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# VOICE



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Crucial phase in the fight to save our industry

## GENERAL SECRETARY'S COLUMN

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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](http://www.billyhayes.co.uk)

## CASINO – ROLL

Recession, as defined by economists, is two successive quarters in the calendar year where negative growth is registered.

And it is experienced by many as a loss of their jobs and the value of their home dropping in price.

Statistics describe events - they tell us what is happening - but, behind every statistic, there is the pain and misery of what a recession means.

With talk of unemployment rising to two million plus this will be hardship, not just for those individuals who have lost their jobs, but those related to, or dependent upon, that wage.

Unemployment means loss of self-confidence, the stigma in being in receipt of benefit and dislocation for those who are at the receiving end.

This is the roller coaster that is the untrammelled free market.

Our industrial departments have a team of experienced individuals who ensure that, no matter

how difficult the problem is, the CWU will be there to defend and promote the interests of CWU members.

But the CWU must also have more than just a fire-fighting role and that is why the CWU national leadership continues to develop an analysis of what is happening and, much more importantly, how we can make a contribution that will help fix the problems we all face.

What is clear, is that the union will derive great strength from our ability to organise and mobilise and to speak with the clearest voice.

The recent announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his pre-budget report is a welcome step in the right direction. From the responses to his report, it appears that the mantra that there is no such thing as society still holds sway in large sections of opposition parties and in the media.

One can almost hear them wanting to say that

unemployment is a price worth paying.

However, in the times that we are now living in, we will be looking for governments to intervene and ameliorate the worst excesses of the market system.

Those whose only response is to cut back on public expenditure or cutting pensions have no concept of the misery and pain that that brings to ordinary people – and to hear the squeals of those who oppose any increase in taxation for the very rich, tells a tale in itself.

We need to make sure that the collective and clear solutions are delivered by governments.

Best wishes for the festive season and let's work for a better New Year.

**IT'S A FACT!**  
Merseyside is the most filmed area of Britain outside London. Last year 180 productions were made there.



## CWU in the news...

November 13 was one of those "good news/bad news" days for us at the CWU. At the same time as the Government was announcing the good news to the House of Commons that the Post Office Card Account was to stay with the Post Office, BT announced the bad news that around 10,000 jobs are to go across the company.

Kevin Slocombe, Head of communications, [kslocombe@cwu.org](mailto:kslocombe@cwu.org)

This announcement came at the end of the week when just about every telecommunications company had announced job losses as part of a falling economy.

The Daily Mirror led with the headline: "10,000 job cuts, profits: £72 every second" and its story opened with: "Union leaders were stunned by the scale and speed of the cuts."

CWU deputy general secretary Andy Kerr was widely quoted saying: "10,000 jobs is a huge number and will be difficult for BT to shed that amount in one year." And, in non-sense terms, he warned: "The CWU will oppose any compulsory redundancies."

The good news came as

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions James Purnell announced to the House of Commons that the Government was to scrap the tender process for the Post Office Card Account and extending the current contract. This announcement is a big step forward for saving the post office network and, effectively, was a huge and clear success for the CWU-led campaign.

Our campaign had been supported and popularised by two million post office users, multi-party backbench MPs and sub-postmasters.

In a speech that could have come direct from our union's campaign material, Mr Purnell said: "The post office is a trusted

brand and is seen as a safe, secure and reliable provider of services in this turbulent time."

Just about every national newspaper carried the story and our general secretary Billy Hayes was widely quoted, remarking: "The Government has listened and made the right decision."

Adding that our union will now continue with the campaign to develop the post office as a people's bank, Billy explained: "As well as defending jobs, this can help meet the growing demand for secure banking."

"It's time for the Post Office People's Bank, which can become the next great British success story."





Image credit: Phil Graham FLMAR Photography



Image credit: Phil Graham FLMAR Photography

# A BANK FOR THE PEOPLE

While Britain's private financial sector lurched from one crisis to another during a disastrous economic autumn, our union's determined campaign to keep the Post Office Card Account (POCA) within the Post Office resulted in a clear 'victory for common sense' and one which the CWU plans to follow with a high-profile campaign for a new Post Office People's Bank...

After the government reacted to October's dramatic slump in stock market values by rushing in stabilisation measures underwriting the banks by an estimated £500 billion, taking equity in those institutions and urging more "responsible" behaviour in the future, the CWU highlighted a simpler and far less risky course of action.

In a letter to the Guardian newspaper just days after the private-sector bailout, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes reminded ministers: "It is well within the government's power to answer the demand for secure banking, not just through bank bail-outs, but also using the post office to its full potential."

"The British public is fed-up with privatisation and free-marketting," Billy continued, adding that, with deposits in the Post Office and National Savings and Investments soaring as people urgently seek the 100 per cent security that only a wholly publicly owned and controlled financial institution can provide, "there is clear demand for government-backed banking."

"The underlying irony here is that the failure in the banking system could provide the perfect opportunity to strengthen the post office network and revitalise it as the shop front for both government and mail services."

CWU-supported MP Jon Cruddas, who many feel is rapidly becoming the Labour Party's leading advocate of a new "people-first" political agenda, added his support to the CWU campaign in a comprehensive national newspaper article which placed the issue within the wider UK social and economic context.

October's crisis had, Mr Cruddas argued, proved that "the days of private good and public bad are over. The credibility of the banking and finance industry has crumbled before our eyes."

"But," he stressed: "State intervention in the form of credit and regulation alone will not turn the crisis around."

"For the long term, publicly accountable, state-owned institutions are crucial and, as the demand for fairness, security and trust grows by the day, the

government should halt the ongoing break-up of Royal Mail and its subsidiary Post Office Ltd and reconstruct them as key institutions in British economic, financial, banking and community life."

"With relative ease, the government could create a universal People's Bank, based on the Post Office and the Post Office card account with its 5 million cardholders," Mr Cruddas explained.

And, at an event marking the 40th anniversary of the launch of Girobank, veteran socialist and former Labour government minister Tony Benn made the topical point that "discussion of a publicly owned bank is very relevant at this time."

Back in 1968, the then Labour government of Harold Wilson set up the Girobank Account, in the teeth of opposition from Britain's private banks, primarily to provide secure banking services for the majority of the population who had no bank accounts at the time.

In his role as Postmaster General in that administration, Mr Benn had, he recalled, also had to fight hard to persuade his own party colleagues to back the Girobank plan, but after much lobbying and campaigning in support of the idea by the labour movement as a whole, both from members of the party and the trade unions, government finally decided to back the plan and the bank was set up, giving ordinary working people access to the full range of banking services.

"We set up a bank without nationalising anything," he recalled.

Operating at a loss initially, due to start-up costs, Girobank became self-financing by 1971 and started to make a profit – and boosting public funds – the year later.

"It became the sixth-biggest bank in Britain," Mr Benn continued. "In 1978, Girobank was relaunched as a fully fledged bank, but, in 1989, Mrs Thatcher sold it off to Alliance and Leicester and then, in 2003, the name Girobank was dropped."

Turning back to today's situation, Mr Benn said: "The case for public ownership is strong and a bank should be brought into the Post Office to replace Girobank."

"It would today have been the safest bank in Britain." ▼

▲ Left: CWU vice-president Jane Loftus, general secretary Billy Hayes and assistant secretary Andy Furey  
Right: Our national officers take the CWU message to government

Major report featuring online on  
**CWU TV**



Dagenham MP Jon Cruddas

## CWU message hits home

At the very heart of government, newly appointed Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Peter Mandelson has echoed some of our union's key themes...

In a letter to Prime Minister Gordon Brown last month, Mr Mandelson identified two key strengths of Post Office Limited (POL), using strikingly similar arguments to those that the CWU has deployed in our recent POL campaigns.

"The first is the trusted 'post office' brand," explained the Business Secretary, and "the second is the fact that it offers direct physical contact across its widely accessible network with the 24 million people who visit a post office each week."

"As recent figures show, many savers have demonstrated their trust in the Post Office by moving their savings into accounts it offers."

"Taken together, I think all of these developments offer POL, with our support, a genuine opportunity to rebuild itself into a widely accessible, trusted provider of a broader range of financial services."

Reacting to this, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes suggested that they indicated that many of the key principles that the union has been arguing for seem to have now been taken up at the very highest level of government.

"These comments are, in our opinion, encouraging and we look forward to meeting with him again soon to outline our case for an expanded Post Office People's Bank in detail," said Billy.

It is vital, he argues, that the CWU builds quickly on the momentum of the union's successful campaign to keep

the Post Office Card Account (POCA) within the Post Office by pushing forward its arguments for a People's Post Office Bank.

Assistant secretary Andy Furey outlined the key themes of the union's forthcoming campaign for a Post Office People's Bank, explaining: "We will highlight how such an institution can help meet the increasing demand for secure government-backed banking, fight back against the recession, save and create jobs and ensure a successful sustainable post office network."

### Britain's real economy

Although the government's financial market stabilisation measures may have won broad political support, many are arguing that it is towards the "real economy," – our jobs, our homes and our public services – that serious government intervention must now be aimed.

And here, the outlook remains extremely gloomy, with unemployment up to 1.8 million in November – a 140,000 rise from the summer – and home repossessions up 71 per cent on the 2007 figures.

"While there certainly seems to be something of a change in the political air in which our union's ideas are attracting more attention," Billy commented, "we must not lose sight of the very damaging recession which is

now reaching our people.

"The private sector has clearly failed the British people and, in our view, government must take the most direct route to intervene in our economy in the interests of all of our people."

### Building on POCA victory

Both Billy and Andy warmly welcomed Secretary of State for Work and Pensions James Purnell's announcement that the contract for POCA is to be retained by the Post Office.

Describing the decision as "a victory for common sense," Billy said that the CWU was "pleased that, following months of extensive campaigning and lobbying by our union, the Federation of Sub Postmasters, Members of Parliament, customers and all those who care about the Post Office right across the UK, the government has listened and made the right decision."

"James Purnell has shown good judgement on this matter," he added.

And Andy Furey added: "In the current turbulent economic climate, the last thing financially vulnerable people needed was a threat to their services."

"The proposals that we are arguing for are based on the key principles of defending our members, protecting the public and fighting for the recovery of Britain's real economy."



Romec strikers picketing outside Portcullis House at Westminster during the fourth day of strike action against imposed changes to workers' shift patterns

## ROMECC peace plan on offer

Looking at the draft deal, Ray said: "My view is we're about as far away from what Romec initially put forward as it's possible to get."

"At the start, they wanted a manager to be able to change attendance patterns as they saw fit, but, under the proposed new agreement, changes require agreement with the union at regional level," he added, going on to explain the proposals in detail.

Reflecting on the dispute, Ray stressed that the union's key objective had been to achieve "the principle of change by agreement, with negotiations at local level within the context of a national framework agreement."

"The whole emphasis now is on change by agreement and there is also provision for new unsocial hours payments, which are among the best in our industry," Ray continued.

And he paid tribute to the determination of Romec members, who had solidly backed the action taken.

"We know what Romec wanted to do and we knew we had to prevent it," he pointed out.

"The huge gains that have been made wouldn't have been possible without the support of our members for the four days of solid strike action that we took."

# 'Solid gains' after strikes

As Voice went to press, assistant secretary Ray Ellis outlined plans for members' meetings around the country to explain, and urge support for a new agreement aimed at settling Romec workers' dispute with the company over changes to attendance and shift patterns.

After four days of solid strike action by around 800 members who provide essential maintenance and building support services to Royal Mail and other organisations, early October saw Romec bosses finally agree to sit down for serious negotiations with the CWU.

The roots of the dispute go back to the 2007 Romec pay deal, in which both the CWU and management agreed that "talks will commence on new attendance, call-out and travel-to-work arrangements."

However, apart from a February 2008 meeting, at which, according to Ray and the CWU negotiating team, the company merely "sketched out some ideas," no further formal talks took place and Romec began preparations to introduce their own planned changes during the summer.

After an industrial action ballot was backed by a massive 90 per cent plus majority on an unusually high turnout, the union called a three-day walkout at the end of September, followed by a ban on call-out duties and a further one-day strike took place in October.

Realising that only serious negotiations could settle the dispute, Romec bosses asked for talks with the CWU and, after lengthy talks over several days, union negotiators finally agreed a draft deal with the

company which has also been approved by the postal executive and is set to be voted on by members.

Under the proposed deal, once new patterns have been agreed, the people involved can opt for a pattern that suits them and, where more than one person wants a particular duty, it is allocated on the basis of seniority.

If a duty cannot be covered, the draft agreement provides for further discussions with the union to seek alternative solutions, based perhaps, on a rota system, through new recruitment or, if no other solution can be found, it is allocated by "juniority," although the individual concerned would still be entitled to appeal on grounds of individual circumstance.

These arrangements pay a daily £10 allowance for work done after

6pm within basic contracted hours, with all work paid at time plus 0.2 while patterns which continue past 8pm - no such duties exist at present but there are plans to introduce them - will attract an extra new daily allowance of £5, with work paid at time-and-a-quarter.

During the dispute, Romec workers picketed at Westminster, where some of them are employed to carry out building maintenance work.

Michael Walker, who has worked in Parliament for seven years, said that he was particularly concerned at the effect that the company's initial plans could have on workers' family lives. And his colleagues Phil McBrien and Peter Newman agreed, insisting that they were determined to achieve a fair deal.



Assistant secretary Ray Ellis

# Royal Mail slammed for keeping Burslem men waiting

CWU Midlands Region secretary Lee Barron has sharply criticised Royal Mail's disciplinary procedures, as six remaining victimised Burslem workers were left still awaiting the results of their national appeals.

Last December, Burslem postal workers began five weeks of strike action after 12 of their colleagues were either sacked or suspended by the company in what was seen by the union as a blatant attack on leading CWU reps and activists.

Although the strike achieved its immediate objective of securing a national appeal for the men and six of them secured a return work earlier

this year, their fellow victims have now been waiting for justice for well over a year.

"It's difficult to imagine what this past 15 months must have been like for these men who are responding to allegations concerning alleged events of almost two years ago," said Lee.

"Procedures must be improved so that future cases can be conducted in accordance with a far more realistic timescale," he added.

"We'd like to repeat our thanks to CWU members up and down the country for the tremendous support and solidarity they have shown to our men at Burslem, which has

allowed us to keep up the fight for justice for all of our victimised members."

As a consequence of what has happened here and at other sites across the country over the past year or so, the CWU has engaged in talks with Royal Mail at national level to try to improve existing procedures in such cases.

However, the union has reminded the company that, while there is a need for improvements, many of the unacceptable delays currently occurring are due to managers failing to follow the existing procedures.



Midlands regional secretary Lee Barron

The ROME, Burslem and Bristol stories are featuring online on



## Bristol victory after strike letter



Paula Franklin, Colin Tucker and Michaela Gibbs

Bristol branch secretary Dave Wilshire explained that September's successful reinstatements of three victimised members in Bristol were won through a strongly worded warning of strike action throughout the area.

The trio, who had been sacked by the company on what the union insisted were "trumped-up charges," have now all been back at work for several weeks, having also received full back pay for the time that they spent away from work.

Key to the successful outcome, the CWU believes, had been the

union's intention to follow up August's march through the town with a ballot for an all out strike across the area in support of the three.

"The same evening that a letter to this effect went out, the company got in touch with offers to reinstate," said Dave.

Reflecting on the case, he described the outcome as "a victory for the union," adding that local managers who had "spoken about dignity and respect at work, have not shown any at all throughout this dispute."

One of the three, Michaela Gibbs, said that she was delighted to get back to work and that the evidence against her and her colleagues had been "very weak."

"We have had a year of fighting and campaigning to get our jobs back and, after long talks at national level, they eventually gave my two colleagues their jobs back in September.

"But my case went to the wire and I got my reinstatement offer just one day before my scheduled Employment Tribunal," Michaela explained.

## Improvements to skills agreement

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey has welcomed the revised national Rewarding Skills Agreement, which has been endorsed by the union's postal executive following a formal joint review with Royal Mail customer services.

An integral part of the comprehensive pay and conditions deal negotiated in 2006, Rewarding Skills is a pay progression procedure which gives our members new opportunities to achieve appropriate financial recognition for their valued contribution to the success of the business.

Taking on board the feedback received from a joint workshop in June involving CWU unit/area reps and contact centre heads, our CWU negotiating team - led by PEC member Lesley McLean and Plymouth CWU rep Sue Owen - held a series of meetings with the company aimed at improving the procedure in the interests of our members by implementing the changes needed.

After a further joint workshop, joint communications to the members affected and appropriate training for key individuals, Lesley agreed to undertake a programme of visits to all contact centres involved.

Reflecting on the consultations, Andy Furey explained that, although the consensus from the feedback received was that the existing agreement was generally fit for purpose, there had been a need for an update because of the constantly changing nature of work and the need to address other concerns.

"This revised agreement will make it easier for our people to move up the pay scales," he concluded.

## Members consider job promotion proposals

As Voice went to press, hundreds of CWU members working for POL were voting on a new national agreement providing key training and promotion opportunities for post shop workers.

Currently, post shop members - retail sales consultants (RSC) - enter the company on a salary of £14,000, which rises to £15,000 after successful completion of a satisfactory six-month trial period.

Under the new agreement, next April will see customer service consultants' (CSCs) salaries - currently at £15,000 - rising to £15,525, while salaries for CSCs at "full competence level" will rise from £16,000 to £16,560 and "advance level" CSCs are set for an increase of £650 taking their pay up to £19,150.

Urging members to vote in favour of the proposed deal, which

has been approved by the postal executive, CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey explained: "As a consequence of this upskilling agreement, all of our post shop members will now have the opportunity over the coming months to move from their current pay onto the CSC advance level.

"For an RSC on the maximum £15,000, moving up to the new CSC maximum of £19,150 equates to a 27.67 per cent pay increase," he continued, pointing out that the new deal would affect some 385 workers employed at 116 crown post office post shops.

If the deal is agreed, proposed interim arrangements during December will see post shop members undertake new duties in relation to mails product sales, in return for which, they will receive a monthly allowance of £83.33 -

pro-rata for part-time workers.

This figure was arrived at by dividing £1,000 by 12, with the £1,000 being the actual difference between the RSC maximum and the mid-point "full competence" CSC level.

Expressed in percentage terms, the full value of this allowance to our members will be 7.14 per cent for our "entry" level workers and 6.67 per cent for employees on the RSC maximum.

From January to April next year, RSCs will be invited to attend a two-week training course which will enable them to become CSCs and perform the whole range of duties, during which time, the £83.33 allowance will continue to be paid to our members.

"This agreement represents a significant step forward in eradicating low pay and moving

towards the creation of a single grade in our crown offices," added Andy.

"If this deal is accepted, all post shop members will, within a relatively short space of time, have the opportunity to achieve the maximum pay rate of £19,150."



Assistant secretary Andy Furey

## InBrief

### Capita TVL

CWU members working for Capita TVL received Stage Two of their two-year pay deal in October, which saw most salaries rise by at least 4.8 per cent. For staff on transferred (TUPE) contracts, the 4.8 per cent increase applied from October 1 2008 and feeds through to overtime rates and any appropriate allowances. Pay for those employees employed on non-transferred contracts has been adjusted according to the company's performance management system. Staff whose standards of work are adjudged to be "acceptable" received an increase equal to the September retail price index (RPI) plus 0.5 per cent, while those whose performance is considered to be "excellent" have achieved pay rises of RPI plus 2.5 per cent. CWU national officer Andy Furey said: "We are pleased to see that our members' hard work continues to be recognised by the company through pay rises which are above the average for this sector."

### Premium holiday pay

Crown office members have now begun to receive payments in lieu of Saturday premium earnings with respect to annual leave. In accordance with last year's national agreement, all members with six weeks annual leave in 2008/09 will receive six weeks' worth of Saturday premium payments. As a consequence, all eligible crown office employees - postal officers and retail assistants - were paid three weeks average Saturday premium based on actual earnings during April to September 2008 in their October salaries and the balance - based on actual earnings from October 2008 to March 2009 - is set to be paid into April 2009 salaries.

### New Consumer Focus

Postal users' watchdog Postwatch merged with the National Consumer Council and energywatch to form Consumer Focus in October, bringing to an end Postwatch's seven-year independent existence. And one of chairwoman Millie Banerjee's last acts on behalf of Postwatch was a detailed letter to Work and Pensions Secretary Pat McFadden, in which she outlined her views on the "challenging and turbulent times" facing the UK postal service. In a public statement, Ms Banerjee thanked the public for its input and participation in the work of Postwatch since its creation in 2001 through the Postal Services Act of the year before.

## LETTER OF THE MONTH



Image credit: Paris Jefferson

## Heartfelt thanks from us all

As the members of the "Bristol Three," we would like to give a massive thank you to the CWU, who have worked tirelessly to get us reinstated.

Our first thanks are to all at the Bristol branch who have worked extremely hard on our behalf, they are: Clive Welsford, Kevin Beazer and Tony Hudd.

Thanks also to Kate Ginty and David Bowman from our solicitors Simpson Millar.

Last but not means least, special thanks to Dave Wilshire, (Area Branch Secretary and City Fan!) and Mike Newport (Area Rep and Gashead!) who have put a tremendous effort into the campaign, to get us back to work at the job we love.

We believe that everyone involved deserves a medal!

We also want to offer our

thanks to all of those who have supported our campaign for justice over the last few months and the many postal workers and others who turned up for the march and rally in Bristol and from across the country, thank you all!

Finally, we would like to thank both Dave Ward and Kevin Slocombe for their personal help in our cases and for joining us at the rally.

The CWU has been value for money for us and to anyone thinking of leaving the union, we say: DON'T.

And, to anyone not in the union, we say: Please think again.

It could be you next time and you need these guys on your side, without them we are nothing!!

**Paul Franklin, Michaela (Kay) Gibbs and Colin Tucker, Bristol**

## Fight to halt all closures

Privatisation and cuts are destroying the postal service, threatening up to 35,000 lost jobs, which would be a devastating blow to our union.

The CWU official policy is for the 35-hour week with no loss of pay, which could absorb the loss of sorting hours from walk sorting machinery. So why has the PEC ignored this policy so far rather than making it central to our campaign?

The Hooper Review has proved that closures, cuts and later deliveries all benefit big business not the universal service obligation.

They do not defend a quality service for the public, or CWU members' need for full-time jobs and family-friendly hours.

The only solution is for the government to call an immediate halt to further closures.

But, on the question of closures, the most recent statement agreed by CWU leaders at the Labour Party's Warwick policy forum simply "regrets" post office closures and nothing more.

This is not using the Labour link but being used by it!

The union should make the 35-hour week central to our campaign, demand a halt to all closures and reject Royal Mail's proposed extension of city deliveries to 3pm. *Unit rep Andy Young, Jamie Dyer, Steven Sandiforth, Mark Ripley, Chris Riley, John Dyer, S Price, P Myland, E Brady, MA Alevi, Andrew Higgins, Paul Swatman, Andy Callaghan, Yuriy Sobol, Kurt Taylor, L Gonzales, A Diamond, Ruth Calder, S Willaid, S Coggill, Jamie Newbould, Alex Firth, F Yanda, C Tyas and M Beattie - CWU members, York Road Delivery Office, Leeds*

**Deputy general secretary Dave Ward replies:** On behalf of the PEC can I assure you and our other members in your office that we have not ignored the Union's policy for the 35-hour week. A reduction in the working week formed part of our claim in the last wage round and it will be a major part of our claim when the 2009 pay negotiations begin. In recent years we have made raising

our members' basic pay a priority and we have made significant progress in the area. Our members have various issues that they are concerned about and they include a shorter working week as well as pensions and pay. We need to consider all these when negotiating with Royal Mail.

I note the points you make regarding our relationship with the Labour Party. This year's Annual Conference spent some considerable time discussing this and passed a number of motions highlighting the Union's concerns and putting in place measures designed to improve this situation.

## Safety afterthought

My office is having geo route revisions and we are being told that it's for our benefit to even out the walks, but it seems that, just as when we agreed to single daily delivery (SDD), safety is an afterthought.

Back then it was in the national agreement that every walk would be risk assessed, but that never happened where I live.

Now with geo route, history is repeating itself.

Safety of our members is a costly dirty word for Royal Mail. Walks are up and running, but where is the walk safety checking?

I wonder how the 9-11 bag deliveries we are seeing now will affect our members' long term health, as it can't be good for your muscular skeleton to have such weight on your shoulders and for so long.

We are already seeing more accidents on duty and more walking wounded in our offices.

Perhaps I now shouldn't worry about my pension so much as I probably won't get to spend it as I'll have popped my clogs early from sheer exhaustion.

*Richard Rennie, Plymouth*

**Assistant secretary Bob Gibson replies:** I can only agree with our member on the safety aspects of the job. The SDD agreement included a comprehensive health and safety section which went largely ignored. Our reps need to make the most of our agreements and make sure that no changes are introduced until all the industrial relations and safety issues have been dealt

with in full, including the provision of all equipment prior to implementation.

## Underpaid postal workers

I was delivering recently when I came across a husband and wife team delivering leaflets for the NHS. They were surprised to learn that we still delivered leaflets and informed me that they were being paid 7.5p per item! Therefore, I would like to know why we're still paid a paltry 1.67p - sometimes rising to 2p - per item. I've been a Postman for 17 years and this payment has not increased at all. Even if the rate was increased in line with inflation we should be getting nearer 3p.

*Adrian Stuart, North East Manchester Delivery Office*

**Assistant secretary Bob Gibson replies:** I am surprised at the figure quoted, as I can assure you that our competitors do not pay that much. It is time, though, to deal with the door-to-door issue and negotiate a new agreement.

## How about respect for us?

If we could turn the clock back would we agree to flexible working? I think not. It has brought even more unfairness.

Those on a 10-hour day are going home before those on an eight-hour and 40-minute day because the system works in their favour. Bullying in the workplace is rife, not from colleagues but from managers and Royal Mail is putting its own interpretation on flexible working, with preparation time cut at the drop of a hat and managers disregarding agreements.

What I find laughable is the pledge which our managers want us to sign to say that we support "dignity and respect" at work. Bring it on!

*Kath Bowman, Scarborough*

**Assistant secretary Bob Gibson replies:** Your comments are noted and will be raised with Royal Mail. Some are already the subject of discussions between us.

Additional letters can be viewed on our website at: [www.cwu.org/links/lettersextra](http://www.cwu.org/links/lettersextra)

## MAKE IT A DATE!

## CWU DIARY 2009

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## Royal Mail taking advantage of own-car drivers

Working out of a West Country sorting office, I and around 20 other delivery workers use our cars on a daily basis. Royal Mail's policy states that we do this voluntarily and do not consider the vast savings that they gain from this, including acquisition and running costs of extra vehicles to distribute delivery persons and the employment of extra personnel to drive these vehicles. Also, a longer working day would have to be attributed to delivery workers so as to include take out, pick up and mail supply as numerous walks do not have pouch boxes of safe drops. Further savings are made on the planning application costs to local councils for the sighting of pouch boxes and on their upkeep and replacement. My fuel costs have risen considerably recently and it is about time that Royal Mail changed its "voluntary car use" policy. *Name and address supplied*

**Assistant secretary Bob Gibson replies:** Royal Mail will not do anything about this while our members continue to use their own cars, saving the business both time and money. In an increasing number of cases, our members are driving around uninsured which can have serious and far reaching consequences. There is really only one answer - don't do it!



# WE SAY: TIME TO DELIVER

This time last year, the CWU was busy fighting a bitter national industrial dispute, but autumn 2008 saw us opening up a new front in our ongoing battle to defend and protect our members and the crucially important service our members provide to the UK public as we took our message calling for a positive future for our industry right across the UK...



Launched to coincide with both this year's conference season and the second phase of Richard Hooper's government-commissioned review of UK postal services, Time To Deliver took our key messages to politicians, businesses, our fellow trade unionists and local communities right across the UK.

At TUC in Brighton in September, the CWU won the unanimous backing of delegates for a resolution committing the whole of Britain's trade union movement to support our determined fight to save Britain's postal service.

In a hard-hitting congress speech, Billy vowed that the CWU would "fight to save postal services, fight any moves to privatise and break up Royal Mail and fight to defend our members' interests."

Urging congress to back the CWU campaign to keep Royal Mail integrated and wholly within the public sector, save the UK postal network and defend members' pension rights, Billy explained how the introduction of competition had led to the current crisis in our industry, as he outlined the key objectives that the CWU aimed for from Mr Hooper's review.

"There have been heavy hints of privatisation or the breaking up of Royal Mail, but they're more likely to use phrases such as 'joint venture' or 'involving staff more'," Billy pointed out.

"But we can all see what damage privatisation has done to our rail and energy industries and, no matter whether it is a Labour or a Tory government, we will fight the privatisation of Royal Mail," he concluded.

The following day, CWU members were delighted to welcome TUC general secretary Brendan Barber to a CWU lunchtime fringe meeting, at which the issues behind our campaign were discussed in detail.

Taking time out from his hectic schedule to come and deliver his personal support, Mr Barber opened by praising CWU members for the determined stance that

they had taken during last year's hard-fought national dispute.

"Members of the CWU stood absolutely solid in ensuring a decent outcome," said the TUC leader, who played a key role himself in helping to negotiate a solution.

Looking at the wider issue of the liberalisation of the industry, Mr Barber won a round of applause when he insisted that it was wrong for UK government ministers to blame the EU for this, insisting: "The government points to EU directives, but the changes in Britain were introduced much, much earlier than the EU required."

"The case for a public postal service has been made by you with consistency and absolute determination to turn the government away from the agenda of privatisation."

"The case has to be continually made – millions of people rely on it and the TUC is absolutely with the CWU in making that case," Mr Barber added.

CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward stressed that the union agreed with the need for change in the UK postal sector, but insisted: "This change cannot just take place on the basis of what Royal Mail management want. Change must be negotiated and agreed and not done in an irrational and piecemeal manner."

"And we also want to see change in the governance of the company," Dave continued, adding: "Our union should be able to nominate people onto the board, as should people from our communities."

Unite joint general secretary Derek Simpson, whose union represents Royal Mail managers, also spoke to the meeting and pledged his full support for the aims of the CWU campaign.

At the fringe event, and throughout TUC week, members of the CWU team handed out Time To Deliver campaign postcards bearing our union's key demands to delegates and visitors, urging them to sign them and send them both to their local MPs and to Prime Minister Gordon Brown. **V**

▲ Left: CWU general secretary Billy Hayes, Scottish regional political secretary Willie Lawson, vice-president Jane Loftus, territorial counters rep Liam Murphy and deputy general secretary Dave Ward in Edinburgh  
Right: CWU members marching through Manchester



Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley MSP Cathy Jamieson



Falkirk East MSP Cathy Peattie



Selby MP John Grogan

## MARCHING IN MANCHESTER

Other Time To Deliver campaign literature that was distributed at TUC and to CWU branches and regions included leaflets promoting our planned demonstration at the Labour Party conference in Manchester two weeks later...

By common consent, this was one of the liveliest, most positive and effective protests that that city has seen for some time.

### Lively demonstration

Indeed, even the local police were impressed by the march - to the extent that they joked with CWU events organiser Chris Tapper that he might help them organise their next protest march!

Over 600 good-humoured but determined postal workers from all over the UK marched through the city, demanding that "Labour must listen" and deliver a successful future for Royal Mail.

Led by a bagpipe band, marchers wound their way through the city streets to Labour's conference centre, where they stopped to greet delegates entering the hall and urge them to back our union's campaign.

While CWU members rallied outside, delegates inside passed the key policy document that this summer's Labour Party National Policy Forum had agreed to, which committed the party, at the next general election, to "a wholly publicly owned and

integrated Royal Mail Group in good health, providing customers with an excellent service and its employees with rewarding employment."

### Lobbying in Scotland

In October, Time To Deliver took the campaign north of the border to meet MSPs at the Scottish Parliament.

Billy Hayes, Dave Ward, CWU vice-president Jane Loftus and Falkirk East MSP Cathy Peattie addressed a packed audience of MSPs and CWU members at a Holyrood committee room, spelling out the urgent need for government action to ensure a positive future for the postal network.

Cathy Peattie praised the CWU for "fighting for this vital public service and not only for their own jobs." To her fellow MSPs, she urged: "Find out more about this campaign and please join the campaign."

During the lunchbreak, Scottish CWU activists then spoke to their respective MSPs in small groups, explaining in more detail exactly what they could do to help and support the union's fight for the future of the industry.

East Lothian MSP Iain Gray, who leads the Labour Party's group of MSPs at Holyrood, said that he had been impressed by CWU members' commitment to winning a positive future.

"Whatever changes take place, CWU members should not be forced to pay the price," he insisted, adding: "I'd like to discuss these ideas further."

### Campaign success

Reflecting on a hectic autumn, Jane Loftus told Voice that Time To Deliver had been "a great success."

"We are delighted to have won such solid support from our members, fellow trade unionists, from the general public and also from businesses."

"Together, we have sent out a powerful message to our politicians that we are determined to fight for a positive future for our industry and that the postal service can have a positive future," she insisted.

To Britain's political leaders, Jane stressed: "We have identified the problems and their causes and we have suggested solutions."

"Over to you politicians now - It's Time To Deliver."

# FIGHTING FOR A POSITIVE FUTURE

Amid uncertainty over Richard Hooper's government-commissioned review into our industry, and against the background of Royal Mail's attack on our mail centre network, Voice asked deputy general secretary **Dave Ward** to explain where we currently stand and the tough challenges that lie ahead for all of us...

## Q. So Dave, where are we with the Hooper review?

**A.** Mr Hooper had been due to present its final report at the end of October, but, perhaps understandably, Prime Minister Gordon Brown's Cabinet reshuffle, which saw Peter Mandelson replace John Hutton as Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform - or Business Secretary - delayed publication.

This is not helpful and is causing frustration across the union.

We contacted the Review team and they told us that the final decision on publication rests with government.

We recently met Mr Mandelson and he told us that he may consider extending the remit of the report it did not solve the main problems facing Royal Mail, which he identified as the growing pensions deficit and market decline.

He also told us that the government did accept that it had a responsibility to solve the pensions deficit, but that it believed that this could only be done through the injection of some form of private equity.

In response, we told the Business Secretary that we would hold the government to account on pensions - including getting our members a better deal - but that we would not support any form of privatisation.

We reminded Mr Mandelson about the Labour Party's commitment to a "wholly publicly owned and integrated Royal Mail Group in good health, providing customers with an excellent service and its employees with rewarding employment."

The government must honour this commitment and sort out the mess they have created or we will definitely be on a collision course over our future relationship with the Labour Party.



North West regional secretary  
Carl Webb



Eastern regional secretary  
Paul Moffatt

## Q. Is this all about stopping privatisation?

**A.** Certainly not - stopping privatisation is not the winning line - we must face up to other challenges if we want success for our members and the company.

We must bring an end to unfair competition and change the way that our industry is regulated.

We must see a fundamental change in how the industry is run - it must be more accountable to its workers and to the public by including representatives of both groups on a new board.

We need to see movement on the Hooper Review before Christmas.

And issues of accountability apply equally to industrial relations, which must improve.

We want new national agreements within which all of us can work towards the type of mutually agreed change that our industry needs - for the benefit of our members and of the general public.

We must deal with change by protecting as many jobs as possible - providing benefits to postal workers and better services to the public and to business customers.

We also need to place Royal Mail on a sound financial footing and this can only be done if the government resolves pensions.

All of these issues are interlinked. They are all as crucial as the issue of ownership and we cannot resolve one without resolving the others.

The truth is that, whatever the outcome of the Hooper Report, it will be down to government to decide what happens next and that's why our overriding priority must be to get immediate talks going with the government.



## Q. What about the recent POCA contract decision?

**A.** Of course, the whole union was delighted when Secretary of State for Work and Pensions James Purnell made that announcement to Parliament last month, a decision that the determined campaign by our union and others had been fighting for for some considerable time.

We are also hopeful that our campaign for a new Post Office People's Bank can build upon that success, particularly in the context of the economic crisis that has erupted this autumn.

Early signs seem to be extremely encouraging, with a range of people from veteran socialist Tony Benn and CWU-supported MP Jon Cruddas to new postal users' watchdog Consumer Focus and new Business Secretary Peter Mandelson all speaking positively about this idea.

Once again, our union has shown that, not only do we campaign tirelessly on behalf of our own members, it is so often the CWU that speaks for the people of the UK as a whole.

## Q. Why are our mail centres under threat?

**A.** Because, under its current leadership, Royal Mail's only answer to its difficulties is to cut costs, even if it means making the service worse.

Rather than deal with us at national level to "deliver change by agreement," as both the CWU and the company agreed last year, Royal Mail has unilaterally announced a savage closure plan and has dismissed all the alternative ideas that have been put forward by postal workers, local MPs and councils and ignored the needs of local communities.

We have been left with no alternative but to hold strike ballots at all the threatened offices for industrial action.

The CWU did not seek this dispute, but we must bring Royal Mail back to the negotiating table to get the national agreement that we need.

Our message to Royal Mail is: 'Positive change by agreement - Yes. Destruction of our industry by diktat - No.'

## Q. So what's our vision for the future Dave?

**A.** The future of the UK postal sector depends on our agreeing that it is, first and foremost, a public service rather than a private business.

We can succeed if we provide new and better services to the public, reliable and dependable services relevant to their needs today.

With sufficient investment, and with a truly democratic, accountable and competent leadership, our members could offer a re-delivery service later in the day, a before-breakfast delivery, a same-day delivery service and make far more effective use of the callers' offices.

Mail must be collected from and delivered to the UK public at a reasonable time and our mail centre and distribution network - and our own organisational systems must reflect that.

As well as improving services and helping in the fight for our industry's future, positive ideas such as these can also protect jobs and, perhaps, create new employment.

As we have said time and time again in our campaigning up and down the country, a positive future is possible and a positive future can be ours.

It's up to all of us to come together to fight for it.



All image credits: Phil Graham FILMAR Photography



### CWU GENERAL SECRETARY BILLY HAYES updates Voice readers on the political aspects of our ongoing fight to save our industry:

The commitment given to our industry by the Labour Party, while extremely welcome, does not answer all of our problems, but it does guide us in direct negotiations with the government, which has also accepted that it does need to take some responsibility for the Royal Mail Pension Scheme deficit.

Of course, we know that there is pressure on the government from several directions for the break-up and privatisation of Royal Mail, so our work since the Labour Party conference has focussed on building up and securing our position.

### MEETING GOVERNMENT

Dave and I met Business Secretary Peter Mandelson soon after his appointment in October and reiterated, in the strongest possible terms, the need for the government to keep to its word on this.

We have also requested a further meeting with him when the government-commissioned review into our industry by Richard Hooper publishes its final report.

At the beginning of November, the TUC organised a meeting of trade union general secretaries with the Prime Minister at Downing Street and I took the opportunity to raise our union's concerns about the future of Royal Mail direct with Gordon Brown.

Although there was only a limited time available for discussion on that occasion, it was clear to me that Mr Brown had registered what I had said and I have been invited back for further talks.

▲ Left: CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward leading the 500-strong march through Milton Keynes last month  
Right: Marchers show their determination to fight Royal Mail's closure plans



General secretary Billy Hayes

### A KEY BATTLE WON

The decision by Work and Pensions Secretary James Purnell to scrap the tendering process for the Post Office Card Account is a major victory for our union's campaign and one which, as we outline elsewhere in this edition, we fully intend to build on by making the strongest possible case for a new Post Office People's Bank.

Our efforts to avoid an industrial dispute over Royal Mail's mail centre closures have included an urgent letter to Pat McFadden, who serves as Mr Mandelson's Minister for Employment Relations and Postal Affairs.

With industrial action ballot papers going out to members at mail centres, our hope will be that we can impress upon Mr McFadden the urgent need for Royal Mail to engage in serious negotiations with the CWU or face a dispute.

### CRUCIAL PERIOD AHEAD

A Parliamentary meeting has been arranged for early December so that we can brief MPs on this and all of the issues facing us. At the time of writing, it is our assumption that the Hooper Report will have been published by that time and the focus of the event will be on making our case to as many MPs as possible.

We will also be meeting Unite joint general secretaries Derek Simpson and Tony Woodley with the aim of trying to ensure that, on issues affecting members of both of our unions, we aim to co-ordinate our activities in order to maximise our effectiveness.

In summary, it is our view that, on the political front, there are several areas where we are making solid progress, while there are other issues on which we need to push harder. ✓

## Hundreds rally to save jobs

CWU-led campaigns against mail centre closures in towns such as Milton Keynes and Crewe have won wide support from a broad range of people within their respective communities...

Hundreds of CWU members have marched in protest at Royal Mail plans to axe over a dozen UK mail centres, axing potentially thousands of jobs and slashing public services.

With ballot papers going out to all members affected, the odds on a bitter dispute - possibly leading to another national strike - rose dramatically during a tense autumn period.

CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward has pledged repeatedly that the union will "fight every inch of the way" against Royal Mail's closure programme, arguing that the company's "piecemeal" approach is extremely damaging, not only to members' livelihoods, but also to the future viability of the company itself.

And, as the union has taken its Save the Mail Centres campaign out onto Britain's streets, it has been evident that determination to fight for this crucial public service is shared right across communities.

Protest marches in Crewe in the North West and Milton Keynes down in the South

East have united hundreds, ranging from MPs, local councillors, business organisations and the general public, in support of the CWU-led resistance.

Just a couple of weeks ago, an estimated 500 people gathered at the closure-threatened Milton Keynes Mail Centre and marched to a town-centre rally, where Dave Ward, CWU Eastern Region secretary Paul Moffatt, Midlands Region secretary Lee Barron and local MP Phylliss Starkey each spelled out why opposition to the closure plan is so strong.

And a similar number of postal workers, their families and supporters marched through Crewe in October, showing their determination to save jobs and protect vital public services in a region that, as North West Region secretary Carl Webb has highlighted, is suffering the greatest threat to jobs. As in Milton Keynes, such is the strength of local feeling, that the CWU campaign has won support from right across the community, local businesses, all parties on the town council and the town's

Member of Parliament all backing the CWU fight for jobs and justice.

With CWU members at both of these towns, along with workers at 13 other centres across the country set to vote on strike action to save their jobs, Dave Ward explained that the strength of feeling within the union is rooted in members' fears that Royal Mail's plans risk "destroying people's lives and livelihoods."

Looking back to the agreement that ended last year's national dispute, Dave recalled: "Last year, we both signed up to change by agreement, but what we're seeing is change by diktat."

In his own message to Royal Mail, Dave vowed: "We're going to fight you every inch of the way, until you do the right thing and sort out the mess you've got this company in."

Unless the company changes course, halts the closures and sits down to serious negotiations with the CWU to reach a new national agreement, the mail centres ballot could, ultimately lead to a full, national industrial action ballot, he continued.

READ MORE ONLINE @ [WWW.CWU.ORG](http://WWW.CWU.ORG)

## NEWS ANALYSIS

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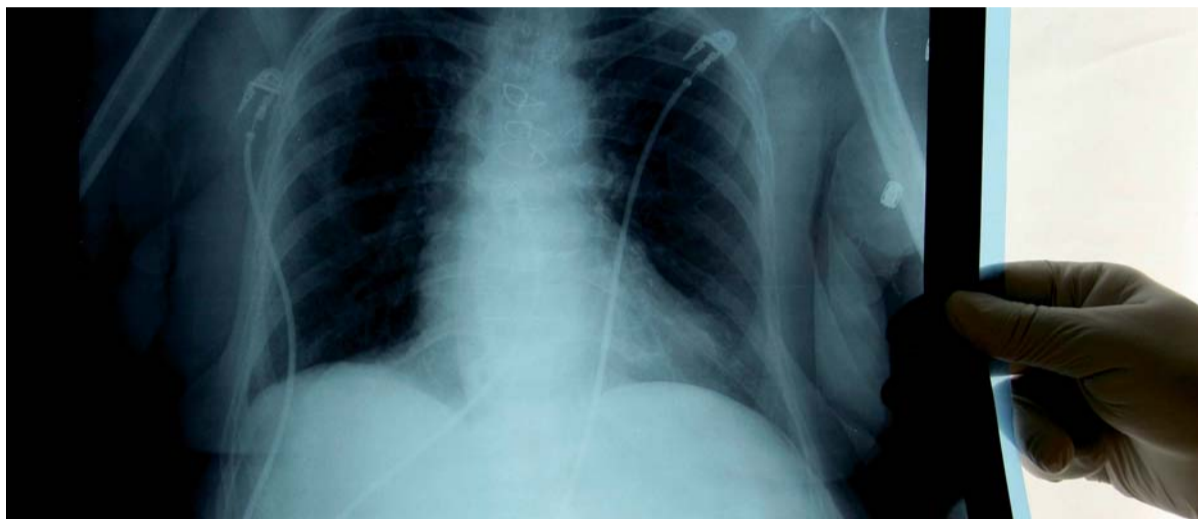
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# LAW MUST ACT

Should victims of pleural plaques be able to seek legal redress and compensation, if appropriate, for their illness? **Paul Donovan** talks to CWU members who are suffering from this appalling condition...



Peter Garrett has just started getting short of breath and wonders if it's the beginning of the end. Peter has always been pretty fit and would normally not think twice about a bit of breathlessness. It's probably nothing, but since he was diagnosed with pleural plaques a couple of years ago he has felt like he's been living on death row.

At the time of his diagnosis Peter was told there was only a three per cent chance of the condition developing but admits this is not particularly helpful when you suddenly start getting short of breath.

Pleural plaques is irreversible thick scar tissue damage to the lining of the lungs caused by asbestos exposure. It is a dormant condition that increases the risk of developing fatal asbestos related lung diseases, like mesothelioma or asbestosis, which often lead to a slow and painful death.

Peter contracted the condition as a result of working in Royal Mail boiler houses over a number of years. The boiler houses had much asbestos in them until the dangerous nature of the substance became clear.

Romec engineer Michael Walker thought last Christmas he just had a bad cold with a nagging cough and went to his doctor who sent him for X-rays.

"It came as a horrible shock when the consultant said I had black spots on my lungs and it was pleural plaques," recalled Michael, who describes the condition as a ticking time bomb. "It could be two years or 20 years, you just don't know," said Michael. "Whenever I get a cough now I don't know if it is just a cold or the start of the end."

Michael, along with other pleural plaque sufferers, is outraged by a decision of the House of Lords in October 2007 upholding a Court of Appeal decision removing the right to compensation on grounds of negligence. For the previous 22 years, workers were entitled to compensation if they developed pleural plaques due to negligent exposure to asbestos by employers. "Once you are diagnosed you should be entitled to compensation. It's ridiculous to talk about democracy when three judges can act in this way," said Michael, who sees the Lords' decision as a sop to the insurance industry.

## BIG CHANGES NEEDED

The Government estimates that there are a potential 1 to 2.5 million potential pleural plaques cases, which could cost between £3,670 million and £28,640 million in compensation pay outs.

Peter and Michael's cases stand in stark contrast to that of Archie Adam, who worked for BT on phone cables in ducts in hospitals. Archie was diagnosed with pleural plaques in 2004 and was initially awarded £3,500 in compensation.

His claim came before the House of Lords' decision. "Anyone who has worked with asbestos should get tested," advised Archie, who is appalled at the added suffering the Lords' ruling has caused.

Following pressure from trade unions, the Ministry of Justice launched a consultation on resolving the problems caused by the ruling. One option would be to overturn the decision by legislation. This route has been taken by the Scottish Executive, which introduced the Damages (Asbestos-Related Conditions) (Scotland) Bill in June.

Other possibilities include improving understanding of the condition, in particular providing support and reassurance to those diagnosed, and setting up a "no fault" compensation scheme to provide financial support. The parameters of such a scheme, and whether the cost would fall on insurers or taxpayers, are open for discussion.

CWU national health, safety and environment officer Dave Joyce, who authored the CWU's submission to the consultation, said: "The good news is the Government has commissioned independent medical research, but the House of Lords decision was a grave injustice to workers."

CWU supported Labour MP Bob Laxton has been at the forefront of the struggle to get the House of Lords decision neutralised. A former BT engineer, Bob has seen much of the damage done by asbestos around his Derby constituency. He is confident there will be legislation restoring the position whereby pleural plaques sufferers can get compensation again, but stresses it must be watertight. "If the process is deficient, the insurance companies will be looking at a way of getting round it," concludes Bob. **V**



Michael Walker  
Pleural plaques sufferer



Peter Garrett  
Pleural plaques sufferer



Dave Joyce  
National H&S officer



Bob Laxton  
MP for Derby

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# BT pensions decision time

In just over a week, members will cast their verdict on a raft of proposed changes to BT's two major pension schemes that have emerged from one of the toughest sets of negotiations with the company in years.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr, who led the CWU negotiating team during a marathon and often deadlocked series of talks, is the first to admit that the decision confronting members is far from comfortable.

While the vast majority of members of the 17,000-strong 'money purchase' BT Retirement Plan (BTRP) - opened in 2001 and now the only BT pension scheme accepting new members - stand to benefit from the proposals, the issue is far less clear-cut for members of the predecessor 'final salary' BT Pension Scheme (BTPS).

Closed to new joiners since 2001, the BTPS still has 65,000 active members, 97,000 deferred members and 178,000 pensioners, making it the largest private sector pension scheme in the UK.

But it also has one of the largest pension scheme deficits - £3.4 billion at the last valuation in 2005.

Left unchecked, particularly in the prevailing market circumstances, that deficit looks certain to continue spiralling - a combination of increasing longevity, lower investment returns and increased regulation adding to the BTPS's woes.

Just before CWU annual conference in June, matters were brought to a head when BT approached the CWU, CONNECT and the BTPS trustees demanding a review of the scheme.

That triggered an emergency

motion to the CWU Telecoms Industry Conference where, following impassioned debate, delegates reaffirmed CWU policy that any attempt to close the BTPS for future service accrual would be met with an immediate ballot for industrial action.

Despite agreeing to the principle of talks - rather than open the way for BT to move direct to consultation with its preferred options unchallenged - Conference was adamant that any deal resulting from that review had to guarantee not just the continuation of a defined benefit scheme for all those in the BTPS, but also firm commitments from BT to ensure it is properly funded into the future.

Delegates also agreed that any deal designed to save BT money on the BTPS had to be accompanied by an increase in company contributions to the 'money purchase' BTRP, addressing the union's long-held concerns that many BTRP members face poverty in old age as a result of low individual contributions merely being matched by the company.

All three of those elements are contained in the deal that is currently out to consultative ballot. It is being unequivocally recommended by Telecoms Executive as the best settlement that can be achieved by negotiation. Its key negotiators go even further - believing that not even sustained industrial action could improve the terms - and that a strike would probably see the current deal being taken off the table by BT.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told the Voice: "I'm not going to try to say that this is where we'd want



to be - because the plain truth is that as soon as we agreed to negotiations on the BTPS we knew the benefits were not going to be as good at the end of talks as they were at the start.

"From the unions' perspective, the whole discussion process has been about the need for sustainability in the BTPS - and the fact that we want it to remain open for future service accruals. This deal achieves those elements and is more favourable than what BT proposed at the outset.

"Given that circumstances had effectively forced us into a review of the BTPS, however, the union insisted

on raising the unacceptability of the position facing members of the BTRP and for them this is good news.

"While the same cannot be said with regards to the BTPS, there's no doubt in my mind that we've secured a far better outcome than many dared expect at the outset - dramatically moving the company from its opening position in many areas.

"I wholeheartedly recommend the deal to members as the best achievable through negotiations - and the best we could possibly hope for in the current economic situation."

• Read the full story at [www.cwu.org/voice](http://www.cwu.org/voice)

## ON THE WEB

View these Telecoms edition stories online at: [www.cwu.org/voice](http://www.cwu.org/voice)

■ **Reassurances on jobs at BT**  
CWU negotiators have secured unequivocal guarantees that not one of the 10,000 job cuts announced last month will result in a compulsory redundancy. The union is determined to hold senior managers to their word, amid profound doubts over the way the company is anticipating the job losses will be met and concerns that the sums don't add up.



■ **Management style on agenda**  
BT has agreed to group-wide discussions about the union's inter-related concerns about performance management and management style. The development took place several weeks after heated debate at a specially convened branch forum to discuss whether BT is using performance management as a tool to force people out of the business.

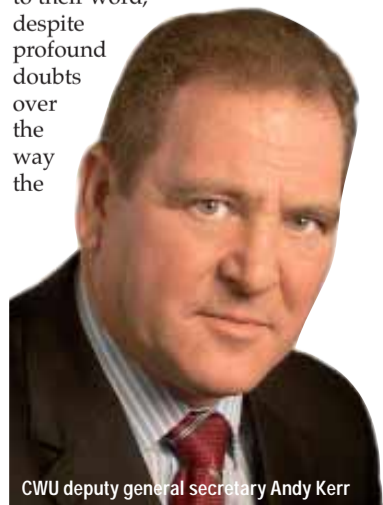


■ **Agency breakthrough**  
As the fight heats up for an immediate pay boost for thousands of agency members - many of whom have not had a rise for years - a significant breakthrough has been achieved in the wider political campaign for equal treatment of the army of disadvantaged 'second class' workers in the UK's shameful two-tier labour force.



## Reassurances from BT on jobs

Unequivocal guarantees have been secured by CWU negotiators that not one of the 10,000 job cuts management want to make by March next year will result in a compulsory redundancy by BT. The union is determined to hold senior managers to their word, despite profound doubts over the way the



CWU deputy general secretary Andy Kerr

company is anticipating the job losses will be met.

As Voice went to press a top level meeting had just taken place with management at which the preliminary thoughts of BT's chief executive officer, Ian Livingstone, as to how the headcount reduction would be met were discussed in detail.

Under the Livingstone plan it was stated that some 2,500 of the job losses, a quarter of the total, would result from under-performers being managed out of the company - a figure that has been challenged by deputy general secretary Andy Kerr.

BT responded by saying that the projected figure was based on previous years and that the 'performance management' heading was being misunderstood by the union because it includes discipline cases, exits involving serious internet abuse, sick and absence-related cases as well as more narrowly-defined 'performance-related' cases.

The CWU, however, remains

unconvinced of the maths.

"Overall there is a planned budgetary objective based on falling work volumes created by the current economic climate. If expectations are not met in one area, less use of agency workers or reduced off-shoring could be an outcome," explains deputy general secretary Andy Kerr. "The union has served warning that it will be monitoring very closely the agreement it has with BT Retail on agency conversions and off-shoring as the company works through its plans."

Andy stressed, however, that at the same meeting BT bosses committed themselves to a group-wide drive against the type of unacceptable management style that has long been reported by local branch representatives at the sharp end. Moreover, BT has agreed to participate in detailed monthly discussions with the union over how the newly named BT Transition Centre for employees awaiting redeployment will actually work.

## 2,200 to go at Virgin Media

Virgin Media has announced that it will shed up to 2,200 jobs over the next three years as a result of an internal review. The company also says it still has 'legacy issues' from the merger between Telewest and NTL.

The news came as a complete shock to the CWU, but bosses have now assured the union that there will be better quality communication and consultation in the future.

A number of meetings are expected in the coming weeks, in which further details of the company's future plans will be forthcoming.

"We'll be pushing that no-one leaves the company on compulsory redundancy," assistant secretary Grace Mitchell told the Voice.

"Natural attrition should be the first method of cuts, with voluntary redundancy should that prove necessary."

## GENERAL NEWS



Image credit: Rob Bremner

iPSL section secretary Gerry Culligan with members outside the Bootle site

# Cheques & balances

A widespread return to the use of cheques instead of debit cards, credit cards and direct debits would help secure CWU members' jobs - and provide a welcome boost to those who are short of cash at the end of the month to boot!

The claim, made by the Girobank Bootle branch, comes amid fears for the long-term future of members at iPSL in Bootle given the rapid decline in the use of cheques as a form of payment.

With cheque volumes falling by around 10 per cent a year - accelerated in recent years by the actions of banks and many businesses to actively discourage cheque use - iPSL's Merseyside cheque processing workforce has already shrunk from 800 to 350, with further reductions expected over the next two years.

"There's now a real concern that if

present trends continue there will be no cheque processing on the Bootle site - the original home of Girobank, the people's bank - by 2010," explains iPSL section secretary Gerry Culligan.

But the impact of the forced withdrawal of the facility to pay by cheque - with many major retailers and petrol stations now refusing to accept cheques at all - goes much further than that, with CWU members disproportionately affected, insists Gerry.

Apart from the direct impact on members at iPSL, Gerry points out that the growth of direct debit and debit and credit card payments has also led to a reduction in the use of Royal Mail and post office counters.

"With the current banking crisis the Government is suddenly having a much greater input into what the banks are doing, so this is an ideal

time for us to look again at what is happening," he said.

"Higher cheque volumes would not just protect our jobs within iPSL but also jobs at A&L which has the Post Office counters cheque processing contract.

"Our postal members would also benefit if more cheques were being sent through the post once again, and likewise more cheque traffic going through the Post Office network would certainly be beneficial to that.

"It would be a win-win situation all round for CWU members - but paying by cheque would also help the general public as well.

"If you're coming to the end of the month and you're short on cash, paying by cheque means the money stays in your account for another four or five days - so it helps the consumer as well."

## Cycling for solidarity



The second annual CWU Cycle Sportive took place in September at the union's Education and Training Centre at Alvescot Lodge in Oxfordshire. This year 25 riders took

part with cyclists from a total of 6 different trade unions joining in to raise sponsorship for Trade Union International Solidarity. Full story at [www.cwu.org/links/cyclesport08](http://www.cwu.org/links/cyclesport08)

## TV boost for ALMA

A Watford postman's campaign to bring rudimentary healthcare to the poor and remote Hafizabad region of Northern Pakistan has received a £17,000 boost as a result of a successful advertising campaign on Asian TV channels during the fasting month of Ramadan.

The success of the fundraising drive has been a major morale booster for ALMA Hospital Trust founder Mohammed Younis after the official opening of the life-saving facility had to be postponed due to the deteriorating political situation in Pakistan.

For months Younis had been working towards the official opening of the hospital on October 30 - but, in the event, the Foreign Office advised it was deemed too dangerous for the charity's high profile UK supporters to travel to the region for the ceremony.

Instead a low-key local celebration took place to mark the successful launch of the facility which is already saving lives - despite delays in the finalising of Pakistani Government commitments for ongoing funding which means the hospital is presently being funded almost entirely by its UK supporters helped by several local benefactors.

Younis told the Voice: "It was bitterly disappointing to have to postpone the official opening, but I'm determined that it will take place as soon as possible.

"In the meantime I'd urge anyone who has supported the charity, or is interested in it, to see for themselves the marvellous work already being done by tapping into YouTube and searching for 'The Alma Hospital Trust' or visiting our own website at [www.almatrust.org](http://www.almatrust.org)".

### NEW CONTRIBUTION RATES

Communication Workers Union Contribution Rates from 1 January 2009	Weekly Contributions		Monthly Contributions		Retired members who pay by direct debit/standing order should notify their bank of the increase. Our bank details are as follows:  CWU General Fund - Sort Code 08 60 01 Unity Trust Bank A/c No 33019822  Members in receipt of PO or BT Pensions will have the increase automatically applied and do not need to make contact with their respective Pension Schemes.  CWU death benefit As of October 1, 2008, the CWU death benefit was increased to £653. Please contact your branch secretary for further information.
	"I" RATE £	"O" RATE £	"I" RATE £	"O" RATE £	
18 years of age and over - full-time (Increase 12p weekly/51p monthly)	2.92	2.82	12.70	12.27	
18 years of age and over - part-time (Increase 7p weekly/30p monthly)	1.69	1.59	7.32	6.89	
Under 18 years of age (Increase 7p weekly/27p monthly)	n/a	1.54	n/a	6.69	
Retired members (Increase 5p weekly/22p monthly)	1.07	0.97	4.65	4.22	
Associate members (Increase 4p weekly/16p monthly)	0.83	0.73	3.56	3.13	

"I" rate includes political fund contribution and "O" rate is the rate paid by members who have opted out of the political fund



The ALMA Hospital - providing rudimentary healthcare where none previously existed

# New organisers boost CWU campaign plans

Bold plans to give new impetus to the CWU's organising and recruitment activity have been boosted by the appointment of three new organisers.

Sarah Connolly, Neil Singh and Pavel Krajca bring the headcount of the team responsible for maintaining and growing CWU membership and influence in both the recognised and unrecognised sectors to 15 - the highest it has ever been.

The trio's arrival comes at a crucial time for the union, with downward pressure on membership in both Royal Mail and BT stemming from planned cutbacks at both companies.

"The pressure is certainly on," stresses national organising secretary John East. "If we do nothing our membership will certainly decline."

"On the RM side we know the company has a target of cutting 40,000 jobs - and at BT there has been a constant process of attrition through leaver schemes even before the recent announcement of 10,000 job losses."

In both the postal and telecoms sectors, John stresses, the challenge is twofold: to 'harden up' membership in the traditional, long-established areas - but also to search out 'frontiers new' within the wider communications and logistics industries.

One key focus for the organising department is the 'ancillary' companies that have been split away from Royal Mail in recent years.

"There's a general acceptance that we haven't built a sufficiently strong union structure within some of the companies that are part of our recognised area on the postal side and that's particularly true of Romec, Quadrant and Capita," explains John.

"In the past, the Royal Mail rep

would have dealt with all of the RM people in a particular area, but because some of those people don't work for RM any more, the eye has been taken off the ball in some areas."

Steps already taken to address this problem in recent weeks have included a training course for Capita and Romec reps and a tour of key Quadrant workplaces.

In October, these initiatives were followed up by a special school for new reps from across the Midlands and the North West who work in communications companies that do not currently recognise the CWU.

Over the coming months these will be rolled out nationally - bolstering the organising department's efforts to build stronger networks of activists in all of the union's key target companies.

These include Virgin Media, Orange, Cable & Wireless, WH Smith, Business Post, Carphone Warehouse, T Mobile and field engineering companies including Babcock Networks, Sky, Greenwoods and Redbridge Managed Services.

It is an organising strategy which focusses on grassroots organisation - resisting the temptation to start out on the quest for formal recognition before a network of reps is in place.

"Our approach from now on will be to build a structure and start dealing with members' concerns. If that leads to formal recognition, all well and good. But, if it doesn't, the important thing is that we're still able to address members' concerns in a practical way," explains John.

"I see it as going back to first principles. The truth is that if members in a particular company want recognition they're going to have to deliver it - it's not something the CWU can do without an effective



Neil Singh, Sarah Connolly, John East and Pavel Krajca

network of local reps. Our new approach is all about putting the power, but also the responsibility, into the hands of activists within any particular company.

"A prime example of what that approach can deliver is the influence the CWU brought to bear on Pell & Bales following the dismissal of a local union rep. His reinstatement - having been sacked for submitting a story about union activity within the call centre to a newspaper - shows you don't need recognition to be effective if you have a strong enough local network. We should never forget that."

Commenting on an impressive growth in recent years in CWU organising activity and membership in the huge swathes of the telecoms industry where unions are not presently recognised - further bolstered by a growing realisation that new entrants to the UK postal industry must be seriously targeted - John insists there is much to be optimistic about.

Particularly encouraging, he believes, is the willingness of many branches to move "outside the comfort zone" in their recruitment and organisation activities, with some branches even looking beyond traditional industry perimeters.

Postal branches including Northamptonshire Amal, Plymouth & East Cornwall, Newcastle Amal and Derbyshire Amal have enthusiastically embraced the challenge of recruiting in telecoms companies - Carphone Warehouse, 118 118 and Sitel respectively. And Leicestershire branch is actively recruiting in a Next call centre.

On the telecoms side, Croydon & South London branch has shown similar boldness - mounting an enthusiastic recruitment campaign in Business Post.

"This is where the CWU needs to be, and it is encouraging to see a growing number of our branch activists really prepared to recruit and organise outside their knowledge base," concludes John.

# Tribunal win strikes blow for sexual equality

CWU member Brian Garratt struck a blow for sexual tolerance and against bullying at work when he won his employment tribunal (ET) case claiming sexual discrimination and unfair dismissal.

Brian had been the subject of homophobic bullying while working at the Hinckley Delivery Office in Leicester, yet it was he who finished up being accused of sexual harassment and dismissed by Royal Mail managers.

The background to the case saw Brian going through a difficult time in his personal life that saw his 27-year marriage break down and his coming out as gay.

Brian endured much crude banter within the workplace with a small group of workmates subjecting him to

particularly vindictive homophobic verbal attacks. "It made life horrible at that time. I just went in and got out as quickly as possible," said

Brian, who admitted life was made more difficult by not having anyone to go home and "unload" the problems on.

The bullying started in early 2006, culminating in a complaint being put in against Brian a year later. He was suspended in April and finally dismissed on 5 June 2007. "I felt very much on my own at that time. I didn't even want to go down town in Hinckley, for fear people would see me and ask what I was doing - I felt like a criminal," said Brian.

The ET found the whole investigation and appeal process

conducted by RM managers to be flawed. This included only providing five statements - that were prejudicial to Brian - out of 13 possible statements that could have gone to the manager making the final decision on his future. Only these five were made available to Brian.

The ET put much store by the evidence of Rosemary Buckler who testified to the regular use of homophobic comments around the office and that, in her opinion, the culture was "one of sexism, racism and bigotry in general."

The ET ruled that the employer "did know of the ethos, circumstances and activities that were taking place on the shop floor."

"It is clear that there was an unhealthy tolerance of horseplay and banter which had significant sexual overtones," ruled the ET, adding that the company had allowed this.

Ali Moosa, who represented the CWU on behalf of the legal services department, believes the decision sends out a significant message to workplaces: namely that trade unions are not going to tolerate discrimination of any kind.

"Sexual, racial or whatever. We will fight for justice," said Ali.

Branch secretary Mark Greenhill believes that this type of bullying is far more widespread than some may believe. "I'd like to see a more proactive approach taken by management and reps also need to look out for it and get it stopped," said Mark.

Brian paid tribute to the union and his workmates. "I wouldn't have got through this without my friends, family, the majority of my workmates and the union," said Brian, who received substantial compensation from the case, but will not be returning to work at Royal Mail.



## InBrief

### Female & black workers

The union's annual Women's and Black Workers' Conferences will both take place early in the New Year. The Black Workers' Conference will take place at Belfast's Holiday Inn Hotel on Saturday February 7, and the Women's Conference will take place three weeks later on Saturday February 28 at the Britannia Hotel in Manchester. Members can attend as observers - but visitors must show their membership cards. For further information contact the equality department at CWU HQ on 020 8971 7388.

### CWU youth on tour

Young CWU members contributed to a UNI Europa Youth conference in Barcelona in October. UNI is the international trade union confederation representing 15.5 million members in 900 unions from over 140 countries world-wide. A CWU motion demanding that working people and their families don't foot the bill for the multi-national multi-billion bail out of stricken banks was well received. "The strategic alliances we made with unions across Europe will serve us well in the ever more joined-up global economy," Youth Advisory Committee chair Maeve Kennedy told the Voice.

### Anthony Walker tribute

In July 2005 18-year-old black student Anthony Walker was killed with an ice pick. Two men were subsequently found guilty of his racially motivated murder and are now serving long jail sentences. In October a special lecture in Anthony's memory, organised by the charitable foundation that bears his name, explored the themes behind the sort of intolerance that cost Anthony his life. At the lecture a CWU donation of £500 to the Anthony Walker Foundation was presented to Anthony's mother, Gee, by national equalities officer Linda Roy. "Our hearts go out to the family of Anthony and to all who have been affected by the racist hatred and violence," said Linda.

### Get yourself published!

Unionlearn - the TUC's learning and skills organisation - has teamed up with Quick Reads to launch a competition to find budding trade union authors. Among the Quick Reads published in 2010 will be a compilation of 20 short stories (1,500 to 2,500 words long) penned by trade union members. Full details of the competition are at [unionlearn.org.uk/QRcompetition](http://unionlearn.org.uk/QRcompetition)

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## CHARITY

## CWUHA

Dawn Chamarette reports on a year in which history was made at the union's charity CWUHA – in more ways than one...



◀ Images from top to bottom:  
1. Young schoolchildren in Moshi, Tanzania  
2. Inside the new classroom  
3. Bulgarian students eager to learn

▶ Inset Top Right: Young recipients of CWUHA aid to Bulgaria pose for a photo with one of the convoy members



The union's humanitarian aid charity, CWUHA, went from strength to strength this year, not only delivering more supplies than ever, but also forging links with new volunteers and sponsors.

This year's convoys delivered essential supplies to orphanages and hospitals in Lithuania in May and Bulgaria in September. Volunteers saw how previous aid had helped the lives of children and the new deliveries were as warmly welcomed as ever.

Clothes, cots, bedding, nappies and detergents, toys, pens and pencils help with day-to-day needs and stimulate the children, while, medical supplies from medicines to incubators bring life-saving essentials to these countries, still emerging from the break-up of the former Soviet Union.

A key reason for the success of CWUHA is that it gets specifically needed supplies direct to the recipients and the charity volunteers see how the donations have been used.

Also the overheads are minimal, with volunteers needing to be able to drive a wagon and raise their own funds to support themselves while on a mission.

Unions including UNITE and ASLEF sponsored a wagon to Bulgaria and the mission brought together, for the first time in the 13-year history of CWUHA, volunteer drivers from both sides of the Irish border. Of the 10 vehicles, one was from Northern Ireland and two were from the Irish Republic's CWU Ireland – whose contribution included three incubators and medical equipment worth over £30,000.

"In total, more than £250,000 worth of aid was given, which is fantastic," said Carl Webb, the CWUHA national secretary. "It included 100 cots – previously, these children slept in cardboard

boxes. Through our excellent contacts we arranged deliveries from local suppliers.

"Again, when we got to our second delivery point, cots and school desks had arrived, which had meant we could take more goods of other kinds in the wagons."

Carl praised and thanked all past, present and future volunteers and sponsors, describing them as "the lifeblood of CWUHA."

"Without them we couldn't operate," he explained, adding: "This autumn, half the volunteers were new to the role and they all said they wanted to do it again."

"CWU branch affiliation is as strong as ever and we have loyal sponsors – Royal Mail and BT in particular, as well as Eircom and An Post – who continue to provide the vehicles, fuel and maintenance.

"We have big sponsors from unions and service providers including our own Friendly Society CWFS, Simpson Miller, Walker Smith Way,

Brodies, MPH J.G O'Hare & Co and Edwards Duthie.

"A big thank you goes to them all for their kindness and generosity," Carl said.

In May, a self-financed fact-finding mission to Tanzania by Alex Pearson and Roger Jones saw the benefits to communities in and around Moshi, brought by the CWUHA from relatively little funding. The pair saw lessons in the two classrooms built from previous donations and went ahead with transactions with a carpenter and an ironworker to build desks and playground equipment.

Text books, a cooking pot and a washing-up tub were also among the new supplies.

Once the current work is done, the school will be able to teach up to 120 pupils a day, in a hugely improved environment.

As well as other projects, the CWUHA trustees plan return convoys to Bulgaria, Moldova and Transnistria next year.

If you want to donate, volunteer or ask about branch affiliation, visit [www.cwuha.org](http://www.cwuha.org).



## A COMPETITIVE OFFER FOR CWU MEMBERS

## Research shows CWU could save you money on home insurance

As a member of CWU you are entitled to competitive prices on home insurance from CWU Insurance. In fact, according to online research by Consumer Intelligence, you could save on average £63 compared to Norwich Union or £62 against RAC, as the table below shows\*:

Insurance Provider	Average saving made with CWU Insurance	Although you could save as much as
Norwich Union	£63.00	£160.72
RAC	£62.39	£127.84
M&S	£61.44	£142.55
First Direct	£54.10	£137.74
Cornhill Direct	£53.94	£115.63

Figures are from Consumer Intelligence 01 Sept – 30 Sept 2008 for prices of buildings and contents insurance using a representative sample of the UK population.

If you prefer to buy your insurance online, you'll qualify for a generous **15% discount**†. Plus, there's 5% off if you combine buildings and contents insurance. And you have the option of paying in easy monthly instalments by direct debit.

However getting the best home insurance is not just about price. You also need a good level of cover. Should you ever need to make a claim, our buildings policy can provide up to **£500,000** to cover the cost of rebuilding. This figure doesn't reflect the market value of your home, but

\*Based on independent online research by Consumer Intelligence during 01 Sept – 30 Sept 2008.

†10% of consumers achieve this saving with CWU Buildings and Contents Insurance.

CWU INSURANCE IS OWNED BY AND RUN FOR THE BENEFIT OF ITS POLICYHOLDERS, SO WE CAN GIVE YOU A BETTER DEAL

the materials, labour and other costs of rebuilding. If you've got a mortgage, your mortgage company may be able to advise you what the property should be insured for.

We are also committed to offering first class service, which is one reason why over 80% of our customers stay with us every year. Your calls will be handled quickly and efficiently at **UK based call centres**. Our claims service operates **24 hours, 7 days a week** and we deal with every claim as fairly and as fast as we can.

We'll even refund any fees up to £25 if your current mortgage lender charges you for transferring your policy to us. So why not find out how much you could save? Just visit [www.cwuinsurance.co.uk](http://www.cwuinsurance.co.uk) or call us on **0800 013 2298**† (quoting ref: Voice 408).

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"You could save up to 27% with CWU Buildings and Contents Insurance"†‡

Independent online research by Consumer Intelligence 01 Sept – 30 Sept 2008

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† Compared to the standard price you would be quoted if you called us. ‡ Lines are open 8.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat. For quality and protection purposes, your call will be recorded. We exchange information with other insurance companies and the police to prevent fraud. CWU Insurance is a trading style of UIA (Insurance) Ltd. UIA (Insurance) Ltd is a member of the Association of British Insurers, The Financial Ombudsman Service and is registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act – No. 2898R. CWU is an Introducing Appointed Representative of UIA (Insurance) Ltd, which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority.

# Crisis to hit disabled CWU in call for action



CWU senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns addressing the Disability and Special Needs conference

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns warned that disabled people would suffer the worst effects of the recession.

Addressing the union's Disability and Special Needs (DSN) conference in Birmingham, Tony contrasted the attitude toward bankers and the low paid. "The Evening Standard carried a headline viewing the loss of 600 banker's jobs at Lehman brothers as a catastrophe but what about the 2,500 maintenance workers who lost their jobs – that didn't make the headlines," said Tony. "There will be less and less people buying mobiles, taking up broadband and using the mail. This will filter through to our members so we can expect the attacks to come."

Tony recalled that while 20 per cent of the UK population are disabled only around 7 per cent of disabled members attend the CWU annual conference. "So even in the CWU we have serious under representation," said Tony.

Dr Norman Waddington, a biodiversity scientist who is blind, pressed the need for disabled people to stand up for their rights. "35 per cent of those visually impaired are registered, which means the Government only budgets for that number. More people need to

register," said Norman, who pointed out that the visually impaired suffered a higher unemployment rate in the workplace than other disabled groups. "45 per cent are economically inactive yet one third say they would like to work."

Sarah Veale, the head of the Equality and Employment Rights Department at the TUC, identified a tendency in government to pass legislation and then assume that the problem had been solved. "The Government must provide resources to support disabled people in work," said Sarah, who condemned the Work and Pensions Department's decision to shut down Remploy, which provided work for disabled people.

Sarah highlighted the growing number of hate crime perpetrators targeting disabled people and called for proper laws to address the problem.

Several speakers applauded the European Court of Justice ruling in the case of Coleman v Attridge Law that secured the extension of DDA protection to cover people with responsibility for disabled persons.

There was some heated debate around the motion calling for a policy to be put in place that would see "the reporting of all instances of cancer."

The idea behind the proposal was to get a full picture of cancer sufferers and what was being done to help them. Concerns centred on the compulsory nature of proposal.

A number of delegates told of colleagues and friends they had who wanted their condition kept confidential. Elspeth Bettany, who proposed the motion for the DSN Advisory Committee, conceded that any such policy would have to be undertaken on a voluntary basis.

Another motion called for stammering and stuttering to be recognised as a disability. "It is a disability that is not always recognised by the sufferer or employer, resulting in many of our members being discriminated against by the employer," read the motion.

Gary Clarke of Scotland No 2 told how many sufferers were perceived as drunk and didn't go out due to the negative attitudes amongst the public. The proposal received unanimous backing.

National equalities officer Linda Roy concluded: "Yet again there was plenty of excellent debate and the topics discussed demonstrate that our union is leading the way in terms of promoting and fighting those issues which matter to our disabled members."

## Disability helpline rings success

October 13–17 was CWU Disability Awareness week, and to mark the event the union sponsored a national Disability Helpline staffed by members of the Disability and Special Needs Advisory Committee (DSNAC).

DSNAC chair Tony Sneddon judged the week to be an overwhelming success. "This initiative is very important to our

members. It gives them the opportunity to contact experienced representatives to find out information and get assistance," he told the Voice.

National equalities officer Linda Roy was pleased to assist what she described as "an event which reinforces the Union's commitment to our members with disabilities and special needs."



DSNAC member Ted Stead, chair Tony Sneddon and Linda Roy

General secretary Billy Hayes has urged the Government to use its stakeholding in public bodies like the PO and the BBC to force positive action on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues.

Addressing the annual LGBT conference in Swansea, Billy praised the enactment of much equality legislation but pointed out that "it is one thing to win a policy another to get it implemented."

Billy pledged CWU support for the international day against homophobia and LGBT history month next year at a time when it is still a crime to be gay in 77 countries.

Derek Walker, the head of policy at the Wales TUC, pointed out that there is far greater discrimination against LGBT people in the private than public sector. Echoing Billy, he suggested that "Government could use procurement powers to promote equality and improve conditions for LGBT staff."

He also called for statutory rights for equality reps in the workplace.

Delegates unanimously passed a motion condemning "the disgusting homophobic chanting" against Portsmouth footballer Sol Campbell in a recent match against Tottenham Hotspur.

Lindsey England from the Gay Football Supporters' Network (GFSN) told how some professional clubs were showing a positive attitude towards kicking homophobia out of football, while the FA was, at best, paying lip service to the idea. Among the most progressive clubs are Aston Villa, which has a gay supporters club, and Bradford City which has taken adverts out in magazines, programmes and around the ground emphasising the need to confront homophobia.

Other clubs showing a positive response to the GFSN include Manchester City, Arsenal, Manchester United, Chelsea, Nottingham Forest, Orient and Millwall - yet the 'tackling homophobia group' set up by the FA that was supposed to meet four times a year has yet to convene. "The GFSN needs action from the clubs, the FA, the police and government if homophobia is to be kicked out of the game," said Lindsey.

Former parish priest and member of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, Martin Reynolds, told how the churches "wield huge power and are answerable to no one." Martin found the attitude of the Catholic Church's to be more aggressive and regressive toward LGBT people.

He recounted how the present Pope, when head of the Congregation of the Faith, had said that letting gay people adopt children was like doing them

violence. "In some religious minds this can be taken as a reason to do violence to gay people," said Martin, who recalled how the Catholic Church had fought equality legislation in the EU.

"The Church in the UK is in massive decline, the only growth is in those that are homophobic," said Martin. "This is bad for people like me who are committed to their faith."

Among the other motions passed was one condemning the decision of an employment tribunal to uphold that an Islington registrar had been discriminated against by her employer because of her refusal to carry out civil partnership ceremonies with LGBT couples on grounds of her Christian beliefs. "People of religious belief shouldn't work in areas that are inconsistent with their beliefs. Jehovah's Witnesses don't work in blood transfusion units and pacifists don't become fighter pilots," said Laurie Smith of the LGBT advisory committee.

Linda Kietz of West London branch highlighted how lesbian and gay people were now being killed in greater numbers in Iraq than when the country was ruled by Saddam Hussein.

National equalities officer Linda Roy told the Voice: "The CWU LGBT Conference was an overwhelming success, ensuring that LGBT issues remain at the forefront of our equality agenda. This way our LGBT members will have confidence in their union's ability to defend and advise them on any issues pertaining to sexuality or sexual identity."

More at [www.cwu.org/links/lgbt08](http://www.cwu.org/links/lgbt08)



Maria and Angela tie the knot

CWU NEC and LGBT advisory committee member Maria Exall and her long-time partner Angela Eagle made happy headline news when they wed in a civil partnership ceremony in September.

As the only openly gay woman in the House of Commons, Angela Eagle – a Minister at HM Treasury – was herself involved in drawing up the 2004 legislation that established Civil Partnership marriages.

She originally met Maria at Peckham Labour Party meetings, and the couple have been together for 18 years.

Their civil partnership ceremony was witnessed by around 50 guests at Southwark Register Office in South London.

# 'OBAMA'S INSPIRATIONAL'

Last month's US presidential election made Barack Obama the first black person to fill the most powerful position on the planet and brought hope of real progressive change to around 300 million US citizens. Here, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes outlines his hopes for the next president and recounts his own experiences of being in the US during the campaign...

## UK reaction

Everyone here in Britain seemed to welcome Obama's win, but for different reasons...



Barack Obama's victory sent the media in the US, here in the UK and around the world into immediate overdrive, his victory being variously hailed as "historic," "momentous," and "a new dawn for

America."

Across Britain's political divide, politicians queued up to pay tribute to the Man of the Moment, who has raised the hopes and aspirations of so many tens of millions of people, many of whom had never voted before.

Clearly aiming to put his own 'political spin' on the result, leader of the opposition David Cameron said that the change offered by Mr Obama contrasted with Labour's offer of "more of the same."

But Prime Minister Gordon Brown disagreed, insisting that Mr Obama had triumphed over his conservative opponent because he "embodied progressive values" shared by Labour.

And, taking a tongue-in-cheek swipe at the Conservative Party, Mr Brown quipped: "The only change they represent is that they change their minds every week."

On behalf of the British trade union movement as a whole, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber was also effusive in his praise, pointing out: "In a country scarred by slavery, by the Ku Klux Klan and by the appalling legacy of a thousand lynchings, this represents a shift of truly seismic proportions.

"It is a message of hope not just to America - but to the wider world."

But, in contrast to many commentators, Mr Barber did not only focus on Mr Obama's ethnic origin; he also drew attention to the president-elect's progressive domestic policy programme, which he has urged the UK government to study and take inspiration from.

"A key part of Barack Obama's economic strategy is to create a green industrial revolution. He plans to invest 150 billion dollars over the next decade for renewable energy and he believes this strategy will create five million new jobs in the US," explained Mr Barber, adding: "We should follow their lead by investing in green technology."

While short-term measures have aimed at stabilising the financial sector, the TUC leader insists that "the government also needs a long-term strategy to ensure that the UK emerges with a more equal and sustainable economy."



▲ (Left-right) Course organiser Carl Roper, TUC academy director Liz Blackshaw, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes and ATL national officer Collette Bradford in Hooksett, New Hampshire

“THIS VICTORY HAS GIVEN WORKERS IN THE STATES A NEW BELIEF THAT, TOGETHER, THEY CAN ACHIEVE CHANGE”

The CWU has had a longstanding sororal and fraternal relationship with the US labour movement and warmly welcomed Obama's win, for his political programme as well as the historic cultural advance that he represents.

In early November, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes took part in a three-day training course for senior trade union officers at Harvard University in the US city of Cambridge near Boston. And, after the course finished, Billy and several others from the course drove up to the town of Hooksett in New Hampshire, about 50 miles away, and spent the weekend helping out local union activists from the National Association of Letter Carriers and the United Association in their election campaigning for Mr Obama.

"We spent hours knocking doors and people were mostly supportive," he recalls, adding: "Some of them wondered if I was Irish because of my accent!"

"And another difference from the campaigning I'm used to is that the houses were all so far apart, so you can't cover loads of streets in a couple of hours."

Billy and his colleagues did not meet any of the "redneck" stereotypes that we sometimes see here on television programmes in the UK. Indeed he stressed

that even the small number of McCain supporters that they met had been friendly.

"We were warmly received by everyone," he explained, although, this being the weekend before polling day "one or two complained of feeling 'blitzed' by the months and months of electioneering."

But, among Obama supporters - the union activists and the others that the UK visitors met while they were out campaigning - Billy's overall impression was that "there was a real buzz" - at the possibility, the likelihood - that real positive change was on the way.

However, this was mixed with feelings of "trepidation and apprehension that it could all go disastrously wrong at the last minute" he added, "and everyone seemed to be holding their breath to a certain extent - not wanting to make predictions."

"We'd flown home by the time of the election itself, but the result, when it came, was tremendous."

Reflecting on the significance of the election, Billy described it as representing a "sea-change" in US politics.

"It's amazing that a black man has been elected president just some 40-odd years after black people won equal rights and I'd put it on a par with the moon landings and Nelson Mandela's release in terms of its historical importance," he said.

"It's inspirational - no doubt about it. Obama took on the establishment - both within his own party and across the wider political establishment - and he won.

"For workers in the States, this victory has given them a new belief that they can achieve change, that they can rebuild their trade union movement, membership of which - as a proportion of the workforce - has fallen far below that of the UK.

"As to how this will affect us here in the UK, well, Mr Obama's clearly got to prioritise the problems his own people are facing at the moment, but, on the international stage, hopefully, we'll see a far less belligerent US foreign policy, and a US that will have more respect for, and will pay more attention to, international institutions such as the UN."

However, despite the many points of agreement between our union and the US President-elect, there remains one area of possible controversy in the future.

As a keen follower of Liverpool Football Club, Billy was surprised by claims in the British press that Mr Obama may be something of a West Ham United supporter.

"I'm not sure if that's true," smiled Billy, "but, if it is, then supporting West Ham would certainly have been character building for him, wouldn't it?" ▽