

BRITAIN'S TRADE UNIONS OPPOSE EU CONSTITUTION

Britain's trade unionists at TUC Conference have recently overwhelmingly rejected the "elitist, militarist, corporate and anti-democratic" EU Constitution. The TUC motion was proposed by the RMT (Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers) and seconded by UNISON. In a show of solidarity, it was supported by the UK's "Big Four" unions, including the Transport and General, AMICUS and the General and Municipal Workers.

Proposing the motion, RMT General Secretary Bob Crow said that a revival of the EU Constitution, which has been rejected by French and Dutch voters, "would create a European superstate that backs Big Business to privatise public services". He said that the majority of people did not want public services to be operated by the private sector and that their future should not be controlled by "an unaccountable EU central bank".

Bob Crow warned that, despite the massive rejection of the EU Constitution by the peoples of France and Holland, parts of the unratified document are still being imposed and he rejected arguments that it championed the "European social model" and pointed out that, while the Constitution contained reference to the right to strike, this was "subject to national laws". He said: "The No votes stood up for the real social Europe".

UNISON delegate Bob Oram told the TUC that the huge French and Dutch No votes last summer had been due to an upsurge of anger over privatisation and cuts in public services. "The EU directives are all about deregulation and liberalisation", he said.

The TUC rejected an amendment proposed by Community union secretary Michael Leahy, which sought to soften criticism of the EU and called for a period of "reflection" on the Constitution rather than its rejection. He invoked the phantom menace of xenophobia, attempting to associate the No campaign with such right-wing parties as UKIP and the Conservatives. But Mr Crow strongly rejected these arguments, insisting: "I don't care if it's the Queen's head or the Queen's backside on my pound coins. I just want lots of them to spend". He stressed that the EU Constitution is like any other document. "You look at it and ask if it takes working-class people forward. Then you decide Yes or No".

The vote denotes a marked shift by Britain's unions, which have broadly supported all moves towards deeper EU integration since 1987. Although some unions have had reservations about Europe in the past, they have always been counterbalanced by pro-EU unions like Amicus. Even Amicus has now changed its tune and this year backed the motion to oppose any revival of the EU Constitution.