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VOICE



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GENERAL SECRETARY'S COLUMN

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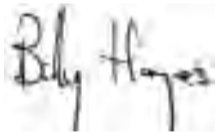
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BILLY HAYES
GENERAL SECRETARY



The GS column can always be viewed prior to publication of the VOICE, along with daily updates on recent events at Billy's weblog: www.billyhayes.co.uk



HILLSBOROUGH

April 15th 1989 was a bleak day. The day after it got darker. 96 people lost their lives, their families and friends lost their loved ones. "You can't put your arms around a memory."

The authorities at first blamed the fans on that day. Then attacked them. "The Truth" said the headline, it was not and sales of that particular paper have never recovered on Merseyside.

As their friends and families sought to cope with their loss, they had to struggle with the smears. "Self-pity city" shouted the headline. The fortitude and the desire for justice was - and still is - moving, twenty years on and justice has never been done but memories linger on.

Fields of Anfield Road

Musical artists John Power, formerly of the La's and the Cast, Peter Hooton of the Farm, Mick Head of Shack, Nick Kilroe from Echo and the Bunnymen, James Walsh of Starsailor and Rob Taylor of the Troubadours have joined forces to record a song

for the 20th anniversary of the most harrowing event in the history of football.

The "Fields of Anfield Road" - from Peter St John's "Fields of Athenry" - is sung by Liverpool Collective and features the Kop Choir. The CD was produced by Ken Nelson, who has produced Coldplay, and features tracks from Elvis Costello and Pete Dinklage.

Trevor Hicks of the Hillsborough Family Support group said: "We welcome and fully support the "Fields of Anfield Road" CD and are honoured that it is being produced in commemoration of our loved ones. Some of our members actually sing on it and we think it is a great way to bring musical talent, football talent, a specially adapted Kop anthem and the wider "Liverpool family" together in an entertaining but respectful way.

Hopefully, everyone will buy or download it and send it rocketing to number one.

You can download at: <http://www.liverpoolfc.tv/news/archivedirs/news/2007/feb/2/N154874070202-1152.htm>

And please visit Hillsborough website at: www.contrast.org/hillsborough/

Thanks
Billy Hayes

Stories highlighted on the following pages are now featuring on



Showing online on demand at www.cwutv.org and on Information TV, Sky Channel 166, at 10am on Tuesdays, 3pm on Thursdays, 10am on Saturdays and 6pm on Sundays



“LIVERPOOL DOES NOT suffer from historical amnesia. Although its pantheons of the slave trade and the industrial age have been made fit for tourists the cobbles restored and swept litter-free, the past remains defiantly the present. As a keeper of the secrets of the blood, sweat and tears of ordinary people, Liverpool has few equals. That is why it excites such prejudice, even hatred, and why the unfashionable resistance of its people endures.”

John Pilger
The Guardian, February 12th 1996

CD Front cover photo, courtesy of Nancy Ostrander. Design: Mike Carney at Mike's Studio Liverpool



CWU in the news...

The union's campaign to keep the post public has enjoyed such wall-to-wall TV and newspaper coverage recently, that it would have been difficult for you to miss. In my last column, I suggested that each of you could join in the campaign and, for once, make the news rather than watch it - many of you have done just that.

Kevin Slocombe, Head of communications, kslocombe@cwu.org

The hundreds of you who attended the rally in Westminster made headline national news for 24 hours, with BBC, ITN and Sky News coming live from a packed Central Hall and then following a spontaneous "march" to the House of Commons for our lobby.

For perhaps the first time in recent years, the union has managed to not only make the news, but shape the story with political media commentators joining the call for a reversal of the government's proposed bill. When Andrew Neil, fronting This Week, one of Britain's most influential political programmes, calls the move into question, we can tell that our campaign is having a huge impact.

The Westminster rally held centre spot in the news for a whole day and was then followed up for over a week on TV, radio and every newspaper. This was quickly repeated when a CWU "picket" at the Labour Party national policy forum in Bristol saw all national news channels filming inside, where Gordon Brown and Lord Mandelson were speaking, and outside where a hundred postal workers and supporters were demonstrating and leafleting delegates. It is fair to say that the demonstration and our campaign monopolised the news rather than the forum itself.

Away from TV, our friends at the Daily Mirror have publicly supported the campaign and

published a Westminster special edition of the paper, over 5,000 copies of which we distributed around Westminster on the day of the rally.

The Mirror has run three editorials supporting the campaign and the Guardian is the second paper that has supported the campaign, with columnist John Harris writing a very supportive editorial piece.

In other news, we have been managing job loss stories across the telecoms sector with every company announcing bad news.

Now, with pay rounds imminent, watch this space.





All image credits: Sharron Wallace

CROSS PARTY COALITION

Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs vowed to back proposals for a new Post Office people's bank at a high-profile campaign launch event at Westminster last month. Voice explains why the CWU and Unite unions have joined forces with small business leaders, pensioners campaigners and think-tanks NEF and PIRC in the new Post Bank Coalition...

Around 150 people packed into a House of Commons committee room to hear senior speakers from each of the main political parties outline their views on the initiative.

As families, communities and small businesses across the UK reel from the effects of deepening economic recession, a crisis sparked off by the abject failure of the private banking system, the need for a new state-owned post office bank is more pressing than ever.

Parliamentary backers of the plan include MPs Roger Gale (Conservative: North Thanet), Jon Cruddas (Labour: Dagenham) and Vince Cable (LibDem: Twickenham), all of whom addressed the launch event, explaining how Post Bank could help their constituents.

North Thanet and Dagenham contain some of the highest levels of social deprivation in southeast England and both Mr Gale and Mr Cruddas were at pains to inject a sense of urgency into the debate, highlighting the damage that the recession is wreaking both on communities and on the small businesses on which their local economies depend.

Stressing the dangers of not taking swift action, the Essex MP warned: "We've got to deliver this as soon as possible - the clock is ticking" and his Kent colleague agreed, insisting: "We've got to do it now."

Mr Cable, who leads for his party on economic affairs, vowed to urge all of his fellow Liberal Democrat MPs to sign up to Mr Cruddas's Early Day Motion (EDM) 1082, which calls on the government to set up Post Bank and which, as Voice went to press, had already gathered 94 signatories. "This is a sound banking idea based on public service," explained Mr Cable, adding: "It captures the spirit of our times."

Conservative and Labour front-bench spokesmen also spoke favourably of the initiative, but were less specific as to whether they would back the plan.

Minister of State for Employment and Postal Affairs Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) agreed that an enhanced banking role would help in securing the future of the post office

network, but argued that this was the key objective, rather than debating whether the Post Office should create a new bank or further develop its current partnership arrangements with Bank of Ireland.

And opposition postal affairs spokesman Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) struck a similarly non-committal note, also agreeing that safeguarding our post offices was crucial, but, while promising that his party would "review" the Post Bank proposal, he stressed that this was "the start of the process."

Veteran socialist Tony Benn began his contribution by reminding the audience that he was "the last surviving Postmaster General," in a reference to the government post that he held during the 1960s.

"I had the pleasure of setting up Girobank," he recalled, pointing to its similarities with today's Post Bank proposal, which he described as "exciting."

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes said that he was "delighted" with the breadth of support for the Post Bank initiative.

"It's great to see that this idea has already won the backing of people right across the political divide," he said, adding: "Post Bank will be a true People's Bank and we urge government to move swiftly to endorse this proposal."

Deputy general secretary Dave Ward said that, as well as the positive social and economic role that Post Bank could play within UK society as a whole, the new institution could also help to stabilise Royal Mail's future.

"It's another reason why we need to win the crucial struggle to keep Royal Mail wholly publicly owned as an integrated whole and resist any attempts to separate Post Office Limited from Royal Mail Group," Dave explained.

CWU national officer for post office workers Andy Furey welcomed the "momentum that Post bank has started to gather, right across the political spectrum" and added that the Coalition was seeking to arrange meetings with Chancellor Alistair Darling and Business Secretary Peter Mandelson to "press home the case for a Post Office people's bank." V

▲ Left: Roger Gale
Centre: Jon Cruddas
Right: Vince Cable

Post Bank - people's bank

Voice examines the case for the new bank and answers some of the questions that have been asked about why the campaign has been launched and how Post Bank would operate...

Crisis hit our private banking sector last autumn, confidence in the commercial financial sector collapsed and we headed into recession, one which leading economists predict is likely to be the most severe for a generation.

And, as the effects of the banking crisis have worked their way through the economy, it has been the most vulnerable members of society - often those already suffering financial exclusion - who have been hit first, while small businesses and those working for them are facing bankruptcy and unemployment.

While government has, to date, tried to tackle this crisis by refinancing the banking system, opinions are divided as to whether this is likely to succeed and many are now calling for a different approach.

Post Bank - the benefits
Coalition members are convinced that a Post Bank would meet the demand for secure and trusted banking and start to regenerate the crucial small businesses sector, while also including the excluded with a range of tailored products and services.

Another benefit that Post Bank would bring is that it would protect the future viability of our post office network, safeguard existing jobs and create new opportunities, both at the

counter and in support roles.

Who would finance it?
Start-up funding should, initially, come from central government and this would continue until Post Bank became self-funding. Profits would then be invested into operations and into local communities to help underpin services directed at small businesses and those who suffer from financial exclusion.

A small and transparent fee could be charged for the administration of accounts and other products which would safeguard customers from high bank charges. Crucially, the establishment of this new bank would not incur bad debt for the taxpayer.

How will it be different?
Post Bank can provide a real alternative to the highly concentrated commercial banks.

It will focus on relationship banking, providing trusted banking products and innovative services that are really needed. It will have a positive strategy of linking with organisations which have social aims such as credit unions, CDFIs and debt advisory bodies. Post Bank would provide all core banking products, including current accounts, debit facilities

and access to credit and there will be no hidden or exorbitant charges, no big bonuses, large executive pay packages or shareholders to swallow profits.

Would Brussels allow it?
Many European countries already have Post Banks and others, such as France, have recently established them, with no objections from the EU.

And Brussels has given the green light to our government to support the post office network, approval which was given partly because of the existing banking facilities provided through the Post Office Card Account.

And, if Post Bank was set up, and was successful, subsidies would gradually reduce over time.

How about the workers?
Post Bank can only help to provide security and new opportunities for our members.

Our POL members are already trained to provide various financial services to the public, including ISAs, insurance and bonds. Currently, due to training programmes already negotiated by the CWU, there are currently 428 financial service specialists in POL and there is an aim of having a total of 640 of our members lifted up to this level by the end of this year.



Billy Hayes



Tony Benn



The CWU argues that the law must be strengthened to ensure that workers have legal protection from potentially dangerous dogs

MPs set to debate dog law

Key political support for laws protecting postal workers and other public-service employees could see the introduction of new legislation across the UK sooner rather than later, according to CWU national health, safety and environment officer Dave Joyce.

Following determined and high-profile campaigning led by the union, and in response to some vicious attacks on our members, the need for tough action against irresponsible dog owners has risen sharply up the political agenda over recent months.

In July, Sheffield Hillsborough MP Angela Smith will be launching a Private Member's Bill aimed at providing new protections for workers whose jobs involve entering private premises.

But, while Ms Smith's Bill is already expected to win widespread support from Parliament, backing from government is crucial to its chances of actually becoming law.

With this objective in mind, Dave

and the Sheffield MP are seeking a meeting with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Minister of State Jane Kennedy to discuss the issue further and urge her to back the Bill.

"This is a long-overdue reform," explained Dave, adding: "Crucially, it would apply the provisions of dangerous dogs legislation equally on private as well as public ground.

"The new law would also allow police forces and local authorities to be proactive rather than just reactive in tackling potentially dangerous dogs. They would, for example, be able to issue control orders - which have been dubbed "dog asbos" to out-of-control animals before, rather than after, dangerous attacks take place."

Some objections have been made to the proposals on the basis that they could be interpreted as an attack on the right of householders to use their dogs to defend against burglars or other unwelcome visitors.

But the CWU and its supporters insist that these concerns can easily be addressed if the new law is framed in such a way as to provide protection - and legal redress - specifically for those whose jobs oblige them to enter private property during the course of their normal duties.

And Dave is also keen to remind people that dog attacks are not only an issue for CWU members.

"This is not just a hazard for our members who deliver post or provide and repair telephone services. Employees of utility companies such as gas and electric engineers, refuse collectors and care workers are also often at risk from dangerous dogs in private premises," he pointed out.

As well as making the case at Westminster, the CWU has also made progress on the issue in other parts of the UK.

South of Scotland MSP Christine Grahame is piloting a Private

Member's Bill through the Edinburgh Parliament, which has a degree of devolved authority in many of these matters.

And, the union is optimistic that moves can be made towards similar new legal protections for public-service workers in Northern Ireland, where Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Michelle Gildernew has recently completed a comprehensive review of various aspects of animal welfare legislation and discussion is currently taking place over possible new laws.

Dave plans to meet with Ms Gildernew, who represents the Fermanagh and South Tyrone Constituency at both Stormont and Westminster, next month to press the union's case further.

The Welsh Assembly has fewer legislative powers than either the Scottish Parliament or Northern Ireland Assembly and, therefore, progress in Wales will, to a large extent, depend on Westminster.

CWU hails new recycling plan

CWU assistant secretary Martin Collins told *Voice* that the union is "very pleased" with the successful trials of the Simply Drop initiative.

The plan, which is backed by both Royal Mail and the CWU, uses the company's unique national network to give people the chance to ensure that their old and unwanted electrical items can be either recycled or disposed of in an environmentally friendly way.

Not only can people "do their bit" for our environment, they can also receive cash for their efforts - depending on the value, make, model and state of repair of the item.

Recent years have witnessed an unprecedented rise in ownership of mobile phones, MP3 players and digital cameras, but, as new and improved models appear on the market, millions of us are constantly "upgrading."

And, too often, unless a friend or family member wants the item, older models - even in full working order - are simply thrown away, contributing to our growing refuse disposal difficulties.

According to Royal Mail, only 11 per cent of us either resell or recycle our unwanted mobiles phones and the figure falls even further for MP3 players and digital cameras.

Simply Drop is the ideal way to keep these items in use, bringing together unwanted items with people willing to buy them, or ensuring that the parts are reused. Any that cannot be reused will be disposed of safely - not in landfill sites.

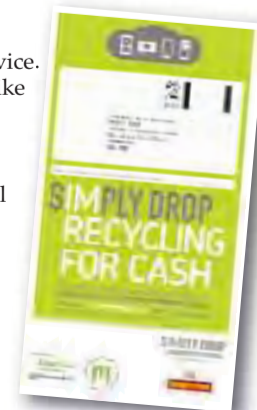
Following successful trials in two London boroughs, Simply Drop is due to be rolled out across the capital in the summer and there are plans to introduce the scheme nationwide next year, although Royal Mail has already sent Simply Drop envelopes to most employees.

Martin Collins explains: "All you will need to do is check the value of your item at www.simplydrop.co.uk then register with the site and post your item in one of the Simply Drop envelopes.

"And there's a third good reason for taking part in the scheme," Martin continues, "some 10 per cent of all profits generated and the value of unregistered items go to children's charity Barnardo's.

"We are pleased with the success of this initiative, which we hope will help to reduce electrical waste in the UK, while also providing an innovative service.

"And we'd like to say: 'Well done', to our people at Greenford Mail Centre in Middlesex, where these Simply Drop envelopes are being sent."



SE Trains agree not to repeat ad

Southeastern Trains has agreed not to repeat advertising posters featuring an image of a postal worker being chased by a dog after complaints that the campaign made a joke of a serious issue.

Last month, the union's national health and safety officer Dave Joyce wrote to the train company after its

posters urging passengers to buy season tickets by post - reproduced left - were brought to his attention.

Explaining the seriousness of the subject, Dave told train chiefs: "6,000 postmen and women get attacked, bitten and mauled by dogs every year whilst on duty and it's no joke."

In response to the complaints,

Southeastern Trains head of communications Sarah Boundy insisted that the advert was "not produced with any malice," and "wasn't intended to cause offence," but she promised: "As we replace the adverts at our stations we'll make sure that this particular one isn't used again."

Union holds protest at Labour's policy forum



CWU members and supporters protesting outside Labour's national policy forum in Bristol

CWU members and supporters gathered outside the Labour Party's national policy forum in Bristol at the end of February to lobby delegates and urged them to stand by party policy and reject Lord Mandelson's mail sale plans.

Addressing the lobby, Billy Hayes General Secretary said, "wherever the government goes, we will be there to tell them the public don't want this sale and the Labour Party don't want this sale."

Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our union was general union GMB general secretary Paul Kenny, who assured protesters that his union is "fully behind postal workers" and would "continue to

campaign against the sale."

The protest followed a lively public meeting the previous evening, at which local MP Roger Berry (Kingswood) told the audience why he has signed up to Morecambe and Lunesdale MP Geraldine Smith's Early Day Motion (EDM) 428.

The EDM calls on the government to keep to its pre-election promise - and for the Labour Party to keep to its democratically agreed policy - to keep Royal Mail wholly in public ownership.

Bristol branch secretary Dave Wilshire told Voice that people in the west country city were "overwhelmingly opposed" to Lord

Mandelson's privatisation plans.

"We've been out in the city centre and at the railway stations, handing out campaign postcards to members of the public and explaining the issues at stake," he explained, pointing out that the postcards are intended to be sent on to MPs by their constituents and urge them to sign up to EDM 428.

"We've given out hundreds of them," said Dave, who added that, to date, although one of the city's Labour MPs, Rodger Berry (Kingswood), has signed up to the EDM, Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) and Dan Norris (Wansdyke) having not yet done so as Voice went to press.

"From the hundreds if not thousands of people we've spoken to in Bristol and the surrounding area, opposition to the sell off is overwhelming," Dave explained, "and, in the light of this strength of feeling among the public, we're urging Mr Norris and Ms McCarthy to think again.

"Democracy is about representing the people and representing the people must be about keeping promises.

"We're going to keep on urging these three MPs to keep the promise they collectively made to the people who voted for them and vote to Keep the Post Public," insisted the Bristol branch secretary.

Burslem impasse could spark strike action

Around 1,600 postal workers in the Stoke-on-Trent area may vote on strike action if stubborn Royal Mail chiefs continue to deny four Burslem workers the justice that they deserve.

Back in autumn 2007, a total of 12 Burslem postal workers were victimised by the company on what the union has always insisted were "trumped-up charges," and a blatant attempt by Royal Mail to try to weaken the CWU in the area.

After a five-week strike, the company agreed to allow the men the right of appeal and, last year, six of the men were reinstated after winning their hearings.

Of the remaining six, CWU rep Jason Cornwall won reinstatement after winning his national appeals panel hearing, but his fellow rep Dave Scarrett was left with no alternative but to take his case to an

external Industrial Tribunal, after a split panel failed to agree his innocence of the charges against him.

Another of the victimised reps has decided to leave the postal service in pursuit of an alternative career - choosing not to pursue his case any further.

The three other Burslem men - Paul Malyan, Dave Evans and Mick Gardner - are still awaiting the outcome of their internal Royal Mail appeals, hearings which have been repeatedly delayed and had been due to be heard at the end of March.

CWU midlands regional secretary Lee Barron explained to Voice that, if Royal Mail fails to reinstate the trio, then the union will support them taking their cases to an Industrial Tribunal along with Dave Scarrett.

"All these men have done absolutely nothing wrong and we want them all reinstated," insisted Lee.

"We in the CWU will continue to give them our full support until justice has finally been delivered."



Lee Barron (left) with some of the Burslem men

InBrief

Woolavington optimism

Postal workers in Woolavington, fighting to save their village's under-threat sorting office received a further boost last month when Royal Mail bosses extended the lease arrangements on their current site for a further three months. The three members of staff hit the headlines back in January when they held what was dubbed "the smallest ever strike" in protest at plans to shut the facility and shift its work to the town of Bridgwater. The action, which was widely supported by local residents, persuaded the company to shelve its plans and seek an alternative site in the village, while this latest extension has raised hopes that a long-term solution is now imminent. "Royal Mail are looking at sites within the village and seem to have one site in particular in mind, so it looks like good news for Woolavington," said local branch secretary Dave Wilshire.

Organising for the future

Branch secretaries, regional secretaries and divisional reps are being invited to take part in a four-day Leading in Organising course later this month aimed at ensuring that the CWU maintains momentum in the crucial area of recruiting and growing the union's membership. "Three of the four days will take place at national education centre in Alvescott," explains CWU senior field organiser, "and the other day will be at Congress House in London, where we have managed to arrange a seminar, to be delivered by Marshall Gann, who masterminded the Obama campaign." Last year, Lynne spearheaded the Organising Ambassadors (OAs) training course, which trained 91 CWU members in recruitment and organising methods. The Leading in Organising scheme is aimed at helping the union's more senior lay CWU officials to run regular organising events and initiatives with the newly trained OAs.

Businesses back network

Small business leaders have called on government to halt any further post office closures after a survey revealed fears that continued decline could hit trade. A study by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) indicated that a massive 80 per cent of its members depend on post offices both for mail and other key business transactions, while almost half - 47 per cent - said that they visited their local branch at least twice a week. Summing up the feelings of his members, FSB industrial policy spokesman Clive Davenport explained: "The current system is not operating efficiently, which is leaving small businesses wasting valuable time travelling to another post office or waiting in queues. We are urging the government to ensure that we have a fully operating postal service to serve the needs of all of our 4.7 million small businesses," he added.



Andy Parrish (left) with the young stars of Hull TUC FC holding the CWU Keep the Post Public campaign banner

Northeast campaign

As Voice went to press, our CWU North East Region reported "excellent support" from both MP's and the public for the union's "Keep the Post Public" campaign.

Regional secretary Paul Clays told Voice that nineteen North East MP's - including four Parliamentary secretaries - had signed EDM 428.

"And we are getting overwhelming support from the public," added Paul, whose region has organised high-street campaigning activities almost every weekend since the launch.

In Hull, CWU branch political

officer Andy Parrish and branch secretary Karl Turner planned to take their case against Royal Mail privatisation direct to the town's three MPs.

Hull currently has three Labour MPs - Secretary of State for Health Alan Johnson (Hull West and Hessle) Diana Johnson (Hull North) and former Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott (Hull East).

"Hopefully, we can convince them that selling off Royal Mail would be a big mistake," said Andy.

Andy has also taken the union's message onto the football field,

winning the support of Hull TUC, the local trade union-sponsored under-16 football team that he runs.

"Our branch and the Yorkshire and Humberside TUC have been sponsoring this team for the last five years," Andy explained, adding that, along with the football training, he also tries to encourage the youngsters to play in a sporting and "ethical" way.

And, as many of the lads are just coming up to the age when they're thinking about their future careers, I advise them that, when they start work, they should join a union."

Sussex backs CWU



Postal services are vital for UK communities

Sussex CWU members were joined by prospective Labour Party candidate for Brighton Pavilion Nancy Platts when they took their Keep the Post Public fight out to the public last month.

After a busy afternoon in the south-coast town, handing out leaflets to passers-by and asking shoppers to sign a local campaign petition against the sale, Ms Platts told Voice why this issue was so dear to her heart.

"I just don't buy into the idea that the only way to create efficiencies is to privatise services," she explained, arguing that, "instead of generating profit for shareholders, a well-run public service should be investing in staff training and business development."

Looking back at how previous privatisations have failed the public, the Labour hopeful pointed out:

"Privatising the railways has created more problems than it solved and we should not repeat this mistake with the Royal Mail - it must be protected as a publicly owned universal service run for people, not for profit."

Local CWU branch secretary Mickey Bowles, who organised the activity, warned that the sellout would be a disaster for postal workers and the general public, right across the county.

"Sussex postal services and jobs would be hit hard," he predicted, explaining: "The government proposal will allow a private company to cream off the most profitable parts of the Royal Mail whilst neglecting deliveries to the public and post offices."

"Everything Royal Mail needs - investment for modernisation, improved services to the public and protection of jobs - can only be delivered under full public ownership."



Andy Kerr, Jim McGovern and Billy Hayes

Image credit: Mark Newton

Scotland rejects mail sale plan

Determined Scottish campaigners sent Westminster politicians homeward to think again last month after warning them that the nation is united against Lord Mandelson's mail sale.

Dundee was the venue for this year's Scottish Labour Party conference, where party members heard key speeches from Prime Minister Gordon Brown and several other senior government figures.

And the historic city is also the constituency of party loyalist Jim McGovern, who resigned as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Postal Affairs Minister Pat McFadden in protest at the proposed sellout last December.

After Lord Mandelson and Mr McFadden announced their plan to try to ditch Labour's long-standing commitment to Keep the Post Public, Mr McGovern stepped down from his government position, furious at the policy u-turn.

"It beggars belief," the Dundee East member commented at the time, adding: "In all conscience yesterday, the statement that was made, I could not support."

As delegates arrived for last month's conference - which was also attended by CWU general secretary Billy Hayes and deputy general secretary (telecoms) Andy Kerr - CWU members urged them to back the union's campaign and to follow

Mr McGovern's example in staying loyal to party policy.

Fife and Central CWU area delivery rep Mark Newton described the mood of delegates that he spoke to as "overwhelmingly supportive."

"And ordinary members of the public are backing our campaign too," he added.

"No-one we've spoken to has said that they back the sale and we've campaigned here in Dundee, as well as the Prime Minister's Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath constituency - there's no support for privatisation up here."

"We can win, but we've got to concentrate on working in the constituencies," explained Mark.

These stories are featuring
on Sky and online on

Bilston CWU members leading last month's demonstration through the Black Country town

Image credit: Phil Graham: FILMAR



Dave Ward

Image credit: Phil Graham: FILMAR

Rochdale public press local MP

Members of Oldham & Rochdale CWU branch attracted "hundreds of signatures" from the public when they spent a Saturday afternoon campaigning against privatisation in Rochdale town centre last month.

Local activists Ted Stead and Saf Khan told Voice that people were angry at the government and also with their own MP Paul Rowen, who has supported Lord Mandelson's rebellion against Labour Party policy.

Reporting "overwhelming support" from townsfolk, Ted and Saf said that people had taken postcards to fill in and send off to Mr Rowen, urging him to stick with the Labour Party and support its longstanding anti-privatisation stance by signing up to EDM 428.

CWU North West regional secretary Carl Webb congratulated the pair for a hard day's work and revealed that the branch is planning further events in both of the towns that it covers, "to raise the profile of the campaign even higher and to put pressure on those local politicians who support privatisation."



Saf Khan and Ted Stead

Activists take fight to Minister's Constituency

Hundreds of CWU members and their supporters marched through Bilston, Wolverhampton, last month against the Royal Mail sale.

The Black Country town - the Parliamentary Constituency of Minister of State for Postal Affairs Pat McFadden - witnessed one of its biggest demonstrations for many years as protesters chanted: "Royal Mail - not for sale" to the accompaniment of drums and whistles.

Union members proudly paraded their local branch and regional banners, Bilston postal workers leading the procession bearing their own strongly worded message to their own MP and his boss Lord Mandelson.

And it was no surprise that the Business Secretary was the number one target of the marchers' anger, their reworking of the old "Maggie,

Maggie Maggie" chant from the 1980s into: "Mandy Mandy Mandy - Out! Out! Out!" leaving our unelected Minister in no doubt as to the anger that his mail sale plan has created.

Also evident at Bilston was the growing support that our union's Keep the Post Public campaign is winning from across the labour movement, banners from fellow public-service unions UNISON and PCS indicating that the anti-privatisation fight has many fronts, while local teachers from Dudley NUT branch also marched with us.

And, carrying out TUC general secretary Brendan Barber's recent pledge of solidarity on behalf of the nation's seven million trade unionists, his Midlands regional secretary Roger Mackenzie led delegations marching under the Wolverhampton, Mansfield and Nottingham TUC banners.

Arriving in the town centre,

marchers packed into Imperial House, to hear a range of speakers outline the successes of the campaign so far and spell out the next steps.

Wolverhampton and Bilston Branch political officer Dave Jones reminded the audience that the CWU had defeated privatisation plans in the past and warned Lord Mandelson that he had "picked a fight with the wrong people."

And Dave refused to accept government claims that the proposed sellout would improve the service, arguing: "Privatisation is all about the fat cats and we would have to pay the price with our jobs."

Bilston Labour councillor Phil Page said that he was at the march because the CWU had always supported other workers in struggle in the past "and we're against privatisation."

Our union's campaign takes to the skies in Manchester



Our campaign lifts off in Manchester

Image credit: Tony Williams

Manchester CWU campaigners released 374 balloons at their city centre rally to symbolise the number of years that Royal Mail has provided a vital public service to our nation.

Local MPs Graham Stringer (Manchester Blackley) and Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) - both of whom are Labour loyalists who have supported EDM 428 - addressed the public, Mr Stringer describing Lord Mandelson's proposal as a "pretty strange and bizarre objective" and predicted that this campaign would be won or lost in the "court of public opinion."

The Manchester MP highlighted the massive extra costs that the UK taxpayer had been burdened with by the privatisation of our railways - an estimated £4 billion per year - and pointed out that this was not a good example for Royal Mail to follow.

As well as opposing the principle of privatisation, Mr Hoyle also criticised the timing of the planned sale, asking: "Who on earth tries to sell something off in the middle of a major credit crunch?"

"Even if you believed in privatisation, you couldn't begin to get the best value for the tax payer. So that in itself is a complete nonsense," argued the Chorley MP.

"Let us be the ones who stand firm. We mustn't give in - we must stand together."

TUC North West region secretary Alan Manning brought the fraternal greetings and support of the rest of the trade union movement as a whole and then went on to question the government's attempts to justify the sellout by claiming that private-sector expertise was needed in Royal Mail.

"Would that be the kind of private sector management expertise that has been so successful in Northern Rock and HSBC and the Royal Bank of Scotland?" he asked.

"Is it the private sector management expertise that has been so successful in delivering us clean hospitals? Or is that private sector management expertise that was so successful in delivering maintenance

of Railtrack so that we had to bring it back into some form of public ownership?"

"The arguments don't wash - it is illogical," Mr Manning concluded.

And Labour MEP for North West England Brian Simpson also pledged his full backing for the union's fight to preserve Royal Mail.

The Labour government must, he insisted, "go back to our fundamental principles that essential services should remain publicly owned and publicly funded."

And, in response to those who seek to pass the blame for the privatisation onto the European Union, Mr Simpson pointed out that Lord Mandelson's plan, and the decision as to whether or not it will go ahead "rests solely with the UK Government."

"Never at any time has the ownership of the national postal administrations ever been discussed by the European Parliament or the European Union. That is an issue for member states to decide," he spelled out.

CAMPAIGN MESSAGE HITS HOME

February saw the national launch of the public phase of the union's Keep the Post Public campaign, which got off to a flying start at a high-profile rally held right in the heart of Westminster, where leaders of all of the largest UK trade unions expressed their support and solidarity for the CWU and its fight to save our postal service...

General union GMB general secretary Paul Kenny praised the Labour loyalist MPs who have signed Morecambe and Lunesdale MP Geraldine Smith's Early Day Motion (EDM) 428 urging Labour to keep its promise not to privatise Royal Mail.

"I say to those MPs: 'You stick with it and we'll stick with you'," urged Mr Kenny, and, after denouncing Lord Mandelson's sly attempt to reverse party policy, the leader of over 600,000 workers clearly struck a chord with the audience when he asked: "In whose name has this been put forward? Not in my name."

Civil-service union PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka drew attention to the tradition of solidarity that has always been respected by the CWU in the past, pointing out: "Every time we or any other union has had a dispute, CWU members have refused to cross picket lines."

"Now is the time for every other union to show the same solidarity to you," he continued, promising: "If there is industrial action, you will get the full and unequivocal support of PCS."

As the launch rally continued, speaker after speaker proved Mr Serwotka's point, pledging their solidarity and the backing of their unions for our fight to save our postal service.

Building workers' union UCATT leader Alan Ritchie, Bob Crow and Gerry Doherty - of rail unions RMT and TSSA respectively - added their promises of support, while train drivers' union ASLEF was represented by district officer Mick Whelan and FBU president Mick Shaw pledged the backing of Britain's firefighters and Neil Anderson brought an international flavour to the day with a message of solidarity from worldwide union federation UNI.

A delighted Billy Hayes said that the

rally had been "an enormous morale-booster" for the CWU.

"If we can all stand together - this is a fight we can win," he insisted.

POLITICAL SUPPORT

As well as winning backing from right across the UK trade union movement, the Westminster campaign launch also showed the growing political support for our union's stance.

Veteran socialist Tony Benn won the first of the day's standing ovations when he took to the podium, having just been told during Billy Hayes's introduction of CWU plans to award him honorary membership of the union.

"I'd rather be an honorary CWU member than a member of the House of Lords," quipped the former Postmaster General, who told the rally that the fight against privatisation is "a battle we've got to win."

"You've got 100 per cent support from the unions and the backing of the public, who rely on the service you provide."

"I just hope the Prime Minister and Mandelson realise what they're up against and that they cannot win," Mr Benn added.

And members of the audience were up on their feet once again to welcome Geraldine Smith, whose EDM 428 has now been signed by 146 Labour Party loyalists, MPs who are determined not to allow Lord Mandelson to unilaterally rip up the party's democratically decided policy.

Looking back to the last attempt by a government to privatise Royal Mail back in 1994, Ms Smith, who was an employee of the company at that time, recalled: "We won then and we can win again this time."

Several of Ms Smith's Parliamentary colleagues - and EDM signatories - also



Brendan Barber



Dave Prentis



Mark Serwotka



Image credit: Paris Jefferson

spoke at our rally, Frank Dobson (Holborn and St Pancras) describing Lord Mandelson's plans in footballing terms, saying that, as a football fan, he was "familiar with the concept of the own goal, but this is like an own goal in a penalty shootout," while Michael Connarty MP (Linlithgow and Falkirk East), pointed out: "The Post Office is more popular than any politician."

Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) reminded the gathering that "you've been victorious over this before and, if we all stay united, this union can be victorious again" and the outspoken John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) promised postal workers: "In Parliament or on the picket line - I'll be there with you."

Two other speakers gave a sharp reminder of how the threat of postal privatisation is raising fears among the general public that it risks damaging the vital services both to businesses and to some of society's more vulnerable individuals.

Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) industrial policy spokesman Clive Davenport stressed that his members "are right behind this, we want a regular and reliable service and we don't want privatisation," while National Pensioners Convention vice-president Dot Gibson complained that Britain's elderly people were "at the butt-end of this."

"At every step, we are together and we'll be right behind you in this campaign"

'MARCH' ON PARLIAMENT

After the rally concluded, the audience filed out onto the pavement outside, where press and television journalists scrambled to film and photograph our members.

Holding up the union's Keep the Post Public banner, CWU members chanted:

"Royal Mail - not for sale," as central London's busy streets rang out to the sounds of hundreds of angry postal workers.

Such was the commotion that police officers had to ask CWU members to move on, amid concerns that the event could turn into an impromptu demonstration.

And so move on they did, carrying their banners, placards and flags and adding a new chant aimed directly at Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Lord Mandelson.

"Mandy, Mandy Mandy - Out! Out! Out!" they chanted, furious at the unelected Minister's unprincipled attempt to single-handedly rewrite the Labour Party's democratically decided pledge to keep the UK postal service wholly publically owned.

For the few minutes that it took for everyone to walk the short distance from Central Hall to the Houses of Parliament - where members had arranged to lobby their Constituency MPs - it almost seemed as if the union had marched on Westminster.

Regional and branch CWU banners, representing postal workers from all corners of the UK, were proudly held aloft on Parliament Green, as union members patiently waited to meet and speak to their political representatives - to urge them to back the union's fight to Keep the Post Public and to add their names to Ms Smith's EDM 428.

Summing up the day's event, a delighted Billy Hayes thanked rank-and-file postal workers for turning out for the rally and lobby from right across the nation.

"It's been a marvellous launch to the campaign and I'm more convinced than ever that this is a fight we can win," he insisted. V

A special feature on the 'Keep the Post Public' campaign is now featuring on



Showing online on demand at www.cwu.org and on Information TV, Sky Channel 166, at 10am on Tuesdays, 3pm on Thursdays, 10am on Saturdays and 6pm on Sundays



The battle in Parliament

While the campaign around the country has started to step up and intensify, Lord Mandelson's Postal Services Bill is encountering stiffening political opposition to his privatisation plans...

As Voice went to press, members of the House of Lords were beginning their deliberations on Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Lord Mandelson's Postal Services Bill.

The reason why this Bill - unlike almost all other legislation - is originating in the House of Lords is because new laws are, by convention, introduced and championed by the Secretary of State who heads the relevant government department.

And, in this case, that man is the unelected Lord Mandelson.

There are two "readings" of the Bill, before the respective "committee" and "report" stages, after which the Bill is "read" by the Lords for a third time and then, if passed, it moves onto the House of Commons, where it proceeds through the same stages.

Lord Mandelson introduced the Bill to the Lords in February - the "first reading," which is an introductory session - and the Bill's "second reading" took place last month.

Following the Business Secretary's opening speech, former UCW deputy general secretary Tony Clarke - now a member of the House of Lords with the title "Lord Clarke of Hampstead" - spoke strongly in opposition, pointing out the damage that privatisation would do to the UK postal service.

"This great postal service of ours must be protected and nurtured and this Bill is not in the best interests of the public," he argued, urging his fellow Lords to "send this Bill back where it came from."

But, despite his opposition, the Bill passed its second reading - largely because many Lords wanted the chance to put forward amendments - and headed into the "committee" stage, where all proposed new laws are scrutinised in detail and changes are proposed.

And, as if to prove the union's warnings about the many shortcomings of the Bill, its first committee day saw 98 amendments being tabled by members.

Billy Hayes commented that the high number of amendments indicated that

Lord Mandelson had "misjudged the interest in and importance of Royal Mail."

"Lord Mandelson was hoping by putting this Bill through the House of Lords that it would have a smooth and swift passage, but it's clear that the Lords understand the problems facing Royal Mail and are prepared to get to grips with these in detail," added Billy.

Among the amendments proposed are several backed by Tony Clarke, which call for the words "...owned in its entirety by the Crown..." to be inserted into the part of the Bill which deals with ownership.

Billy said that the CWU was "proud" of the efforts made by Tony on behalf of the union and for the future of the service.

These changes will be debated by the House as the committee stage proceeds during April.

And, if the rate of progress during the first committee session is a guide - only two paragraphs of the bill were dealt with - then this legislative process is likely to be extremely slow.

▲ Left: Central London echoes to the chants of angry postal workers

Right: Dave Ward



Geraldine Smith



Tony Woodley



Paul Kenny

Setting a positive agenda

Dave Ward explains how important it is that our union's campaign builds on its early momentum by starting to outline our own positive alternatives to privatisation and decline...

The campaign so far has been very effective. It has received huge attention from the media - both at local and national level - and has put pressure on the government.

Parliamentary supporters of our Keep the Post Public campaign have continued to sign Morecambe and Lunesdale MP Geraldine Smith's Early Day Motion (EDM) 428, which, at the time of writing totalled 176.

Crucially, this means that, if the government refuses to change course, privatisation can only get through the House of Commons with the support of the opposition Conservative Party.

No surprise then, that we are now hearing noises about "alternative forms of ownership" from sources close to power.

Whether this is accurate or just rumour remains to be seen, but it is clear that the government has been taken aback somewhat by the sheer strength of opposition to Lord Mandelson's plan and the tenacity with which our union has fought back.

And, as you can see in the preceding pages, this has

been down to the hard work of our CWU members nationwide, who have got busy writing to and meeting MPs, holding rallies and protests or spending their Saturday afternoons leafleting and petitioning in their local high streets.

Once again, it's quite clear there's no other union like the CWU for the sheer scale of commitment, dedication and determination of our members and we're all proud of every one of you.

While the privatisation Bill continues to make its way through the committee stage of the House of Lords, our campaign will continue its journey across the length and breadth of the UK - visiting every major city in every region of the nation.

While we turn up the political heat, we will also keep up the industrial pressure.

Defeating privatisation is, of course, absolutely crucial for the future of Royal Mail, but, in and of itself, defeating privatisation does not represent the winning post.

It is essential that we secure the future of our members' pensions and that

we build a positive industrial relations framework within a constructive environment.

In summary, we want true modernisation.

1. Which benefits our members and improves services to the public.
2. That protects jobs by creatively, and jointly, developing innovative new products and services.
3. And brings in new revenue streams to help stabilise finances and ensure our members receive their just rewards for their efforts.

Our message to government is clear: Keep your promise to Keep the Post Public, fulfil your obligations to resolve the pension fund crisis, improve the regulatory regime and allow Royal Mail to operate on a level playing field.

And our message to Royal Mail is equally clear.

Work with us for true modernisation.

Work with us to improve industrial relations and work with us to build a positive future for our members, for our industry and for this vital public service which so many of our people depend upon.

TOPIC OF THE MONTH



Is seniority fair for everyone?

I've been a postal worker for 13 years and have never thought of seniority as unfair even though I'm still relatively junior in my office.

So I'm guessing that Mr Scanlon (Voice letters Jan/Feb) has also got low seniority.

How does he feel loyalty should be rewarded if not by making the job less back breaking for those who have been carrying the post for many years more?

More to the point, unless someone comes up with a sensible argument - is there one? - why does Voice bother printing selfish rantings from people who only care about themselves?

We respect our parents and others who are senior to us, so why not do the same at work? After all, senior men and Women have done the hard years too!

Sandra, West Central Delivery Office, London

I agree with David James Scanlon (Voice letters Jan/Feb).

I remember much the same sort of treatment many years ago, when work from a senior man's duty would be lumped on to us.

This was done so that he could get back early and do another one on overtime - of course we'd got no chance of getting back early.

Much good work has been done over the years to redress the imbalance in most delivery offices, but, in others, it's the same now as it was then.

But it's the management who make up and adjust the size and content, not the senior postman or postwoman, so have a bash at them about it - with the help of course of your CWU union rep.

Good luck.

Colin Parker, Nottingham

Heartfelt thanks to all

Through your letters column, I would like to express my grateful thanks to my area branch secretary Phil Chadwick for his support, effort, dedication and input throughout the difficult times within my employment at Paignton Delivery Office from the period 2000 up to my retirement in October 2008, following over 30 years service.

These thanks are also extended to my area union rep Paul Wotton for his support.

Thank goodness I was in the Union, and feel that Phil and Paul deserve a medal for their tireless campaign on my behalf.

Clive Richard Russell, Paignton, Devon

You're wrong Mr Hooper

After reading through the Hooper report, the conclusion I came to was that this report was just a green light for the government to make big job losses, part-privatise Royal Mail and fully privatise it at a later date.

If the government goes down this route, then, within three years, Royal Mail employees will be wearing the white and orange of TNT.

Mr Hooper seemed to keep comparing Royal Mail to Deutsche post and TNT because they were making big profits, but the one main point that I saw was a graph showing the difference in price structure between the companies.

Royal Mail charges a flat fee for a letter up to 100 grams, but Deutsche post and TNT can charge three times as much for the same letter. If that price structure was applied to Royal Mail, then it would be making similar profits too.

I do disagree with the union on one point and that is I think that deliveries should be Monday to Friday only, which I think would increase staff morale and cut down on sick leave.

Gary Scales, Elm Park, Essex

Assistant secretary Bob Gibson replies: Most of Gary's letter I can understand, but I disagree with him on cutting down to Monday to Friday deliveries only, which would result in the loss of all rest day covers/floaters overnight without negotiation - around 17 per cent of delivery jobs.

This has been debated at conference and was massively defeated.

We also published a document for Branches which explained how this would impact on the industry. It would also result in a loss of contracts and revenue for Royal Mail. It may be popular in some small sections of the membership but it is certainly of no benefit to our members and would be an irresponsible approach from the union.

CWU - worth every penny

I would like to place on record my thanks to those two stalwarts of the Wolverhampton branch Dave Jones and Vera Kelsy for the help and advice they gave me prior to my retirement from Royal Mail.

With two dedicated workers for CWU members like Dave and Vera, it makes the CWU fee money well spent.

EA Loveridge, Stourbridge, West Midlands

Keep 'biting back' for us

May I express my best wishes to the Cambridgeshire postman who was savagely attacked by dogs before Christmas.

There can be very few delivery operatives who have not been at least startled if not scared or actually attacked by dogs while doing their duty rounds.

I was once knocked to the ground by an ex-RAF attack Alsatian - luckily they are trained to ground you but not to bite so I suffered only minor injuries and shock.

I was ok, but the dog was destroyed and this is the nub - it wasn't the dog's fault.

Most incidents like this are because the owner has lost, or never had, control of the animal, which is

plainly ridiculous when you can see the loyalty and obedience that can be achieved, for example at Crufts, with an animal that wants to know where it belongs in the pack and who is master; but only if the master can be bothered.

There needs to be strengthening of the legislation regarding big dogs both nationally and locally via government and local council.

Owners of all except very small dogs should have proper licensing, training certification and insurances that are regularly renewed to prove they are in control of this possibly harmful animal.

Nobody should have to be in the least bit worried, apprehensive or frightened in any way whatsoever during their workday, for any reason at all.

Simon Rickman, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire

Editor's note: Many thanks for your letter Simon. Page four of this edition features an article which updates readers on the progress achieved so far by the union in pursuit of changes in the law to protect public service workers from dangerous dogs.

Thought-provoking article

I refer to your interesting article on whether to legalise drugs.

While government needs to consider whether to waste police time as well as the cost to the NHS, our union needs to seriously consider the issue in relation to the Staff Conduct Code.

Managers are able to discipline when staff are found using drugs or alcohol and the union should push for a review of the Discipline Code & Guidance on ill health, particularly the use by management of their own medical advisers who are hardly independent.

Name and address supplied

Additional letters can be viewed on our website at: www.cwu.org/voice/

Royal Mail unfairness

I was reading the last edition of Voice and I came across the item about Jane Storey (Voice Jan/Feb Page Five).

I have worked for Royal Mail for over 11 years and, just before Christmas, I was forced to take two weeks off work with flu - my first absence for over six years

Despite my doctor's certificate, I was issued with a Stage One warning when I returned to work, which I thought was so unfair, particularly as I have turned up for work on a number of occasions feeling unwell but soldiered on as I didn't want to let the side down.

I was told by my manager and union rep that I could not appeal against my Stage One, but I believe we as a union should be fighting for a right to appeal against any warning, whatever stage it is.

Name and address supplied



These stories are featuring on Sky and online on



BT pay talks on knife edge

A ballot for industrial action in response to BT's refusal to budge from a proposed pay freeze for all UK staff - barring non-executive directors who have just received a 50 per cent hoist in their fees - was looking a distinct possibility as the Voice went to press.

Against a backdrop of total company intransigence on an emailed decree to all members of staff that a pay freeze was "the right thing to do", an emergency meeting of the CWU's Telecoms Executive unanimously agreed that unless BT changes tack, a ballot for strike action is inevitable.

While the proposed pay freeze includes senior management, those

individuals will still be eligible for performance related bonuses - though the company is claiming they will be "substantially lower" than in previous years.

It is the comparative pay position of non-execs and ordinary staff members, however, which provides the starkest contrast - with the decision to raise non-execs fees from £40,000 to £60,000 coming in the very same year that the value of the group's shares has fallen by 50 per cent.

Aside from the £60,000 basic fee, non-execs receive an additional £5,000 for sitting on a board committee and up to £15,000 for chairing a meeting. BT's largesse leaves some receiving

more than £100,000 for attending fewer than 20 meetings a year.

The CWU negotiating team has repeatedly made the argument that a pay freeze for CWU grades fails to recognise the pivotal contribution of ordinary employees at a time when the company is still making substantial profits and shareholders are still being paid dividends.

Pay talks came to an abrupt impasse on March 18, however, when BT negotiators indicated they were unable to move from their position. They said, however, they would consider the CWU's written response.

A further meeting was imminent at the time of printing - at which CWU

negotiators were again intent on underlining the importance of a fair pay award which properly rewards the talents and dedication of CWU members.

"We will also once again be emphasising the union's desire for a negotiated settlement, while making clear our intention to ballot for industrial action if necessary," deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told the Voice.

"There's no doubt we are dealing with a very challenging set of circumstances and facing a potentially serious situation on pay this year - but the union is committed to doing everything possible to try to find an agreed way forward."

ON THE WEB

View these Telecoms edition stories online at: www.cwu.org/voice/

Desperate times - bold action
As the sharpest recession in decades continues to buffet BT, the pressure is on as never before to protect members' jobs and terms and conditions. Under the codename 'Project Holborn', talks are presently underway to map out a way for the company to reduce costs without incurring compulsory redundancies that would inevitably trigger a major dispute with the CWU.



Fresh talks halt strike action at Airwave

Solid strike action in protest against Airwave's determination to make compulsory redundancies amongst CWU grades - even though the company is profitable - has secured an agreement with the company.

The developments came less than 24 hours after a very public show of employee disgust - and just in time to stop the second of three scheduled days of industrial action by workers who collectively maintain the secure digital communication network used by the combined ranks of Britain's emergency services.

Despite a strong public service ethos amongst those taking strike

action, what had incensed CWU members the most was not simply the fact that compulsory redundancies were being imposed by a profitable company - but a perception that bosses were intent on going down that route simply to flex their muscle.

While 95 job losses had originally been proposed, the success of the voluntary approach and redeployment has now eliminated any compulsory redundancies for CWU grades - managers and personal contract grades were not so fortunate.

In large part it was anger that

management was prepared to force the issue - even if it meant putting a vital public service at risk - that persuaded CWU members they had no option but to stand up for an important point of principle.

"Ultimately I don't think Airwave's private equity owners, Macquarie, believed we would take action, particularly if they managed to get the compulsory redundancies down to a very small number. If that's the case, they totally misunderstood the way in which a union like the CWU operates.

"It wasn't the number that was

important for us - it was about the impact on those individuals when quite clearly there was no reason why anyone should be forced to lose their jobs."

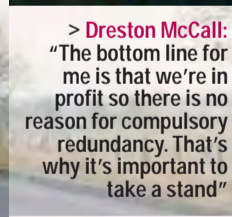
Commending members and the CWU's four Airwave reps for their courage in making a stand, Grace concluded: "I would certainly hope that Airwave would now think twice before embarking on an exercise like this without sitting down with the CWU and talking it through from start to finish.

"Had they done that this time, we may well have been able to avoid this dispute."

Pay breakthrough at O2
A pay deal which provides for a significant real-term increase for the vast majority of members at O2 was out to ballot as the Voice went to press. Significantly the three-pronged offer provides for an across-the-board 2 per cent rise for all members on O2 contracts in Customer Services. As such the deal goes some way to address long-held CWU concerns about lower pay rates amongst those employed on O2 contracts as opposed to those who transferred from BT.



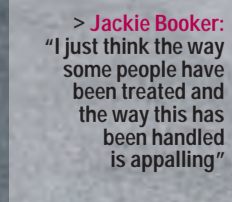
< **Chris Mason, lead CWU rep:**
"We simply won't accept compulsory redundancy - it's an absolute matter of principle for us"



> **Dreston McCall:**
"The bottom line for me is that we're in profit so there is no reason for compulsory redundancy. That's why it's important to take a stand"



< **Louise Western:**
"Taking action hasn't been easy for us because we all have a public conscience - but at the end of the day they treated us so badly we didn't have a choice"



> **Jackie Booker:**
"I just think the way some people have been treated and the way this has been handled is appalling"



Vodafone's "betrayal" of 200
Some 200 employees at Vodafone in Newcastle under Lyme learned they were to be sacked when they heard about it on the news. CWU members at the site are furious, not just at the manner of the announcement, but also by the fact that much of the work is being offshored to call centres in Egypt and India. They also feel betrayed that no effort was made to soften the blow by a voluntary redundancy exercise.



Making a stand: Airwave employees on the picket line at the company's headquarters near Rugby

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Chris Long 'will be sadly missed'



Tributes have been paid to the CWU's first national president, Chris Long who died in February, aged just 60, following a

short and sudden illness.

Chris's tenure of the most senior lay position within the union spanned a pivotal time for the newly formed CWU following the merger of the UCW and the NCU.

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge told the Voice: "He didn't have a nasty bone in his body; he never forgot his roots and continued to the end to represent the members' interests to the best of his ability.

"To say Chris will be missed is an under-statement...a funny, charming, unassuming, dear man who had such a big heart."

● Full tribute at www.cwu.org/voice/

Protesting for peace



CWU members in Northern Ireland were proud to join peace protests last month

Northern Ireland CWU Region joined a mass lunchtime gathering at Belfast City Hall this week, protesting at the recent murders carried out by dissident republicans.

The silent vigil, which was organised by the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, saw union members take to the streets in Belfast, Newry, Downpatrick & Craigavon and other major towns in the province.

Northern Ireland CWU regional secretary Lawrence Huston said that the protest marked "a clear demonstration by the trade union movement, and indeed the general

public, that these latest unacceptable atrocities will not derail the political agenda on peace and progress, which clearly has the widespread support of the people on all sides of the community.

"We must never return to the dark times of the past," he continued, adding: "In a short space of time, much has been achieved and the trade union movement must ensure we continue to make progress.

"Everyone has a basic right to live and work without fear and intimidation. The affiliates of the NIC ICTU strongly condemn violence from any quarter."

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Lord Young vows to tackle Britain's skills gap



Lord Young is keen to use his influence to help train a new generation of engineers

Lord Tony Young of Norwood Green talks with an infectious enthusiasm when it comes to the subject of apprentices and the skills agenda.

The former joint general secretary of the CWU - and now Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills and Apprenticeships - believes that this is one area where the Labour Government's success has not been recognised.

He points out there are now 250,000 people in apprenticeships with 64 per cent of those entering such vocational training now completing the course. This compares to 65,000 under the previous Conservative Government, when only 27 per cent completed the courses. "Our aim is that by 2013, every young person who wants an apprenticeship should be able to get a place. The target is

400,000 by 2020," said Tony, who points out that the range of apprenticeships has expanded from trades like engineering and plumbing to encompass IT, finance, health and social care.

Tony recognises, however, that with the economic downturn these are challenging times. "There is a concern that employers could see apprenticeships as something they could cut back on," said Tony, who took up his ministerial post last October. "We are saying think carefully, because businesses that cut back on training are 2.5 times more likely to fail."

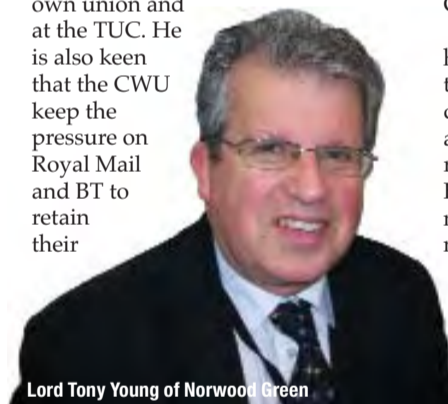
The picture at the moment is mixed, with some signs of firms cutting back while other companies like Rolls Royce, Sainsbury's, Carphone Warehouse and Network Rail among those committed to take on more apprentices.

Tony believes that the Olympic site is one area where apprenticeships can flourish, thereby making sure there is a skills legacy left by the Games. At present there are 350 apprenticeships at the site but Tony believes this can increase. He is also looking to the Crossrail project as another area for potential apprenticeships.

A former telecommunications apprentice in the Post Office himself, Tony believes that trade unions have a crucial part to play in promoting the skills agenda. "Unions need to ensure their members are well trained," said Tony, who paid tribute to the CWU for being in the vanguard of training among trade unions. "Because union learning reps are amongst the workforce they can convince people that it is worthwhile retraining to learn.

"Unions make it easier for those with literacy and numeracy problems to return to learning without any loss of self-esteem."

Tony paid special tribute to the role CWU general secretary Billy Hayes has played in promoting the learning agenda in his own union and at the TUC. He is also keen that the CWU keep the pressure on Royal Mail and BT to retain their



Lord Tony Young of Norwood Green

commitments to their respective apprentice schemes.

On the question of the future for Royal Mail, Tony sees the two vital issues as safeguarding the pension scheme and retaining the universal service. "We must ensure we maintain the pension scheme because a defined benefits pension scheme is a very valuable condition of service," said Tony. "The other priority must be to protect the universal service and defend the maximum number of jobs in the future. It is no easy task in a very competitive market place. It has been made more difficult by the past regulator but we have to recognise the challenge of technology."

Tony is also keen that whatever the outcome of the present argument over the future of Royal Mail that the union does not cut its links with the Labour Party.

"Union members must ask themselves: 'Are we seriously saying we would rather have a Tory Government in power after the next election?' he said, adding: "Will we fare better under a Tory Government? I don't think so."

The newly assigned minister hopes that some of the good things that the Labour Government has done in areas like skills and apprenticeships receive the recognition deserved in the media. He believes there is a bias to bad news stories in the media, good news just does not seem to figure. "There is so much good stuff this Government has done and in my own area there are all of those articulate apprentices happy in their work - why can't we hear more from them," he concludes.

CWU supports asylum claimant



Yahya Al Faifi campaigning for justice

The Government is seeking to deport a CWU member who fled Saudi Arabia and sought asylum in the UK after his life was threatened for trade union activity.

Yahya Al Faifi, his wife and children now face deportation, after his appeal against a refusal to grant asylum was declined.

An engineer, Yahya organised a trade union at BAE Systems in Saudi Arabia 2004 after the company announced it was cutting pay by 40 per cent. Yahya and two others were then sacked.

Yahya kept up the fight over a period of months but this resulted in his receiving repeated threats with a final warning to leave the country or the lives of his family could not be guaranteed.

On arriving in the UK, Yahya joined the CWU. In 2008 he spoke touchingly at the Black Workers' Conference about the plight of asylum seekers.

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes told the Voice: "The Home Office say that Yahya can't show any evidence of threats that he received in Saudi Arabia. Yet the Home Office must know that the regime in Saudi Arabia is a family dictatorship who have no respect for fundamental democratic or human rights.

"Does the Home Office believe the threats against Yahya should have been written in triplicate with a copy for Yahya to sign to prove he'd received it? This is a regime which uses arbitrary arrests, torture and execution against its opponents."

Billy concluded: "Yahya is a courageous activist. We must keep up our work in support of Yahya and his family - to ensure he is given residency in the UK."

Other supporters of his case include Ann Clwyd, MP, Jeremy Corbyn, MP, Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT and Mark Serwotka, general secretary of PCS.

Hunger striker wins fight for father

A CWU member from Truro went on hunger strike for five days to secure his father's employment status at B&Q.

Chris Shaw's father, Graham, has lived in the UK for the past 35 years after coming here from Kenya. He worked for the army and civil service before joining B&Q in 2007.

As proof of identity then he showed his P45 and also his MOD90 ID card, and everything seemed to be fine until, unbeknown to Graham, new employment regulations came into force.

"After a recent human resources audit my father was informed that he needed to produce a British passport or full driving licence due to a change in regulations," explains Chris, who works at the BT call centre in Truro.

"He does not drive and had previously found it difficult to apply for a passport," added Chris,

who confirmed a less than helpful attitude from the Home Office in resolving the matter.

With his father facing the loss of his job and maybe worse - and no help whatsoever forthcoming from officialdom - Chris concluded he had no option but to take desperate action to highlight the injustice of the case.

He decided to go on hunger strike to secure media attention and, after five days of self-imposed starvation, Chris attained his objectives. Under the glare of the media spotlight, B&Q declared that Chris's father has proved his status and his job is now safe.

The whole saga arose due to more stringent obligations placed on employers by the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006. This legislation places the onus on the employer to carry out a check and to keep copies of documents to show that an individual has the

right to work in the UK.

South West and Thames Valley branch secretary Matt Gillett told the Voice: "Chris has highlighted an important issue that affects not only his father but, potentially, a number of our other members.

"There's clearly an anomaly in the current legislation that needs to be addressed. Chris has taken a very principled stand on behalf of his father and the branch has been happy to support him by getting an emergency proposition - submitted and moved by our youth officer Sara Barnicoat - carried at the recent Youth Conference and enlisting the help of national officers such as general secretary Billy Hayes and assistant secretary Simon Sapper.

"Chris is one of a growing number of young members becoming active in the branch which bodes very well for the future of the union."



CWU Truro member Chris Shaw

DIVERSITY IN DEBATE - UNITY OF PURPOSE

Paul Donovan concludes his series of reports from this year's CWU sectional conferences, at which important debates took place over a range of key issues affecting our young, black, female and retired members, all of whom play a crucial role in the life of the union...



Delegates at the 2009 Youth Conference in London

YOUTH CONFERENCE - WE WANT HOMES, NOT BANK BAIL-OUTS!

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns called for the Government to invest in building houses rather than pouring money into the banking system.

Addressing the Youth Conference, Tony declared that "instead of bailing out the banks, the Government should be investing in sustainable housing. Otherwise young people will still be living at home with their parents into their 30s and 40s." Poignantly, his comments came just hours before the tragic death of relentless social housing campaigner, Alan Walter. (See obituary on facing page.)

Returning to the current economic downturn, Tony warned that even in the good times employers never give anything willingly to workers - and this is bound to intensify.

"There will be attacks on workers and we must be ready to confront them," said Tony, adding that unions must join forces on common causes and reach out to other groups in areas like the environment.

In debate, there was strong support for the motion calling for a high-profile campaign to counter the electoral threat posed by the BNP at the upcoming European elections on June 4.

Dave Firth from Greater Manchester Amal called for alliances to be forged with anti-fascist groups. "We need to get out the vote and prevent the BNP taking any seats in the European elections," said Dave.

The most heated debate of the day concerned a motion that had been taken off the pad that had expressed concern about "the extent to which many young activists are subject to treatment which may be construed as bullying and harassment within branches."

Despite the fact the motion had been withdrawn, delegates regarded the points it raised as so crucial that they

voted to suspend standing orders and held a 15-minute debate on the subject anyway.

Lisa Hadley from Greater Manchester Amal declared that bullying and harassment must be stopped - and her attitude towards the motion's withdrawal was unequivocal. "I'm here to do a job and you won't stand in my way," she said.

Jodie Pearce of Manchester Clerical declared that both the debate itself, and what people had said to her outside Conference, indicated that bullying and harassment of young trade union activists is a genuine problem.

There was lively debate on a motion calling for trade unionism to become part of the national curriculum in schools. Proposing, Stephen Gribben of Northern Ireland West argued that trade unionism needed to be brought into the education system.

In opposition, Jodie Pearce questioned "whether we want government to be able to decide what trade union studies should include."

Simon Sapper for the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) argued it was crucial for the history and role of trade unions to be taught in schools. "How else would important issues like our collective values be conveyed?" he asked.

Delegates also backed a motion calling for the removal of differentials in the amount of minimum wage paid according to a person's age.

"If you are working in a bar or supermarket, doing the same work as a colleague who is older, it is not right that you should be paid less," said Kye Dudd for the YAC, who stressed this was blatant age discrimination.

There was also strong support for greater involvement from trade unions in combating climate change.

● The conference was attended by 57 delegates representing 39 branches

RETIRED MEMBERS' CONFERENCE - ROYAL MAIL PRIVATISATION 'A BETRAYAL'

Lord Tony Clarke told retired members that the Labour Government had betrayed postal workers with its plans to privatise Royal Mail.

Addressing the Retired Members' Conference, Tony said: "Now we have the spectre of a Labour Government putting a dagger at the heart of the Post Office with privatisation."

Tony traced back many of the problems of the industry to the Postal Services Act 2000 which brought liberalisation of the market at "an indecent haste."

"Other countries have not even thought about liberalisation. The problems we have got at the moment are a direct result of what our Government did to our industry nine years ago," said Tony, pointing out that the 2000 Act created the regulator Postcomm which became "a mouthpiece for the opposition."

Tony recalled how the union had been down this path before with the privatisation of BT. "There was the promise of golden shares and all the other nonsense. This privatisation of RM is all about getting foreign capital in so that they can cream off the profits," said Tony.

A shadow hung over conference with the news that CWU stalwart Stan Skinkis had died in his hotel room overnight. (See obituary on facing page.) Stan's spirit, however, dominated proceedings with delegates enthusiastically backing a motion he had tabled calling for the establishment of a national carers service, based on the NHS ethos of providing at the point of need at no cost to the individual. The motion also called for the funding to be provided from a 2 per cent increase in taxation on those earning £100,000 or more a year. "We must get away from the 'gimme, gimme, gimme' and 'more more more' society to become more caring," said Gordon Wilson of the North West region.

Supporting the motion for the Retired Members' Advisory Committee (RMAC), Alan Lloyd pointed out that 45,000 people had been forced to sell their homes last year to pay for care.

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns attacked the Government's vision which sees a reversal of the burden from the present 65 per cent reliance on the state pension compared to 45 per cent on occupational pensions. "Yet occupational pensions are crashing everywhere, it's absolutely ridiculous," said Tony, who called for trade unions to come together more with other groups like the National Pensioners Convention, the Scottish Pensioners Forum, Age Concern and Help the Aged.

Vice-president of the National Pensioners Convention, Dot Gibson, highlighted social care as the next area being targeted by private companies as a source for profits. "Do we want private companies that are committed to profit operating in social care?" she asked.

There was heated debate over motions to expand services within the Post Office Card Account and to stop the closure of public conveniences across the country.

Mervyn Dowd of the South West Region pointed out that 40 per cent of public conveniences had disappeared over the past eight years. He observed that there are 3.5 million people in the UK with urinary condition, half of them over the age of 65. Doreen Watson of the North West region pointed out that it was not just an older person's problem. "How about when you are taking young children out in town?" she asked.

Delegates voted for the motion demanding a national care service - and another calling for an advert in every edition of the Voice laying out the benefits of retired membership - to be sent for debate at the union's Annual Conference in June.

● Full report can be viewed at www.cwu.org/voice/



Last month's Retired Members' Conference

“IF YOU ARE DOING THE SAME WORK AS A COLLEAGUE WHO IS OLDER IT ISN'T RIGHT YOU SHOULD BE PAID LESS”





CWU national equality officer Linda Roy with London Assembly member Valerie Shawcross

WOMEN'S CONFERENCE – EQUALITY AGENDA MUST BE PRIORITISED

London Assembly member Valerie Shawcross warned delegates at the Women's Conference in Manchester not to accept the argument that equality issues can be put on the back burner until the economic good times return.

Valerie declared that if the Labour movement had accepted such an approach to equality over the years children would still be going up chimneys and the slave trade would still be operating.

"Societies that don't allow for the education of women remain poor.

"Women's equality is the core driver of success in any community," said Valerie, who, prior to going to City Hall, worked in aid agencies and local government.

She argued that even today there is still blatant discrimination against women, quoting the example of women newsreaders being forced to retire when they get older compared to their male counterparts who "go on and on."

Valerie singled out successes such as the Labour Party's women shortlists as examples of where, as a result of struggle, the equality agenda had moved forward. "We need to shift power towards us. There is no such thing as natural progress towards equality; we have to fight for it," said Valerie, who insisted that women must not be shy of seeking power or be embarrassed to exercise it.

National equality officer Linda Roy called for an increase in the number of women holding office in the CWU structure. She applauded the decision at the NEC to set up a working party to examine how to make the union more inclusive.

Linda told how, almost 40 years since the first Equal Pay Act came into force, there is still a 17.1 per cent gap between male and female full-time workers. This rises to 36 per cent in the case of part-timers.

Linda illustrated the discriminatory culture that remains in some workplaces when she told how recently a manager in a delivery office had gone around asking who among the women intended to become or was pregnant. The manager claimed that he was asking the question in relation to budgets, but "no man has the right to go round a delivery office asking if any woman intends to be pregnant."

Linda claimed that the glass ceiling stopping the advance of women was still intact. She welcomed the Single Equalities Bill that is now going through Parliament and will place an obligation on employers to promote equality.

CWU vice president Jane Loftus protested that equality issues cannot be put on the side lines at times of economic depression.

Jane warned that there could be three million on the dole and there would be attacks on benefits.

She accused the Labour Government of nationalising debts and privatising profits. "As a result of the banking crisis there is now a debt of £33,000 for every man, woman and child in this country," said Jane.

The CWU vice-president blamed Lord Peter Mandelson for the move to privatise Royal Mail. "The interim report from Richard Hooper was good but it bore no resemblance to the final report. What happened in between? Lord Mandelson arrived!" said Jane, accusing the Labour Government of "betrayal" by not supporting the people who had always supported it. "People must get involved, get active and make sure we win," said Jane.

In debate, Judy Griffiths of the Coventry branch called for resistance to government plans to cut welfare, thereby "imposing a huge burden on working women, many of whom will be thrown out of work through job cuts and privatisations."

Judy called for members to turn out to defend the welfare state. "We are fighting for the future, not just for us but for those who come behind us," said Judy.

Marion Brain of Birmingham, Black Country and Worcester accused the Government of returning to Victorian values with its plans to force single parents out to work and cut benefits.

Another motion was passed calling on "the Women's Advisory Committee to work with the Executive to ensure that the impact on women CWU members is carefully monitored to ensure that it is not disproportionate where redundancy or leaver packages are in place."

● Some 190 attended the Womens Conference of which 128 were delegates. 80 branches were represented.



TRIBUTES TO STAN

Heartfelt tributes have been paid to RMAC member and long-time CWU stalwart Stan Skinkis who collapsed and died in his hotel room on the morning of the Retired Members' Conference. In a touching obituary written for The Link (the magazine for retired members sent out with this issue of Voice), deputy general secretary Tony Kearns describes Stan as simply "inspirational".

"Stan was, quite simply, a giant amongst trade union activists throughout his life. The retired members of the CWU have lost a man whose passion for their cause can not be matched," he said.

● Those not on The Link mailing list can read the full obituary at www.cwu.org/voice/



HOUSING HERO RIP

Politicians, trade unionists and friends throughout the CWU have paid tribute to tireless social housing champion Alan Walters who died on March 7, aged just 51.

Alan, a telecoms engineer and Capital branch member, won widespread admiration for the spirited 'Defend Council Housing' campaign of which he was a founder member.

Amongst the many who have expressed their shock and sorrow are MPs Jon Cruddas, John McDonnell and Austin Mitchell. CWU general secretary Billy Hayes told the Voice: "Alan was a great fighter for his class and an outstanding member of the CWU."

● See tributes at www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk/dch/dch_alanwaltermemorial.cfm

BLACK WORKERS' CONFERENCE – MORE REPRESENTATION NEEDED IN OBAMA ERA

The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States and the lack of black representation at the top table of the CWU were recurrent themes of the Black Workers' Conference in Belfast.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr recalled that it was less than a generation since black people were denied a vote and segregated in the United States. "Racism is still a serious issue in the US. Remember there have already been white supremacists arrested for trying to murder Obama," said Andy, who went on to warn of the threat of the BNP in the UK.

Andy pointed out that black and ethnic minority (BEM) workers are still discriminated against in the workforce - yet even now BEM people are under-represented in the decision-making structures of the CWU.

Equalities officer Linda Roy urged BEM members to come forward and help address that shortfall. "You must contact your branch or regional secretary if you want a role. Get the branch to nominate you for the Race Advisory Committee (RAC) or the Executive. We can't make you get involved, only support you in that effort," said Linda.

The theme of under-representation of BEM members within the CWU was picked up in a motion which called for the RAC and the NEC to work together to produce an action plan to address the problem.

Proposing the motion, RAC member Ian Taylor questioned whether there was institutional racism at work in the CWU, claiming it was easier to be a white male than a black female in the union.

Amarjite Singh of South West Wales Amal called for a process to identify what is stopping people coming through the system.

John Hunt of Essex Amal suggested that the RAC need to find out why only 50 per cent of branches send delegates to the Black Workers' Conference. "We need to write to the branches who don't attend and ask why," said John.

The motion was passed, but one of the possible incongruities of reserved seats was exposed in the following debate

which called on the NEC to fill up delegations to TUC conferences with men where there were reserved seats for women but not enough had come forward.

Guest speaker Hratche Koundarjian, co-ordinator of the Strangers into Citizens campaign, paid tribute to last year's Black Workers' Conference for voting in favour of the campaign to regularise undocumented workers.

Commemorating the fifth anniversary of the death of 23 cockle pickers on the beaches of Morecambe Bay, Hratche recalled how the plight of those cockle pickers typified the lives of many undocumented workers.

While their exploitative gang master is now in jail, he pointed out that no action has been taken against a group of British cockle pickers who had attacked the Chinese a few days before.

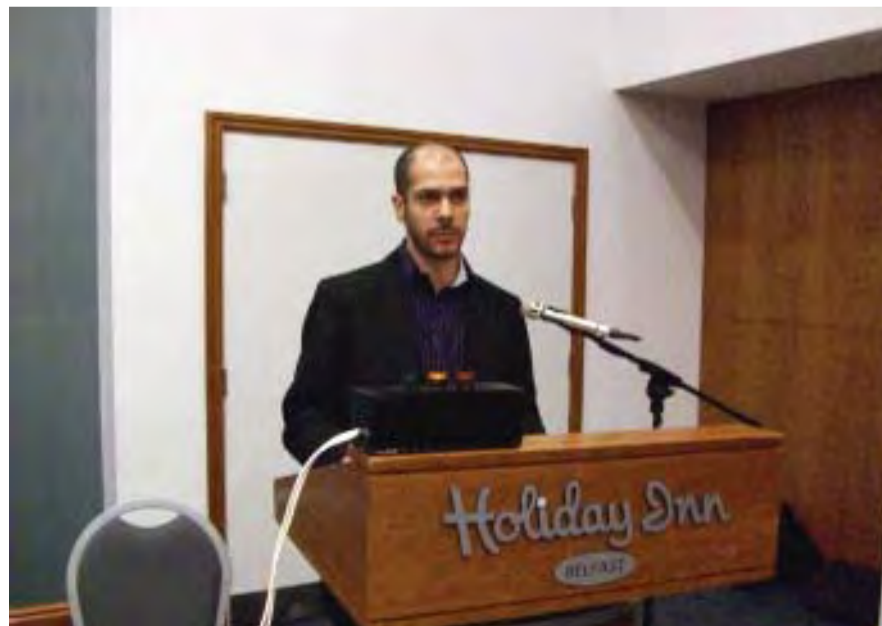
"This was why they were collecting at night," said Hratche, who questioned what would have happened if the Chinese had felt they could have reported the attack to the local police.

With an estimated one million undocumented workers in the UK, the Strangers into Citizens campaign argues that allowing this exceptionally vulnerable group to work legally would net an additional £1 billion a year to the exchequer in taxes - quite apart from tackling the pressing issue of exploitation. Hratche appealed to CWU members to urge local councillors to sign up to the campaign and attend a rally in Trafalgar Square on 4 May.

Delegates also voted in support of motions calling for asylum seekers to be allowed to work and rejected Government plans to link qualification for citizenship to benchmarks relating to integration.

Pauline Buchanan, the equality and social policy officer at the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, told how 70 per cent of social housing is situated in areas that are either 90 per cent Catholic or Protestant. "It's particularly difficult for incoming communities to go into these areas and set up home but it is something that is changing," said Pauline. "The likes of the CWU coming here for conferences helps change the face of Belfast."

● Full report can be viewed at www.cwu.org/voice/



Hratche Koundarjian of the Strangers into Citizens campaign speaking at the Black Workers' Conference



HEATHROW EXPANSION?

Heated debate ensued when the Government announced plans for a third Heathrow Airport runway. Labour MP John McDonnell picked up the mace in Parliament in protest at the lack of debate, while Transport Secretary Geoff Hoon criticised celebrity opponents like actress Emma Thompson for regularly using planes. **Paul Donovan** weighs up the arguments...



FOR

Brendan Barber, TUC general secretary, believes that the economic imperatives, when tempered with the environmental qualifiers, mean that plans for a third runway at Heathrow must go ahead...

“ Britain is a world leader in air transport, an industry that directly employs around 180,000 people and sustains hundreds of thousands more jobs in tourism and related industries. In order to maintain the UK's competitive advantage we must look to modernise continuously, which is why the TUC was in favour of Terminal Five at Heathrow and now supports a third runway. A viable air transport industry is vital for wider economic growth and jobs.

The TUC believes that air transport and projects such as the sustainable expansion of Heathrow should lie at the heart of the skills-based economy that must emerge from the recession. To achieve this, it is essential that Heathrow is not left behind during the rapid expansion of other European airports. We have a lot to do to catch up with the progress made by Frankfurt and Charles de Gaulle airports over the last decade.

The TUC understands the challenge Heathrow faces in combining expansion with environmental considerations. In terms of the local environmental impact of Heathrow, we support measures to encourage passengers and airport staff to travel there by public transport rather than by car. Many unions support the urgent development

of high speed rail links to Heathrow from the South West, the Midlands and the North - something that would deliver major job opportunities and environmental benefits in itself.

The TUC and aviation unions are committed to supporting all means of reducing CO₂ emissions. We believe that the EU emissions trading scheme - which sets a 'cap and trade' system, limiting total emissions and pricing carbon allowances - offers the most effective way to achieve this. Unions strongly support the inclusion of aviation in the EU scheme from 2012. This would mean that any growth in emissions above the level set in 2004 would have to be paid for, ensuring the aviation industry pays for the cost of its wider environmental impact.

Clearly, it is important to balance the employment opportunities provided by a third runway with the Government's commitment - supported by the TUC - to reduce carbon emissions. We believe that by including aviation in the emissions trading scheme the Government can build a third runway, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in the process, while staying on course to meet its target of reducing carbon emissions, by one third, by 2020.

The Government decision to push ahead with a third runway and sixth terminal at Heathrow airport has spurred a very public debate over environmental versus economic growth objectives.

The Government argues that the £8 billion project will bring between 50,000 and 75,000 jobs to the west London area, claiming that without expanding Heathrow, custom will simply go elsewhere. Among the backers of the project are airlines like British Airways, the British Airports Authority, CBI plus trade unions such as the GMB and the TUC.

Opposition to the extension spans a wide breadth of opinion from Labour MP John McDonnell to London Mayor Boris Johnson and the Conservative Party. Local residents of villages around the proposed extension like Sipson, which will be flattened, have been joined by environmental groups including Greenpeace, Plane Stupid and celebrity voices such as actress Emma Thompson and satirist Alistair McGowan.

Environmental opponents claim that the Government's approval for the plans proves that it is not serious about countering global warming. When push comes to shove, they argue, expanding the economy and creating jobs always trumps saving the planet - proving that Ministerial words on the environment owe more to vote-chasing rhetoric than true conviction.

Locals oppose the extension on environmental and personal grounds. Some 700 homes will be flattened and up to 20 schools will suffer more pollution as a result of more flights.

The protests to halt the expansion of Heathrow have already begun. Groups and individuals have bought up land around the area where the runway is due to be built. It seems certain that there will be direct action protests when the bulldozers move in.

Before that can happen, however, there will be a planning process to overcome and likely judicial reviews. Adding to the uncertainty of the whole project is the fact that the planning stage is not due to be reached until 2011.

If in the meantime the Labour Party was to lose power at the next general election then it seems unlikely that the extension would go ahead.

There are many aspects to the proposed extension of Heathrow airport, but perhaps the most central is that of sustainable development. Economic growth has to be environmentally sustainable, otherwise it simply cannot happen.

Global warming is happening at a frightening pace and real steps need to be taken to stop it.

What the debate over the Heathrow extension really highlights above all is that the need for economic growth must be met in a sustainable way that provides for people without risking further damage to our planet. **V**

AGAINST

John McDonnell, Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington, believes that the devastation caused to the local community and the environment mean that the extension must be prevented...



“ There are many issues, social, economic and environmental, as to why the third runway should not go ahead. There is the immediate devastation that it will cause to the area. It is not just the 700 homes that will be lost with the flattening of Sipson and the surrounding area. The real number, according to the British Airports Authority's (BAA) own figures, is likely to be more like 4,000 homes, affecting some 10,000 people. There will be the devastating effect this will have on communities, churches and schools - all wiped off the face of the earth.

Then there are the environmental consequences. Beyond the immediate devastation to all of those lives there will be increased pollution for the rest of London from the emissions. This will obviously have implications beyond London for the whole country and the planet itself.

The decision to go ahead flies in the face of promises made at the inquiries into Terminals 4 and 5 that the third runway would not happen. BAA themselves promised that if they got the fifth terminal there would not be a third runway but they seem to have gone quickly back on that promise.

The repeated argument about

Heathrow missing out as a hub airport where people fly into to pick up other connections is also an erroneous argument. There are five airports around London - Heathrow, Stansted, Gatwick, City and Luton. It is not a question of one airport representing a hub but these airports all coming together to form a collective hub. What needs to be done is for high speed rail links to be put in place between these airports. This would ensure not only that more jobs are created, but that they are good quality jobs in rail.

The rail links will ensure that large numbers of people are moved from the collective hub, only in a sustainable way. This would be good environmentally, socially and economically. The penny needs to drop that economic growth has to be sustainable. It is not an either-or argument regarding the economy and environmental priorities and the focus should not be all about west London.

A lot of the argument concerning going ahead with the third runway is about BAA maximising its profits at Heathrow. The whole plan is unsustainable socially, environmentally and economically.

It must not be allowed to happen.