

## Identity Crisis

Britain's second largest union, the General Municipal and Boilermakers' Union, faces a major challenge as it attempts to keep pace with the times.

Plans for a corporate identity re-vamp, provide the potential for a fascinating debate about the image industry. For the GMB, formed by gasworkers in 1889, predominantly male membership, activist dominated, is turning its attention to part-timers, women, blacks and the young to boost flagging figures. Its membership has fallen from nearly one million in 1979 to 840,000.

But while it proclaims the as yet unseen new identity (concocted by the Jenkins Group, used by Lamborghini) to be 'more friendly' than the current 'boots and braces' image, its drive towards new members will take it into hostile country: the hotel and catering industry, for example, and the rag trade.

General secretary John Edmonds says that recruitment in the service industries will rely heavily on showing that the union is not 'dominated by white middle-aged men' and by concentrating on the skills and advice it can give to individuals on their rights and working lives.

Edmonds feels that women will be more encouraged to join if they realise there are home helps, catering staff and nurses in the union, and not just engineers. Young people will be attracted by campaigns against low pay, 'the more exploitative aspects of the government training programme' and by other active young members.

By the 1990s Edmonds estimates that the union will have to recruit three women for each man to make any modest growth in membership. He identifies the change in women's representation as vital and underlines a recent recommendation to allocate 10 executive seats to women: probably the highest proportion of any union. •

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