



GMB latest union to abuse workers as branch secretaries go on strike

## Description

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GMB Union logo outside one of its UK offices

GMB branch secretaries have told the union to “practice what you preach” as they [strike for pay and job security](#). The dispute is the latest in a woeful surge of unions abusing their staff while claiming to represent workers.

## “GMB’s chutzpah is unbelievable”

The branch secretaries say they are being bullied by the union’s management, threatened with summary dismissal and often paid below the legal minimum wage. They are demanding that the union engage in “serious talks” to resolve the dispute.

Further strike action is scheduled for Friday 5 June. Their spokesperson, Alex Mitchell, has accused the union of “unbelievable chutzpah” in its treatment of its workers.

He said:

GMB’s chutzpah is unbelievable.

GMB was an enthusiastic backer of Labour’s Employment Rights Act, which extends protection from unlawful dismissals to staff with only six months service. GMB wanted to go further and have full employment rights from day one.

Yet the strikers have told Unite the Union that in GMB’s Southern Region, the Regional Secretary claims to have the power to close any branch at any time, without process, and therefore deny the branch secretary their livelihood, even when they have worked for GMB

for several years. This can obviously be used to bully branch secretaries.

GMB has a category of skilled but casual worker, who they call an "accompanying Rep". These individuals have extra, special training to be accredited, and yet GMB pays them £40 for a half day, and £80 per day. This is less than minimum wage.

## No employment status

The union is also denying employment status to the workers, even though they work full time and qualify as such.

Mitchell said:

The branch secretaries involved in the current strike work full time for the union, at a highly skilled level, and have enormous experience and responsibilities. Yet GMB denies them employment status

Undoubtedly, they are employees. In fact, all employees have a legal right to strike, and GMB did not seek an injunction to stop the

There are other branch secretaries who have smaller branches, and whose work is not full time, but GMB denies them even the sort of worker status that Uber drivers have, and which GMB campaigned for to support their members who work for Uber. These branch secretaries are, in some cases, paid less than minimum wage by GMB for what they do.

GMB needs to practice what they preach, they cannot campaign against rogue employment practices by other employers, and then themselves exploit people in a two-tier workforce.

## Anti-union unions

The GMB strike is just one recent example of union workers going into dispute with their employers over complaints of abusive conduct. In response, the unions' managers have allegedly engaged in blatant anti-union and strike-busting tactics.

Unite's union officers went on [strike](#) in April this year over the union's [Murdoch tactics](#) to block workers from organising. Shockingly, it was far from the first time that employees of the union had felt forced to take industrial action against Unite boss, Sharon Graham.

Unite workers have repeatedly gone on strike against Graham and her husband, Jack Clarke. Clarke was appointed to a top job in the union soon after Graham took over despite Clarke's reputation for bullying and misogyny.

Unite's lawyers, long after Skwawkbox first reported it, admitted that the union had, under Graham, [destroyed evidence gathered by workers](#) against Clarke. Workers in Clarke's previous department had gathered evidence against him. Graham had [asked colleagues to destroy this evidence of bullying](#)

[and misogyny](#) before she became general secretary.

## Graham and Clarke vs workers

Despite his record, Clarke was promoted shortly after Graham took over the union in 2021, overseeing Unite's newly-created Bargaining and Disputes Unit (BDSU). Union insiders point out that Unite's approval procedures for the promotion had not been followed. Prior to his promotion, Clarke had [been on a final warning from Unite](#) over his conduct.

Like workers in his last department, BDSU staff were [soon in dispute with the union and Clarke](#) over alleged bullying by Clarke and his cronies.

Graham and Unite have also [spent huge amounts of members' money on lawyers' fees](#) on behalf of Clarke.

Staff have also accused Graham and her management team of [employing intimidation, suspension and anti-union tactics against staff in the dispute](#). So bad was this alleged conduct that [more than 90% of Unite staff working at the union's Holborn HQ voted for strike action](#)

Three, some say four, of the five [women who worked in Clarke's department](#) since Graham formed it left. Union sources say they also alleged bullying and abuse.

## A spreading problem

The same kind of tactics have been picked up by other union bosses. TSSA rail union staff [demonstrated](#) again in March this year against the war on their democracy they say general secretary, Maryam Eslamdoust, is conducting.

The [deeply unpopular](#) Eslamdoust had moved, a month earlier, to [disenfranchise all the union's retired members](#) and [boasted](#) about it. Senior TSSA figures also said that she and her coterie lied to justify it and have put the union's structures into collapse.

But this was just the tip of an iceberg of member, rep and staff disgust with Eslamdoust. The TSSA has been [embroiled for years in strikes](#) because of the union workers' fury at her attacks on them and their GMB union reps, both public and private.

The attacks culminated in January with [Eslamdoust de-recognising GMB as the workplace union](#) an outrageous move for a union boss, and one that came after Eslamdoust [told the Guardian that she is only being criticised because she is female](#)

## One in ten

In 1982, the band UB40 sang:

*I am the one in ten, a number on a list, I am the one in ten even though I don't exist.*

The lyrics could apply in the GMB in 2026. The union has about 700 branches that act as vital hubs of democracy in the union. Of those, about one in 10 are so large that the branch secretary is a full-time role.

As GMB fights the TSSA over bullying, the union is accused of doing the same to these vital branch representatives. As Unite the Union represents the branch secretaries against their union employer, Unite workers are in ongoing disputes against its management for similar, and even worse, behaviour.

Unions acting as bad bosses badly undermines the fight of their members against their own bad bosses. It is a betrayal of the working class and must stop. But the grip of union bosses on the structures of their unions is not easily pried loose, to the detriment of workers and their whole movement.

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By [Skwawkbox](#)

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