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The union's fight against privatisation is a fight for us all - so how can you lend a helping hand?

VOICE



TELECOMS & FINANCIAL SERVICES | MARCH & APRIL 2009

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WHICH WAY ARE WE HEADING?

PAGES 8 & 9 New routemap to protect members in BT

PROJECT HOLBORN

KEY TO PROJECT

- OPERATE
- RETAIL
- PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT
- OPENREACH
- RESOURCING
- MANAGEMENT STYLE

The diagram illustrates a strategic 'routemap' for Project Holborn. It features a central hub labeled 'HOLBORN' with several main branches: 'OPERATE' (black line), 'RESOURCING' (green line), 'MANAGEMENT STYLE' (red line), 'PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT' (red line), 'OPENREACH' (blue line), and 'RETAIL' (blue line). Sub-branches include 'Job Security', 'Securement', 'Attendance Patterns', 'Outsourcing', 'Grading', 'PIPs', 'Incentivization', 'Attendance', 'Legacy Networks', 'Surpluses', 'Subsidies', 'Home-Sharing', 'Coaching', 'Incentivization', 'Future Skill Requirements', 'Voluntary Redundancy', 'BT Transition Centre', 'India', 'Managed Exits', 'Operators Transformation', and 'RESOURCING'. A legend in the bottom right corner identifies the color-coded lines for each project area.

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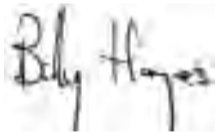
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BILLY HAYES
GENERAL SECRETARY



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.



The BT pay and Airwave 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."

'Play fair' plea to Carphone bosses



Membership has been growing at Carphone Warehouse and now the union is fighting back

Carphone Warehouse has announced 495 redundancies with CWU members being hit hardest at Portal Way in London and Tulketh Mill in Preston.

Some 61 jobs are going in Preston, while it is believed 250 to 270 jobs are set to go at North Acton.

Between 10 and 15 jobs are going at the Stanford House site, where staff have been put on 30 days notice.

Other job losses are expected at sites in the Midlands and the North West. There are reports that the job losses may go all the way to senior management functions, and even board level.

Glenn Slater, Central and West Lancs branch assistant secretary, believes Carphone Warehouse isn't "playing fair" by its workers. At the very same time that the company is getting rid of 61 positions at Tulketh Mill, the company is advertising another 90 new jobs in the area.

"On the consultative discussions nothing was said about those losing their jobs going for the new vacancies," said Glenn.

"The 90 jobs are comparable and could be transferred across."

In a bid to ensure Carphone Warehouse adheres to its legal and moral responsibilities, and to assist members, the CWU has set up an office near to the Tulketh Mill site, where employees can get advice.

National organising secretary John East told the Voice: "In times like these the company should be moving mountains to assist their employees."

"Instead management have maintained their usual slipshod approach to their responsibilities as employers."

"Over the past few years membership has been growing in Carphone Warehouse. In some areas prominent union members have been bullied and intimidated, and now this."

"It's yet another example of the credit crunch being used as an excuse to dispense with people and treat employees with disdain."

"As a union we will be doing everything in our power to protect our members and we will continue to build an organised workforce in Carphone Warehouse to change this culture of disdain."

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."

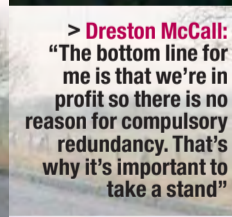
"Had they done that this time, we may well have been able to avoid this dispute."



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



< **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"



InBrief

Talks with Connect

CWU is exploring the possibility of a merger with sister union Connect, following an invitation from its general secretary, Adrian Askew. Connect has also invited Prospect to participate in similar discussions. The CWU's NEC has established a working party to consider the feasibility of such a merger, which would create one major union in the telecoms sector. The NEC will decide whether to press ahead in early April, and how any final decision should be made.

Computacenter pay deal

Members in the recognised areas of Computacenter have overwhelmingly backed a pay deal that gives them a 2.5 per cent rise in pay and related allowances including London Weighting from January 2009. Assistant secretary Colin O'Callaghan, said: "With inflation plummeting, this deal represents a real increase against the cost of living, despite a very challenging negotiating environment."

Telereal jobs agreement

Any directly recruited Telereal staff made redundant as a result of restructuring in the wake of the acquisition of Trilium will receive three times the statutory terms. There are no proposals for Telereal for any job losses in CWU represented grades at the present time. The union is backing the deal. More at www.cwu.org/voice/

BT pensions reminder...

Members of the BT Retirement Plan and the Syntegra Ltd Flexible Pension Plan are being reminded to join the BT Retirement Savings Plan, the new BT defined contribution pension. Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove explains: "BT will cease contributions to the BTRP and SLFPP pensions on 31st March. If members do not join the BTRSS they stand to lose future BT pension contributions and valuable death benefits." Full details at www.btretirementsavingscheme.com

H&S gong for Graeme

Edinburgh and Dundee Borders rep Graeme Russell has been named winner of the Scottish TUC Health and Safety Representatives of the year Award for 2009. Graeme will be presented with his award at the STUC Congress in Perth later this month. The accolade continues an impressive winning streak for CWU on the H&S front. Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Asbestos heroine dies

Tributes have been paid to inspirational anti-asbestos campaigner Nancy Tait, who spent the last 40 years of her life exposing the dangers of the so-called 'miracle mineral' that killed her husband, POEU member Bill Tait, in 1968. Routinely ignored and often derided during the early days of her campaign, Nancy's tenacity finally won through - and arguably she achieved more than anyone else in exposing the hazards of asbestos. Full obituary at www.cwu.org/voice/

VM pay freeze unacceptable



Standing firm: Assistant secretary Grace Mitchell pictured with VM reps at a recent forum at HQ

Virgin Media has announced a pay freeze for all staff until at least next February or March. The pay review was due to take place in July this year and the company has also announced the change of the review month until February or March 2010.

The announcement was made with no prior consultation with the CWU and, as a result, the company met the union's negotiators in March to discuss the issues. Assistant secretary Grace Mitchell told the Voice: "There should have been early consultation and full visibility of the company's financial position. We have a further meeting arranged where we've asked for a presentation by VM, around its finances and budgeted targets.

"It's only once we have this information that we can respond to the issue of the pay freeze. To simply announce the freeze, was unacceptable."

The CWU is also concerned that the performance related pay scheme known as Reach may not deliver for

members. VM believe the scheme is working well but union doubts persist based on the results so far.

"We need to ensure that the scheme does deliver and if it is not likely to, then we need to see adjustments made to the criteria so that the scheme motivates, rather than demotivates, as we believe it does now," Grace explains.

"If the company is saying the Reach scheme is working then it should mean a pay rise for our members. VM has agreed that these points will be explored in the further pay talks due to take place next month."

At a recent meeting of 12 reps from Virgin Media it was agreed to up the activity at the company, part of which would involve the establishment of CWU health and safety reps. "We will need to discuss with Virgin Media the number of reps and how they are going to interact with the company but in the meantime we will be pressing ahead and starting training etc for those reps," said Grace.

Organising fast at PTF

Some 26 members and employees of Personal Telephone Fundraising (PTF) met in February to discuss the campaign to unionise their workplace and how to organise around many issues they face at work.

Brighton-based PTF, which undertakes telephone fundraising for well-known UK charities, has been the subject of many complaints from members. These range from bullying and negative management style, a lack of fairness and transparency in appraisal and career development processes - right the way through to very serious allegations about attempts to cut members' pay and dismiss employees on dubious grounds without following proper procedures.

Active members have been working hard to organise their colleagues with membership levels

increasing rapidly. Dozens have joined the CWU since the autumn, and members are now able to get union representation at grievance and disciplinary meetings and already a number have been given advice on a range of workplace issues and concerns.

Commenting on the success of the members' campaign, South East Central branch secretary Chris Power told the Voice: "I've never seen membership grow in a company at such a rate in such a short period of time. Members have been driving this campaign forward. It is they who asked us to call this meeting and it is they who have persuaded their colleagues that together, as a union, we can begin to tackle some of the serious issues at PTF."

● Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/



CWU organiser Nick Childs leafletting at PTF

Migration from Global Services

There have been significant changes in Global Services (GS) resulting from the transformation agenda.

"For some time now BT has been looking at how it can re-align itself across its various lines of business, under the umbrella of Project Precision.

"This is an ongoing process," said Colin O'Callaghan, assistant secretary.

"Last year, saw Field engineers and their controls moving from GS to BT Operate.

"More recently GS Switch (CPE) Provision Teams - and a number of units in Service Assurance have been earmarked for a similar move by April 1, 2009."

Colin stresses this is a 'lift and shift exercise' with no change to location. "No one will become a redeployee as a result of the transition," he said.

Another area of significant movement of people will be from the operational parts of GS that support BT Business.

It has been decided to move 1,150 customer accounts from GS to BT Business.

A significant number of people will move with the work as BT Business creates its own Service Team. All in all the moves announced so far will impact on some 600 people, mainly NewGRID grades.

More changes are likely to follow involving transfers from GS to BT Design and BT Operate.

New disability support service

Remploy has signed a deal with BT to supply a support service for any employees who have a disability or health condition. This effectively relaunches the 'Enable' scheme with a different provider.

The service covers all BT employees and enables staff and managers to access advice on health and disability matters. Line managers can refer employees to the service or individuals can self-refer and access advice independently.

BT and Remploy hosted a special

event for CWU activists last month so that branches could hear directly about what the service offers and how to effectively utilise them.

Crucially Remploy now advises BT on the 'reasonable adjustments' required to allow members to carry out their role effectively.

Assistant secretary Grace Mitchell, believes this welcome service comes at a critical and timely moment.

"We're seeing the widespread abuse of the Managing Changing Capabilities Procedure, with managers

seeming to be mistaking it for a redeployment procedure," Grace explains. "The relaunch of Enable, using Remploy, crucially allows individuals to self-refer and will also allow access to the CWU. Members should ensure that if they are currently being targeted under the MCC process, that they get a referral to Enable, which is available through the Enable web-site on BT's intranet.

"It may help to save them a lot of heartache and give them what they need to stay in work."

The O₂ pay story is featuring on Sky and online on



Pay breakthrough at O₂ as company listens



Pay rise at O₂ compares well with inflation

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 - secured in just three weeks of intense talks with the company and being strongly recommended to members by the union's negotiating team - provides for an across-the-board consolidated 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 on NewGRID contracts.

The latter group, however, have not been left out either, with all but those with the lowest annual performance rating (APR) score receiving a 1.5 per cent consolidated increase combined with un-consolidated payments. These unconsolidated payments equate to 0.5 per cent of salary for those with an APR rating of 3, 1 per cent for those with an APR level 2 rating and 1.5 per cent for those with an APR score of 1.

Meanwhile those on O₂ contracts in Retail with an APR rating of 3 or above - another group whose comparatively low-pay rates have been a long-standing CWU concern -

will also see significant above inflation increases, ranging from 2 per cent for those with an APR of 3 to 3 per cent for those with an APR score of 1.

The rises, which will come into effect on April 1, compare favourably with a projected RPI rate of minus 1.6 per cent for that month - meaning that arguably even the pay standstill for those NewGRID and O₂ contract Retail staff receiving the lowest APR score of 4 represents an increase in real terms when pegged against RPI.

Commending the CWU's lay negotiating team of six reps, all of whom work for O₂ and who, for the first time, led the talks with the company, assistant secretary Ian Cuthbert told the Voice: "The negotiations have been speedy and what we have secured is a deal which doesn't just keep members' heads above water in an economic recession but which actually gives them a real

increase.

"I'd like to hope that the positive nature of the talks - once the initial distraction of the make-up of the CWU's negotiating team was resolved by the company withdrawing an objection which has now been proven to be thoroughly unwarranted - is indicative of improving company/union relations. I think, however, it is also down to the fact that last year O₂ was one of Britain's most successful companies.

"We asked O₂ to recognise that the people we represent are responsible in large part for that success - and the company has done so."

● **Connected to the pay deal, O₂ has agreed to talks to finalise a Bank Holiday agreement in Customer Services prior to the Easter holidays and jointly acceptable mechanisms for pay progression within the O₂ contract community within six months of a successful ballot outcome.**

'High level review' needed!

Union negotiators have reacted furiously to BT's claims that its disciplinary process is so robust that a 'High Level Review' stage - a second appeal in most serious cases - is unnecessary. "This is disingenuous," said assistant secretary Simon Sapper.

BT announced it intended to withdraw the High Level Review (HLR) from grievance, discipline and under-performance procedures just days after telling negotiators 'we will sack more people for misconduct'. "BT's latest figures show that discipline cases resulting in any penalty have increased by 55 per cent in two years - and your chances of a discipline case ending with no penalty have dropped from one in two to one in eight over the same period," Simon told the Voice.

"In trying to withdraw the second stage appeal, the CWU believes BT has breached three collective agreements, cancelled a contractual right and set itself at odds with government policy.

"Members rightly see the HLR as a useful backstop when things go badly wrong."

New regulations on disciplines and grievances come into force in April, but ACAS guidance says larger employers should retain second appeal stage for some cases.

The removal of the HLR stage is paralleled by other changes to the statutory procedure that will be imported into BT's arrangements. Further advice on dispute resolution will be placed on the BT intranet, and revised rights to call witnesses to disciplinary and grievance hearings will be introduced. The union has welcomed a deferral on implementation by BT as an opportunity to press the company to rethink its position.

"With such huge challenges, we cannot understand why the business would embark on something that is so counter-productive," said Simon. "Members can be reassured that we will continue to provide the best possible representation."

Orange recognition a 'moral imperative'

Fast-track progress towards voluntary recognition is being demanded for members at Orange's OP60 division following the company's decision to outsource 230 employees to Nokia Siemens Networks.

A further 235 employees are to be transferred to BT Managed Services Ltd - a subsidiary of BT which signed a recognition agreement with the CWU last month (see adjacent story). As Voice went to press the CWU was attempting to establish which members were being transferred to which company.

With a TUPE transfer now looming - and 230 of the affected staff scheduled to move into a company without a recognition agreement with the CWU - the union is arguing that Orange now

has a "moral imperative" to proceed swiftly towards a voluntary recognition agreement that has been on the agenda in discussions with the company for months.

National organising secretary John East told the Voice: "With an easily demonstrable and very clear majority of OP60 employees in union membership, recognition is something we'd like to wrap up as soon as possible - especially in the current circumstances.

"Recognition would allow us to take the collective voice of those facing transfer to Nokia to the new employer - and we believe that Orange has a moral imperative to recognise the contribution of these loyal members of staff over the years by at least granting them that safeguard."



John East (left) with reps from Orange who recently met to discuss developments

Recognition at BT Managed Services



Steve Haines signs on the dotted line for BTMSL

Full collective bargaining rights have been secured for members at BT Managed Services Ltd - a wholly owned subsidiary of BT which at present is populated entirely by

employees who transferred from Virgin Media (VM) after BT won the VM network management contract.

The voluntary recognition agreement - which covers all grades up to level 2 managers - was concluded after the company conceded the CWU had well over the 50 per cent membership levels required to trigger automatic recognition.

Welcoming the company's decision to embrace recognition voluntarily rather than insisting on a time-consuming legal process being followed, assistant secretary Brian Healy told the Voice: "This is a significant step for the union,

bringing with it considerable challenges because the 181 people who came across from VM carry with them their own discreet terms and conditions of employment."

Stressing that it was the members themselves who had been at the forefront for the campaign for recognition, Brian added: "They have fair and legitimate issues that they want the CWU to raise with the company, particularly with regards to confusion as to which BT policies apply to them and which of the policies that they came across with under the TUPE process continue to apply.

"Last but not least the largest irritant is that they have

performance related pay. It is already quite clear on the superficial inspection we have already made that there is no perceived transparency or fairness as to the mechanism under which members get their increases - so one of the CWU's first objectives will be to tackle that."

Members within the new bargaining unit did not enjoy union recognition rights during their time with VM - and it is quite possible that other contracts currently being pursued by BT will result in more CWU members working for companies who don't currently recognise the union being TUPE'd into the unit.



Assistant secretary Simon Sapper is adamant that BT needs to rethink its position

TALKING POINT

I felt driven into a corner...

Responding to Jim Campbell's letter in the last issue of Voice, I agree the use of the word 'voluntary' in the leaver schemes being run by BT is not as simple as many would like to think.

I left the company on 31st December as a "voluntary" leaver, I was not under immediate threat of being "put in the bucket" but, like Jim, I have worked out of the back of a van for 35 years. The way the company is conducting business in the Operate division makes it plainly obvious that they do not want direct dealing with customers anymore. Work levels are declining in the business sector and former customers are reporting that BT is not even tendering for contract renewals with its existing customers. Operate management declared that the leaver scheme offered in November 2008 would be the last available. Coupled with line managers' comments - such as "we will manage people out of the business" - and the

forthcoming PIPs, we all felt under threat.

Some of us decided to apply for the leavers package as we felt we had been driven into a corner. The question BT should be asking itself is why are so many people volunteering to leave the company in the middle of a severe recession?

One colleague was put into the Career Transition Centre (CTC) and left soon afterwards. He felt that there was no future with BT and it hit him very hard. I too was sad to leave, but also felt there was no future with BT.

Lots of us now face an uncertain future whilst BT management continue to dress up the company to the shareholders. I truly believe that the likes of Mr Livingston have no idea of the devastation being wreaked by lower and middle management upon the workforce and BT's customers.

*Ex BT Field engineer (C3)
Name and address supplied*

Thanks to East Midlands

In April 2008 I sought advice and assistance from the CWU's East Midlands branch with regard to BT's reluctance in honouring an agreement to increase my hours. After a long, uphill battle, which has lasted over 10 months, I'm really grateful that the case has finally reached an amicable and favourable conclusion.

I feel compelled to write in as I believe I would not have reached this agreement without the help of Mick Teece and Les Marriot. Their hard work and commitment on my behalf is a clear indication of the value of being a member of a united and strong union.

Michele Walford, Nottingham

Peeved about pensions

Well I'm afraid we have been done again! This time over the pension review. For section 'B' members it has been all compromise - increased service, higher contributions, higher National Insurance and reduced benefits. For section 'C' members - increased service, higher National Insurance but with increased benefits. To my mind the vote was flawed as we were voting for different terms, some more beneficial than others, with a simple YES/NO answer. With split votes and better guidance from the Executive the outcome of the vote may have been different and negotiations could have continued with BT on the strength of it. 'Let down' is the feeling of a number of colleagues who are strongly considering withdrawing their membership from the union. I discourage this as we ALL need to stick together: A union is only as strong as its members - with no members we have no union, though it feels that way at times!

Name and address supplied

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr responds: The reason why there was one vote on the BT Pension Review Agreement was because there was only one deal on the table. The offer from BT embraced changes to the BT Pension Scheme and the defined contribution schemes. It was not possible to pick and choose the different elements, and the agreement was only put to the members once we had exhausted all possible avenues of negotiation. I do not agree that members feel let down by the CWU. We had to face up to real problems with the future pension arrangements in difficult circumstances. Two thirds of BT members endorsed the judgement of the Executive and voted for the agreement. With the economy in recession, unemployment mounting, and the stock market falling, it is likely that the next valuation for the BT Pension Scheme (BTPS), which is due shortly, will show a significant increase in the pension deficit. At that time I am sure BT members will be glad the union leadership took responsible action to secure the future of the BTPS and significantly improve the defined contribution pensions. Finally I am glad that you have rejected the idea of resigning. The only way to ensure that we can defend job security and protect terms and conditions is to have the highest possible levels of membership.

Reinstated - and grateful

I am writing to thank the CWU and in particular Capital branch for their support during my recent dismissal and eventual reinstatement from Pell and Bales. I was sacked in February for swearing at a fellow employee. The incident was minor, and was also my first offence in seven years employment. I fully expected to be disciplined for the incident but not to be dismissed.

From the outset the branch and the CWU in general offered me support and advice. At the hearing my representation was thorough and professional, pointing out several discrepancies in the company's approach to the incident. I'm extremely grateful for the expertise brought to the situation.

John Moore, Walthamstow

Peace for Gaza

I write to voice my concern at the speech made by Billy Hayes at the pro-Gaza rally in London in January. I think that Mr Hayes is wrong to align himself with terror groups like Hamas. This brings no credit to the membership of the CWU.

He is wrong to speak of "occupation." I would point out that Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005. When the Israelis left the intention was to have normal relations with their neighbours, the people of Gaza. Instead, thousands of rockets were fired from within Gaza into southern Israel.

The Israelis left the Gazans a functioning market garden industry in 2005 which could have provided fruit and vegetables for export and thousands of jobs. Instead hothouse buildings were looted and equipment

vital for growing the fruit and vegetables was destroyed.

How would Mr. Hayes react if 6,000 rockets had hit South London? Would he expect his Government to take action? It may upset Mr Hayes but Israel, like every other sovereign state, has the right to self-defence. It cannot sit by and allow its citizens to be killed and left traumatized by years of these missile attacks. Even Egypt and Saudi Arabia have supported the Israeli action in Gaza.

Hamas is a terror organisation backed by its paymasters in Tehran, dedicated to the destruction of Israel and pushing the Jews into the sea. Israel cannot negotiate with Hamas until it recognises their right to exist. The way forward is not boycotts or embargoes but dialogue; not with Hamas, but with the Palestinian Authority - the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people. Peace for both Israel and the people of Gaza.

Jeff Graham, Harrow

General secretary Billy Hayes responds: The CWU is affiliated to Palestine Solidarity Committee, so I spoke in line with CWU policy. Hamas was elected by the Palestinian people, including Gaza. Hamas must be recognised if there is to be any progress. A former Israeli Prime Minister was involved in the Stern gang who blew up the King David Hotel when Palestine was under the British mandate - yet the world recognised his election. The CWU has supported visits to Israel organised by the Labour Friends of Israel. We want to understand both sides of the conflict, but what is certain is that talking and real negotiations must commence. Peace has to be made.

Full marks for persistence!

I would like to thank the union and Bradley Wright of solicitors Edward Duthie for their help in a compensation claim on behalf of my wife. The process was long-winded, however his persistence prevailed, and my wife received redress for her injuries.

Jim Hallinan, BT Kent

Reality check

We often hear claims from local councils and national government about the high standards of care and support they give to elderly people. I feel the reality for most pensioners is very different. The value of pensions is steadily being eroded - and at the same time we are having to pay more for services. Pensioners with their own homes and savings are now being penalised. The problem is that we are led by decision makers whose privileged lives are far removed from ours. (Full letter at www.cwu.org/voice/)

Roland Laycock, East Midlands

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

"Unsung" no more as Neil gets credit at last!

At the Devon and Somerset branch we would like to place on record our thanks to Neil Spicer to whom we awarded honorary membership at our recent AGM. Neil took the Newstart release package last year after working for BT for 38 years. He has been an active member of the branch committee and for over 20 years has been the minute secretary for branch and committee meetings. He is one of the unsung heroes that all branches have and need in order to deliver the services we provide to our members and his contribution has been much appreciated.

The photo shows Neil being presented with his certificate from Davie Bowman, watched by branch chair, Phil Thomas.

Francis Banks, Devon & Somerset branch



Vodafone's jobs bombshell "a betrayal"



Local CWU rep Cath Kenny outside Holditch House in Newcastle under Lyme

Some 200 employees at Vodafone in Newcastle under Lyme learned that 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 customer care work is being offshored to call centres in Egypt and India. They also feel betrayed that Vodafone didn't soften the blow through a voluntary redundancy exercise - even though it has been widely known for some time that a looming move to a new, smaller call centre meant it would be physically impossible for everyone to transfer to the new site.

Describing Vodafone's behaviour as "sneaky and underhand", one member told the Voice: "Is it a coincidence that the people who are losing their jobs have been told it could take up to 9

months? The new call centre is due to open in 9 months."

Even the company's offer of transfer opportunities to Warrington for those facing redundancy is viewed with general cynicism.

"Most are unlikely to relocate - and I'm sure Vodafone know that," explains Holditch House-based CWU rep Cath Kenny.

North Midlands branch secretary Andy Cawley concludes: "The branch considers the job losses, and the manner of their announcement, a betrayal of the workers in Vodafone - workers who have given loyal and dedicated service to the company.

"The branch intends to ensure that the consultation process that has to take place before the redundancies can happen is a genuine process and not just a rubber stamping exercise for a decision that has already been made."

Monteray and BT renegotiate

The implementation of BT's new facilities maintenance contract with Monterey has been delayed, pending talks between the companies over the next few weeks

Assistant secretary Simon Sapper told the Voice: "A firm commitment has been given by Monterey to communicate the outcome of the discussions with BT to us at the earliest opportunity. We will be keeping in close contact with the company and taking soundings from BT to ensure we have the maximum possible information on, and input into, this 'review'."

As Voice went to press a special meeting for reps in Monterey had just taken place at CWU headquarters in Wimbledon to discuss, amongst other things, how best to communicate developments to the membership. Also on the agenda was the continuing drive to extend union organisation throughout the company.

CWU senior field organiser Lynn Browne said: "This meeting is just the beginning. The Monterey reps who attended are a dedicated and committed group and, along with the Monterey members, they have a vital role to play in the CWU."

A&L's integration into Santander continues



Glueing together the different parts of the new Santander Group is underway - with the CWU keeping an ever-watchful eye on developments

The absorption of Alliance & Leicester into the wider Santander Group continues to gather pace. The Bank, which is already a subsidiary of Abbey, is moving to harmonise pay dates and performance management systems while

continuing with the ongoing redundancies and restructuring.

On pay, from next month (May) everyone will be paid on the 19th of the month. Currently members are paid on the 14th or at the end of the month.

During the course of talks on the changes, the CWU has secured commitments from the company that anyone currently paid on the 14th has the option of applying for an interest free loan to help them over the transition. A&L has also

agreed to take a sympathetic approach to anyone who incurs charges because of the bank's failure to move a standing order in time for the change.

"Anyone who encounters problems as a result of the pay date change should contact their CWU rep," stresses Nigel.

On performance management, a new system is being introduced that will change the way in which appraisals are carried out, how performance is measured and how development needs are assessed.

"The new arrangements bring A&L into line with Santander practice, and we believe that in several key areas they are actually better than the current system," Nigel explains.

"A new matrix for performance scores should be more consistent and objective than the current system, and is welcome as there is less scope for discretion by Line Managers."

The new system will apply from next year onwards - because the ratings for 2008 have already been concluded using the old system.

New worries for Kelly members

Fresh uncertainty for agency members already bearing the brunt of BT's drive to reduce its headcount is being generated by a 'consolidation' exercise at Kelly which could result in 31 of the company's branch offices sold off to another agency supplier.

As Voice went to press a decision on whether the sale to Hexagon Staffing Solutions - also known as the 'Interaction Group' - was believed to be imminent, raising questions as to what the impact of such a sale would be on CWU members currently employed by Kelly on the BT contract.

"This is a particularly pertinent question for BT agency staff employed via the Coventry and Crawley branches of Kelly, who make up a strong part of our membership in Kelly," assistant secretary Sally Bridge told the Voice.

"While in theory it would be a TUPE transfer, meaning that current terms and conditions would be unaffected, what isn't clear at the moment is whether BT, as the client, will extend the existing commercial contract into the Interaction Group."

"The CWU has been seeking unequivocal answers from Kelly Services about this complication - and we are right to be concerned as our members are clearly caught in the middle of a cost-cutting exercise that's being dressed up as a re-organisation."

iPSL 'review' triggers concern

Close tabs are being kept on iPSL's plans for a wide-ranging review of terms and conditions amid concerns at both the scale and scope of the exercise and suspicion as to what it the company is aiming to achieve at the Bootle site.

Company negotiators say the review is to allow for harmonised job terms and conditions across the company and the full introduction of 'job families' - but the fact that no less than 20 changes are on iPSL's

agenda reflects the scale of what is being proposed.

Issues the company want to look at range right the way from the introduction of performance related pay to new pay scales, holiday entitlements, sick payment levels, various allowances and overtime rates.

Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove told the Voice: "While we do not have formal proposals on these issues at this stage, we want

members to be aware of the scope of the review that is taking place. This is clearly an extensive and challenging agenda.

"Nothing has been agreed and the CWU will ballot all members on any changes before any agreement is reached.

"Rest assured, the CWU will continue to take all steps necessary to protect and promote members' interests and secure the future of the Bootle operation."



Keeping tabs on developments: Nigel Cotgrove

DESPERATE TIMES – BOLD MEASURES

As the sharpest recession in decades continues to buffet BT in a way no-one could have envisaged just a few months ago, the pressure is on as never before to protect members' jobs and terms and conditions. **Simon Alford** reports on how the union is rising to those challenges in a wide-ranging set of negotiations currently underway, the outcome of which will have a profound effect on all our futures...

Mention 'Holborn', and most would currently think of either the London Underground station or the famous Victorian viaduct that bears the name. Over the coming weeks and months, however, that looks set to change for members across BT - with the union now embarked on a crucial set of negotiations that will literally determine how thousands are impacted by the unprecedented challenges the company currently faces.

Named after the location of a meeting between CWU negotiators and BT senior managers at the end of February, 'Project Holborn' - with its immediate associations of 'travel' and 'bridging a gulf' - is perhaps more appropriate than those who coined the title had initially intended.

After all, with the BT share price in serious decline and soaring numbers of employees being declared 'surplus' in many parts of the business, if the gap between BT's problems and the CWU's duty to defend members' interests cannot be amicably resolved, we're all metaphorically 'down the tube'!

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr makes no bones that squaring the circle will be no mean feat. That is self-evidently the case given the scale of the savings BT insists it needs to make within a very short time frame if it is to avoid the very real risk of further share price falls triggering a hostile bid - quite possibly from a private equity concern. Such an eventuality could easily be the precursor of the wholesale break-up of BT - something that no-one but a few asset-strippers could possibly want to see.

Hot on the heels of the 10,000 job losses BT announced just before Christmas - on schedule to be completed by the end of March - the company now believes it needs to further reduce its headcount as quickly as possible in the new financial year to reflect the current economic climate.

Most of these proposed job losses are expected to fall in the UK.

Coming so soon after the last job shedding redundancy exercise, this is bound to place intense pressure on the CWU's long-standing agreement with the company that any redundancies



Andy Kerr



Brian Healy



Ian Cuthbert

► **Main image:** Project Holborn aims to map out a way for BT to reduce costs without incurring compulsory redundancies that would inevitably trigger a dispute with the CWU

amongst the directly employed workforce must always be voluntary.

And it is precisely to defend the 'voluntary' approach - arguably the most important of all the 'red lines' of union policy that the CWU has defended so vigorously over the years - that explains why the present talks on Project Holborn are currently taking place.

"We didn't seek these talks, and of course we'd far prefer that they weren't needed," deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told the Voice.

"These are unprecedented times, however - and the truth of the matter is that, however unwanted - and indeed unpalatable in parts - these talks are, they represent the best opportunity we have to protect members' jobs and terms and conditions against an increasingly bleak backdrop.

"The CWU has never shied away from difficult discussions to protect members' interests, and we have to be clear that the threat we face is a major one. If we don't work our way through these talks we could all be in serious trouble - and if they break down it could be Armageddon."

There are five broad strands to the Project Holborn discussions - all of which ideally need to be concluded this month (April) given the seriousness of the situation facing BT. Some of the key elements are expanded upon later in this article, but in summary the talks cover:

■ **Resourcing:** Focusing on the need to reduce total labour cost and headcount without resorting to compulsory redundancies. Issues up for discussion include innovative approaches to managing staff surpluses including the secondment of employees to other companies for limited time periods and the repatriation to the UK of work previously remote-sourced to India.

■ **Service Delivery Transformation:** Focusing on the difficulties currently being faced by Openreach against a backdrop of the collapse of the housing market (resulting in a dramatic reduction in demand for new lines) and competition from rival networks including Virgin Media. Issues up for discussion include managing an estimated surplus of around 3,000 employees by bidding for work on



external projects, canvassing for interest in part-time working and sabbaticals - and the thorny issues of attendance patterns and grading.

■ **BT Retail:** Focusing in particular on large-scale changes to attendance patterns that will be necessitated by the mass repatriation of work to the UK from the company's Indian call centres. Another strand of the talks covers the concept of 'home-sourcing' - confusingly not referring to work returning from India but to the creation of an all-new 'home adviser' job title. These advisers, it has been suggested, could literally work from home, but outside the scope of the union's current home-working agreement with BT. As matters stand, the union is awaiting formal proposals.

■ **BT Operate:** Dealing with a significant headcount reduction against the backdrop of a significant shortfall in the numbers applying for release.

■ **Management Style & Performance Management:** This is the one part of the

'Project Holborn' discussions placed on the negotiating agenda at the specific request of the CWU and Connect. Both unions are determined to tackle once and for all long-standing union concerns about management style - the successful conclusion of which is accepted by all parties, including the company, to be key to securing successful outcomes to all the other Project Holborn objectives.

Commenting specifically on the discussions surrounding management style and the long-standing disagreement with Openreach on grading, deputy general secretary Andy Kerr points out that in one sense, the appalling economic situation that has triggered the 'Project Holborn' talks has provided a new platform for the union to tackle long-held bones of contention.

While a number of the other issues up for discussion are far less welcome, involving potentially difficult decisions for both the union and

This story is featuring
on Sky and online on

Image credit: Howard Burns



individual members, Andy is adamant, that non-engagement by the union was not an option.

"If we fail in these talks, the company's problems - and therefore the risk to all our members in BT - will escalate. There's no getting away from that - and that's why we have to face up to these issues.

"That's not for one moment to say that the CWU is going to accept everything the company is proposing - far from it - but if we're going to get through this next 12 to 18 months, maximising employment in the company and defending decent terms and conditions, we need to talk.

"We know there are going to be things in Project Holborn that'll be unpalatable - people are going to have to seriously look at attendance patterns, for example, and that is all over the country in different parts of the business.

"The secondment issue will also be scary for some people, but we have to

“IF WE FAIL IN THESE TALKS THE RISK TO ALL OUR MEMBERS IN BT WILL ESCALATE - THAT'S WHY WE HAVE TO FACE UP TO THESE ISSUES”

work through the proposals and see if we can get it right.

"The whole thing, after all, is about maximising employment and holding on to the very real achievement that every redundancy in BT since privatisation has been a voluntary one. In essence it's as simple as that."

RESOURCING

At the heart of the current talks on resourcing, being led for the union by CWU assistant secretary Brian Healy, is a determination to safeguard the union's proud achievement of ensuring that every single redundancy in BT's history has been a voluntary one.

With further CWU-grade job losses now being sought in the current financial year - hot on the heels of the 10,000 announced just before Christmas - concern is growing that these are unlikely to be delivered by natural wastage and individuals opting for release under 'Newstart'.

"We simply don't believe that people will volunteer for Newstart in the numbers that BT want, particularly under the new terms which now give leavers a year's salary compared to the 18 months to two years offered in the past," explains Brian.

"Given the present economic uncertainty there is a natural reluctance for people to get up and go - so other measures need to be considered if we are to maintain the voluntary approach.

"Another factor is that BT itself is keen to avoid mistakes of the past under which it has paid dearly for people to leave in economic downturns - only to find it has to embark on a costly recruitment drive when the upturn comes."

One innovative solution being discussed under Project Holborn could result in a thousand or more BT employees being transferred, on secondment, to third-party companies who require temporary resources but who don't want to commit to permanent recruitment.

Such secondments could, in theory, temporarily take surplus labour off BT's books - reducing the need for redundancies, and hence the creeping risk of compulsion being considered if insufficient volunteers come forward.

Already the company has agreed to a special 'sunset clause' tabled by the union in preliminary discussions which would mean all outstanding secondments would have to finish on a given date - by when it is hoped economic recovery will mean sufficient work will be available for returning secondees.

Small-scale secondments of volunteering staff - allowed by the union under the Career Corridors resourcing agreement of 2004/5 - are already proving successful, with small groups of BT employees currently working (on BT terms and conditions) for the charity One Water, for Monterey and Eircomm.

The scale of potential secondments now being proposed are much larger, however, requiring detailed discussions on how they would actually work and how the interests of those involved can be adequately protected.

Brian Healy concedes that not everyone would relish the idea of being seconded to a third-party employer, but stresses that against a background of compulsory redundancies and shorter hours being imposed by some other companies, accepting the concept of secondments "is a far better alternative to having a fight on our hands about keeping jobs or current salary levels."

"The bottom line in all of this is that we're prepared to enter discussions and, so long as the protections for members

are right, we're prepared to reach an agreement that maximises ongoing employment on BT terms and conditions.

"Although it is true to say that the employer is looking for a degree of flexibility in terms of the nature of the work, the location and start and finish times, we're determined to ensure that any agreement protects our members. We're not going to be providing any burger flippers for the 9,000 jobs that are currently being advertised by KFC!

"One key element of the discussions involves the need to have a reasonable consultative process about the nature of the jobs and employers we would allow our members to be seconded to - and another is to ensure secondees get the assurances they need over arrangements for their ultimate return to BT."

OPENREACH

With a dramatic decline in Openreach's work volumes - triggered in large part by the collapse of the housing market - current projections suggest that as many as 3,000 of the division's 30,000 CWU-grade employees are currently surplus to requirements.

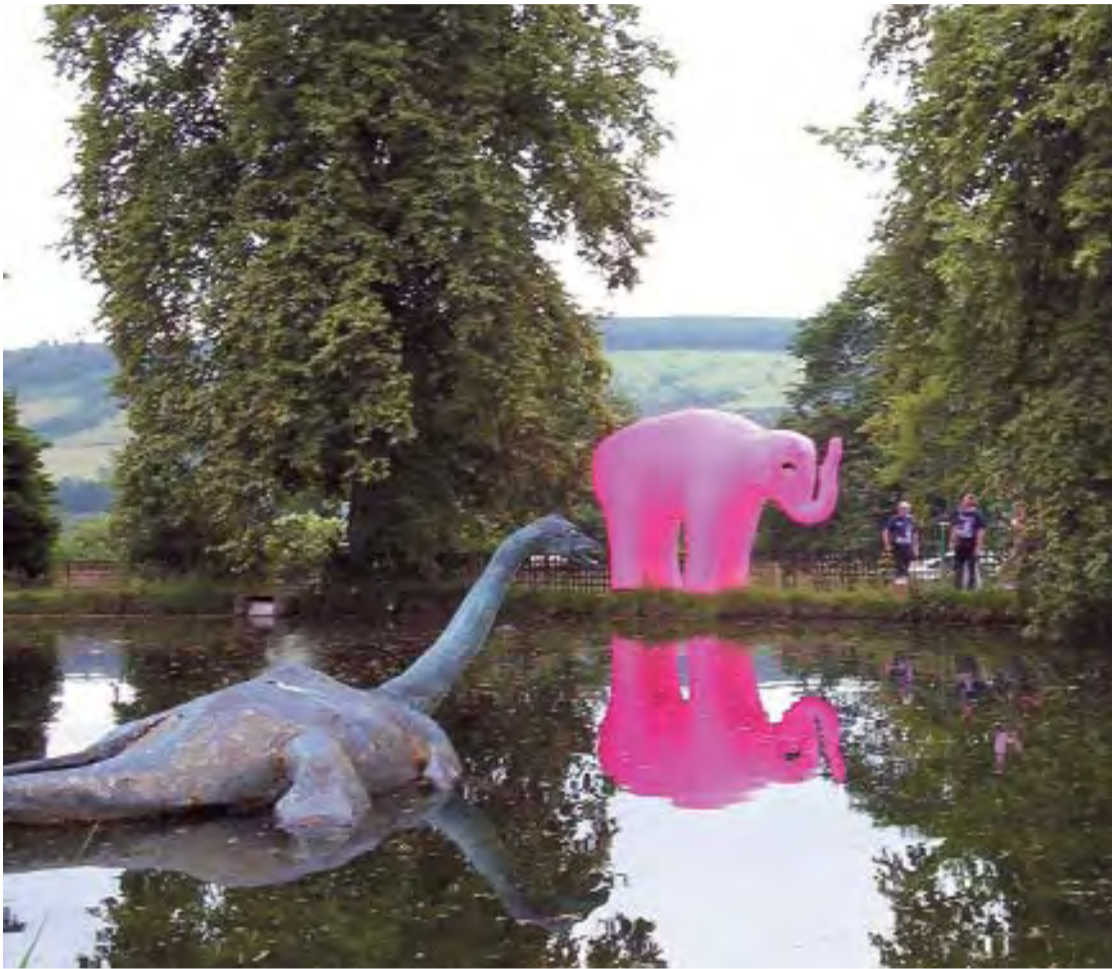
That said, the company itself recognises that previous drives to reduce headcount have sometimes backfired spectacularly. That was evidenced during the service crisis of 2006, itself triggered by a release scheme which saw 11 per cent of the field engineering workforce take voluntary redundancy.

"When volumes went through the roof, they didn't have enough people to carry out the work - and Openreach wouldn't want to be in that situation again," assistant secretary Ian Cuthbert told the Voice.

As such, one key element of the current Project Holborn discussions involves the expansion of the company's current efforts to find new work areas - bidding for contracts including the installation of structured cabling infrastructures in buildings owned by organisations from businesses to councils - and even new-build housing projects.

While some surplus staff will undoubtedly apply for release under Newstart, Openreach is also canvassing employees for a number of options that should hopefully diminish the number of redundancies it needs to make. Around 160 individuals have recently expressed an interest in part-time working, and a further 50-plus in taking unpaid sabbaticals.

"For Openreach, the driver of the current talks is Service Delivery Transformation - namely the preservation and shaping of the business for the future. For the CWU, the driver is frankly to stave off compulsory ►



Flashback to the CWU's 'Pink Elephant' campaign against remote sourcing: Now many of the jobs offshored to India may be coming home

◀ redundancies - that's how serious it is," explains Ian.

Part of the problem is that, despite welcome Government support for the universal rollout of next generation broadband access - as expressed in the recent 'Digital Britain' interim report - it is by no means certain just what the role played by Openreach in building the new network will be.

"Market forces and costs will determine that - and as such we've agreed to participate in negotiations looking at driving down costs - talks that are very much being conducted from the union's perspective to protect our members' jobs by ensuring that the workload goes to them," explains Ian. "There's no doubt that Openreach needs to reduce its costs in order to compete. Our role is to ensure a dialogue with Openreach that ensures that the cost-cutting measures don't impact directly on the workforce but are achieved by making the processes within the business more efficient.

"From my perspective the consequences of failure are too serious to contemplate. It would accelerate the view that rather than there being an in-house solution to the building of Digital Britain, the BT Board will look for ways of offsetting that capital - and that could potentially mean a cartel of companies taking over that part of the workforce.

"It's as serious as that. That doesn't mean that we're on our knees, ready to accept anything that Openreach proposes, but it does mean we need to earnestly engage to try to find solutions that are acceptable to our members."

Difficult though many elements of the negotiations are likely to be -

particularly on the issue of attendance patterns - Ian insists that the talks do offer up the opportunity of progress finally being made on long-standing thorny chestnuts including grading and management style.

"We've said to Openreach, okay, you've got your shopping list but we have ours...and the whole thing has to come as a package," Ian concludes.

All aspects of the Project Holborn talks that impact on members in Openreach will be the subject of a ballot of members.

INDIAN SUMMER?

Another of the more welcome aspects of the current Project Holborn talks could be the return to the UK of many of the call centre jobs offshored to India since the turn of the century.

In one sense, this remote-sourced work is now actually providing members in BT Retail with a buffer against the sort of surpluses being felt across the business during the current downturn - partly because of a review mechanism enshrined within an earlier agreement with BT.

Under 'Project Pond', BT agreed that if surpluses were to arise in the UK, a review would take place of work sent to India - and that review has now been triggered. Interestingly, however, BT Retail was already considering repatriating much of the work anyway - because surveys have repeatedly shown that the company's UK call centres have far higher customer service satisfaction levels than the Indian ones.

While the CWU campaigned long and hard against the initial offshoring, the prospect of potentially thousands of call centre jobs returning to the UK -

while just what the union has wanted for years - is ironically not without its problems.

"Of course we want that work to come back, because surplus employees in the UK need those jobs," explains lead national officer for BT Retail Ian Cuthbert. "The dilemma we now have - and why the issue of attendance patterns is high on the agenda in our discussions - is that currently 60 to 80 per cent of evening coverage and half of weekend coverage is done in India.

"If the work comes back to the UK, someone is going to have to do it."

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr agrees: "The simple truth is that if that work comes back it cannot be done between 8am and 4pm on weekdays. We have to face up to that - either we want this work or we don't - and if we do want the work we'll need to be prepared to change some of our working practices to ensure that the work can be covered."

Traditionally, attendance reviews have been fraught with difficulty in BT Retail - but Ian Cuthbert is convinced that given the right framework and a 'positive' approach on all sides, that needn't be the case.

"I think part of the problem in the past has been that attendance reviews have been embarked upon in a 'command and control' way - basically 'thou shalt do this' - rather than an approach that is genuinely shared.

"What we need is an approach that says, 'okay, collectively we have to do this work: How can we provide that coverage?'

"It's all about everyone being honest about what needs to be done - and, once people understand the reason for it, the challenge is to find a framework within which the burden of evening and weekend work is divided fairly across the workforce.

"Of course we will also have to be cognisant that there are people with caring responsibilities, family or religious issues who genuinely can't work the full gamut of attendance patterns, and they need to be safeguarded as well.

"Essentially, however, this is going to be about engaging people in both the problem and the solution...which brings us to the key issue of management style..."

MANAGEMENT STYLE

Leading negotiations for the union on both performance management and management style, assistant secretary Grace Mitchell is convinced that the current Project Holborn discussions provide a "unique opportunity" to tackle long-standing union concerns that have been bubbling under the surface - and sometimes rising to it - for years.

"We've insisted that this is a key part of the Project Holborn, because we believe that without this strand being discussed and effectively sorted out it will be very difficult for the company to achieve any of the other things it needs.

"The reality is that while people are feeling intimidated, under pressure or worried about their job security, you're not going to get co-operation and goodwill out of them - and the reality is that the company badly needs that

goodwill right now.

"I think the company understands that is the case - but the fact the discussions are now taking place was also down to the CWU's insistence that if they want things from our members there is a very big thing that we want in return: That is for them to start treating their people with dignity and respect."

The discussions are taking place against continuing CWU concerns that Performance Management (PM) is being used to put undue pressure on members and ultimately reduce headcount.

Last month the union teamed up with sister union Connect, representing MPG grades in BT, to issue a joint statement to all members about their concerns.

Both unions cite numerous occasions when arbitrary targets have been set for issuing PIPs (Performance Improvement Plans). These have included criteria like the bottom 10 per cent or at least one person in every team being on a PIP.

While these instances - which run totally contrary to BT policy - have been raised with the company and have been subsequently dealt with, both Connect and the CWU believe the erroneous approach remains far too commonplace amongst senior managers.

"We reject this management approach which leads to an intimidating and aggressive atmosphere in BT workplaces. It can only undermine BT's stated goal of being a high performing company," explains Grace.

"Our members deserve to be treated with dignity and respect at work. Performance management must be about positively motivating BT people to get the best from them, not about 'managed exits' and not to arbitrary timetables."

Branches have been urged to ensure that the joint statement is widely publicised amongst members and placed on notice boards.

Evidence collected from the CWU's leaflet to members about how their performance should be managed, will be presented to BT shortly. **V**



Grace Mitchell

► Right: The vexed issue of management style within BT spilled onto the streets of Bournemouth and Southampton as more than 300 CWU members staged very public protests about performance and sick absence targets that make them feel harassed and bullied. Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/



These stories are featuring
on Sky and online on

Fight against privatisation is a fight for us all

The campaign to save Royal Mail from privatisation is in full flow. Here, CWU head of communications **Kevin Slocombe** outlines how telecoms and financial services members can help make a difference...



Central London echoes to the chants of angry CWU members at February's Keep the Post Public campaign launch

The Government has proposed a Bill to sell shares in Royal Mail, possibly to a multi-national company. The argument, led by Lord Peter Mandelson, is that this is essential for the success of the postal service.

The union disagrees and has been campaigning strongly to keep Royal Mail in public ownership as a viable modern mail system.

We firmly believe that public ownership is vital to providing a public mail service rather than one driven by, and for, private profit. For over 350 years the country has had a publicly owned Royal Mail, and the service can continue to be profitable and sustainable while remaining in

full public ownership.

Investment and modernisation are essential, but these can be achieved whilst protecting a great British institution that is admired and treasured by the British public.

You will have seen and heard some of the union's activities on this campaign due to the high-profile media coverage it has received. However, every member of the CWU, regardless of their employer, can help us win. All of us are customers of the postal service, and we all have a vested interest in defending that public service.

The key priority of the campaign so far has been to grow opposition to the

campaign amongst MPs - the ones who have the opportunity to kill the Bill stone dead at Westminster.

With the help of union members, family, friends and the general public, we can help cement opposition to the Bill and grow support for an alternative solution for a modern Royal Mail in public ownership.

Over 170 MPs have already signed an Early Day Motion (EDM428). This has been a focal point of media interest and has put us in a strong position to defeat the Bill. Find out if your MP has signed by viewing the signatories at <http://post.cwu.org>

If he/she hasn't signed, write and ask them to support the motion.

Also, and this applies whether they have signed or not, ask them to ensure they will oppose any sale of Royal Mail when it is debated in the House of Commons. You can find your MP and write to him/her easily by visiting www.writetothem.com

You can also go the extra mile by visiting your MP at his or her surgery. These are usually carried out on Fridays and are advertised in the local press. You can also write a letter to them at the House of Commons and sign the e-petition at the No.10 website. This address is found at petitions.number10.gov.uk

To make it simple, all of these addresses are available as direct links by visiting the CWU website, www.cwu.org

Most importantly, sign up your support at www.post.cwu.org

By signing here, we will also be able to send you information on other actions you can take.

A major national event in which postal workers will be carrying a large sized postcard from John O'Groats to Lands End is about to commence. On the way, there will be events in many towns and cities where signatures of support will be collected on the postcard and the public will be asked to strengthen the campaign. Your branch will be advertising these events which are certain to generate local media interest - so please go along, join in and sign the postcard.

Other public meetings and local events will be publicised and your attendance will be invaluable. The campaign to save a publicly owned Royal Mail affects everybody, but you will also be supporting your postal colleagues. As a result of privatisation not only will services be cut but tens of thousands of jobs will be attacked. We all have a responsibility as trade union members to support each other.

ON THE WEB

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

■ Post Bank plan launched

Last month saw the public launch of a new campaign aimed at persuading government to set up a new, wholly state-owned "people's bank" through the post office network. The campaign is organised by the Post Bank Coalition, a collection of organisations including CWU, the Federation of Small Businesses and the National Pensioners Convention.



■ Progress on new dog laws

At Westminster, Holyrood and Stormont, the union is winning growing support for its demands that new laws are needed to provide real protection for our postal and telecoms members whose work requires them to enter privately owned premises. CWU national health and safety officer Dave Joyce explains how this issue affects not only our members, but other key public-service workers too, and he goes on to outline the progress we have made towards new legislation in the UK and Scottish Parliaments and the Northern Ireland Assembly.



■ CWU protests at Labour NPF

The Labour Party's key decision-making body, the national policy forum (NPF), met at the end of February. This event was held in the west country city of Bristol, where CWU members held a public meeting and rally as part of ongoing efforts to persuade Labour MPs to keep the party's pre-election promise to Keep the Post Public.



Openreach pricing must be got right!

The need for a fair pricing structure for companies accessing Openreach's services - and realism on the part of Ofcom on the "efficiencies" Openreach is likely to be able to make when setting those prices - have been forcefully set out in a joint CWU/Connect submission to an Ofcom consultation.

Questioning the regulator's assertion that efficiencies of up to 4 per cent per year were within Openreach's grasp, the unions have thrown their weight behind the company's own submission that "a 4 per cent target would necessitate significant reductions in headcount, which would make it difficult to maintain current service levels."

Not just jobs would be at risk, stresses CWU assistant secretary Brian Healy. "To achieve these sorts of cost reductions the company would probably have to look at real cuts in wage levels as well."

Given that Ofcom chairwoman Collette Bowe has herself recently responded to MPs' criticisms of her own generous remuneration package by arguing that organisations need to pay "appropriate awards" to attract and retain committed and talented people, Brian wryly makes the point that double standards appear to be at play.

On the broader issue of the prices Openreach should be able to charge those companies using its network,

the CWU/Connect submission warns: "If Ofcom does not enable Openreach to make an appropriate return on capital, the incentive to improve existing services and to invest in future access networks and technologies will disappear, presenting a serious threat to BT Group's current plans for much needed investment in Next Generation Access (super-fast broadband)."

■ On the separate but related issue of the Government's recent Digital Britain report, a detailed CWU analysis of the document has revealed ambiguities in some areas which the union believes could seriously hamper the Government's

ambitious plans for universal access to high-speed broadband.

These have been flagged up to Government in a follow-up submission. Assistant secretary Brian Healy explains: "Whilst the CWU generally welcomes the Digital Britain report, we are increasingly concerned there is not enough by way of hard and timetabled action points to ensure that some excellent aspirations are actually delivered."

"In particular, we question the use of the word 'commitment' as a substitute for what we believe should be firm 'obligations' - the former being inferior in the sense that a 'commitment' can mean no more than 'best endeavours'."

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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."

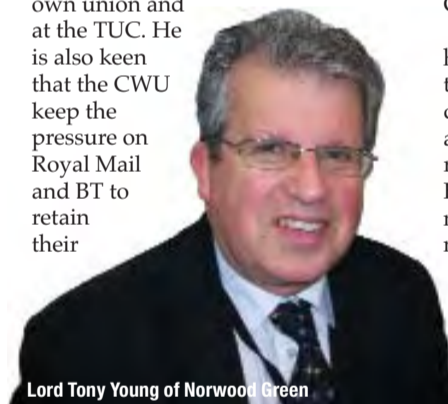
The picture at the moment is mixed, with some signs of firms cutting back while other companies like Rolls Royce, Sainsbury's, Carphone Warehouse and Network Rail among those committed to take on more apprentices.

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.

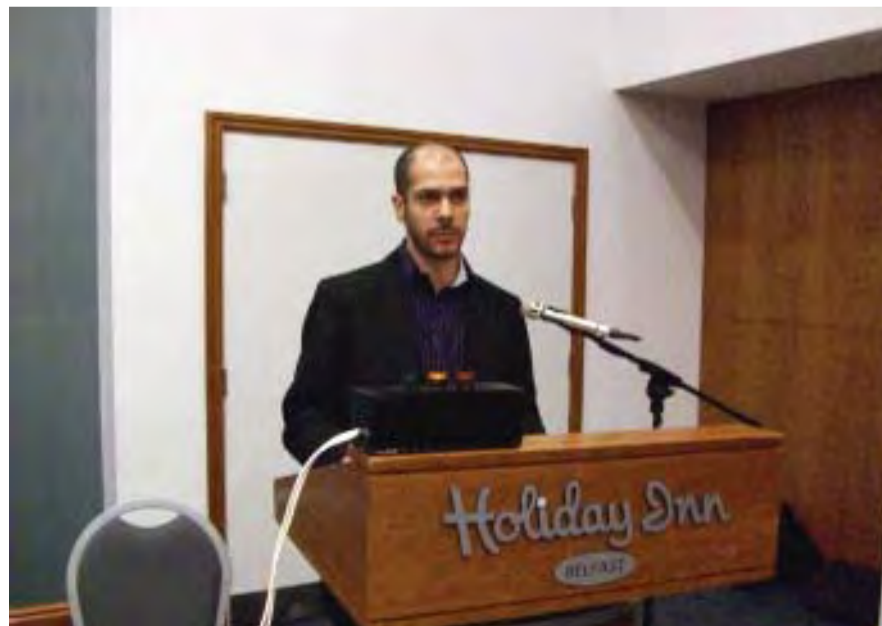
"This was why they were collecting at night," said Hratche, who questioned what would have happened if the Chinese had felt they could have reported the attack to the local police.

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.