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UK must continue to invest to grow says TUC

Responding to the Chancellor's Spring Statement on 26 March, **TUC** General Secretary Paul Nowak said:

“Labour inherited a toxic economic legacy from the Conservatives. But at the Budget the Chancellor took the right call to invest in repairing our public services and infrastructure. To rebuild Britain this approach must continue long-term. In the face of strong global headwinds, we need to keep building stronger foundations at home. That must include protecting the most vulnerable.

As the last 14 years have shown us – you cannot cut your way to growth. UK taxes are low as a share of GDP. Those with the broadest shoulders must continue to contribute more through a fairer tax system. And the Tories' botched Brexit deal must be improved to boost growth and trade.”

On the government's social security reforms, Paul said:

“Ministers need to rethink their plans. Decisions that affect millions of people's lives must be made with care – not as a last-minute response to changed fiscal forecasts. These changes mean many disabled people – whether they are in work or not – will be pushed into hardship.

And removing support could even make it harder for some people to stay in their jobs. Disabled people need timely access to high quality healthcare, and accessible jobs – particularly in the towns and communities where there are fewest opportunities.”

On the public sector workforce, Paul added:

“Public sector workers are key deliverers of national renewal. But after 14 years of Tory chaos and ruin, many feel burnt out and demoralised. It's vital the government invests in these workers and recognises the key role they play in improving the services we all rely on.

“Any approach to transforming our public services must include clear workforce plans for every part of our public sector, developed in partnership with staff and unions.”

On the OBR's growth forecasts, Paul said:

“It is time to review both the role of the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) and how it models the long-term impacts of public investment. Short-term changes in forecasts should not be driving long-term government decision-making.”

Source: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/spring-statement-uk-must-continue-invest-grow-says-tuc>

New buildings before lecturers' pay condemned

Lecturers at Sheffield Hallam University walked out on strike for 48 hours on Monday 24 March over withheld pay. Members of the University and College Union (**UCU**) said management had refused to honour a 2.7% national pay increase in August last year. The award was implemented in March after lecturers voted to strike. **UCU** said the delay cost lecturers £100 a month for seven months.

The union said the university is spending £220 million on campus expansion and a satellite campus in London.

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said: “We refuse to accept that Hallam can invest hundreds of millions of pounds in shiny new buildings yet can't afford to meet the nationally agreed pay award, as every other university in Yorkshire was able to.”

Strike action could mean cashless

Banks, businesses and cash machines could be left without cash as more than 1,000 G4S workers vote to strike over a real-terms pay cut, **GMB** has said.

Union members who deliver money to companies such as banks NatWest, Lloyds and Santander, supermarkets Tesco and Asda, pub chain Wetherspoons, fast food giant McDonald's and hotel chain Travelodge have voted to strike with a majority of 91%, on a 59 % turnout.

This follows being offered a deal as low as 1.4% in some cases, while G4S's directed competitor Loomis offered workers 4.6 per cent earlier this year, the union said.

GMB national officer Eamon O'Hearn said that workers doing a difficult and dangerous job are being offered a real-terms pay cut. He added: “Thanks to G4S penny pinching, the public faces an Easter break where businesses and banks run out of cash, potentially causing major disruption.”

A G4S Cash Solutions UK spokesperson said: “We are continuing to engage with the **GMB** and hope to reach an amicable agreement without the need for industrial action.

Arla – where were the decision makers asks the GMB?

The **GMB** has accused Arla decision makers of not taking consultation with them serious when they ‘swerved’ a crucial meeting over the proposed closure of their Settle factory.

The union met with the company on 13 March in the first formal consultation over plans to move production to the company’s site in Lockerbie, Scotland at a cost of up to 130 jobs.

However, key decision-makers from Arla were absent, meaning critical questions about **GMB’s** alternative business case went unanswered. The union called on



Arla bosses to engage properly with the process.

Deanne Ferguson, **GMB** Regional Organiser, said:

"Many livelihoods are at stake and the Settle community is on the brink of devastation if Arla workers lose their jobs. But the company doesn't seem to be taking it seriously.

GMB is committed to finding a solution; we've worked with key stakeholders and presented a viable alternative business case to keep the site open. We now expect Arla to show the same level of commitment by ensuring decision-makers are in the room with us, so we can have a meaningful consultation."

Meanwhile a meeting with Arla Foods about the proposed closure in Settle has been described as 'positive'. Skipton and Ripon MP Sir Julian Smith, who hosted a meeting on Monday 24 March attended by Arla, the **GMB**; North Yorkshire Council and Settle and Penyghent Councillor David Staveley, said it had been a 'positive step forward'.

The meeting, to discuss the proposed closure of the creamery, reported in the last edition of TU News follows the MP's previous efforts to support affected workers and explore alternative solutions for the site.

After the meeting, Sir Julian said: "Today's meeting was a positive step forward. I will continue working with all stakeholders to protect the interests of the workers and the community. I am grateful to all attendees for their input and support to help explore all options."

Strike action at Hull trains

Aslef's dispute with Hull Trains first reported in the last edition of TU News has now escalated to 8 weeks due to begin on 31 March. The news was given to the North East, Yorkshire and Humber Regional TUC Conference held in York on 22/23 March. The action which will run until 24 May will disrupt services on the East Coast Main Line,

The dispute is for the reinstatement of a driver who was sacked for raising a safety concern.

Scunthorpe – thousands of jobs at risk following closure threat

One of the panel discussions at the North East, Yorkshire and Humber Regional TUC Conference was on the future of Steel. Representatives from the **Community Union**, **GMB** and **Unite**, all closely involved in the campaign to keep the steel works open, spoke on the need for a just green transition, and about the impact any closure would have on the local community, the supply chain, on UK security if it had to rely completely on overseas imports. The plant has been making steel for 160 years and closure would mean that the UK would become the only country in the G7 unable to produce its own virgin steel.

Two days later British Steel, which is owned by China's Jingye, announced that it was launching a consultation that could see the closure of its two blast furnaces at Scunthorpe, putting up to 2,700 jobs at risk out of a workforce of 3,500.

The company said the blast furnaces were "no longer financially sustainable" due to tough market conditions, the imposition of tariffs and higher environmental costs.

The BBC news web site <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjryeqrnldvo> reported that **Community** union general secretary Roy Rickhuss called it "a dark day" and urged Jingye and the UK Government "to resume negotiations before it is too late".

The **GMB** union called it "devastating news"; while **Unite** general secretary Sharon Graham said the potential job losses were "a disgrace".

"British Steel is guilty of trying to hold the government to ransom, while using its dedicated workforce as pawns," she said.

The full **Unite** response can be found at: <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2025/march/unite-response-to-british-steel-job-losses>

Birmingham bins

Unite has criticised the slow rate of negotiations over the Birmingham bin strikes and questioned if council decision making is being hobbled by unelected commissioners. Negotiations between **Unite** and the council took place on Thursday 20 and 27 March.

The meeting on 27 March broke up without agreement. The report is at: <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2025/march/birmingham-council-accused-of-threats-and-intimidation-against-striking-workers>.

Unite national lead officer, Onay Kasab, said: “There is no positive spin **Unite** can put on today’s negotiations. ...”

As well as pay cuts of up to £8,000 for 150 workers, the council has refused to rule out further attacks on wages and conditions for the rest of the refuse workforce, including the drivers.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said earlier: “The council’s public statements about wanting to end this dispute are directly at odds with its sluggish approach to negotiations. The lack of clear answers during talks, and the long periods between meetings make it seem like the council can’t call its own shots.

“Are the council’s decision-making abilities being hobbled by unelected commissioners? If that’s the case, the council needs to be honest with its workers and the public and tell them exactly what decisions it can and cannot make without the commissioners’ permission.”

Unite believes that the pay attacks on the refuse workforce, most of who barely earn above the minimum wage, are being directed by Birmingham’s commissioners. The commissioners were handed control of the council by the previous government and are overseeing massively damaging budget reductions across the city.

Background: <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2025/march/slow-rate-of-birmingham-bin-strike-talks-criticised-by-unite>

RMT elects new general secretary

Eddie Dempsey has been elected unopposed as the union’s new General Secretary. He previously served as **RMT**’s Senior Assistant General Secretary and took over from Mick Lynch on Friday 7 March. He will serve a 5-year term until March 2030.

Mr Dempsey has been a leading figure in the union’s campaigns for fair pay, job security, and better conditions for transport and maritime workers. He has

pledged to continue **RMT's** tradition of industrial strength and tough negotiation to protect members' interests.

He originally joined the railway in 2008 and has worked as station staff and a train driver.

Outgoing General Secretary Mick Lynch, who has led **RMT** through the successful national dispute, welcomed Dempsey's election and expressed confidence in his leadership. He said: "It has been an honour to serve as **RMT** General Secretary, representing our members in their struggles for better pay terms and conditions. Eddie Dempsey is a committed trade unionist who has played a pivotal role in our union's recent successes. He has the experience, determination, and leadership qualities to take **RMT** forward, and I have every confidence that he will continue to stand up for our members with strength and resolve."

New General Secretary Eddie Dempsey said: "I am honoured to be elected as **RMT** General Secretary. Our union has a proud history of standing up for working people, and I will ensure that continues. The challenges ahead are significant, but we will meet them with the same unity, strength, and determination that defines **RMT**."

"I want to pay tribute to Mick Lynch for his leadership and dedication to our members – he has set a high bar, and I will do my utmost to build on his legacy."

More at: <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/eddie-dempsey-elected-as-rmt-general-secretary/>

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