everyone, I would just like to thank them all.

That is enough from me, Osh. I move the hotel and education part of the EC report. Thanks.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Brian. If I can now call upon Garry to speak on the adoption of the Executive Report and second it, please.

GARRY ELLIOTT (Executive Committee): Good morning, colleagues. Garry Elliott, Nautilus International. For the ones of you that do not realise what that is, that is for seafarers, worldwide seafarers. Following from Brian's moving of the adoption of the BGCM report, I am sure that you have all read it thoroughly and without me going through everything that Brian has said and all the thanks that he has made, I would just like to touch on a couple of things just for a few minutes. I was thinking on this this morning. When our union came into the GFTU family, as Brian refers to and the thread of the last couple of days is something that we use as a similar thread. We have been about since 1857, so along the same lines as the likes of the TUC and the GFTU, we have been around quite a long time. We are very proud of our past and we look to the present and we fight for the future and they are the sort of straplines that we use in everything that we do. I feel very much that is the thread through the GFTU. We have listened again on some of the direction, the strategy, what the GFTU wants to do on stability, growth, development etc etc and it sort of begs

the question when you read through the report why is the GFTU as relevant and why is it fit for purpose today as it was in 1899, because that is the reality. They would not still be here if they were not fit for purpose and they were not relevant, but how do we move, how do we attain that stability? How do you grow it? You heard Doug talking on that yesterday that we want to go forward, we do not just want to stabilise. We want to go forward and we want to grow the GFTU.

When I look at it, similar to what Brian just said, it is the equality of all the unions, it is the cooperative approach where everyone has a voice and everyone has credibility and that is very important, because even a union such as ourselves, we are very much a specialist union, we are not a general union, we are not a general transport union, we are a specialist for seafarers and we have to have that voice and sometimes in the industry in the sectors that can get lost because the bigger unions or the general unions might have a view on different elements of transport. What we have done by coming into the GFTU which is reflected here, and there will be lots of colleagues on the call exactly the same, it does not matter whether you are a general union, a specialist union, it does not matter whether you are large, whether you are small, it does not matter if you are political/non-political. A lot of the unions and associations are non-political. That is the reality. It does not matter whether you a new union, you are an old union, campaigning union, industrial union, organising union, international union. It does not matter. It is all in the report. There is something for everyone and I think that is why the GFTU has stayed relevant and why it is fit for purpose over all of that period and it is much to do so today.

I just want to quickly touch on three points, three parts of the report. One is the strong governance. You have heard many, many reports over the last day or two, some of the challenges that are ahead. The governance is very strong within the GFTU, whether we are talking about the General Secretary, the Executive, each BGCM itself that sets the policies and procedures for going forward, the elections of the President, Vice President, the reserve young members and equality seats, the General Purpose Committee, the Finance Committee, the pension trustees. You can go wherever you want to go within

the setup of the GFTU and there is governance all over it and that is why it is still in existence today.

The second area I would like to touch on out of the three would be the young members and there has been a little bit of debate on that surrounding the education. Obviously, this is fundamental to the future of the GFTU. Again within the report you see reference to the next generation of leaders and the work that the GFTU has put into that over a significant period of time and the training that has taken place for the new generation and leaders of the future. We have the annual weekend for the young members which our union participates in and finds it far better than anything else that we have facilitated in the past. We have a lot of young members, we have a lot of seafarers that go through the nautical colleges between the age of 16 and 19 and we have 100% union membership, because we sign them up at point of entry within the college. They find the GFTU very relevant. We were talking before, again on the education debate, it is not just about the older version of activists and trade union officials, it is about the young ones coming through. We find our members to be very active within our trade union and they find the GFTU to be a major benefit in what they are looking to achieve through our union.

There is also talk in the report about Friends of the Union. That is another thing that allows us to go out and look at different sectors where people might not necessarily be trade union minded. Again, it might be amongst a number of young members who have not been educated and brought up on trade unionism as possibly a lot of us would have been and, again, it is important to get them into the family, into the Friends of the Union. We have a Friends of Nautilus, but it is reference to friends of various things that various unions are looking into and we find that very important to bring them in and make them feel part of that family again and then educate them into trade unionism and bring them through as activists of tomorrow.

The final one on young members is not to underestimate the amount of work and the achievement of the GFTU in facilitating elements of the trade union apprenticeship. We have got the first in the trades union movement where we

are going to have qualified trade union officials. The likes of the GMB, RCN, PDA, POA, BFAW are already facilitating a training programme. We have got over 35 apprentices going through the system at the present time who are going to come out the other end as the first qualified trade union officials. We have got the TSSA and Unite who are about to start their training programme in October and that is going to consist of specialist training, up to 20 days training, one to one coaching, qualified coaches, mentoring and it is an excellent achievement and the GFTU are a fundamental part of that.

Just concluding on the final point before Osher politely tells me to wrap up is the international element. I suppose as an international union ourselves you would expect me to make reference to this within the report. The report has a lot of information on the fact that the Federation is very much an international organisation, a lot of the work that we have done in the past and the present surrounds that international work and, again, by the fact that it is a federation indicates the global reach of that. That was one of the interests to us, because, again, when we were looking at the elements of the work we do with the TUC and other relevant bodies, the UK centric work is fine, but what were we offered internationally? We merged ten years ago with three other countries – Croatia, Switzerland and Holland – to provide the first cross boundary trade union in the UK and we have been an international union for that period of time and we will continue to expand that internationalism. We are part of a federation from 1945 with the likes of New Zealand, Australia, South Africa. We are part of the International Transport Federation. We have got 110 seafaring unions around the world. All that interlinks into what the GFTU do and the involvement that they take in the international world.

I will wrap it up there, but I just wanted to touch on those few points that sometimes can maybe get missed when talking about all the traditional historical things, but there is very much a future, there is very much relevance and there is a great opportunity to grow the GFTU. So I recommend adoption of the report. Thank you, Osh. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you Garry. We have another speaker, Paul Day.

PAUL DAY (Executive Committee): To be honest, Osh and Doug, the guys have covered much of what I was going to say. I love Brian's thing about the family. We have been members or affiliates for only the last couple of years and I cannot reiterate that enough, I think. The skills are there. Clearly, we touched on this yesterday with the funding in that we could not-- Well, we could have predicted the pandemic, but people would have thought we were crazy. The hotel has to succeed, but once it does the opportunity for us to crystallise some of the work we have done over the last couple of years is definitely there. I have not got really much to add to that, so I think that is fine for me. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Paul. Can we now take that to the vote, please, shown by an indication of your hand or your virtual hand, adoption of the Executive Report. I can see it is overwhelmingly carried. Thank you. Just before I call upon Ronnie to give the final vote of thanks I would just like to say hello and welcome to Julian Risso from the Gibraltar General and Clerical Association. Hey, they are on the green list, so, Julian, you may be getting a lot of emails from delegates once council has finished!

JULIAN RISSO (GGCA): And everyone is welcome absolutely.

THE PRESIDENT: A hastily arranged international study visit, Doug Nicholls! Lobby him!

### **VOTE OF THANKS**

THE PRESIDENT: Finally, may I call upon Ronnie Draper to move the BGCM vote of thanks.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Ronnie Draper, Vice President for the next ten minutes of the GFTU! It is a pleasure to give the vote of thanks this year. First of all, I just want to make a special mention of a great friend of the trade union movement, Geoff Shears. It seems that all my trade union life Geoff has been there. At times I have thought he is my dad, he has always been wherever I have been and I think he has been a great example to the trade union movement and long may that continue, so thank you, Geoff, for appearing again at our BGCM.

I want to thank all our speakers to start off with. I am not going to name them all, because there are too many, but to say I think the discipline that you have shown in speaking, the broad education that you have brought to all delegates has added to the richness of what has been a very, very special BGCM.

On behalf of the Executive I would like to thank all our partner organisations who not only look after business for us, but offer services to our members and allows the GFTU to give a comprehensive package of benefits throughout the year. I also include when I say “providers” the colleges, the universities, the tutors, the professors who make our educational offer the envy of the trade union movement.

I would also like to give a vote of thanks to somebody who we never see but makes a remarkable stand in our history and that is Jane Norman who is our verbatim reporter. We know she is on, we never see her, we never hear from her, but our history is safe in her hands, so thank you, Jane, on behalf of the GFTU.

Thank you to Andy from UK Engage. We did have a couple of glitches at the beginning, but that was not Andy’s fault. We did not have any contentious motions that needed the votes against, so we probably did not see his offer to its full potential, but I can understand where it would help affiliates when it comes to contentious votes at conferences or the need for tellers. This is a good platform to use and I hope that some of the affiliates take that up in the future.

I think a special vote of thanks to Claire Ryan and Ian Richards who work for the GFTU, not just for the way that they have worked throughout the conference, but for their dedication and guidance to the GFTU over the years. It has been absolutely fantastic. We all turn up at conference and everything works, doesn’t it? You turn your computer on and it is there, but not everybody understands the work that goes on behind the scenes and it is people like Claire and Ian who make that possible so that when we switch on everything goes swimmingly.



Can I also thank Georgia and Heather who I know have put part of the agenda together, Georgia has been involved in some of the IT stuff, and all the Quorn Grange staff and all the GFTU staff for helping make the GFTU the organisation that it is.

I want to thank Osh for the efficient running of the conference, a great character both on and off the pitch, a great trade unionist and a great friend and I endorse his words that our friendship will continue long after this conference is over.

You have set a brilliant example over two years presiding and have been a fantastic ambassador, not only for the GFTU but for the PFA as well, but also to our movement. The GFTU has benefitted from your wise counsel, educational support and forthright views. Cheers, Osh. Keep singing Minnie the Moocher!

In anticipation of the next two years I would like to congratulate Roy Rickhuss and Sarah Woolley on becoming the President and Vice President respectively. They are well versed in taking on challenges and I am sure they will look forward to that with gusto. When I was looking through the report and looked back over the years of the GFTU, back to 1899, there are some strange organisations that were in there originally, but they have all been swallowed up by other unions and I think it is great what the GFTU have done, but the one that really took my eye was the Fancy Leather Goods Workers which I actually read as the Fancy Leather Goods Wearers and it made me think of Roy straight away. I did not know that Roy kept his membership up well after 1899 and it is something that he still practises to this day. I did have a private word with his wife and said, "Do you mind him using the leather goods?" and she said, "No, because every time he gets something new it smells like we have got a new car". So, Roy, I am sure you will do a great job, keep on wearing the gear!

I want to give my personal message of thanks to Doug Nicholls for his dedication to our organisation. I think he was a great choice when we elected him. I know there was a big contest and I am pleased that I was on the side of the righteous. It is okay to be a figurehead of an organisation, but delivering is sometimes a thankless job. You have met the challenges head on and delivered above and beyond.

Finally, delegates, I would like to thank all our delegates who have made the last two days a pleasurable and educational event. Thank you and your members for the difference you have made to the quality of life of millions of people and, of course, our visitors and hope that they take the message of the GFTU away. Thank you all. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Ronnie. As usual, just like when we have an argument, you have managed to have the last significant word. It only remains for me to close the conference. A final thank you from me to you all for your ongoing and much valued support during my term of office and I look forward to reuniting with you all in the physical world. I now declare the conference closed.

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