

INSIDE:



**PAGE 3
POST OFFICE CUTS
SPARK OUTRAGE**

Opposition mounts over proposals to shut down 2,500 post offices across the UK



**PAGE 4
FIGHTING ON FOR
JUSTICE AT WORK**

As six of the Burslem 12 win the right to return, the struggle for full justice continues



**PAGE 7
DISPUTE LOOMS
OVER PENSIONS**

Members reject Royal Mail's plans to cut staff pensions rights and raise the retirement age

VOICE



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PUTTING OUR STAMP ON THE FUTURE

PAGES 8 & 9 Postal workers in the UK and across Europe unite

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

SPIDER TO THE FLY

Trade Unions for the Tories is not much in evidence at the moment. However, the portents are there.

During the 1981 Tory Party Conference, Norman Tebbit, who was then Secretary of State for Trade & Industry, wore the yellow and blue badge of the Conservative Trade Union Association as he berated those who had expressed their anger at three million unemployed, by suggesting that they "get on their bikes" and look for work. He then proceeded to introduce some of the worst trade union laws in a developed world.

These 18 years of trouble and strife are sometimes easily forgotten when we are grappling with the problems that we face with the current Labour government.

Whether that is with Royal Mail under liberalisation, resisting attacks on our members' conditions and pensions, leading to cuts in service provision, or our struggle to get justice for agency workers, or to roll back many of the laws that stifled trade unions.

And, all the while, we see the rich and the powerful being celebrated at home and abroad.

Labour has failed to listen to its core support and seems to take them for granted, while the mistaken belief is that their supporters have nowhere else to go.

But, in the forthcoming elections, that lazy assumption could prove horribly wrong.

It is evident that there are many dangerous developments that could lead to increased support for the far right. Trade unions are, of course, not political parties, but we have a right to make common cause with those who best serve members' interests.

It was once said that the difference between the major parties may only be 10 per cent, but we live in that space.

It is, therefore, all the more intriguing that the Conservatives are now seeking to woo trade unionists in an apparently twin-track strategy, designed to break the link with Labour and yet draw trade unionists to the Tories. According to the Independent on Sunday, (March 23), David Cameron has appointed a special trade union envoy to undertake this task.

Coupled with this, the Centre For Policy Studies

pamphlet – that is the same organisation that advocated Post Office privatisation – has called for trade unions to break the link with Labour, in much the same way that the Tories did in the aftermath of the General Strike in 1926 when they legislated to break the link, citing the fact that 19 per cent of trade unionists voted Conservative.

Much of what is wrong with the union's relationship is the failure of the Government to listen, but that ability to listen is there nonetheless.

That is why we have a review of liberalisation and that is why progress is being made on agency workers' rights.

Whatever government is in power, the CWU will continue to campaign for our members' interests.

Vote Labour on May 1st



IT'S A FACT!

Liverpool has produced more number 1 records than any other city, with 56 since 1953. John Lennon and Paul McCartney wrote 25 of them. The first woman to have a number 1 was Liza Roza with 'How Much is That Doggie in the Window'



CWU in the news...

The positive developments for the joint trade union campaign to achieve equal rights for agency and vulnerable workers have made excellent press coverage in the last few weeks. So too has the government review of the impact of liberalisation, or competition, on the postal service in the UK. CWU has played a prominent and leading role in both these stories. Kevin Slocombe, Head of communications, kslocombe@cwu.org

Having run an excellent campaign that persuaded and lobbied MPs to support a Private Member's Bill, the results were paraded in the UK media. "Ministers face revolt over rights for agency workers" led *The Independent*; "MPs challenge Brown on rights for agency workers" headlined *The Times* and "Brown feels heat over bill on agency staff," added *The Financial Times*, as all the UK broadsheets carried detailed stories that heralded the union success story.

Unions are sharing the responsibility for the campaign and equally shared the limelight in the national press.

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes was quoted in the

Morning Star and *The Guardian* saying: "This is a real minimum wage moment. The working lives of 1.4 million agency workers and their families are one step closer to the fair and equal treatment they deserve and need." The campaign continues and is covered in detail in this Voice (T&FS edition).

"Ministers in the last-chance saloon" was the quote of our general secretary as the papers widely covered the current government review into postal liberalisation. *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Times* have all covered the review in depth, most recently when all parties tabled their first submission to the government-

appointed review team.

Most papers focussed on regulator Postcomm's criticisms of Royal Mail for being distracted by competition.

"Royal Mail was spending time trying to keep competitors out of the postal market and not enough on meeting the needs of users" the *Financial Times* reported the regulator as saying.

Billy Hayes called on the government to protect the public postal service and he referred to the review as an opportunity. "If the government gets it wrong, the British public will not easily forgive them," reported the *Morning Star*.

You can read more about the liberalisation review in the postal Voice.





CWU members protesting against franchising



Billy Hayes and Ken Livingstone meeting last month



Bexley residents fighting to save their post office

FURY OVER PO CLOSURES

Post Office Limited's announcement of a significant cutback in the number of offices up and down the country has, not surprisingly, provoked fury on the part of our union, but the potential loss of these vital centres of public service has also sparked anger from all parts of our communities and from either side of Britain's political divide

Members of Parliament, the Mayor of London, local councillors and members of the public have joined the CWU in a growing chorus of outrage at the savage programme of post office closures across the UK.

A total of up to 2,500 offices are to close under Post Office Limited's (POL) Network Change Programme, which, the company claims, will "modernise and reshape the network and put it on a more stable footing."

The national plan – timetabled for the next 12 to 18 months – was announced towards the end of last year and the first phase has seen POL begin a series of area plans spelling out what the cuts will mean around the country.

As of April 1, out of a total of 41 area programmes, 15 have yet to start, 8 are "in public consultation" and, in the remaining 18, the six-week dialogue has now closed.

In London, for example, 169 branch or sub-post offices are set to go, along with two crown offices – Essex Road and Ludgate Circus – an announcement which has sparked anger from both the CWU and London Mayor Ken Livingstone.

Condemning the proposals, Mr Livingstone revealed that he is mounting a legal challenge to the London plan.

"Communities in every part of London, especially the most vulnerable people, depend on their local Post Office. Post Office Ltd has not provided adequate time to consult on its proposals, leaving me with no alternative but to ask lawyers to seek leave to challenge their decision to close 171 post offices in London through a judicial review," the mayor explained.

"Over the last seven years, there has been a 45 per cent reduction in the number of post offices open in London while the number of people living and working here has increased. Now is not the time to be closing post offices but expanding the service."

Welcoming the mayor's support, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes said: "This is a proportionate response to scandalous behaviour by POL, who seem determined to strip the country of post offices.

"The consultation has been completely

inadequate, failing to seriously consider individual cases, and the effect that so many closures will have on the network as a whole. London has been hit particularly hard and we fully support Ken Livingstone's actions to defend this vital public asset."

In a letter to the Guardian newspaper, Billy warned of the dangers facing the British postal service as a result of the cuts and pointed out: "There have been over 5,000 closures since 1997.

"We do not expect our hospitals or schools to make profit and need to recognise the post office network for what it is – a valuable public asset which requires government investment and which has not been helped by the withdrawal of government services, such as Girobank and TV licences.

"Ken Livingstone's legal challenge to further closures and campaigns across the country to save offices should speak loud and clear to politicians," added Billy, who spelled out the impact that the cuts would have when he gave evidence to the Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) Select Committee inquiry into the closure programme in February.

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey, who accompanied Billy to the Westminster hearing, echoed the general secretary's call, demanding a halt to the closures and urging the Government to "expand the role and remit of the network to provide universal access to postal, government and financial services, including the establishment of a People's Post Bank."

After unveiling their London closure plan, POL ignited further anger by announcing the franchising out of another eight crown offices, with the loss of almost 100 jobs, to A&D Thornton Community Retail and other retailers.

Thornton's is set to take over postal services from offices at Barras Bridge in Newcastle and Manchester's Newton Street, along with with Crosshill in the city of Glasgow and Airdrie Crown Post Office in North Lanarkshire, while the work of four London crown offices at Tottenham, Maida Hill, East Acton and Borough is to be outsourced elsewhere.

Parliamentary challenge

Labour MPs faced an acute dilemma last month, when, in what appeared to be opportunism, the Conservative Party tabled a Parliamentary motion urging a halt to the closures

Some Labour members took the difficult decision to back an opposition Parliamentary motion urging suspension of the closure programme last month, cutting the Government's majority to just 20 as the motion lost by 288 to 268 on a dramatic night in the House of Commons.

One of the rebels, Hayes and Harlington MP John McDonnell described the result as "a huge embarrassment to the Government.

"The Government has always underestimated the strength of anger on Labour benches against the privatisation and cuts in this essential public service, he argued, adding: "The Government is the sole shareholder in Royal Mail and could stop this closure programme in its tracks."

Commenting on the motion, Billy Hayes thanked the Labour MPs for backing the motion and welcomed the Parliamentary debate, but he repeated his warning that the opposition Conservatives are no friends of the UK postal sector.

Although their motion called for a halt to the closure programme, Billy pointed out that it did not include demands for an end to the franchising-out of crown post offices, a policy which will cost large numbers of jobs.

"We have consistently called for the suspension of

both the closure and franchising programme and we are concerned that the Conservative Party does not have the best interests of the network at heart, as its policy effectively calls for it to be dismantled," explained Billy.

Lancashire MPs also urged the Government to reconsider plans to attack services across their county, when they held a Private Members' Debate at Westminster.

Chorley MP Lindsay Hoyle, who also sits on the BERR select committee, pointed out that "Lancashire has been particularly badly hit, a quarter of our post offices have closed since 2003.

"We have an inordinate amount of deprived areas in the county and a very large rural area. The most vulnerable people will find it more difficult," Mr Hoyle warned.

And Blackpool North and Fleetwood MP Joan Humble, referring to the increased distance that many of her constituents – a significant number of whom are elderly – would now have to travel in order to access services, warned: "More and more people will now find themselves outside of the one-mile radius."

CWU North West regional secretary Carl Webb said that he was pleased to see the areas' MPs highlighting

the damage that the cutbacks would wreak.

"At a time when politicians of all colours are talking about a breakdown in our social fabric, it's crazy to be destroying one of the key parts of society's infrastructure," Carl stormed.

"We seem to be the only country in Europe which expects its post office network to run at a profit, rather than providing an essential public service, where people can access the full range of government services."

■ Full list of Labour MPs who supported the Parliamentary motion: Diane Abbott (Hackney North & Stoke Newington), Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North), John Cummings (Easington), Andrew Dismore (Hendon), David Drew (Stroud), Frank Field (Birkenhead), Paul Flynn (Newport West), John Grogan (Selby), Kate Hoey (Vauxhall), Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North), John McDonnell (Hayes & Harlington), Eric Martlew (Carlisle), Alan Meale (Mansfield), Gordon Prentice (Pendle), Alan Simpson (Nottingham South), Geraldine Smith (Morecambe & Lunesdale), Peter Soulsby (Leicester South), David Taylor (Leicestershire North West), Mike Wood (Batley & Spen), Robert Wareing (Liverpool West Derby).



Kate Hoey MP



John Grogan MP



The suspended Burslem postal workers holding a protest outside their delivery office last autumn, a case of victimisation of key CWU activists which has been repeated elsewhere in the UK

Fighting for fairness and justice in the workplace

Deputy general secretary Dave Ward expressed confidence that "full justice" will be achieved after six of the "Burslem 12" won the right to return to work last month.

And, thanks to the agreement won by the union through the bitter winter strike, the CWU is confident that the remaining six Burslem men will join their workmates soon.

Dave pledged the union's continuing full support for the Burslem men and vowed: "The struggle for full justice continues."

"The agreement that we won through the Burslem strike kicks in now and we're confident that Royal Mail will be exposed by this independent process," he predicted.

Explaining the procedure, Dave

continued: "It will be a three-member panel consisting of an independent professional, someone from the CWU and a Royal Mail manager from another area."

Midlands regional secretary Lee Barron explains: "The strike earlier this year secured independent appeals – that was the key demand of the 5-and-a-half-week strike – and that process now begins. That is what will deliver the justice."

"Our campaign for justice was always going to be a long road, but our determination and our commitment remain unbounded," added Lee.

With top-level talks now under way to review Royal Mail management's use of Bullying and

Harassment procedures – which, the union alleges, have been abused by rogue local managers in some areas in order to victimise CWU members – Dave Ward expressed optimism that the union is now getting to grips with the difficulties created by this particular aspect of industrial relations.

While Burslem has been a particularly high-profile example of such victimisation, the union has also won significant disciplinary cases recently at Oxford and Bude in Cornwall.

"At Oxford, we had two lads summarily dismissed last autumn following accusations of abusive behaviour," Dave explains, adding: "But, at national appeal earlier this

month, their sackings were replaced by warnings."

And at Bude, where a former unit rep with 22 years' service was sacked last October for allegedly calling a scab "scab," an industrial tribunal ruled last month that this was an unfair dismissal.

Plymouth Branch secretary Tony Bough said that CWU members were "delighted" with the success of the hearing.

"This member's never had any previous disciplinarys in 22 years of service," Tony revealed, adding that Dave Ward had pledged his full support for the members' case as soon as he heard about it at the Plymouth branch AGM at the end of January.

Joint conference reports problems

CWU divisional reps and national officers joined senior Royal Mail executives and area managers at the second Working Together to Win event in central London at the end of February.

Arising from last autumn's national agreement, these joint conferences are aimed at reviewing and monitoring the deployment and implementation of the deal, through its multiple phases.

In response to Royal Mail operations director Ninian Wilson's opening remarks, stating disappointment at the recent slowing rate of progress, CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward pointed out that progress on four key issues – pensions, the Government review of competition, deployment and bullying and harassment (B&H) procedures – are all linked.

"On deployment, we must do this in a way which is pragmatic and takes everyone with us," Dave insisted and, turning to B&H procedures, he added: "We need to be able to work these problems out without using the conduct code every time – there have got to be better solutions."

Ninian replied: "If we need to look at how we deal with it, or if we can find a more effective mechanism, then I can do that with Dave."

The divisional reps and their respective area managers then sat down together and discussed deployment progress within their regions, problems and possible solutions.

A mixed bag of results were revealed in the subsequent reports back, with almost all regions admitting to difficulties over interpretations of the "30-minute" flexibility plan, while a blurring of phases two and three was also apparent in many areas, as well as problems with outdoor lapsing arrangements.

Mayor and MPs urge support for Labour/union links

London Mayor Ken Livingstone revealed to CWU Labour supporters that Royal Mail had rejected an offer to allow its vehicles to be exempted from the congestion charge just so long as they paid the charge for workers on their way to work.

Mayor Livingstone (pictured right) expressed his belief that Royal Mail's present management were not interested in growing the business. "I've never felt, dealing with them, that they wanted more work," he said, adding that he wanted RM to distribute the Londoner, but their bid had been too high.

The Mayor confirmed that he would be suing the Post Office over its London closures programme, describing the proposals as "a sham."

"They are determined to close them. We are determined to stop them," he insisted.

Addressing the annual CWU Labour Supporters Network, the London mayor set out the main policies that he would be putting before voters at the May 1 elections.

He pledged that the £7.20 an hour living wage would apply to those working for the Greater London Authority (GLA) and all of its subcontractors.

"We've seen bus companies paying their caterers and cleaners the living wage and now they are saying that productivity is up and turnover down," said Mr Livingstone.

Going on to speak of the powers that he had been granted and of new

finance that he had received, Mr Livingstone committed to building 50,000 affordable homes over the next three years and pledged action to tackle the capital's skills shortage.

Conservative candidate for mayor Boris Johnson came in for some strong criticism, Mr Livingstone reminding the meeting that Mr Johnson had "opposed the minimum wage, supported rail privatisation and opposed equal opportunities."

Speaking next, CWU-sponsored Labour MP Jon Cruddas heralded the progress of the Temporary and Agency Workers (Equal Treatment) Private Members Bill.

But Mr Cruddas was less impressed with Prime Minister Gordon Brown's suggestion of a

commission to look into the issue, describing it as "terribly long grass."

The Dagenham MP went on to argue against severing the party's link with the union, insisting: "The party is there to be rebuilt. There is a need for a campaigning radical labour movement. If it means cracking a few heads and having a full and frank discussion with the leadership, so be it."

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes said that he expected the union's links with the Labour Party to come up for discussion at this year's annual conference, but he insisted: "I welcome that debate."

"Keeping the link is the only way we can influence government and Parliament," Billy added.



London Mayor Ken Livingstone

Union agrees to back new driver safety plan

Assistant secretary Bob Gibson welcomed the introduction of new driver risk assessment procedures last month, following lengthy negotiations with Royal Mail, which guaranteed that they will "not be used for disciplinary purposes."

With around one-third of all road accidents in the UK involving a vehicle being driven on business, accounting for an average 20 fatalities and 250 serious injuries each week, and against the backdrop of new legislation obliging employers to take a more pro-active approach to workers' safety, the Drive Safely Campaign was launched across the business.

The initiative, which has been jointly agreed between Royal Mail and the CWU, is aimed at raising drivers' awareness of their

responsibilities to other road users, while supporting them in improving their driving skills and keeping themselves safe on the road.

Over the next six months, everyone who drives a company vehicle – even if only for a few hours or so a week – will undertake a risk assessment using an interactive computer programme to assess their driving skills and identify any issues and areas for improvement.

In a joint statement by Bob (pictured below) and Royal Mail head of assets support and programmes Dawn Parker explaining the agreement, it is made explicitly clear that "the aim of the programme is solely to improve safety.

"This is a safety initiative, designed to support and assist our drivers to

improve safe driving skills by helping them identify any areas of improvement for themselves," they insist, adding: "It is not trying to catch people out in any way, nor will it be used in any way against drivers who have a record of accidents.

"It is not intended to be detrimental in any way to drivers, nor will it be used for disciplinary purposes."

In most cases, no follow up training or support is anticipated, but, if an individual's assessment results do identify a serious risk, the agreement provides for discussions with the employee's local manager and her or his representative to determine the appropriate course of action.

This may take the form of further on line training or one-to-one

coaching with an assessor from the AA or similar organisation.

Both the company and the union stress that they want people to take part in the exercise without feeling under any pressure and, although each driver will receive a risk rating, this must not, they insist, be interpreted as a "pass or fail" outcome.

Drivers complete the programme themselves and everyone has their own unique password. Most of the questions are multiple choice and invite drivers to identify the correct response in certain situations, or to recall the rules of the Highway Code.

If drivers get a factual answer wrong, the program will point this out to them at the time so that they can understand and correct their response.

An important feature of the programme is the part on defensive driving. Working through the module, drivers are encouraged to think about situations and how they might handle them with skill and expertise.

There is also an automatic driving licence check against the DVLA database.

The session will be conducted in official time – drivers will be released from their normal jobs in ones and twos in order to do this. Following completion of the online session, the results will be analysed and a summary fed back to the individual's manager, who, providing they are an experienced driver themselves, will discuss the results with the driver.

Summing up his view of the new programme, Bob pointed out that, "with the safeguards that have been built into this agreement, we see this as, potentially, an important step forward for driver safety and for the safety of other road users."



Assistant secretary Bob Gibson



Assistant secretary Ray Ellis

Talks begin on B&H procedure

Assistant secretary Ray Ellis attended talks with Royal Mail head of diversity and inclusion David Vaughan last month to formally present the union's concerns over the company's use of current Bullying and Harassment (B&H) Procedure.

Following the high-profile Burslem strike over the winter, sparked by the suspension of 12 CWU members at the Stoke delivery office, and numerous similar cases in offices in other parts of the country, the postal executive vowed to seek negotiations with Royal Mail over its implementation of the code.

In preparation for the discussions, Ray (pictured left), who heads the union's technical and central services section, urged branches to gather information regarding cases against representatives, activists or members that have been brought under B&H procedures, evidence which will, he explains "assist us in our endeavours to review the agreement."

The review, which Ray hopes can reach some firm conclusions at the earliest opportunity, the often controversial role of independent harassment investigators, the issue of consistency of approach and the treatment of trade union officials.

"And the unresolved issue of access to documentation prior to interview under the procedure needs to be resolved, while we need to strengthen the emphasis on informal resolution of complaints to avoid the unnecessary escalation which has been evident in a number of recent cases," he added.

Progress on early retirement rules

Ray also expressed satisfaction at the "significant progress" made in addressing members' concerns over early retirement due to ill-health.

The current agreement cuts off at 60 years of age and the union's negotiating team, led by Ray and supported by postal executive vice-chair Peter Donaghy, has been seeking a resolution with management for the past 18 months.

Management have accepted that change needs to be made, but, as Voice went to press, a sticking point remained over Royal Mail's insistence that a lump-sum payment replaces the service-related payment provided for within the current agreement.

The reason that the union objects to this is, Ray explains: "Payments in such form could adversely affect our longer serving members and, therefore, before we resume negotiations, we're consulting with our legal representatives for clarification."

New laws keep company bosses on their toes

From April 6 this year, new corporate manslaughter legislation comes into force which could see employers face unlimited fines, adverse publicity orders and far-reaching remedial action orders, explains CWU national health, safety & environment officer Dave Joyce.

"Courts will also have the additional power to disqualify directors and senior executives from company directorship for health and safety offences if convicted of corporate manslaughter," he adds.

Welcoming the introduction of the new law, Dave (pictured right) continues: "Our union has campaigned for over a decade for a specific offence of corporate manslaughter and the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act is a wake-up call for all employers.

"This new law will be a powerful deterrent to those employers failing to meet the proper standards of health and safety at work."

For Royal Mail Group employees, an updated policy on drugs and alcohol is to be introduced following extensive consultations with the union's health, safety and environment department.

Commenting on the new code, Dave said: "We are satisfied and content that the new policy and guidance now being deployed is in the best interests of our members.

"Simply put, alcohol and drugs problems are always best treated with sympathy and support where misconduct is not an issue and disciplinary action is a last resort.

The primary aim of the new policy is to help, support and rehabilitate our people who have these problems,

free from a blame culture."

Dave, who was re-elected unopposed for a further five-year term last month, is also leading efforts to tighten up legislation on dangerous dogs, following a spate of attacks on postal workers recently.

"The 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act (DDA) doesn't work," said Dave, adding: "It's neither prevented nor reduced the large number of dog attacks in the UK.

"Behind this come over 5,000 dog attacks on postal delivery staff every year that seem to go unnoticed by many, including the government.

"To date, the response every time we've raised it with ministers has been strong resistance to amend the DDA, which ministers say is robust enough to deal with dangerously out of control dogs, despite criticism of the law by many, including us.

"The statistics don't support what the government say and that's why we say it's time to change the Act.

"We've launched our "Bite-Back" campaign and hope that enough support can be brought to bear on Ministers and the government to review the law" added Dave.



Health, safety & environment officer Dave Joyce

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Beware Tory danger

I think Mike Rathbone of Stockton (Voice letters Winter 2007) should widen his reading material away from the Socialist Worker because he is talking utter nonsense. I find his remarks that the Labour Party has done nothing for postal workers inaccurate and patronising. Don't postal workers have mortgages? Don't postal workers use the NHS? Don't postal workers send their children to schools? Don't postal workers need more police? Don't postal workers have families that are in employment now? This is the first government in history to subsidise the Post Office.

If the Tories win the next election, I warn you not to be different, I warn you not to be young, I warn you not to be sick, I warn you not to grow old and I warn you not to be a postal worker!

Shaun Shute, postal worker, Gloucester

Save our post offices

It occurs to me that Royal Mail should stop further closures at once and look at siting post office stalls at larger mail and bus terminals for essential items such as stamps, top-up cards, application forms, driving licences and TV licences etc.

Royal Mail's excuse that people no longer use offices by choice is rubbish. Old aged pensioners and other people who cannot use the internet have been marginalised through dogma and blinkered attitudes by both Royal Mail and successive Tory and Labour policies.

Community post offices could be kept within a financial framework if the will was there, but Royal Mail decided long ago that profits come before public convenience. Even now, there should be room for dialogue with all concerned parties.

Mark Shield, CWU IPSL, Bootle

Family unfriendly

I'm a postman of 19 years' service and change is a thing that has to happen. When the 6.15am start was introduced at my local office, we were all interviewed to see if the later start would affect family life, for example, issues such as children, schools and childcare etc.

My work and my senior manager are great. I have a three-year-old child in nursery and costs are £250 a month for mornings - with the latest pick up at 1pm - so my work let me start at 5am and I do indoor work and then my delivery so I can get my child from the nursery. But, if I had to pick him up under the new hours that Royal Mail has brought in, I would get charged a full day, which would double my costs to £500.

My son starts school next January, but my partner is expecting another child this July and I've been told that they can't be family friendly this time around as we are having the baby after the changes were brought in.

I find this not family friendly at all. It's basically putting pressure on workers not to start families or have more children and this cannot be right.

Royal Mail workers should be looking forward to having children and not be anxious about whether or not their workplace is going to be helpful and a

family-friendly company like they say they are.

Jason Butterworth, Calderway Delivery Office, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire

Action on accident procedures

For some time now, members of my branch who have been unfortunate enough to have an accident at work have been, in some instances, receiving blameworthy letters from untrained managers which state they were at fault.

Subsequently, any sick days incurred are not being discounted at a later attendance procedure interview.

Having examined the attendance procedure in great detail, I cannot find justification of our managers' use of this procedure and, also, investigations by management after many of these incidents have left a lot to be desired.

In closing, as we know, members cannot appeal against a blameworthy decision and personnel managers are not prepared to overturn these blatant misapplications of the attendance procedure.

Short-term agreements can be reached locally, but these are ignored during times of national strife.

Ryan Ward, CWU area safety representative

Assistant secretary Bob Gibson responds: "There is no appeal against a blameworthy decision within the road traffic accident procedure, but a grievance can be submitted and there is an appeals procedure for removal from driving."

Thanks, true friends...

I would like to thank a number of people who have helped me through my recent cancer surgery and subsequent MRSA infection. These include Billy Hayes for his kind letter of support, my fellow members of the Disability and Special Needs Advisory Committee, especially Tony Sneddon and Ted Stead, as well as the beautiful flowers I received from the committee and equalities department. I must not forget my friends and colleagues in BT Glasgow Operator Services for the continued good wishes, along with their marvelous bouquet of flowers, numerous cards, as well as hospital visits. There are many others, who are too many to mention, but it is at times like these when you know who your true friends are.

Hopefully, if and by when this is published, I will be well on the road to recovery as the all-clear has been given. I cannot wait to be back in the fray, helping all members with disabilities within the CWU and the wider trade union

Quick Reads winners

The winners of the Quick Reads book competition in the last issue of Voice are: Liz Robinson of Harrogate; William Barnes of Ipswich; Ian Buchan of Aberdeen; Harry Rooney of Glasgow; Yvonne Reed of Cumbria; M Blake of Manchester; Keith Carter of Lincoln; Alan James of Minehead; Mrs K Bessell of Huddersfield; Mr C Coysh of Totnes; Jim Deffy of Kings Lynn; Peter Wilson of London; Chris Williams of Poole; Frances MacKenzie of East Kilbride; David Adams of Campbeltown; Andrew Spragg of Manchester; Mr J H Parker of Preston; Steve Doherty of London; Jayne Thunder of Bexhill-on-Sea and Mary Buchan of Aberdeen.

Winners' details have been forwarded to the competition organisers at the TUC who will be dispatching the books shortly. Happy reading!

movement.

Elsbeth Bettany, Vice Chair DSNAC, Scotland No1 Branch

What price for Liberty?

I was disappointed to see an article by Liberty director Shami Chakrabarti in the latest issue of Voice. Especially as a defence think-tank recently warned that Britain is at high risk from home-grown and foreign terrorists due to our soft stance and open-door border policy, this woman is anti-western and would like to see even further complacency shown by our politicians and courts at a time of increasing risk.

The memory of emergency services scooping up the remains of 52 innocent commuters with a bucket and spade should remain in our minds before listening to dangerous people like her. The police can hold terror suspects for as long as they like as far as I'm concerned and the vast majority of Brits would agree with me. Please do not print her views ever again!

Alex Hobbs, by email

General secretary Billy Hayes responds: "CWU members were killed and injured in the 7/7 attacks on London, so, as an organisation, we need no reminders about terrorism. But, quite different from being "anti Western," we believe that Liberty is in keeping with the best of our democratic traditions – the right to free speech, free association and to practice any or no religion of your choice so long as it does not interfere with others. Is Alex really suggesting that we shouldn't support such ideas? These are not only important values for society as a whole, they are fundamental to our own existence as a trade union and our ability to represent and protect our members. Alex says that the police should hold terror suspects for as long as they like, but would he feel the same if the sentence referred to trade unionists? But that is exactly the position our counterparts in many countries of the world find themselves in."

Thinking of others

Dave Ward recently came to our AGM in Bristol. It was a very good meeting and the most talked about subject was how cleaners are so underpaid and the lack of people employed with disabilities.

I know we have our own struggles, with pay, pensions and job security, but, from time to time, it would be good as a union for us to remember the forgotten members. I hope we can improve their situations in years to come.

M Watts, Bristol

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

PENSIONS FIGHT LOOMING

The second day of February's Northampton briefing (see centre pages) discussed in detail Royal Mail's plans to switch occupational pension scheme members from a final salary plan (FSS) to one based on career average earnings, a discussion which gave the CWU national leadership a clear indication of the strength of feeling



All image credits: Phil Graham FLMAR Photography

Opening the session, deputy general secretary Dave Ward explained the importance of placing the pensions crisis within the overall context of the liberalisation review.

The deficit facing the scheme is, he pointed out, a direct result of the almost impossible market conditions that the 2000 Postal Services Act have imposed on Royal Mail.

Without new funding from Government, the company faces the prospect of paying out £260 million per year for the next 17 years to pay off the deficit and a further £580m per year to fund the scheme, Dave explained, adding: "That's equivalent to 30 per cent of your pensionable pay."

"It's perfectly legitimate to link the Government review to pensions," he insisted, adding that, during earlier talks, there had been suggestions that there was a prospect of retaining both FSS and early retirement in return for other concessions by the union.

"There are no easy solutions, but our policy is to fight to retain the current retirement age and to retain FSS. We want a better deal, but it won't be easy and we'll have to turn up the heat on the employer and on the Government in this review."

Assistant secretary Ray Ellis told the audience that "two common themes" had emerged from the feedback received from members across the country so far.

"These are that some reform is necessary, but that the Royal Mail plan is not supported by CWU members.

"For some, the retirement age is the biggest issue – particularly among our longer serving members – while keeping FSS is also a huge concern. Most want to find a way to retain it," Ray explained.

In the discussion which followed, most contributors highlighted early retirement and retaining FSS as the key issues at stake.

North West regional secretary Carl Webb pledged his support for the policies that Dave had outlined and Anglia

divisional area admin rep Andy Hoppin asked why Royal Mail was pushing the changes with such urgency. "Why does the deficit have to be paid off within 17 years?" he wondered. "Why can't it be 25 or 35?"

Dave Wilshire, Bristol & District Amal Branch secretary, pointed out that this issue had, originally, been a major factor in last year's dispute.

"A big part of taking the members with us last year was the fight over pensions," he reminded the meeting.

Paul Turnbull, from Eastern No. 4 Branch, insisted: "Pensions are deferred wages and we shouldn't accept a cut in our wages.

"Let's unite to fight to defend our pensions," Paul urged, sentiments with which Steve Wisley, of South and East Thames Amal, heartily agreed, adding: "This is what we want to hear – that we're going to take the employers on."

Jim McNicholls from Greater Manchester Amal, predicted: "I think members will be up for a fight on pensions" and South East Divisional proposed linking up the postal workers' struggle with that of other unions.

"We should try top co-ordinate action with rail workers on pensions," the Division suggested.

On the Monday following the briefing, the CWU postal executive met and agreed option two, a consultative ballot of all CWU members working for Royal Mail Group.

And, later in the week, Royal Mail confirmed that it intended to proceed with the changes proposed.

As Voice went to press, around 180,000 Royal Mail members were voting in the CWU-organised consultative ballot, which was held to give them a genuine opportunity to register their opinion on the company's plans.

If, as early indications suggest, the vast majority of members reject the changes, the union's national leadership will meet to plan the next steps of the campaign. ▼

▲ Above: Deputy general secretary Dave Ward addressing the briefing
Right: Bradford branch officer Simon Midgley



General secretary Billy Hayes



Assistant secretary Ray Ellis

RECRUIT AND ORGANISE

CWU senior field organiser Lynn Browne explained the union's policy of meeting the challenge posed to wages and conditions by liberalisation by building the organisation across the sector



Lynn opened the second day of the Northampton briefing with her presentation on the need to recruit both non-members working within Royal Mail and postal workers right across the private sector.

A task for all of us

She began by reminding the audience that there is also a job of work to do within Royal Mail, she pointed out, revealing that there are, currently, 30,295 non-members working for RM.

Turning to the non-RM sector, Lynn said: "It's vital to our ongoing struggles that we're seen as the number one union for all UK postal workers – a fighting, forward-thinking union that puts organising and recruitment at the top of the agenda.

Our strategy explained

"Get away from the notion that we're a 'Post Office' union – we're not. We're here for all communication workers," she insisted, going on to highlight the union's latest initiative of training a dedicated team of "organising ambassadors" (OAs).

These are, she explained, volunteer lay CWU activists who have agreed to lead non-RM recruitment and organising campaigns within their respective regions. "Under the guidance and leadership of the national organising department, we are aiming to establish teams of OAs in each region, who can, eventually, carry out co-ordinated recruitment and organising activity across the UK," Lynn said.

"We want to encourage discussion in our branches about the importance of organising in all non-recognised sectors and, if your branch needs assistance, contact the organising department."

Making the case

When speaking to workers at private companies such as DHL, TNT, FEDEX, ANC and UPS, activists needed to be clear about the reasons why effective union organisation can make a real difference in the workplace.

Picking up on the previous day's discussions over the need for statutory national employment

standards across the UK postal sector, Lynn pointed out that being seen to fight for this could be a useful means of encouraging non-RM workers to join the CWU.

Leading the struggle

"The CWU must lead this struggle," she stressed, adding: "We must establish our own manifesto for the sector so that workers can see where we stand. "We need to show workers we're serious about fighting for them."

Deputy general secretary Dave Ward said: "We're facing new challenges and we're totally committed to Lynn's strategy going forward.

"We are obliged to get out there and organise other workers and it's time for the CWU to organise postal workers wherever they are. "We must be their union.

"Over the next few years, we've got to see ourselves as the union for all communications workers. We have to be aggressive in recruiting. We're a fighting union – the others aren't."

TIME TO FIGHT TO SAVE OUR INDUSTRY

Determination to defend public services and postal workers' rights was the key theme that emerged from a 380-strong national gathering of the union's key activists in February

Day one of the two-day national briefing, which was held in Northampton, focussed on shaping CWU strategy and tactics in response to the Government's review of competition in the UK postal sector.

Opening the event, to which all of the union's area, divisional and branch officers were invited, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes explained that Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) John Hutton had ordered the review largely due to pressure from the union.

Former OFCOM deputy chairman Richard Hooper will head Mr Hutton's three-member review team, which also includes Food Standards Agency chairwoman Deirdre Hutton and construction industry businessman Ian Smith.

All organisations representing UK postal sector employees, businesses and users have been invited to enter submissions and, towards the end of the summer, Mr Hooper and his colleagues will deliver their report to Mr Hutton, who will then consider whether to bring in new legislation.

Looking back at the introduction of competition, Billy Hayes (pictured right) stressed how much damage the distorted market conditions created by industry regulator Postcomm had wreaked.

"The assumptions of Postcomm, the Government and Royal Mail have been proved wrong and our predictions that their strategy would lead to a crisis has been proved correct," he said.

"However, if we simply call for the restoration of the Royal Mail monopoly, that's not feasible in the current political climate," he warned, but insisted: "There is a potential for progress."

Calls for the extension of the Universal Service Obligation (USO), the introduction of new services and an end to subsidies for other operators will form a significant part of the CWU case, Billy continued.

And the union also intends to put the role of postal regulator Postcomm under the spotlight, vigorously opposing any calls for a separation of Royal Mail and Post Office Limited and calling for fundamental reform of the regulator itself – making it fully accountable.

"Postcomm must be made more democratic," he said, adding: "We want recomposition of that board of commissioners and of Postcomm's remit."



General secretary
Billy Hayes



Deputy general secretary
Dave Ward



Head of communications
Kevin Slocombe

"We intend to direct specific parts of our campaign to bodies such as the Federation of Small Businesses.

"Small to medium-sized businesses are very important and, potentially, extremely influential."

Another key component of the union's strategy will be to compare the UK postal sector with those of other EU nations, highlighting, in particular, Germany's minimum wage for the industry.

"And the leader of the German postal union got this commitment from Germany's Tory government," Billy pointed out, insisting: "In terms of principle, a minimum for the sector is absolutely the right point and we're completely in favour of it."

Deputy general secretary Dave Ward told the audience: "We're here because of bad political decisions.

"The Government, Postcomm and Royal Mail got the introduction of competition wrong. There's been no benefit to the public, only to large companies," he explained.

"The Government introduced competition too early, Postcomm seems to have abandoned its commitment to the USO and Royal Mail seems to have no real ambition to innovate and develop new services."

Looking ahead to the review, Dave stressed the importance of the union making full use of its political links to lobby for the changes that the sector so badly needs and he agreed that Germany's statutory protection of postal workers' employment rights was an example that the UK should follow.

Insisting that the campaign would not end when the union enters its contribution to the review, Dave continued: "This is the launch of a campaign which will mobilise our members to take the case out to the general public."

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey outlined the particular importance of opposing any call for a separation of Royal Mail and Post Office Limited and placed this within the context of the campaign against the current round of crown office closures.

"We've got to fight to ensure we keep Royal Mail as one," he insisted, describing the defence of the Post Office network as "vital to the USO."

"In London, Mayor Ken Livingstone has been in touch with our office supporting our campaign against the closures," added Andy.



OBJECTIVES AND TACTICS

1. Extension of the USO and its funding.

Our CWU activists and members in our regions and branches across the UK will be encouraged to arrange meetings with local chambers of commerce and Federation of Small Business branches to win support for the extension of the USO to include them.

We aim to seek agreement with Royal Mail to co-ordinate campaign events and to create pressure on the Government to oblige other operators to pay towards the cost of the USO through a dedicated support fund.

2. European perspective

Liberalisation has taken place at varying degrees and at different paces across the EU and our campaign intends to highlight this. In Germany, for example, there is a minimum wage right across the postal sector, although this has been the subject of an ongoing legal challenge, while some countries have introduced a USO support fund and others plan to apply USO standards to any new operators.

We intend to show how both the UK public and postal workers are at a clear disadvantage and drive home the message that Postcomm has let down our country.

Our tactics here will focus on working together with our sisters and brothers in other postal unions across the EU and on joint work with sympathetic Labour MPs and MEPs.

3. Postcomm proposals – Emerging Themes

We will attack any proposals to separate Royal Mail into wholesale and retail – POL and RM – and oppose outsourcing.

We must encourage Royal Mail to introduce new services and spell out how the existing regulatory framework has frustrated innovation.

And our tactics will include dialogue with business users, presenting proposals of our own and making it clear to all what is at stake.

4. Reform of Postcomm and of its remit

Our objective here will be to highlight the profoundly flawed approach that Postcomm has adopted and to argue the need for urgent reform.

The structure of the regulator itself, its remit and its activities must all change.

The UK postal sector needs a democratically accountable regulator which will bring the service closer to the people whom it serves.

Our tactics will be to work with Royal Mail, lobby MPs – especially BERR select committee members – contact MEPs, study EU regulations and assess other European postal sector regulations to see what form they take.

Highlighting the importance of media coverage to the campaign, CWU head of communications Kevin Slocombe said that this was "a key area of our work."

"The Financial Times, the Times and Telegraph all featured stories when the liberalisation review was announced," he reported, adding: "We're also looking at targeting trade publications – specifically those aimed at small and medium-sized businesses around the UK."

"Also, we've got to get out to the local media and, in this way, reach the local public and small businesses. More people get their news from local media than from national press."

"We're also conducting a nationwide poll of public, urban and rural dwellers to ask them about any difficulties they've experienced since liberalisation and we'll use the results of the poll to launch our public campaign and hone our message to the public," he explained.



Image credit: Photoflibrary

REPS SPEAK OUT

Throughout the event, platform speeches were interspersed with contributions from the floor, giving CWU reps from all parts of the UK the opportunity to ask questions and contribute their own views on these vital issues, while allowing the union's national leadership to accurately gauge the mood of members.

London divisional rep Martin Walsh pointed out: "Change is happening and our job is not to face away, but to shape change."

Since the introduction of Postcomm back in 2000, the industry had moved on, Martin said, arguing that it was the right time to introduce regulation of the new, emerging postal operators.

"What's the union's position on fighting for a minimum wage in the UK postal sector?" he asked, suggesting that this would "be a great banner to move forward in recruiting and organising across the sector."

"And why not apply quality service regulations to Royal Mail's competitors?"

On a political note, Martin reminded everyone that "our conference decision was that, if Postcomm is not removed in its current form by June, we'd ballot members on funding the Labour Party."

Alex Hassan, from Northern Ireland, pointed the finger of blame at the Government for the difficulties facing the postal sector, claiming: "We've now got a Government that doesn't care," but, he added: "If we all stand together, we can put a united front on."

Central No. 1 Branch representative Bob Cullen backed the call for a minimum postal wage. "It's definitely got my vote," he insisted, adding: "We must move on and defend our members' rights," while Bristol and District Amal branch secretary David Wilshire pointed

▲ The UK postal sector aims to be more like its European counterparts



Carl Webb



Martin Walsh

out that, "among Royal Mail's competitors, Unite have members working for TNT.

"How do we get them on board?" Dave asked.

From Merseyside, Mark Walsh condemned the current wave of post office closures and warned: "POL is sliding down quicker than the rest of the business, while North West Lancashire Branch chairman Paddy McGill accused the opposition Conservative Party of hypocrisy over the issue.

"As for the Tories speaking out in defence of Post Offices – cheeky bastards! They shut more than the Labour Party will ever do," he stormed.

Andy Hoppin, London North West area rep, spoke for everyone when he said: "Our problem is from Postcomm. How could we allow the government to set up something like that?"

"We're now losing money because of Postcomm's decisions. They failed and now they've got to go.

"We must unite in a campaign to get rid of Postcomm," Andy urged.

Midlands divisional rep Paul Kennedy stressed that there was "a massive European context" to the whole issue.

"The rest of Europe is far more lukewarm about liberalisation and competition and I want to know if Royal Mail's going to say anything to the Government about that in terms of the UK national interest," he added.

Getting down to the practicalities of the nationwide campaign, Carl Webb, North West regional secretary, insisted: "This review is the most important priority for us and we need to talk about and plan the activities we're doing.

"Let's have branch and regional campaign packs, model resolutions and press releases," Carl urged. ▼



Image credit: Louise Jefferson

CC00 delegate Monserrat Mir sharing the experiences of Spanish workers with the conference

Solidarity across borders

Trade unionists representing postal workers from 16 European nations gathered in central London last month to discuss ways of tackling postal liberalisation across the continent

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes welcomed delegates with a brief outline of the situation in the UK, explaining that, after two years of full postal liberalisation, our Government is undertaking a formal review of the sector and the effect of liberalisation on it. The union's head of international affairs John Baldwin then explained that the conference had been organised at fairly short notice because of the tight deadlines of the review, to which all submissions had to be entered by March 28.

Commenting on the fact that sector liberalisation in the UK is several years ahead of most of the rest of Europe, John added: "We've faced the worst of liberalisation and we hope you don't have to."

Welcome comrades

Deputy general secretary Dave Ward gave "a warm welcome to comrades from postal unions across Europe and other guests, adding: "It's time for trade unions right across Europe to stand firm against the attacks on our jobs, terms and conditions."

Turning to the various EU liberalisation directives that have been implemented in recent years, Dave pointed out: "These decisions have been taken not in the

interests of workers, but in the interests of big business."

But he insisted that the blame for the state of the UK sector should not be laid solely at the door of the EU and made some sharp criticisms of the British government, UK industry regulator Postcomm and Royal Mail, whose position, he argued: "Is based on a concerted attack on members' terms and conditions.

"It blames workers for being paid too much and uses the threat of competition," he added. Looking forward to the day's proceedings, Dave urged: "Let's debate our experiences, but can we also establish policy positions across Europe and prepare to fight together?"

Organise everywhere

Swiss communications union SC/GK general secretary Michel Gobet explained that, although his nation is not an EU member, its postal sector is set to liberalise fully from 2012 and, in his opinion, "the future for trade unions must be towards winning collective bargaining arrangements for workers in other operators."

Resist attacks

Italian union confederation CISL representative Lorenzo

Galbiati suggested to the hosts that, "perhaps you put too much trust in the words of Royal Mail."

Italy's postal sector is currently gearing up for liberalisation and Lorenzo explained: "We want to reach the deadline in a much stronger position, so that our national operator can resist competition."

Trust politicians? No!

French sector union FCCC general secretary Hervé Morland explained moves to set up an "equalisation fund" to pay for the universal service and outlined plans by his union to win collective bargaining agreements with new operators, while Regino Martin, general secretary of the communications section within Spain's largest trade union federation Comisiones Obreras, warned: "We can only believe 10 per cent of what politicians say and we must rely on our own resources."

German example

And Claus Zanker, chief executive officer of German industry think-tank Input Consulting, gave a detailed explanation of efforts by the giant Verdi union federation to tackle liberalisation by winning legislation for a sector-specific minimum wage, efforts that are currently subject to a legal challenge by employers.

CWU reaching out to all communications workers

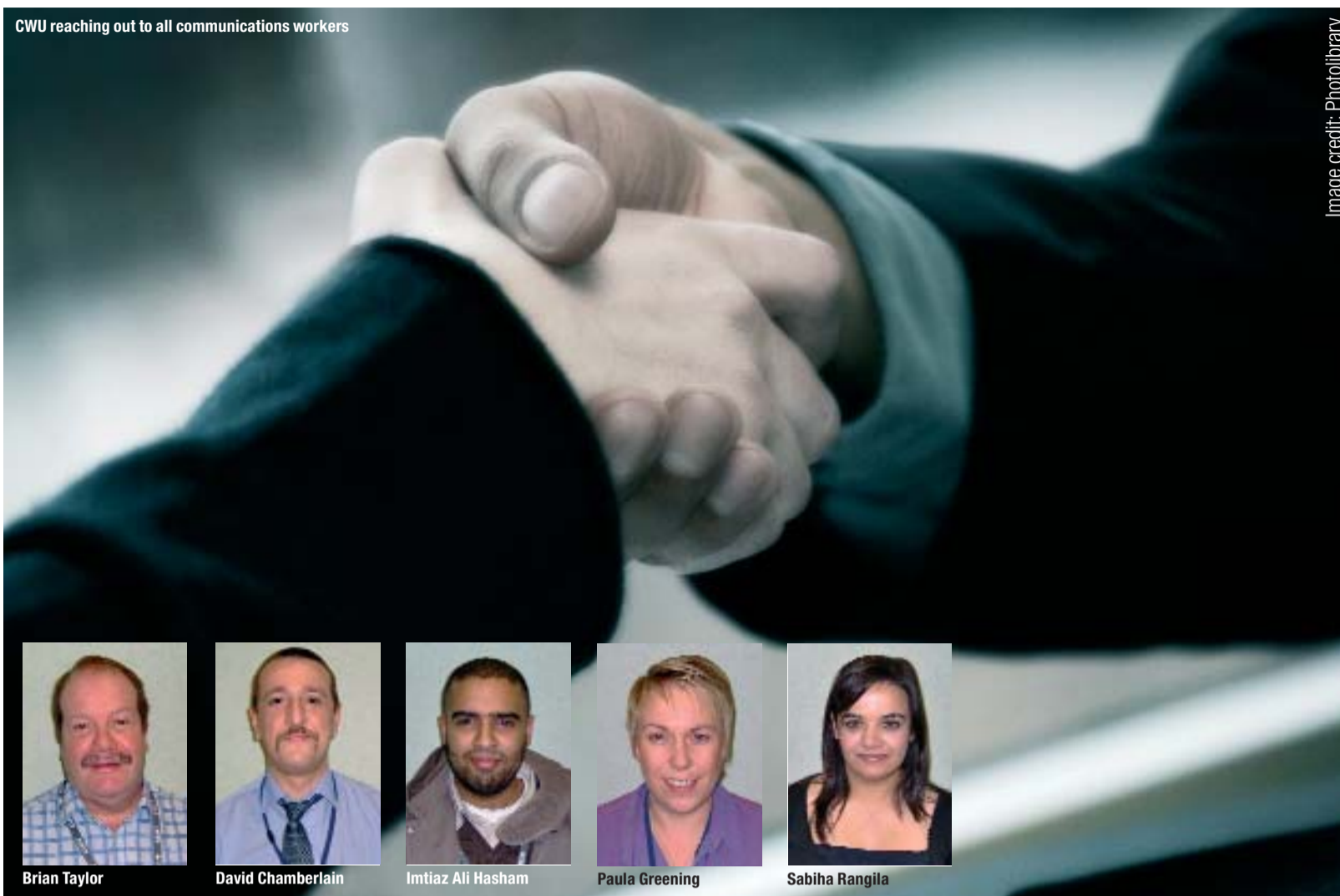


Image credit: Photolibrary

Brian Taylor

David Chamberlain

Imtiaz Ali Hasham

Paula Greening

Sabiha Rangila

New CWU reps get active at Capita TVL in Darwen

Following an introductory workshop in January, five new CWU reps have now stepped into their new roles at Capita TVL in Darwen, Lancashire.

The reps work across several company departments, including customer services and the field back office.

Within days of taking up their duties, some of the reps had already accompanied members to meetings with management and, by the end of February, they had successfully represented members on a wide range of issues.

Early successes have included protecting members from dismissal and reaching agreement on family friendly working arrangements.

Union membership has also increased at the site.

Commenting on the way that the team have taken up their roles, assistant secretary Andy Furey said: "I am delighted by the enthusiasm of our new representatives at Capita."

"The fact that they took on their role during the lead up to a pay ballot has not fazed them at all and the feedback received on the way they have represented members and built local relationships is very positive."

Alan West and Bryan Cossar, senior reps at Capita have been providing regular support to the Darwen team and Alan added: "Building sustainable union

organisation where there wasn't previously a strong union culture is tough, but our reps have shown that this can be done."

"Our priority is to continue to support our Darwen team in representing and recruiting more members."

Recruiting, organising and developing strong union structures outside of traditional areas is a key strategic objective of the CWU and is vital, not only to improve pay and conditions for workers in other companies but also, to raise the bar on pay across the industry.

The reality of increased competition means that there is often a race to the bottom on terms and

conditions as employers attempt to slash costs to the detriment of members. The most effective way to counter this is to organise in all areas and raise conditions across the sector.

Explaining the need to develop this strategy, Andy pointed out: "We must expand union organisation to new and unfamiliar territory and bring the benefits of union membership to a new generation of workers."

"After achieving recognition for all Capita members, we have now begun the important task of creating self-sustaining and representative CWU structures that will facilitate a stronger negotiating position going forward."

Career path gives staff new opportunities

As part of last year's POL pay agreement, Crown Career Path was designed to simplify grades and pay points, as well as creating new opportunities for members to earn additional pensionable allowances, based on sales.

After lengthy negotiations with the company, agreements on pay progression, financial services specialists (FSS) and product sales specialists (PSS) have now been concluded.

Pay progression is intended to meet

the aspirations of around 20 per cent of our members working in crown offices who are not on maximum pay for the job, including postal officers, retail assistants and customer service advisors (CSAs) who have not yet attained CSA pay points 5 and 6.

Welcoming the deal, assistant secretary Andy Furey said: "I have no doubt that our members who are not on the maximum pay will be appreciative of a simplified and quicker process which will enable them to get to top pay after a

minimum one year and maximum two years service."

The plan also includes the introduction of 740 new FSS staff, who will receive, as a minimum, an additional £1000 pensionable allowance per annum based on sales of financial services if they volunteer, and are accepted, for these roles.

Andy explained: "The benefits of this cannot be underestimated and will generate significant additional revenue for POL, while giving members the opportunity to earn a

pensionable allowance that can rise to £3,000 per annum.

"This is coupled with the ability to earn additional commission payments in excess of the pensionable allowance," he added.

There is no cap on the number of members who can apply for the PSS roles, which entitle them to a pensionable allowance of £1,000 plus unlimited sales-based commission.

Commenting, Andy said: "I'm pleased that we've secured this new opportunity for members."

Successful bone marrow event

The latest joint project between the African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT) and the CWU took place in Royal Mail's Mount Pleasant Mail Centre in February, as the union continued its efforts to help the Trust increase the number of donors from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Bone marrow is a blood-like liquid, which can be donated by one person and transplanted into another using either of two relatively straightforward procedures.

An essential procedure for leukaemia sufferers, the treatment can only work if donor marrow is compatible with that of the recipient and, as type is a genetic characteristic, the chance of finding a match is far greater if both are from the same ethnic background.

In 1974, Shirley Nolan established the Anthony Nolan Register – named after her son who died from the disease – and, by 1995, over 275,000 potential donors had joined.

But only 550 of these were people from ethnic minorities – 0.2 per cent of the list, compared to around 9 per cent as a proportion of the UK population as a whole.

In 1996, Beverley De-Gale and Orin Lewis, the parents of leukaemia sufferer Daniel De-Gale, established the ACLT with the aim of tackling this under-representation.

And, through determined work across the UK in the 12 years since, the De-Gales and teams of ACLT volunteers have managed to lift the figure to 15,500 – slightly over 4 per cent of the current UK total of 380,000.

The ACLT has set itself a target of 30,000, which will mean that members of our black and ethnic minority communities are represented in proportion to their presence within the UK.

February's event led to over 70 new donors adding their names to the register, which CWU race advisory committee member Cyril Onyejekwe (pictured below) described as "great news."

"Big respect also goes to the local CWU branch Mount Pleasant and Roger Charles and Tony Fredericks for all their support on the day," he said, adding appreciation for the co-operation of Royal Mail in making the day "the success that it was."

● For more information on how you can join the national register for bone marrow donors, please go to www.acit.org



Cyril Onyejekwe (left) at CWU conference

Image credit: Jamina Struk

P&OD pay deals

Members working in Royal Mail's P&ODS and finance operations departments have voted overwhelmingly in favour of CWU-negotiated two-year pay rises ranging from 5.2 per cent to 14.29 per cent and backdated to last October.

Just over 88 per cent of finance operations members backed the agreement, which also raises members' bonus payments from £750 to £1,000, money which is due to be paid on April 1 subject to business targets being met.

A key feature of this deal is the rise in new starters' salaries from £14,200 to £16,000 – 12.68 per cent – and the amalgamation of financial service adviser grades 1 and 2.

And, at the top of the pay scale, the introduction of Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) qualifications will allow senior members to move up to the new intermediate and AAT qualified grades, raising top-level salaries to £20,350 and £21,000 respectively from the previous ceiling of £18,850 – a rise of 11.41 per cent.

A similar pay deal for staff working for Royal Mail's people and organisational development services (P&ODS) was backed by 89 per cent of CWU members.

Like their colleagues in finance operations, P&ODS staff will all receive a minimum 5.2 per cent rise in basic pay backdated to last October, with improvements to

annual leave entitlements for many.

The lowest pay grade rises from £14,000 to £16,000 – up 14.29 per cent – and pay points 2 and 3 are lifted by 6.19 per cent and 5.26 per cent respectively.

From April 1, staff with more than five years but less than 15 years service will receive an extra two days annual leave, while those who have worked for the business for less than five years will achieve five weeks and three days of annual leave at the five-year mark rather than 10 years.

Assistant secretary Andy Furey (pictured below) said that he was "delighted with the progress we've made on pay and I'd like to thank members for supporting the deal."

Members at Capita TVL voted by a massive 93 per cent to accept a two-year deal, which will, Andy explained: "Deliver improvements to consolidated pensionable pay keeping pace with or exceeding, the retail price index (RPI) for over 90 per cent of members."

The key features of the agreement are the introduction of RPI proofing for over 90 per cent of staff – all TUPE contract members and 85 per cent of Capita contract members, a move towards narrowing the pay gap between the two sets of workers, a new bonus scheme from July 1 for customer service members in Bristol and Darwen and substantial improvements to administrative assistants' new entrant pay rate.

Boxer thanks CWU



Kevin McIntyre with fellow CWU members in Glasgow

Image credit: James Williamson: Williamson Photos

CWU member and boxer Kevin McIntyre successfully defended his British welterweight title with a unanimous points victory over Kevin Anderson at Glasgow's Kelvin Hall in February.

Kevin, who is sponsored by the CWU, was defending the title for the first time, having originally won it from Anderson last November.

It was a hard fight, with Kevin outlasting a storm from his opponent before finishing the stronger at the end of the 12-round contest.

Anderson had boasted that he would win the fight in six rounds, but, once again, Kevin proved his superiority, the judges scoring the contest 115-114, 117-112, 117-112 in favour of the champion.

Speaking afterwards, the Scot said: "I felt I was quite in control through the fight, but there were a couple of rounds where I got a bit silly and was getting caught."

"I feel I've got the beating of him every day of the week and I'm here

to stay. That's the message I'm sending out," he added.

Kevin said that he was grateful for the support he received from the CWU, whose sponsorship, he believes, may have been decisive in ensuring his victory.

The union paid for Kevin to have seven weeks off in the run up to the fight and a week for recovery afterwards.

"The support enabled me to focus properly on the fight and get the training in," he explained, adding: "It was a tough fight and, if I had not had that preparation, I may not have won."

In the past, Kevin, who is now back on his round in Paisley, had to train before and after his round in the build up to fights.

"I want to thank all the CWU members for the support they gave me on the night," he continued.

Kevin's next title defence is scheduled for May against Kell Brook from Sheffield and the CWU will again be sponsoring him.



Image credit: Janina Struk

Assistant secretary Andy Furey

CWU learner rep to advise ministers

Lead ULR for Eastern No. 3 Branch Graeme Brinded left school with few qualifications to his name – but now he is helping to spread the word across the land that it is never too late to learn.

After being picked to advise government ministers on further education and training as a member of the National Learner Panel (NLP), Graeme will help to shape how further education is delivered to UK adults.

The panel was set up by the

government in 2006 to give learners themselves a say in the development of further education at national level by organisations such as the Learning and Skills Council.*

Reacting to his selection, Graeme described himself as "surprised and pleased."

"I've always been interested in learning and I am currently working on my Advice & Guidance NVQ3 to enable me to teach lifelong learning courses," he explained.

"I also have three children at

different stages of education, so I have a broad base of experience to bring to the panel."

By providing a learner's perspective on policies, proposals and initiatives, the NLP aims to make a difference to learners' experience of further education, whether they are in work-based learning, studying at a college or taking an evening class.

The panel meets four times a year in different cities around England, but it also appoints sub-committees to look at specific educational issues.

InBrief

Customer service pay

Almost nine out of 10 (88 per cent) customer services members voted to accept a two-year pay agreement worth almost 7 per cent and received arrears of pay, overtime and London Weighting Allowance (LWA) in their February salaries. A further pay increase of 1.7 per cent is due to be paid from April dependent on the implementation of the Customer Change Agenda (CCA), which CWU representatives and customer services managers held a one-day workshop during February to discuss. In addition, a national Joint Working Group has been set up to oversee the introduction of CCA.

Admin salaries up

POL admin postal officers are set to receive a £300 consolidated pay increase from April 1, while secretaries and typists will see their pay rise by 1.5 per cent. There is an additional 1.5 per cent increase in LWA for all grades, with Saturday premium being paid for up to six weeks of annual leave from the start of next month. Members outside London will also benefit from the introduction of a shorter working week, which will mean a pro-rata increase in hourly rates of 2.86 per cent.

POs and CSAs

Crown office postal officers' (POs) pay rises by 3.08 per cent from April 1, with the addition of a £95 lump sum. Customer services advisers (CSAs) grades 1, 2, 5 and 6 are also set to receive additional increases to pay. London Weighting Allowances for all grades will go up by 1.5 per cent and Saturday premium will now be paid for up to six weeks of annual leave, also from April 1.

Supply chain increase

From the start of next month, supply chain crew receive an extra £3 per week, while LGV drivers' weekly pay will rise by £5. London Weighting Allowances go up by 1.5 per cent for all grades, while staff working in Hemel Hempstead will benefit from the introduction of a new "defined area" payment of £38.23 per week.

TCR elections

National secretary Andy Furey welcomed new territorial counters rep (TCR) Peter Meech and chairmen John Batt and Mole Meade following the recent biennial elections for 15 TCRs, chairmen and chairwomen across the UK. "Congratulations to Peter, John and Mole," said Andy, "as well as all the other TCRs and chairs who were re-elected. It's these people out there on the frontline, along with all of our other CWU reps, who are the very backbone of the union."

CWU Eastern Region project worker Neil Coleby said that he was proud of Graeme's achievement, pointing out that he had been "extremely successful with developing learning within his branch and across our region."

"This adds another string to his bow and to that of the CWU by adding a further way to influence government policy," added Neil.

*The Learning and Skills Council is a non-departmental public body, which was set up in 2001.

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First bank charges, now Loan Protection Insurance...

HOW HIGH STREET LENDERS ARE COSTING US £'000s

Your loan, mortgage or credit card may be costing you far more than it needs to and you may be entitled to claim back £000's. This is because yet another financial mis-selling story is hitting the headlines – the Payment Protection Insurance (PPI) mis-selling scandal.

Payment Protection Insurance (PPI) or Loan Protection Insurance as it is more commonly known, is a policy designed to cover credit repayments should you be unable to make them due to an accident, sickness or unemployment.

You may not even realise that you have been inadvertently sold PPI. Fewer still realise the often extortionate amount being charged for the insurance or that it may not pay out just when you need it most, with only 1 in 4 claims paying out.

The Citizens Advice Bureau has dealt with a case where a loan of £17,800 had an additional £5,162 added for "Insurance". In another example, an individual took out a loan of paying over £2,200 for "Insurance Cover" despite the fact that the bank was aware that he may not be

eligible for any payment under the policy.

The PPI industry was worth over £5 billion in 2005 alone and it is easy to see why: We found one major high street lender charging £56.67 for PPI insurance on a loan of £10,000 over 5 years. Simpson Millar have found similar policies available for as little as £8.00 per month – a saving of over £48.00 per month or £2,880.00 over the term of the loan.

The banks are being found out. In January 2007, the OFT fined GE Capital Bank a massive £610,000; in February 2007, Capital Bank were fined £175,000.

Simpson Millar LLP has represented members of the Communication Workers' Union for many years and has a dedicated Consumer Protection Department that has already recovered thousands of pounds in compensation for CWU members and their families as a result of endowment mis-selling, unfair bank charges and PPI mis-selling. If you think you are entitled to compensation as a result of PPI mis-selling, we can help you. However, with over 20 million PPI policies out there,

you may want to beat the rush of people looking to claim and contact us soon.

If you believe that you have been mis-sold a PPI policy and you would like advice on how to make a claim, then you can call our legal helpline on freephone 0808 129 3313, email us at

PPI@simpsonmillar.co.uk or visit our website at www.simpsonmillar.co.uk.



But what can you do to help yourself?

- Find out if you have a PPI policy
- Check your documentation or telephone your loan, mortgage or credit card provider and ask them
- Think about whether the policy was forced on you and, if so, whether you wish to claim compensation
- Call our team at Simpson Millar LLP on 0808 129 3313

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Looking to save on your home insurance?

As a member of CWU you are entitled to a number of great benefits and savings. In fact, you could save up to £84[‡] by switching your home insurance to CWU Insurance. It's yet another advantage of your membership. Plus to make things easier, you can conveniently spread the cost with monthly payments.

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[‡]Based on independent online research by Consumer Intelligence during 01 January-31 January 2008. 10% of consumers achieve this saving with CWU buildings and contents insurance.



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* Compared to the standard price you would be quoted if you call us. † Lines are open 8.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat. For quality and protection purposes, your call will be recorded. UIA (Insurance) Ltd 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 Introducer Appointed Representative of UIA (Insurance) Ltd which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority.



Standing together : Andrew Miller with general secretary Billy Hayes and assistant secretary Sally Bridge. Also pictured (l-r) are CWU agency members Jackie Smith, Angela Reilly and Rebecca Ames

United front for justice for UK agency workforce

"We're not being fobbed off on agency injustice again", is the unmistakable message being sent to Government by a coalition of Britain's biggest unions.

Following a dramatic show of support by backbench Labour MPs in February for Ellesmere port and Neston MP Andrew Miller's Private Member's Bill (PMB) demanding action to end the exploitation of over a million UK agency workers, union hopes are rising that the political pressure on the Government to finally act on this issue is fast becoming unassailable.

But, following years of government foot-dragging and double-crossing, nothing is being taken for granted.

Indeed, fears that yet another fudge may be being concocted by ministers have been exacerbated, not allayed, by an offer from Prime Minister Gordon Brown to set up a special commission comprising representatives from trade unions and the CBI. With the employers' organisation implacably opposed in

principle to any significant extension of agency workers' rights, both the TUC and the body which promotes the Labour party-trade union link, TULO, have forcefully voiced their view that the commission is extraordinarily unlikely to result in any meeting of minds.

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes told the Voice: "We're still awaiting precise details of the make-up, terms of reference and timescale of the commission the Prime Minister is proposing. However, the primary instinct of all those on the trade union side is that the commission is a red herring - a smokescreen which would simply result in the issue being kicked into the long grass."

That view was forcefully put to the Labour Party's spring conference in Birmingham last month by TULO general secretary Tony Dubbins, who branded the commission "a last-ditch attempt to deflect the Bill."

"The Government's current proposal for a commission is not

acceptable to our movement," he told delegates.

First and foremost, he stressed: "Trade unions know that the commitment for agency and temporary workers was approved by the Party and the Government and contained in our election manifesto. Despite that manifesto commitment, it has, regrettably, been our Labour government that has consistently blocked the EU directive, even as recently as last December."

Tony Dubbins concluded: "Fundamental decisions on agency and temporary workers are decisions for the Government and not for any commission. MPs recognise that this legislation will be genuinely popular with the electorate and a graphic demonstration of the party's commitment to protecting working people."

Directly after the Bill successfully received its second reading, Unite joint general secretary Tony Woodley expressed the same view that agency

exploitation is one issue that the Government now ignores at its peril.

"The message sent by Labour MPs to their government could not be any clearer," he said. "Nothing less than primary legislation can quell the clamour that has come from MPs, the Labour Party's ruling body and from the wider labour movement."

In the absence of any decisive government move to break the deadlock, and with the terms of reference of the commission still unclear, the backers of Mr Miller's Bill are determined to keep the legislative process going and are refusing to be bought off with vague promises.

Speaking the night before the big Commons vote, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber concluded: "There's no way back. This principle has to be delivered and I think that we are now on the verge of seeing that happen."

● **More on the united trade union front to win justice for all workers can be seen at www.cwu.org/links/agency**

Pay breakthrough at O₂ confounds early fears

The best pay deal for members in O₂ since the mobile giant was spun off from BT in 2001 was out to ballot as Voice went to press, with initial soundings indicating that the recommended offer will be overwhelmingly accepted.

Providing for a consolidated 4.1 per cent increase for virtually all members, the deal was secured following tough negotiations in which local activists played an active part for the first time.

Deputy general secretary (telecoms) Jeannie Drake told the Voice: "This deal represents a huge step forward because it's a minimum of inflation increase for all our

members. It's pretty much the same deal whether you're an engineer, a technical specialist, a customer service adviser or whether you work in a shop - so it's very fair. The elements of performance-related pay in it are fairly minor as well as we've successfully ensured that all members above an APR 4 will receive an inflation-related increase.

"This is an important gain in our fight to ensure that members are treated fairly."

Assistant secretary (clerical) Emma Forrest added: "For people who are in customer service and ex-BT, the rise is equal to all the other deals put together since O₂ separated from BT.

"In 2003 they got 1 per cent. In 2004, anyone at the maximum of their grade didn't get a consolidated pay rise at all. Nothing was consolidated in 2005, then 1.5 per cent in 2006 and 1.5 per cent in 2007. Added together, that's 4 per cent - this is 4.1 per cent."

Despite early predictions that this year's pay round could easily have escalated into industrial action, it quickly emerged that something significant had changed.

Jeannie explains: "I think there are a number of factors, key to which is that we've spent a lot of time rebuilding our relationship with the company. It was also the first time

out for the lay negotiating team who really dug their heels in. O₂ believed we would take action if we didn't achieve at least inflation - and that's why we got there."

Jeannie concluded: "I think this deal goes a long way to rebuilding relationships. O₂ is the most successful mobile company in the UK - and, equally, it is the only unionised mobile company in the UK. That, I'd suggest, is not a coincidence."

● **Signalling a further improvement in relationships, the CWU's lay negotiating team has just had the first of what will become regular half yearly meetings with O₂ chief executive Ronan Dunne.**

ON THE WEB

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

■ Aiming for recognition

The CWU's long-running campaign for recognition at union-hostile Cable & Wireless is coming to a head with it looking increasingly certain that the simple maths of a ballot will prove the ultimate decider. Following an epic legal battle to get this far, and with campaigning intensifying on both sides, Voice outlines why a combination of bizarre ballot rules and the invidious presence of union busters means every single vote will count.



■ One step closer to justice

More than a million UK agency workers across the land received a huge boost in February when a Private Member's Bill demanding an end to unequal treatment successfully received its second reading without overt Government opposition. Coming just under a year after a near identical Bill was cynically derailed by the self-same Government, the remarkable about-turn has led to spiralling optimism tinged with suspicion as to what ministers are playing at.



■ Payphones in peril

The future of payphones is again in the spotlight, with the European Commission looking at universal service rules, and BT wanting UK regulator Ofcom to relax the company's obligations.

Voice argues the case for new funding arrangements to safeguard the future of a key public service.



InBrief

Boris is now British!

Readers may remember the story of Cambridge postal worker Boris Lidovski, whose desperate fight to stay in the UK triggered a major CWU campaign. While at various times defeat looked probable and Boris's deportation imminent his supporters never gave up – and the authorities finally relented. Now, 11 long years after he first arrived in the UK, Boris is now a British citizen. Regrettably Boris was dismissed by RM in 2005 due to his immigration status. He now hopes he can be re-employed.

Support MND Week!

Retired CWU activist Mike Findley is urging members to support his plans to mark National Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Awareness Week with a series of fund-raising events. As well as raising much needed resources for the charity, Mike also hopes to use the week - Saturday June 14 to Saturday June 21 - to increase awareness of the degenerative condition from which he suffers. For further information, visit www.mikefindleymndfund.com

Time on their hands

CWU ran its first union learning rep course for retired members in York in January. CWU national project manager Paul Dovey, said "I think it is a very innovative step. Our retired members have a wealth of experience and contacts in the wider community and they can bring a lot to the project." CWU regional project worker Andy Sorton agrees, pointing out that "retired members have an abundance of a scarce and valuable resource – time!" More at www.cwu.org/links/retiredulrs

Exposing Burma

Six Burmese trade union activists were recently sentenced to 28 years in prison simply for going to a meeting. The military junta's vicious crackdown on any forces for progressive and democratic change was outlined in harrowing detail at a recent TUC seminar. The event coincided with the launch of an online petition demanding the BBC withdraw the Burma edition of its Lonely Planet range of guidebooks. The CWU, meanwhile, is urging BT to reconsider its use of Total fuel given the company's extensive interests in Burma. See www.cwu.org/links/burma

Gold badge for Paul

Retired former national legal and medical officer Paul Grace received the CWU's highest honour when he was presented with the union's Gold Badge by general secretary Billy Hayes. Many former union friends and colleagues from across the UK attended the presentation which took place in Derry in February. Paul's long and committed involvement with the union began from the moment he joined the Post Office in August 1960. In 1979 he was elected to national office. Paul retired in 1992.

Running for CWUHA

The CWU's head of legal services Tony Rupa is swapping his customary suit for lycra running gear as he prepares to relive his "athletic days" and raise money for CWU Humanitarian Aid to boot.

As a young man Tony was a keen runner but, despite not taking part in a half marathon for more than 20 years, he is still confident he will be able to complete the Manchester 10K event on May 18 without medical attention.

Much is at stake, because running alongside an intrepid team from the Manchester office of union solicitors Simpson Millar, Tony hopes the CWU legal eagles - including practice manager Peter Watson – will raise a total of £1,000 to help fund the next CWUHA convoy.

"By way of encouragement, the rest of the firms on the union's solicitors panel have agreed to match the total amount raised. So, as long as we can stagger to the finishing post, we've

got the potential to raise a really significant amount of money to help CWUHA's work with disadvantaged children," Tony told the Voice.

Urging branches and individual members to sponsor his charity effort, Tony pointed out the appealing thought that, the more money that is pledged, the deeper the panel of lawyers will have to dig into their pockets!

Unsurprisingly CWU national organiser Alex Pearson - himself an Olympic-class blagger for the charity – is wishing the team well in their endeavours.

"Tony has always supported CWUHA, not least by bringing the solicitors firms into the fold with their sponsorship. Now he's going to be supporting us physically, and we're very grateful.

● Cheques made out to CWUHA should be sent to Tony Rupa, Legal Services Department, CWU, 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1RX.



Raring to go: Tony Rupa in his running gear

CWU national elections 2008

Elections for CWU national representatives are now underway - with ballot papers and election addresses, for those positions in which you are entitled to vote, distributed to members in the same mailing that includes this copy of Voice.

Four national officers have been elected unopposed. Deputy general secretary (postal) Dave Ward, assistant secretary Royal Mail (outdoor) Bob Gibson and national health, safety and environment officer Dave Joyce have been re-elected for a further five year term. Colin O'Callaghan has been elected unopposed to the post of assistant secretary in the telecoms constituency.

A full list of candidates standing for other officerial and NEC positions can be viewed at www.cwu.org/links/election2008

Remember, the ballot closes on April 28 - so cast your vote without delay!"

General secretary Billy Hayes concludes: "Trade unions are fundamentally democratic institutions - membership participation is paramount - so please ensure you cast your vote."

Witnesses needed for count

Why not put your name forward to be a Members' Observer at the election count?

The count takes place on 28 April 2008 and the union needs two members to oversee proceedings to ensure that everything is open and above-board.

Interested? The two observers will receive two paid days off work, subsistence and expenses and a fee of £100 after tax. If you would like to put your name forward please contact CWU senior deputy general secretary, Tony Kearns, at CWU, 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1RX by no later than Friday April 18.

Union artists win high praise



Gallery-goers admiring the artists' work

Northern Ireland regional learning committee hailed a "major coup" for the union after negotiating space in a prestigious gallery in Belfast to host an art exhibition.

The Golden Thread Gallery is renowned in the city for hosting high-quality exhibitions and the opportunity to work with a trade union was a first for them.

Regional secretary Lawrence Huston explains: "Our exhibition, which we called The World of Work, celebrated the creative talents of the CWU membership. Our aim was to demonstrate to the community at large, that trade unionists are not one-dimensional strikers but the sum of all their parts; creative, constructive and caring, playing a vital role in society as a whole."

The union hopes that visitors will be inspired to become involved in lifelong learning opportunities themselves and, of course, to join trade unions.

Competition amongst NI's CWU artists was such that not all entries could be displayed, Lawrence continued, adding: "Credit goes to the organising committee for the items selected which resulted in an excellent exhibition."

And the gallery was so impressed with the project, and with their involvement with the CWU, that they are keen to continue this partnership into the future.

"On behalf of NI Region, I'd like to thank JG O'Hare & Co Solicitors of Belfast, UIA Insurance and all the CWU branch members in the region for their enthusiastic participation in what was a most worthwhile project," Lawrence enthused.

UMF grant gives equality scheme its DEBUT

The latest round of Union Modernisation Fund grants saw the Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform approve a second CWU initiative.

The union's pioneering work with young people, under its youth engagement strategy, will now be complemented by a new comprehensive training scheme for equality reps entitled 'Deconstructing Equality Barriers with Union Training' (DEBUT).

The union's equal opportunities

department explains: "DEBUT was designed because there was a recognition within our department of the difficulties faced by our equalities reps in their localities. Not only do the vast majority of our equalities reps have to carry out their duties in their own time, they are often dealing with casework that can, from time to time, involve incredibly complex legal issues.

"We wanted to put into a play an action plan that would not only help them to deal with these issues more

confidently, but it would also give them the respect that they fully deserve, both within the CWU and by employers."

DEBUT, which is described by the union's equalities department as "a comprehensive online equality toolkit," is to be developed and introduced nationally over the next two years.

It will endeavour to cover issues of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion and transsexuals.

In addition to this, the programme will also train reps to deal with issues concerning flexible working applications and part-time working regulations.

The CWU equalities department is asking for further suggestions for the "toolkit," which will be designed in an interactive manner and is set to become a valuable sign-posting mechanism, rather than simply a reference point.

Find out more about this at www.cwu.org/links/debut



RAC chair Colin Bell addressing the Black Workers' Conference

Image credit: Duncan Strivens



Gloria Mills (right) with Michele Emerson (centre) and CWU president Jane Loftus



Peter Raynor of the National Pensioners Convention at the Retired Members' Conference



Young delegates absorbed in debate at the 2008 Youth Conference

EQUALITIES CONFERENCES

Paul Donovan hears conference delegates pledge support for agency worker and affordable housing campaigns while calling for better representation at the top table. Full reports from the Black Workers', Women's, Retired Members' and Youth conferences can be viewed on the web (see url links) – but edited highlights are printed below

BLACK WORKERS' CONFERENCE

Head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Trevor Phillips told the Black Workers Conference of the need to attack structural racism if the equality agenda is ever to be realised. "We need to start dealing with the causes rather than the effects," he said.

Trevor supported his argument by pointing out that at present rates of progress the Metropolitan Police would not reflect the diversity of London until the middle of the 22nd century; the House of Commons would not reflect diversity until 2085 and that 11-year-old boys from an African/Caribbean background would not come up to the average level of academic achievement until 2042.

General secretary Billy Hayes expressed his concern that ethnic minorities and women are still under-represented in the decision-making bodies of the CWU. "There is still much to do," he said.

Billy called for the Government to be bold and stand against the anti-asylum, anti-migration agenda being promoted by the tabloid press and Tories. "Asylum seekers should receive the same benefits as others, while they are in the country, and should not be sent to areas with a history for harassing migrants," said Billy, who also called for an amnesty for undocumented workers and legislation to protect the terms and conditions of agency workers.

Conference also passed a motion calling for support for the Strangers into Citizens Campaign, which aims to provide for the regularisation of undocumented workers who have lived in the country for four years or more.

Winston Richards, Central London, pointed out how regularising such undocumented workers could earn the exchequer in excess of £1 billion. There were also major impracticalities of deporting more than half a million people, he added.

Guest speaker, secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain Dr Abdul Bari, told of a growing partnership between the MCB and the TUC. "There are not many

Muslim employees who are part of the trade union movement. We can help. Mosques and Imams can encourage people to join the trade union movement," said Dr Bari.

WWW.CWU.ORG/LINKS/BW2008

WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

Unison national equalities organiser Gloria Mills declared that for too long real power had been in the hands of men, while responsibility remained with women. Addressing the CWU's Women's conference in Belfast, Gloria recalled how Unison had adopted the principle of proportionality in 1993. "We wanted to shift the balance of power in a union whose membership was made up of 73 per cent women," said Gloria.

Now, as a result, 75 per cent of Unison's chief negotiators and five out of 10 chief negotiators are women.

Gloria highlighted the importance of getting the promised equalities Bill from the government. "Labour is the only government to deliver on equality and the only one that will deliver on the equality Bill," said Gloria.

Challenged from the floor about her faith in the Labour Party, Gloria pointed out there had been 35 pieces of equality legislation passed since 1975 – and it was all delivered by Labour governments.

General secretary Billy Hayes commended the first edition of the Women's Talk magazine that has gone out to 48,000 members. Billy also pledged CWU support to the Abortion Rights campaign, predicting that "there will be a struggle over abortion rights in 2008."

On the question of women's representation, West London branch promoted motion 20 calling for rules 2.5 and 2.6 introducing the need for proportionality and positive action "until such time as the union is satisfied that its structure reflects and supports the gender and racial balance of the members it represents" to be enacted.

Echoing Gloria Mills's comments earlier, the branch declared: "We'll only get change at the top table if we change the top table."

Other motions were passed condemning the rise in forced marriages, calling for the union to work with the group Stop Honour Killings and raising concerns about "the huge growth in the sex industry in the UK."

The two motions to go forward to annual conference called for campaigns for life-long follow up for all breast cancer patients and to raise awareness among members of pension issues.

Chief executive of the Northern Ireland Equalities Commission, Evelyn Collins, told of the changing equality agenda in Northern Ireland with issues like homophobic bullying in the workplace coming to the fore.

WWW.CWU.ORG/LINKS/WOMENS2008

RETIRED MEMBERS' CONFERENCE

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns revealed how the surplus in the £57 billion strong National Insurance Fund (NIF) has been used by the Government as a source to borrow against to finance ventures like the war in Iraq and bailing out of Northern Rock Bank.

Tony was responding to a unanimously passed motion calling on government to openly declare that the fund exists, declare the true surplus, identify other purposes it was used for other than pensions and publish half yearly statements.

General secretary Billy Hayes hailed the success of the strike against Royal Mail and the advance of the agency workers Bill. "The dispute was a long one with one million days of industrial activity," said Billy. "Now there is a commitment to look at Royal Mail liberalisation."

Billy described the "disgraceful" situation where the world's fourth largest economy has 2 million pensioners living in poverty – and pledged support for the NPC campaign to mark the centenary of the establishment of the pension.

Another motion was passed calling for a campaign to restore a minimum number of inspections of each care home per year. Jimmy James of Eastern Region expressed

concern that the present four inspections – two notified and two un-notified – were to be cut back to one inspection every three years. "Inspections should be increased not decreased," said Jimmy.

Peter Raynor, vice president of the National Pensioners Convention, claimed the problem with travel is that it is seen as "a perk, not a right", for pensioners. "We must fight on the grounds of value to the community, not that we are entitled to travel," said Peter.

SDGS Tony Kearns revealed that from 1 May 2008 there will be associate members of the CWU. This category of membership had been requested by past retired members conferences. The cost will be 69p a week or 79p with the political levy.

WWW.CWU.ORG/LINKS/RETIRED2008

YOUTH CONFERENCE

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns declared that "unless we find a way of attracting young people this union will die on its feet."

Tony drew attention to the importance of the motions on the pad focusing on agency workers and the need for affordable housing. "A lot of young workers are agency workers and the housing issue is just going to get bigger and bigger," said Tony. "People in their 30s and 40s are being forced to stay living at home with their parents, not able to leave and get their independence."

A huge campaign for affordable housing is needed, he added: "The private sector is only in it for private profit."

Motion 7 pledged support for the agency campaign while motion 8 called for the Youth Advisory Committee to organise a lobby of Parliament on affordable housing. YAC member Lisa Hadley told how she could not afford a home and was directed toward a home for battered wives. "As a working Mum it looks as if I will always be in the same place living with my Mum," said Lisa. "It is important that we lobby Parliament to get our homes to secure the future for ourselves and families." ▼

WWW.CWU.ORG/LINKS/YOUTH2008

“
MOSQUES
AND IMAMS
CAN
ENCOURAGE
PEOPLE TO
JOIN THE
TRADE UNION
MOVEMENT
”

BACK PAGE DEBATE NUCLEAR POWER



NUCLEAR OR NOT?

"This discussion on nuclear power kicks off what will become a regular back page debate in Voice on leading issues of the day," explains CWU head of communications **Kevin Slocombe**. "Please send in your views for publication in the next edition as part of each debate. I hope you find the debates interesting."



FOR

GMB national secretary **Gary Smith**, whose responsibilities include representing around 30,000 members across the UK energy industry, backs "like-for-like" replacement of existing nuclear plant...

"The reality is that yet more of our baseload may need to be produced from nuclear and this could reach 40 per cent in the future," Gary adds, pointing to domestic oil and gas decline and high cost estimates for clean-coal.

On waste disposal, he predicts that, "the amount of future waste will be far less, but the existing legacy waste is not going away."

The Government's chief scientist David King has backed a plan which, it is claimed, would reprocess some 60,000 tonnes of high-level nuclear waste into "free fuel for life," meeting, potentially, well over half of our electricity needs until 2060.

This proposal has been attacked on both cost and safety grounds, but Gary backs such initiatives, explaining how waste can be turned into mixed oxide (MOX) fuel and then burnt in a reactor to make electricity.

"If our nuclear industry disappears completely, then so will the skills and technology needed to deal with legacy waste," he argues.

Gary insists that "we must not see renewables as opposed to other energy sources and an increased role for renewables is absolutely crucial," but he does admit to a degree of scepticism.

The Government's 20 per cent target is, he says, "ambitious"

and he questions the practicalities of some of the projects currently being planned.

On comparisons of cost and efficiency between the UK and French nuclear industries, Gary highlights the benefits of long-term, strategic planning.

"The UK nuclear industry was a victim of short-termism and laissez-faire attitudes, but the French had a far more coherent vision and their nuclear sector was planned in a rational, strategic and far-sighted way."

And Gary goes on to sharply criticise government energy policy over recent years.

"There are soaring energy prices in this country and one-sixth of our people are living in fuel poverty. It's a clear case of market failure and the failure of liberalisation," he argues, adding: "Energy must come back into the public sector."

Summing up, the union official urges: "We should support technological development, while ensuring that it is used to benefit of all of society."

And calls for a reduction in energy use are, he cautions: "Potentially reactionary and bourgeois arguments."

"Under current levels of poverty and inequality, it would be the poor who would go cold, while the wealthy would keep warm."

Nuclear power currently provides around 20 per cent of UK electricity, with most of the remainder coming from gas (40%) and coal (33%) and so-called "renewables" (4%), imports (2%) and oil (1%) contributing the rest.

With our existing nuclear plants set to reach the end of their life-cycle over the next decade or so, a 20 per cent drop in domestic electricity supply looms unless either new, replacement, plant is built or if the shortfall can be made up through other sources.

BRITAIN'S ENERGY DILEMMA

Domestic production of oil and gas is predicted to fall 75 per cent below 2005 levels by 2020 and greater imports – from some of the world's more unstable regions – leave supply vulnerable, while insufficient progress in carbon-capture technology means that an increased reliance on coal-generated power could actually increase CO₂ emissions.

While the Labour government has set out its strategy – giving the green light for a new generation of nuclear power stations to be built – many inside the party disagree, backing, instead, a radical shift towards "renewables" – the harnessing of wind, water and solar power.

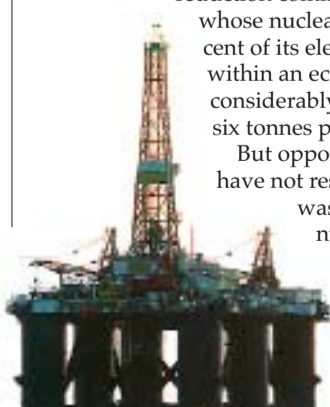
The Conservatives argue that nuclear power should only have a role as "a last resort," – with no public investment – and they accuse Labour of opting for nuclear as a "first choice," while the Liberal Democrats want to phase out nuclear power.

Opinion is divided within the UK labour movement too, unions with significant membership in the industry – such as GMB, Prospect and Unite – supporting continuation or expansion, while other unions disagree – UNISON, for example, states that "there is no case for embarking on a new nuclear build programme." To date the CWU has no stated policy.

Nuclear energy's supporters argue that it is the most effective way of maintaining security of supply while meeting our carbon reduction commitments, often citing France,

whose nuclear industry provides almost 80 per cent of its electricity at a relatively low cost, within an economy that produces considerably less CO₂ than ours – an average six tonnes per citizen per year compared to 11.

But opponents reply that even the French have not resolved the problem of radioactive waste disposal, that the cost of new nuclear build in the UK would divert resources from the development of "renewables" and that it would fail to impact significantly on CO₂ levels in any case. **V**



AGAINST

Greenpeace UK senior climate and energy campaigner **Ben Ayliffe** is adamant that nuclear power should have "no part to play" in meeting UK energy needs and that other sources can plug our energy gap...



Energy efficiency, cleaner use of fossil fuels, renewables and state-of-the-art decentralised power stations, together, have the potential to deliver reliable low carbon energy quicker and cheaper," Ben begins.

"And these sources are safe and globally applicable, unlike nuclear, but they will be strangled if cash and political energy get thrust at nuclear."

Like-for-like replacement of existing nuclear plant would not, he explains, make a significant impact on our CO₂ targets

"The Government's figures reveal that this would cut UK emission by around 4 per cent some time after the year 2025 and this won't be until after deep cuts in carbon emissions need to have been made," adds Ben.

And he insists that "the government simply does not know how to deal with existing waste, let alone any new waste," adding: "This highlights the irrationality and immorality of building nuclear power stations."

Ben cites Nuclear Decommissioning Authority estimates that the cost of cleaning up legacy waste is around £72 billion. "Building a waste dump could be as high as £21bn," he adds.

Ben rejects criticisms of the reliability of "renewable" sources

and calculates that the looming energy gap can be plugged by generating 40 per cent of our electricity from renewables by 2020 – a target which, Ben insists, Prime Minister Gordon Brown has committed to.

"So, if the Prime Minister is telling the truth, there is no energy gap," he insists.

Before outlining Greenpeace's vision of a 'decentralised' energy system, Ben attacks the current "wasteful centralised method."

"Two-thirds of the energy in the fuel is wasted before use, because the large power stations far from our cities discard an enormous amount of heat," he explains.

But a decentralised system, "would see everyday buildings playing host to devices such as solar panels, small wind turbines and combined heat and power boilers, which generate electricity as well as heat and hot water," Ben continues.

"With its much improved efficiency, coupled with the fact that it is more suited to hosting renewables, a decentralised system could halve the global warming emissions of the sector," he predicts.

"It shouldn't be confined to either the public or private sector. If local authorities can use it, they should and if private firms can invest in it, then they should too."