

What was the CBI for? And can any good come from its de...

Published: January 13, 2026, 4:39 am

I guess the day had to come for the Confederation of British Industry (the CBI).

The fact is that there is remarkably little industry left in the UK. Its failure to recognise that was indicative of its inability to recognise its own purpose.

It was also never possible to pretend that one organisation could really represent the interests of 190,000 businesses, large and small, ranging from banks to companies who hated their bankers, as many do.

The organisation was also not helped by the fact that for decades the UK has been run for the benefit of its largest members, who also dominated many of its committees. What does a lobby organisation without anything to oppose actually do but ask for ever more favours?

Historically they have been corrupted. It appears to be the opinion of many of its members that this might now be the CBI's fate. They left in droves yesterday. It has now suspended its operations. The chance that it might survive now seems small.

I am not going to be mourning the passing of the CBI. It has, like the Institute of Directors, seemed to me like an organisation out of touch with the reality of life in general, including for its membership, for decades. When I was in business I would have nothing to do with either. I was never much enamoured by the myth of the glorious entrepreneur whose real quest in life was a secure salary and pension pot which both seemed to exist to champion.

The question that remains though is will there be a new organisation to champion the interests of business?

And what will it champion? Even less tax? Lower still regulation? Delays to the green agenda? Yet more opacity?

I ask because it is not clear what the business lobby can now want.

Alternatively, what about a lobby that demands responsibility, accountability, and sustainability from business and puts forward serious proposals for each? Now that would make a difference. But could a business lobby organisation actually embrace the idea of doing something for the common good? There's a question that needs an answer.