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VOICE



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DEFENDING UNIVERSAL SERVICES

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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

IT'S ALL TOO MUCH

The CWU had won,' writes BBC business editor Robert Peston in his new book *Who Runs Britain*, a book which will be of interest to CWU members.

But it is no paean of praise for the CWU, as Peston castigates the Government for its failure to privatise Royal Mail. In the book, unions get a walk-on part and the CWU even gets a backhanded compliment, when he describes the union as "anachronistically powerful."

Nonetheless, Peston's work is a sad indictment of all governments who worship at the altar of the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and those on average earnings, in the supposed belief that we will witness a trickle-down effect of increased wealth for all.

Yet, with no demonstrable evidence, we continue to hear government ministers heap praise upon the doings of the super rich, whilst at the same time imposing limits on public-sector pay on everyone from civil servants to teachers.

Around 30,000 people are now paid more than £500,000 per annum – they are the top

0.1 per cent of Britain's earners, with a combined income of £33 billion, about four per cent of all earnings in the UK.

Yet for all the fawning upon the super rich, Britain is a much less equal place than France.

Books such as Peston's are useful reminders in the struggle for equality and justice, whether that be in the workplace or more generally, in enabling us to understand what is happening in our country and the wider world.

Despite the increase in wealth and power of the super-rich, the work of organised trade unions still delivers benefits. The TUC has demonstrated that being a member of a trade union increases your pay by around 17 per cent above that of the unorganised workplace. In other areas, such as equality and health and safety, real improvements are made.

The CWU Pay Handbook, now in its fifth edition which will be issued shortly, tracks how well the CWU performs as a trade union and will once again show the value of the CWU.

Agency Workers

The CWU, as part of the TUC negotiating team, reached agreement with the Government and the CBI recently on a commitment for the implementation of the European Directive on Agency Workers. It will lay the foundation for improving the lives of 1.4 million agency workers within the UK. There is much still to do, but it should be registered that the CWU have been campaigning on this issue for many years. It is as a direct result of the cogency and doggedness of our campaigning activities that we have raised this issue up the agenda within the Labour movement. Congratulations to all those within the CWU who have helped deliver this breakthrough.

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IT'S A FACT!

The eight museums and galleries that form the National Museums in Liverpool house the largest collection of artefacts under single ownership in the UK



CWU in the news...

Progress on agency workers, the future of the postal industry and fat cat pay brought CWU into the news over the last few weeks. The highlight was the delayed announcement of Royal Mail's accounts that were sent out late on the Friday before bank holiday in a sad and failed attempt to hide the enormity of the chief executive's pay.

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

The union consistently led stories on Royal Mail pensions. Headlines in daily papers included: "Royal Mail forces more disputes over pensions" (Guardian) and "Post strikes loom after pensions row" (Metro). This story, along with post office closures, saw both print and broadcast news.

The review on the future of the postal sector saw prominent items on television, radio and in the papers. CWU Communications spent time briefing a number of comment journalists and secured excellent coverage in the Guardian, particularly with Seumas Milne's column titled "Corporate cherry-picking isn't delivering the goods," an excellent analysis of why government

policy on Royal Mail hasn't worked. The union's consistent criticism of the role of Postcomm was reflected with the Guardian commenting of the regulator that its "ideological passion for markets and unchained competition has been central to this sorry saga."

Prominent media coverage of the agency workers' campaign reflects the significant developments achieved through negotiation with government in May. The FT screamed: "Unions flex muscle on agency workers," while the Mirror's headline was "Unions' joy as temp workers win new deal."

CWU has been on the airwaves publicising the issues facing Fujitsu workers in Birmingham,

securing national and local print coverage around the industrial action ballot, with the Morning Star reporting, "members of the CWU...backed walkouts by 68-1 in protest at plans to cut 150 jobs." It was the fat cat story that made the biggest news, however, with CWU leading the opposition. "Outcry over £3m payout for the boss closing your post offices" shouted the Daily Mail, while the Mirror headline summed up the common view: "Failure...yet Royal Mail boss Crozier pocketed £3m last year." CWU general secretary Billy Hayes was widely quoted saying the chief executive was being "rewarded for managing decline. This is a massive insult to employees and the public."





FIGHT FOR OUR SERVICES

CWU members and activists are at the forefront of the growing chorus of opposition to the ongoing programme of savage cuts to the post office network right across the UK, a closure programme which, the union warns, threatens massive job losses and the decimation of essential public services which are relied on by the most vulnerable members of society

Pensioners, local councillors and members of the public joined CWU members and activists at a lively and determined protest last month against the axing of London crown post offices earmarked for closure or franchising to high street retailers.

The demonstration, at Borough in south London, was the latest in a series of actions aimed at bringing pressure to bear on the government to halt its nationwide closure plan, which is set to cut at least 2,500 post offices and franchise out 83 crown offices.

South London counters section secretary Graham Franklin explained that the office – one of eight crown offices currently under threat in the capital – is due for closure in July.

The public consultation period – which, controversially, has been cut from 12 to just six weeks – was set to end some two weeks after the protest, but Graham predicted that the decision to close had already been taken by Royal Mail bosses.

"The consultation's all a sham," he asserted, revealing: "I've seen an email in the office ordering the removal of archive records."

"It's appalling in a public service and the only people who want this is high-level management."

Southwark Borough Labour Party councillor Gordon Nardell, who also described the consultation process as a "sham," pointed out: "All eight post offices in my area that were under threat have had their closure confirmed."

"The mayor was right to begin a legal challenge," he insisted.

And, reflecting on the recent local elections, Gordon added: "We did particularly badly where there were closures earmarked."

"I hope that rank-and-file party members like me can help to push policy direction away from liberalisation and back towards the idea of a public service run by those who work for it and use it."

National Pensioners Convention vice-president Dot Gibson described the cuts as "a scandal".

"The government can subsidise the banking system, so why not the post offices?" she asked.

One of the arguments used by government minister Pat McFadden to justify the closures is that increasing numbers of people bank and pay household bills online rather than at their local post office.

But Dot was not reassured by this and pointed out: "Older people find it more difficult to bank and pay bills by computer."

Lambeth and Southwark Greater London Assembly member Valerie Shawcross accused Royal Mail of "one-dimensional thinking" and insisted that, by expanding rather than slashing services, the network could become profitable.

But, most importantly, Valerie highlighted the social cost of the savage programme of cuts.

"Post offices are right in the heart of our communities," she continued.

In response to suggestions from some quarters that local authorities could step in and take over the running, Valerie voiced a note of scepticism and warned that this was not necessarily a magic-wand solution.

"I'd be disturbed if all that happens is that the costs were passed down to local councils," she noted.

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey agreed, asking: "Why would you need to rely on local authorities if the government provided the necessary subsidy?"

And, turning the government's argument that it could not afford to properly fund the post office network on its head, Andy countered: "After last week's electoral disaster, the government can't afford not to support this vital public service."

"An extra £100 million per year would comfortably protect our network," he explained, adding that this sum was dwarfed by the tens of billions of pounds of taxpayers' money that are currently being pumped in, by government, to prop up the ailing private banking system."

▲ Local residents and politicians protesting with the CWU at Borough Crown Post Office last month

Our positive alternative

As well as actively campaigning and organising to defeat Post Office's "managed decline" strategy, the CWU also has an alternative vision of a successful, expanding post office network

Assistant secretary Andy Furey met industry regulator Postcomm officials at the end of April to outline the union's staunch opposition to plans to split Post Office Limited (POL) from Royal Mail Group (RMG) and to restate the continued opposition of the CWU to franchising and closures.

Postcomm finally put their cards on the table last month, when they called, in their submission to Richard Hooper's review of postal liberalisation, for the separation of POL and RMG.

On behalf of the CWU, Andy presented a written brief, which will feed into Postcomm's annual report to government on the post office network, in which the union makes a powerful case against separation and argues that, only by maintaining RMG as an integral whole, can the company overcome its current difficulties.

Reacting to Postcomm's proposals, Andy said: "Once again, the regulator has exceeded its remit and has undermined its statutory duty of protecting the universal service obligation."

"There are," he continued, "few other postal operators in the world who have separate accounts for their post office and mail networks, let alone any who have demerged."

"Postcomm claim that their motivation lies in protecting the network, but we suspect that their arguments are

driven by a dogmatic obsession with privatisation," he stormed.

"Postcomm's plan would be a huge blow to the viability of the network, the public and our members' jobs - it must be defeated."

As well as placing on record the union's rejection of post office closures and separation, the CWU document also puts forward a comprehensive alternative strategy for the company.

If the right decisions are made now, the post office network can, the union argues, build a positive future based on growing revenues generated from an innovative and expanding range of services.

Specific proposals made include calls for increased funding for the network with a commitment by government for financial support beyond 2011.

Renewal of the POL contract to provide the Post Office Card Account and the development of greater functionality for the account.

The establishment of a universal "People's Bank," including current, basic and children's bank accounts, aimed at tackling financial exclusion, to be operated by and through the Post Office, along the lines of La Banque Postale in France.

Extending the Social Network Payment to support urban deprived crown offices.

A commitment by local,

regional and national government to fully utilise the network to ensure that it is the shop front for accessing government services and a commitment to give greater powers over post office service provision to devolved and local authorities.

■ In the last issue of Voice, we reported that the then mayor of London Ken Livingstone had launched a legal challenge to the London closures, citing the shortened public consultation period.

Official government cabinet office guidelines for public consultations recommend a 12-week formal consultation timescale, but this has been ignored and has been cut short to just six weeks.

New Mayor of London Boris Johnson has assured us that he will continue to pursue the case, which is currently under consideration by the High Court.

"Local post offices provide vital services for Londoners and they must be protected," insisted the Mayor.

"That's why we are taking legal action to challenge the post office closures."

And he promised that his administration will "amend the London Plan to recognise the need for a post office to be within walking distance of residents and I will continue to campaign against the proposed closures in all parts of London."



Assistant secretary Andy Furey



New organising ambassadors from the South West Region standing outside Bristol CWU branch office after successfully completing their two-day training course last month

OAs get ready to organise

After seven Organising Ambassadors (OA) training courses, 85 CWU activists, from right across the UK, are now fully trained and accredited to lead the fight to build the union in every postal workplace in the land.

During April and May, CWU senior field organiser Lynn Browne led OA classes in Birmingham, Bristol, Stockport, Glasgow, Newport and Belfast, as well as two sessions at national headquarters in Wimbledon, training volunteer CWU activists to recruit and organise both within Royal Mail and in the private sector.

Each two-day course follows a similar pattern, with the first day dedicated to recruiting members working within Royal Mail, while Day Two typically focuses on the struggle to recruit and organise across the private postal sector.

Explaining Day One, Lynn points out: "There are around 30,000 non-members in Royal Mail and that's an important target constituency for us.

"We describe this as 'infill' recruiting," she adds.

Non-membership here occurs for a

variety of reasons, Lynn continues, highlighting instances where a long-serving unit rep either leaves or retires from the company and there is no-one to replace her or him from within that workplace.

As well as spending time in classroom role-play scenarios – learning new techniques in both group and individual situations – OA students were also given guidance on how to identify areas where membership is low and to develop strategies to reverse such trends.

After the completion of their training, this will be a key part of the OAs' roles within their regions.

Before liberalisation, the CWU only organised Royal Mail workers, but now, there is an urgent need to extend the benefits of trade unionism to workers right across the sector.

Since the union adopted this policy, Lynn and her team have developed the twin-track approach.

But this second part of the strategy has been "a struggle," she admits, adding that she warns students at each course not to expect instant

rewards when they visit non-recognised companies' premises.

"Sometimes, there are unrealistic expectations," she explains, adding: "Workers at the companies aren't going to just flock to join as soon as union organisers appear from over the horizon – it often takes months of solid, patient and targeted hard work before we make a breakthrough."

As well as having to temper students' enthusiasm, the CWU organising department also answers those who argue that organising in the private sector neglects the union's core membership, by repeatedly stressing that sector-wide organisation is the only way to protect employment standards for all.

Another issue that is often mentioned by CWU activists at these OA courses is "facility time."

It is common for Royal Mail-employed union reps to be allowed to carry out CWU activity in company time, but this is less well known in the private sector, even at companies with recognised unions.

CWU head of organising John East

made it clear to students that, if there was a need to represent new members recruited at private companies, then "no, Royal Mail won't pay you," he explained, pointing out that this would have to be done in members' own time.

And John had some practical tips for OAs on how to overcome any difficulties that this might present.

"Remember," he added: "For every member you recruit outside Royal Mail, your branch gets to keep their subs for one year – that's £72 per year per member. And that money can be used to fund reps' costs.

"But we shouldn't be looking at servicing members at other companies from within Royal Mail in the longer term – we need reps inside these companies as soon as possible."

"And I want every rep trained in both recruitment and organising."

Later this year, the department plans to begin a series of Stage Two courses, which will include a practical element, where senior organisers will accompany and assess students on recruitment activities.

ULR spreads learning 'bug'

South East Wales Amal Branch lead union learning rep (ULR) David James told Voice that, in the three years since he first took on the position, he has "got a real bug for doing this."

Over 300 students have taken advantage of the various learning opportunities on offer during the time that David has been in his post, he recalled.

Speaking after Welsh regional assembly member Jon Griffiths visited Cardiff Mail Centre last month to officially open the new learning centre in the building, David said that he and each of the other ULRs in the area "feel really good every time each person completes a course."

CWU head of education Trish Lavelle praised the union's ULRs and described the Cardiff centre as "just the beginning."

"The challenge now is to extend learning opportunities to all our members, regardless of where they work and what they do," she added.

Also speaking at the event, CWU NEC member Pete Keenlyside stressed the historical role of trade unions in educating working people and he went on to highlight the crucial importance of education in developing workers' political consciousness.

"After all, knowledge is power," Pete added.

Awards were then presented to six CWU members by Cardiff College International principal Malcolm Charnley, who paid tribute to the hard work and dedication of both the tutors and the students.

This is the first CWU learning centre in Wales and its work has been supported by the Wales TUC and funded through the Wales union learning fund, while the courses and tutors have been provided by Cardiff Basic Skills Services and Cardiff International College.

Midlands' lead learning rep relishes challenges ahead

Lead union learning rep (ULR) for Midlands No 7 branch Shaun Pender told Voice of his plans to develop union learning in the area after winning the right to paid release for his duties last month.

Shaun was elected to replace Dave Condliffe back in November 2006 after Dave was appointed as an area project worker by the union.

But, before Shaun could get started with his new duties, unit manager Giovanni de Marco withdrew his facility time, although Dave had been granted full release while in the position, which he held from 2004.

As there is a statutory requirement for ULRs to receive appropriate release, the union had taken his case to an employment tribunal, but, just

the day before the scheduled hearing, Royal Mail had accepted the union's case and offered 20 hours per week release, settling the claim.

Commenting on the case, CWU head of education and training Trish Lavelle said: "This situation is symptomatic of Royal Mail's inconsistent approach to ULR facilities and their reluctance to reach a national agreement with the CWU."

"It is a shame that it took such drastic action to secure the deal, but I believe that these events have left Royal Mail in no doubt that we will continue to pursue them for ULR rights wherever they are in breach of the law – and that includes taking them to Employment Tribunals if necessary. The result achieved in

Stoke-on-Trent has sent a clear message to Royal Mail – take ULR release seriously, or you are going to end up in a Tribunal sooner or later."

And CWU Midlands lifelong learning project worker David Condliffe added: "I would like to commend the branch on its diligent work in bringing this case to a successful conclusion."

"Against the backdrop of conducting the 'Burslem 12' suspensions campaign and, more recently, the campaign to stop the closure of Stoke MLO, the branch has never allowed the learning agenda to take a backseat," he added.

Clearly keen to get back to his duties, Shaun told Voice of the enthusiasm for the project, for which

there is a "matched-funding" agreement in the area.

"The withdrawal of my rights denied valuable learning opportunities to workers in this area, but we've got a dozen or so courses lined up just in the week or so since this was settled," he explained, adding that, in the first two years of the initiative, which runs in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent College, around 200 members completed learning courses.

"The principle courses are IT, numeracy and literacy," Shaun continues, adding: "Teaching English as a foreign language is also very popular, as is learning Spanish."

Plumbing and electrical courses are also very popular.



Shaun Pender and Dave Condliffe

Calling time on the witchhunters

Assistant secretary Ray Ellis has insisted that the union remains in support of the underlying principles of Royal Mail's Bullying and Harassment (B&H) procedures, but that the company must stamp out the "scalp-hunting mentality" of a small minority of the company's harassment investigators and managers.

Too often, he explained to Voice, these essentially well-meaning regulations have been abused, particularly in the aftermath of last autumn's industrial dispute, in order to "target CWU reps and activists."

At delivery offices across the

country, from Burslem in Staffordshire and Morden, Surrey, to Bude in Cornwall, unfounded accusations of Bullying and Harassment have led to suspensions, transfers and, in some cases, dismissals of long-serving CWU reps and other loyal union members with previously unblemished disciplinary records.

In many cases, the allegations have been made by postal workers who openly crossed CWU picket lines and worked during strike days.

High on the union's list of concerns, according to Ray, "is the developing scalp-hunting mentality

among some of the independent harassment investigators, who are looking to 'get a result' rather than resolve the real issue," he adds.

Determined to return these procedures to their original purpose, the postal executive has sent Ray into high-level meetings with the company's head of diversity and inclusion David Vaughan, at which agreement has been reached to attempt to jointly tackle these concerns.

"We've agreed to re-establish regular quarterly meetings and, at our request, management have given us a breakdown of these B&H cases across the business, detailing the numbers involved, the range of issues involved and the outcomes," continued the CWU national officer.

But the union is as committed as ever to the underlying principles of the B&H regulations. Indeed, Ray argues that the problem lies, fundamentally, in the failure of many managers to properly apply the agreed procedures and this will be central to the case that the union makes at future meetings.

"We need the timescales in the agreement to be adhered to and we're not looking for changes to the procedure as such, but in its application. Specifically, we're looking for managers and reps to be involved in joint B&H training, so that there's a common understanding and we're also seeking to involve our field officials more," he explained.



CWU assistant secretary Bob Gibson

Burslem's long fight rumbles on

Burslem CWU officials have expressed their confidence that the six remaining suspended men will return to work at the Stoke delivery office.

Six of the original "Burslem 12" won their fight for justice back in March, while their colleagues were granted independent national appeals panel (NAP) hearings to investigate their cases.

Three of these NAPs began at the end of April and the other three are set to start in August, with postal executive member Noel McClean leading the CWU side.

Until then, the men remain suspended without pay and are being supported through the Burslem Fighting Fund.



Postal executive member Noel McClean

Morden CWU rep pledges to clear his name

Victimised Morden Delivery Office unit rep Dave Hallett vowed last month to clear his name after winning the right to an independent national appeals panel (NAP) investigation into Royal Mail's decision to compulsorily transfer him to another site.

Following last autumn's national postal strike, nine CWU members, including Dave, faced disciplinary charges after complaints were made by the two postal workers in the office who crossed official CWU picket lines and went into work during the dispute.

When the dispute ended last October, Dave asked his unit manager for a "clear-the-air" meeting, with the aim of restoring good working relations at Morden as quickly as possible and ensuring that working relationships at the office were not permanently damaged by any lingering bitterness in the aftermath of the dispute.

But, before the meeting could take place, the manager was abruptly transferred to another office amid allegations relating to the use of petty cash and the situation was then taken

on by a delivery sector manager.

The situation at Morden rapidly deteriorated and, within a couple of weeks, formal allegations had been made both by and against the two members of staff concerned.

According to Dave, many of the allegations against him and his colleagues are utterly unfounded.

"They've accused us of sending them to Coventry, taking photos of them and even of 'staring at them the wrong way'," he explained, adding: "But one of them even admitted that he'd told lies."

Of the two picket-line crossers, one has now left the company altogether and the other has, according to Dave, been off work claiming to be suffering from stress ever since the end of the dispute.

Dave has worked for Royal Mail for 20 years – 15 of them at the Morden office – and he has never had any disciplinary action taken against him before.

Of the others involved, four were also transferred – one of these men has moved voluntarily and the other three have appeals pending. If Dave wins his NAP, it is likely that the

cases against the others may be dropped.

The other four members all received various stages of warnings or reprimands.

Croydon and Sutton CWU area rep Ally McLeod said that, "now Dave's won the right to a national appeal, we're hoping that the truth will come out."

And, commenting on the implementation of the B&H procedures, Ally added: "This needs to be changed big time."

"Our union reps should be given more protection and the whole process needs an independent person."

And Dave agreed, pointing out: "The whole process takes far too long. The current situation relates to allegations made almost seven months ago and it all needs to be speeded up."

"At present, it's all definitely being used by management as an attack on our union in this area, which is a very strong area."

"Out of over 1,000 people, less than 70 went in to work during the strike.

InBrief

Germans win deal

German postal workers won a 4 per cent rise in pay plus one-off payments of 200 euros (£157) last month following a series of strikes which paralysed deliveries in key areas of the economy. And the workers, members one of the world's biggest unions the 2.4-million strong Verdi, also won key concessions on job security from their employers Deutsche Post. Selective "warning" strikes during April saw several thousand of the company's 130,000 employees walk out in specific, targeted actions calculated to cause maximum impact across Germany's 16 federal states.

New ill-health scheme

Talks over new procedures for members who retire early on ill-health grounds have made progress following Royal Mail's recognition that their existing policy is at variance with current age discrimination legislation, explained assistant secretary Ray Ellis. And, although the company's introduction of a lump-sum payment rather than one based on length of service remains problematic, if the payment is high enough to ensure that members do not lose out, then this may be acceptable.

Stoke CWU vow fight

Local CWU members in the Stoke area are determined to resist threats to close Stoke Mail Delivery Office and transfer its work to Wolverhampton. Around 250 workers are employed at the Stoke site and branch officials suspect that the company's plan is a deliberate attack on the CWU in the area for its long tradition of staunch trade unionism.

Scottish challenge

Edinburgh CWU member Colin Scott has laid down the gauntlet to postal workers in York and London to "come and take us on" in two six-mile Postman's Walk events this summer and autumn. Colin is a member of "Team Edinburgh," consisting of him and his workmates and they will be aiming for victory at July's York contest and down in London in September. "If any postal workers from other areas think they can beat us and want to take part, contact me on (0131) 661 6075, Kevin Goodwin on (01904) 617284, or call Steve Wynn on (020) 7239-2262," Colin said.

Steve's moonwalk

NEC member Steve Fishwick will take part in the night-time Edinburgh Moonwalk later this month in aid of charities that care for breast cancer victims. Anyone wishing to sponsor Steve, contact him at www.justgiving.com/stevefishwick Cheques to: Steve Fishwick, CWU North Lancs & Cumbria Branch, 75 Garstang Road, Preston, PR1 1LD



Dave Hallett and Ally McLeod

LETTER OF THE MONTH



Bosses must learn to care

After nearly 17 years service with Royal Mail, I have had to retire due to ill health.

I suffer from cancer and, as well as going through the treatment of chemotherapy, I somehow got a trapped nerve in my spine and now suffer with severe "foot drop," so now I need a walking stick to get around.

I'm writing this because of the "care" from management – or lack of it – I received.

In nine months while off sick, I was contacted by our resource manager only to let me know that my sick certificate was due, or to let

me know that I had an appointment with EHS. He never once asked how I was or if I needed anything and my line manager never contacted me once.

I must stress that I think all managers should get a copy of the National Ill-Health Retirement And Management of Long-Term Sickness Absence Procedures and read it!

I'll sign off by saying that I will miss the staff and the banter we used to have. I made some good friends over the years both on delivery and in processing.

Keith Morgan

Green psycho-babble?

I agree with CWU senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns that saving the planet is a fight for us all (Voice New Year 2008) – in particular saving the planet from the dubious science and New Age psycho-babble of the green movement!

For those of us who are reluctant to be seduced by their apocalyptic siren songs, and who view green politics as just another phase of middle-class angst, a day spent at the recent Heathrow Climate Camp only confirmed our worst fears. Everywhere you went you would be assailed by hysterical and strident rhetoric condemning mass consumption, mass production and mass travel.

But the rhetoric hid a deeper meaning – namely, the fear and loathing of the masses in general. Presumably that is the reason why environmentalism has always been popular with the rich. Green politics has its roots in philosophies of the right. Conservation=conservatism.

Hugging trees is preferable to hugging humans, because trees do not answer back.

Steve Higginson, Liverpool (retired)

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns replies:

Either wilfully or through ignorance, Steve misses the point.

Yes, the planet will survive and so will the trees – the problem is, it's the people who are in trouble.

Simply ridiculing individuals because he doesn't like the look of them is all good knockabout stuff, but it shows a lack of socialist principles in defending real people the world over from the real dangers that exist.

"New Age psycho babble" is, I presume, massive deforestation displacing indigenous populations the world over, creating food and water shortages and condemning millions of the world's poor to even more poverty and starvation. The notion of green politics having its roots in the right is as laughable as it is untrue and anyone who really understands trade union history will know that concerns for the environment have dominated our movement's thinking for generations.

I've never seen standing on the sidelines pointing and laughing just because I don't

understand as a particularly progressive way of dealing with issues affecting the working class, but Steve's entitled to adopt that approach if he wants.

Meanwhile, the rest of us will get on with dealing with reality, as all real socialists should.

Heartfelt thanks to CWU

I am writing this letter to say a huge thank you to the Bristol branch of CWU.

My husband was dismissed at the end of last year for alleged picket-line offences relating to the industrial action that took place last summer, but, with the help and support of CWU, he has been reinstated at his appeal.

In particular, I would like to thank Clive Welsford, David Wilshire, Mike Newport and Kevin Beazer. I would also like to thank Dave Ward for his involvement and also my husband's colleagues in his delivery office.

We are truly grateful for your help and support through this difficult time. If you could print this letter for me it would be great, as it would be a small way of thanking those who helped us through this difficult time.

Emma Kivell, Bristol

Shape up Royal Mail!

I don't know if you will print this gripe, but here it is anyway.

As a postman of some 25 years, I fear where this current Royal Mail management is leading this once-great institution.

Where once, Royal Mail was the delivery network to live up to for our competitors, we seem now to be looking down to them to carry us forward and adopting their practices.

For example, later deliveries provide less opportunity to catch the customer in, thus carrying out a procedure known as "pouching off," for any items that cannot be delivered.

They are then returned to the delivery office to be collected the next day, causing a 24-hour delay to the delivery.

In my experience, one thing to get

people's backs up – besides getting their mail late – is having to wait 24 hours for mail that they would have been able to collect on the day of attempted delivery before this bird-brained idea was put in to practice.

Come on Mr Leighton and Mr Crozier, listen to the experienced people you still have and, perhaps, we can salvage something of what's left of this company

Mike Rathbone, Stockton Brook SPDO

No government support

I recently delivered a letter from the Government's State Pension Department. The postage on the envelope? Not even Mailsort – it was UK Mail.

That just about sums up the government's support for Royal Mail.

M Jones, Cheshire

Save our post offices

One morning a week or two ago, I twice stuck my nose in the entrance to the crown office in Chesterfield.

My nose was about all that I could get in as the place was absolutely jam-packed with the queue stretching virtually out into the street.

This is hardly surprising, when a quick count reveals that the next seven nearest sub-post offices have all been closed over recent years.

It really gets up my nose when I hear government spokeswomen and spokesmen saying that the reason that post offices close is because people don't use them enough.

This from a government who have systematically diverted much business away from post offices, including pension payments, TV licenses and, if they succeed, road tax as well.

We are now assailed with adverts telling us that we can renew our road tax online.

All we can do is to dig our heels in and fight back where possible.

Mind you, this isn't only the fault of politicians, top management of Royal Mail are as bad if not worse.

Keep at them!
Don Foster (retired), Derbyshire

Vacancy For Member-Nominated Trustee Director – Royal Mail Pension Plan

Nominations are being sought for the position of Member nominated Trustee Director of the Royal Mail Pension plan (RMPP). Nomination can be from any CWU member or any individual who is a current, retired or deferred member of RMPP Sections A, B or C, irrespective of Union membership.

Further information regarding the nomination process can be obtained from your Branch Office or by contacting the Senior Deputy General Secretary dept at CWU HQ. Please note that all candidates will be required to submit a 200 word statement supporting their candidature for the election to the position when submitting their nomination.

If there is more than one valid nomination, a ballot will be held of all individuals who are CWU members (who are members of RMPP) and of current, retired or deferred members of RMPP Sections A, B or C, irrespective of Union membership who are employed in CWU represented grades, the ballot will be conducted by an appointed Independent Scrutineer - Popularis Ltd.

New delivery procedures causing new problems

I have been led to believe that the time limit for town deliveries is 2pm and 3pm for rural deliveries as agreed by Royal Mail.

In practice, would this mean no letter should be delivered or no duty would end after 3pm? The implementation of later starts and geo-route is causing some members to work past 3pm on busy days.

Would it therefore be possible to cut off on delivery to ensure no delivery after 3pm and what would the possible repercussions be?

Could you clarify this issue and inform all local and regional branches as to correct procedure?

Some members may be interested to know that, after geo route, some walks were increased, thus taking them over their three-and-a-half-hour time limit. In our office, the walking staff deliver for the required three-and-a-half hours, then cut off and make their way back to the office with their surplus mail in the trolleys.

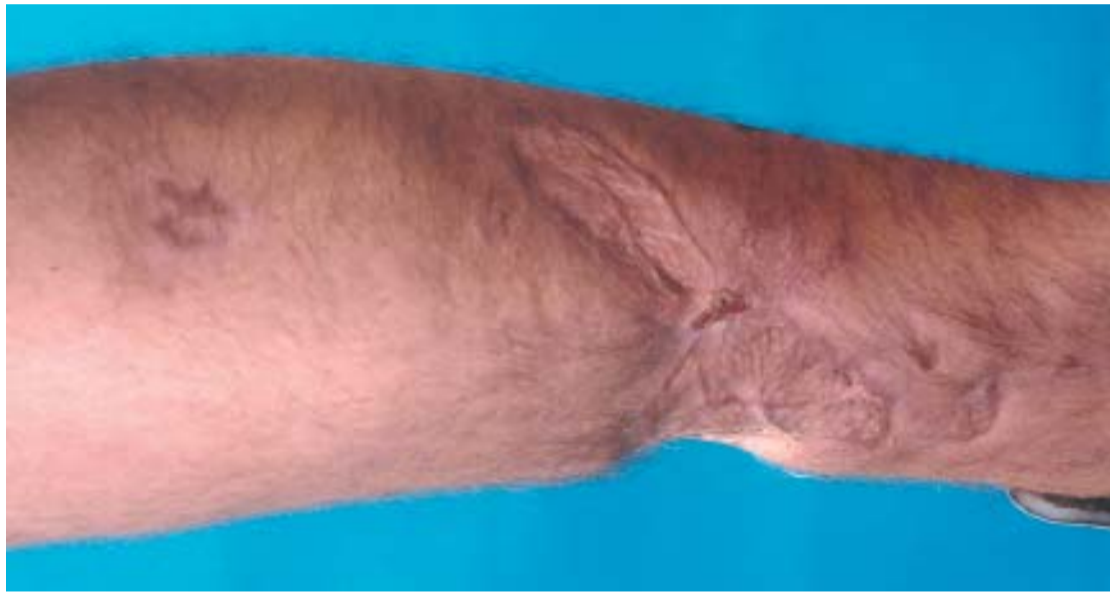
This infuriates our dictator – sorry, line manager – because he is still powerless to stop it due to national agreement.

Name and address supplied



LAW NEEDS MORE TEETH

For too long, dog attacks on postal workers have been regarded as little more than a joke by many in society, who simply have no idea of the dangers faced by women and men whose job entails entering private premises every day of the week. But CWU members are not laughing, they're demanding new laws to stop workers suffering these horrific injuries



CWU national health and safety officer Dave Joyce and national officer for delivery members Bob Gibson have welcomed the tough sentence handed down to dangerous dog owner Jamal Richards at Sheffield Crown Court last month, following the savage mauling of Sheffield postal worker Paul Coleman by Richards's two bulldog terriers.

But the dismissal of charges against another owner in Milton Keynes (see "case studies" right), whose animal caused facial injuries so serious that a postal worker needed 100 stitches across his face and jaw, sparked renewed calls from the national officials for a tightening up of the law.

In the Sheffield case, Judge Alan Goldsack QC jailed owner Richards for nine months after the 19-year-old pleaded guilty to two offences under the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act of allowing his animals to be dangerously out of control in a public place and he was also banned from keeping dogs for seven years.

Last December, Paul Coleman was carrying out his deliveries when two dogs attacked him, grabbing a leg each and dragging him to the ground, where, for several terrifying minutes, they subjected him to a vicious mauling.

Paul suffered serious leg, arm and chest injuries and was in hospital for six days, undergoing skin grafts and plastic surgery.

One of the dogs was later destroyed, but the other evaded capture.

Paul has permanent scarring and suffers reduced mobility. Further surgery may be required in the future.

At one stage, doctors feared that he could lose his right arm, in which serious nerve and muscle damage occurred, but surgeons managed to save it. Bites on Mr Coleman's left leg went down to the bone and skin grafts were needed to the front and back of both legs.

Passing sentence, Judge Goldsack told Richards: "Anyone knows these kinds of dogs can cause very serious injuries if they are not properly controlled."

"The photos show dreadful injuries. Lumps of flesh were literally torn from the victim's body and he was in a state of trauma, as, no doubt, were the witnesses and his wife and children."

Speaking after the case, Paul said: "Hopefully, this will show people they can't leave dogs out to cause damage, because they risk jail if they do."

Dave Joyce added: "The union welcomes the seriousness with which the court treated this case and welcomes the decision of the judge in this case to hand down a sentence of two concurrent nine-month jail sentences."

"This sends out a clear message to other irresponsible owners of dangerous animals that can inflict such terrible injuries. Imposing custodial sentences is clearly the only deterrent these individuals understand."

But both CWU officers highlighted the fact that, too often, horrific attacks on postal workers go unpunished.

Bob Gibson commented that "there still seems to be in circulation the strange idea that, when a postman or postwoman is bitten when making a delivery, it is a great joke. Recent instances once again prove the opposite – it is a deeply serious matter which government must address."

"Equally, Royal Mail has got to be more proactive in getting its own managers to take it seriously. When we get cases like these, deliveries need to be stopped until we know it is safe to go to these houses."

"Cases such as Alan Smith's in Milton Keynes, and others that have occurred recently, where prosecutions have not been made, highlight clearly the pressing need for a change in the law to close this 'private property' loophole," Bob added.

And Dave stressed: "We should all be able to return to home in exactly the same condition as we came into work."

"This attack is one of several that have occurred recently involving Royal Mail employees and have gone unpunished."

"The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 must be amended urgently," Dave added. **V**

▲ Above: Paul Coleman's horrific injuries. Right: Paul needed skin grafts and plastic surgery

CASE STUDIES

Although the owner of the dog that attacked Paul Coleman was jailed, it is too often the case, as these examples show, that no-one is punished when our members are attacked. The CWU feels that this is often due to inadequacies, or loopholes, in the law.

Wayne Collard

In January, Wayne Collard was attacked by a dog while out on deliveries in a small village near Bridgewater, Somerset, and received serious injuries to his testicles in an attack which lasted several minutes.

Wayne was taken to hospital, where he received 17 stitches to the wound and he was not able to resume normal married life for one month.

At the time of the attack, the dog was being looked after by a friend of the owner and, when the case came to court, the defendant received an absolute discharge.

Commenting on the case, CWU area safety rep Mike Hamilton said: "This is another case of one of our members being injured because an owner doesn't control their dog."

"We urgently need a tightening up of the law to stop owners getting away with cases like these," he added.

And Wayne, who returned to work just weeks after the attack, said: "People must be more responsible with animals they're looking after."

Elaine White

In April, postal worker Elaine White had the top of her finger bitten off while delivering an item at a house in Wakefield, Yorkshire. While an ambulance rushed Elaine to the local hospital, police arrived on the scene and, having gained access to the house, were able to recover the severed finger.

But, although the officers rushed the digit to the hospital, it had been so severely damaged that surgeons were unable to reattach it, leaving Elaine with a stump where her finger had been.

As Voice went to press, a decision over whether to arrest and prosecute the owner was still under consideration.

Alan Smith

In February, Alan Smith, of Milton Keynes, needed over 100 stitches after being bitten in the face and jaw by a German Shepherd, which attacked him after its owner's son opened the door as Alan approached up the front path of the house.

The dog was impounded by police the same day, while the owner was

charged by police under the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act.

But, after an initial court hearing, the Crown Prosecution Service wrote to Alan last month, informing him that the case would not be taken any further.

A key reason for the CPS decision was the fact that, under the 1991 Act, attacks which take place on private property are treated differently to those that occur in public areas.

And this is a key area of the law that the CWU is determined to change, in order to protect postal workers and all other workers whose duties involve regular visits to private homes.

New laws we need

A legal duty of care must be placed both on the person in charge of the dog and the owner to stop people escaping prosecution by saying that they were looking after the dog.

And Section 3 of the 1991 Act, which refers to dogs which are "dangerously out of control" must be extended to include attacks which occur on private property.



Alan Smith needed over 100 stitches after being savaged by a German Shepherd.



Elaine White's hand, after a dog bit off the top of her finger.

DEFENDING UNIVERSAL SERVICES

Fighting industrially and politically to defend postal workers' jobs, pensions and terms and conditions of employment goes hand-in-hand with the struggle to protect services to the UK public

Postal services in the UK hit the headlines last month with the publication of Richard Hooper's hard-hitting interim report on the industry, which stated that competition in the sector had brought "no significant benefits" to either the public or small businesses.

Commissioned at the end of last year by Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform John Hutton to carry out an independent review into the sector, Mr Hooper heads a three-member team, which includes businessman Ian Smith and Food Standards Agency chairwoman Dierdre Hutton.

Since beginning their work, Mr Hooper's team have sought and received submissions from 50 separate organisations with links to the UK postal sector.

Ranging from the Federation of Small Businesses, the Institute of Directors and the Mail Users Association to organisations such as ourselves, our fellow trade unionists in Unite and our sub-post office colleagues in the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, virtually all of our industry's stakeholders, whether service providers or service users, have had their say.

Mr Hooper, Mr Smith and one of the review team's advisers Jon Booth gave a presentation to the CWU postal executive committee last month and Mr Hooper explained that the second phase of his review – from now until the autumn – will start to focus on looking at possible solutions to the difficulties being faced by our industry and his final report is likely to include suggestions to the government for possible changes in legislation.

Our union's initial submission to the review, which was widely reported in the last edition of Voice, has now been followed up by a second submission which, as Mr Hooper has requested,

focuses on how we would like to see our industry develop in the future.

Key suggestions within the second CWU contribution are calls to ensure that the universal service obligation (USO) is protected by being funded by all postal operators and through a new price control mechanism, a firm rejection of any plans to separate the post office network from Royal Mail and a staunch restatement of the union's opposition to privatisation.

As part of our union's ongoing campaign to achieve the changes that we would like to see, our CWU representatives and members in our regions and branches right across the UK have been getting busy arranging meetings with other stakeholder organisations, as well as contacting MPs and local politicians to explain our case for positive reform.

Our general secretary Billy Hayes and deputy general secretary Dave Ward have written a joint letter to each of the 646 MPs in the UK, as well as to the 129 members of the Scottish parliament, everyone at the Northern Irish (108 members), Welsh (60) and London (25) assemblies and leaders of local authorities right across the nation.

The letter warns our political leaders that Royal Mail faces "terminal decline" and urges them, in no uncertain terms, to "Act now!"

In what almost amounts to an SOS on behalf of our industry, Billy and Dave remind the politicians that "Royal Mail is a great British institution."

But, they add, it can only remain so "if you believe post really does matter and if you demonstrate political will."

The communication goes on to explain the issues at stake over the Royal Mail pension scheme and highlights the key reasons why this is likely to spark a serious dispute between the CWU and the company.



MESSAGE TO MEMBERS

Here, deputy general secretary Dave Ward explains why the first report from the review provides some grounds for optimism and he outlines the next steps forward for the campaign to save our industry and protect CWU members' pensions.

HOOPER'S REPORT

The union campaigned long and hard for this review and we have to see it as positive that the headline message was that competition has not benefited the public or small businesses.

While we would not agree with everything in the report, its analysis of the problems in the industry line up with many of our own views.

Mr Hooper has made clear that this report is only an analysis of the problems and that the bigger challenge facing the union and Royal Mail is: "What are the solutions?"

We've got a big job on our hands over the next few months to campaign for the right solutions that will be in the best interests of our members and of the UK public.

I see the report as a great opportunity for us to engage the public, MPs and our members in trying to sort out the mess caused by bad political decisions from government and Royal Mail mismanagement.

FIGHTING FOR PENSIONS

There is no agreement and CWU members have overwhelmingly rejected Royal Mail's pensions plans. However, we recognise that there is a problem with pensions and a big deficit, but we want to make it absolutely clear that we are not asking to be treated as a special case.

We just want fairness.

Clearly, the government has given

more protection to other groups of public-sector workers.

And, in the case of Royal Mail, as the owner of the company, the government does have a strong legal and moral obligation to offer similar support and protection to postal workers, particularly existing employees.

What a postal worker does, in providing an essential service to the public, is every bit as important as the service provided to the public by civil servants, local authority workers and all of the other public-service workers who have, quite rightly, won the right to have their final salary pensions schemes protected.

Royal Mail's stubborn determination to ignore the overwhelming opposition of its employees and press ahead with its attack on our pensions rights will, we warn them, inevitably provoke a damaging conflict within our industry.

An emergency resolution at our national conference will firmly establish our position on this going forward and, if settlement is not reached, an industrial action ballot is inevitable.

ROYAL MAIL'S FUTURE

There is no reason why Royal Mail cannot be a successful publicly owned company. What it has to do is be clear about what its social obligations are and build on the important role it has in communities.

This means guarding the universal service obligation (USO), re-energising the post office network and expanding the service offered to the public.

On this last point, there is, for example, no reason why, with the company's nationwide infrastructure, we could not offer a same-day collection and delivery service within town and city boundaries.

Our key role, as a union, will continue



CWU General Secretary Billy Hayes is leading the political campaign

Image credit: Phil Graham FILMAR Photography

to be the protection of our members' terms and conditions of employment while dealing with the challenges ahead and this means that we must continue to be very strong, as we were during last year's national dispute.

We need to fight against the use of so-called "market-rate" pay to try to drag our members down.

Royal Mail must continue to lead the way in setting the benchmark for pay across the sector.

And we've got to recognise that, in order to help our own members, it's also the right thing for us to promote trade union organisation within the workforces of Royal Mail's competitors.

ON POST OFFICES

We've got to get the clear message across to government that there is a direct link between maintaining the post office network and maintaining the USO. For millions of people right across the UK, the local post office is the way that they access the network. For these reasons, we're strongly opposed to any calls for the break up of the company through separating Post Office Limited from the Royal Mail Group.

ROYAL MAIL LEADERSHIP

The RMG board has to change. Specifically, we need people leading the company who spend all their time focussed on Royal Mail and who are prepared to fight back against competition rather than simply managing decline.

And, most important of all, RMG leaders must fully understand their social obligations, obligations that Royal Mail should be proud of.

There's no doubt in my view that the current board remains pre-occupied with privatisation.

It almost seems that they are intent on

▲ There is a direct link between maintaining the post office network and maintaining the USO

running the company down in order that they can achieve the "solution" that they have always wanted.

The make-up of the board needs to change to include people with a background of successfully running public companies and delivering services to the public. People who understand and appreciate the vital importance of the business's social responsibility.

GOING FORWARD

We cannot shy away from giving difficult messages to our members. Debates on automation and increased efficiency are not going away and this will impact on the overall number of jobs in the industry.

This doesn't mean that we have to go along with everything the company says, but it does require us, as a union, to take decisions that are in the long-term interests of everyone.

The strength of our union is not just in setting out what we disagree with, but working to shape and influence the future in the interests of our members and the general public.

FIGHT ON TWO FRONTS

But our struggle for justice and fair pay has a political as well as an industrial dimension.

We've sent a letter making our case to every MP, every MSP, Wales, Northern Ireland and London assembly member and the leader of every local authority.

As the issues of postal sector liberalisation and the pensions crisis are inextricably linked, our communication covers both aspects and urges the politicians of our nation to take up the fight for this vital public service, and for those who deliver it, right to the heart of government. ▼



Dave Ward insists that the CWU must fight on both the political and industrial battlefields

Raising the political heat

While our national leadership is taking the struggle direct to the employers, our political allies at Westminster are ensuring that our case gains the widest possible hearing in Parliament

Our industry remains high on the political agenda at Westminster, where CWU-sponsored Labour MPs John Grogan (Selby) and Sharon Hodgson (Gateshead East and Washington West) took part in last month's adjournment debate on the future of Royal Mail and both warned against Liberal Democrat plans to part-privatise Royal Mail and separate Post Office Limited from Royal Mail Group.

LibDems or neo-Liberals?

Outlining her party's policy towards the sector, Liberal Democrat spokeswoman for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Sarah Teather (Brent East) claimed that part-privatisation – specifically, the sale of 49 per cent of the company – would "kick-start" a revival and help to address the pensions deficit, before going on to add: "Separation of Royal Mail and Post Office Limited is the key to survival."

A real Labour response
But Ms Hodgson warned:

"The solution is not to follow the Liberal Democrat's policy of privatisation and break-up. That would lead to the massive job losses that we're trying to avoid."

And Mr Grogan argued that the solution to the company's funding problems lay not in selling out to the private sector, but in making private postal operators pay towards the maintenance of the USO.

"Given the threat to the USO, is it not time for other operators to make a contribution?" he pointedly asked.

Royal Mail's own goal

Labour MP for Stroud, David Drew, put the blame for Royal Mail's crisis firmly at the door of chief executive Adam Crozier and chairman Allan Leighton, who he accused of having "taken Manchester United and turned them into Derby County."

There is, he continued, "a serious problem with the leadership - the double act of Leighton and Crozier. "If the government have not yet given them a vote of no

confidence, it is about time they did.

"We have had a dispute which was lamentably handled and these closures. "No-one seems to know the strategy, other than there must be 2,500 of them." Speaking just a week before Royal Mail released financial results revealing the enormous sums being paid out to bosses, Mr Drew attacked the company's financial priorities.

"At the end of the day," he continued, "people are being paid millions of pounds to sort out this matter and, when this is not being done, we must look at the people at the top."

No excuse for privatisation

Competition and liberalisation, Mr Drew added, had "been a disaster – all pain and no gain.

"We need to revisit the Act. It's not working and we've created an unfair situation," he continued, adding that Mr Hooper's interim report and the current crisis "must not be used as an excuse for further privatisation."

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New 'Hub' of safety

CWU national health, safety and environment officer Dave Joyce has hailed a "hard-fought and well-won victory" for members following the construction of vital engineering access systems at the Parcelforce National Hub building in Coventry.

Parcelforce Worldwide opened their flagship £65 million national and international "hub" buildings back in 2000, providing some 100,000 sq ft of space and employing over 600 staff to serve the domestic and international parcels markets.

Inside the national hub building, 48 "infeed" conveyors carry parcels from lorries at the loading docks up to a five-metre high, 1,600m-long circular track consisting of wooden tilt-trays.

After each item has passed through a scanner, the trays tip the package into one of 106 spiral chutes leading down to its correct despatch point.

Outlining the sheer volumes passing through the centre, CWU deputy rep Peter Reade, a technical

supervisor of the national hub maintenance team, explains: "Last year, we handled 56 million parcels. We've got an hourly capacity of 40,000 and, on one day over the Xmas period, over 350,000 items were processed through here."

But a problem which had been overlooked during pre-installation planning and design was engineering access to the facility.

When the inevitable system blockages or other failures occurred – at times, leading to stoppages of several hours at a time – on-site maintenance staff could only gain access by climbing up the inside of the chutes themselves, risking musculoskeletal injuries to joints, hips, knees and ankles, with accidents occurring at a rate of one or two per month.

Dave Joyce explained that the issue had first been brought to his attention back in 2004. "It's taken seven years to put right and those responsible have

long gone from the company," he recalled.

"The issue first came to my attention in 2004 after local efforts had fallen on deaf ears and the Coventry engineers were concerned about their physical wellbeing after having been forced to undertake bad working practices for so long.

"In 2005, I commissioned an independent CWU report, went to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and took the case up with Parcelforce at the highest level."

The union's position was that the company was in breach of both the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER) 1998 and the Working at Height Regulations 2005 and, thanks to the union's representations, Parcelforce recognised their compliance responsibilities and committed £1.4 million to the major improvements required at Coventry.

Coventry Hubs has now benefited from the installation of access walkways, ladders and platforms, while other technological improvements such as low-friction chute liners and conveyor track inspection cameras aim at preventing blockages and system failures.

On top of the significant improvement in safety standards, the new installations have also cut onsite downtime by 50 per cent.

Dave Joyce concluded: "This was a CWU initiative which I take pride in and so should the Coventry engineers. I'm pleased at the progress and would like to acknowledge Parcelforce for ordering the works."



CWU deputy rep Peter Reade

Vehicle services balloting begins

As Voice went to press, around 900 members working for vehicle services were voting on a new, repackaged, two-year pay deal, having rejected the previous offer from management.

After the first ballot, in which members rejected the original offer by a margin of around 60/40, the union carried out a survey among vehicle service workers to identify their key areas of concern.

Apart from the pay offer itself, other key complaints were the calculation of weekend overtime payments, changes to shift and attendance patterns and HGV driving for the business during high-pressure periods.

The revised offer addresses four of the top five areas of concern identified by workshop staff as reasons for rejection of the previous offer, the monies having been significantly repackaged so as to produce a substantial lump-sum payment for the 2007/08 pay year.

In terms of the overall cost to the company, this remains the same, but assistant secretary Ray Ellis and his negotiating team have managed to repackage the offer to maximise the benefit for CWU members.

Ray explained: "The 9.7 per cent (£37.54 p/w) for PTTs – rising to £57.54 per week (pensionable) for those PTTs opting to become ST – and 8.4 per cent (£37.40) for LTTs remains the same, but the way that we've increased the money in year one and to maximise the cash available to members is by paying the 2007/08 elements of the offer as a non-consolidated lump sum."

This lump-sum will be enhanced for nearly half the workforce by a £600 payment for having already passed the IRTEC qualification and further enhanced by colleague shares lump sums.

Where the original deal only flowed through to week day overtime, the increase in basic pay now also flows through to weekend

overtime and there is no change to the overtime multipliers.

Management-initiated change to attendance arrangements is now limited to workshops failing existing quality of service criteria – there are currently a total of only 11 workshops on this category – and the provision to undertake HGV driving for the business during high-pressure periods has now been removed.

Negotiators believe that the revised package represents an improvement on that rejected by the members previously and addresses most of the key concerns.

"It is," Ray insists "absolutely clear that the only alternative to acceptance of this offer would be significant and sustained industrial action in an attempt to improve it.

"And the negotiating team do not believe that such a course would be in the interests of members in the light of the significant improvements in remuneration," he added.

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CWU officers urge support for new pay deal

As Voice went to press, assistant secretaries Ray Ellis and Bob Gibson urged nearly 3,000 CWU Romec members to back new pay deals for engineers and cleaners following "lengthy negotiations" with management last month.

At the company's request, this year's pay negotiations were dealt with jointly, Ray representing our engineers and Bob representing our cleaners, and, after a series of meetings, the following offer was made by the company.

A 3 per cent increase in basic pay rates for all CWU-represented grades, flowing through to overtime and allowances – apart from London weighting – and a 7.5 per cent rise in both inner and outer London Weighting Allowance (LWA) with effect from April 1.

And for cleaners only, there is an additional 0.2 per cent on the existing intermediate rate from the end of September. This will become the new starter rate.

In addition to this, the proposed agreement provides the opportunity, subject to the business achieving a better quality performance in 2008

than last year and a revenue of £190 million, for members to achieve the following extra payments.

A non-pensionable and unconsolidated xmas bonus of £160 per full-time person, adjusted proportionately for those on less than full-time hours and a further 1 per cent rise in basic rates and LWA applied retrospectively from April 1 2008 to those individuals still in post when the December pay roll is run.

For the avoidance of doubt, this retrospective increase will not flow through to 2008 overtime and allowances, apart from LWA.

Furthermore, if the business achieves £200 million revenue for 2008, then there will be a further 1 per cent rise in basic rates and LWA from January 1 2009, with a 2 per cent flow through to all other allowances and overtime.

The overall deal provides an opportunity to achieve an exit rate of 5 per cent on basic pay and all allowances and overtime, including a lump sum of £160 being paid as an xmas bonus, with the next pay review date being April 2009. It also provides the opportunity to achieve

an exit rate of 9.5 per cent on London Weighting.

In respect of engineers, these benefits are in addition to those generated by the existing engineers' achievement bonus scheme, while the business have indicated they wish to review the terms of that bonus to take account of cross SPC working, SPC mergers and bottom line efficiency levels as measured in terms of work-load utilisation. The final element in respect of engineers is that this offer does not include the gas engineering grading. The business intends to send separate correspondence on this aspect.

Urging support for the proposals, which have been approved by the CWU postal executive, Ray said: "We think it's a reasonable offer in the circumstances and one which produces a satisfactory guaranteed increase in pay, overtime and allowances, with the potential of significant further money flowing into pay, based on achievement of revenue and quality criteria."

With regard to cleaners, the proposed agreement abolishes the current starter rate from the end of September and replaces it with the intermediate rate - which currently requires at least 6 months service - plus 0.2 per cent.

This would mean that anyone currently on the starter rate, or a new entrant who starts between April and September, will get a weekly increase of £20.51.

In addition, movement on to the top rate will be automatic unless "demonstrable performance faults" can be proved by management.

Commenting on the deal, Bob explained: "This is the best achievable deal under current circumstances, particularly bearing in mind the financial position of the company. The settlement compares very favourably with those elsewhere, particularly as far as cleaners are concerned.

"The extra payments which could be available later on are linked to the company's revenue, not profits, and there is confidence the targets will be reached," he added.

Poll winner Andy gets ready to take the reins



Deputy general secretary-elect Andy Kerr

The CWU's telecoms and financial services membership will have a new leader in less than a month, with Andy Kerr taking over from long-standing deputy general secretary (TFS) Jeannie Drake at the end of June.

Andy, the clear winner of a postal ballot for the post of DGS, has formerly served five terms as president of the CWU, four terms as vice president and has been chair of the telecoms executive for the past nine years.

In his first interview with Voice as DGS(TFS) elect, Andy thanked all those who supported him and pledged to continue in the unifying leadership tradition so long espoused by Jeannie Drake.

"It is truly an honour to have been elected to the post of DGS (TFS) - and it means a tremendous amount to me that my support came from right across the telecoms and financial services membership, a level of support that I will be looking to build upon," Andy told the Voice.

"Within the telecoms and financial services department, we have a great team of officers and staff and I am confident they will afford me the same loyalty and commitment they have always shown Jeannie.

"Over the coming weeks I will be having discussions with them and the telecoms executive to establish how, as a team, we can best operate

to respond effectively to the challenges that lie ahead."

Paying tribute to the "enormous contribution" made by the outgoing DGS, Andy stressed: "There's no doubt that Jeannie is going to be a hard act to follow - but I guarantee that I will be giving my all to ensure a continuity of leadership in the months and years ahead.

"It is a testament to Jeannie that she has left the telecoms and financial services section of the CWU in such good shape - and I'm sure I speak for all CWU members in wishing her well in her ongoing work in the pensions field that resulted in her decision to step down from a role she had very much made her own."

Andy is also an enthusiastic and long-serving member of the Labour Party and is keen to ensure that CWU members' voices, concerns and aspirations are heard within the political system.

Andy also serves as our union's representative on the Labour Party's national executive committee.

The next issue of Voice will include an in-depth interview with Andy in which he will set out his priorities for the months and years ahead.

In the meantime, however, his message was simple and heartfelt. "Thanks for putting your trust in me - I will not let you down."

TELECOMS

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

■ Betrayal of Birmingham

CWU members at Fujitsu in Birmingham are taking centre stage in the fight to save what is left of the west Midlands's dwindling manufacturing base. Voice reports on a brave and defiant stand against yet another multinational intent on exporting work from British shores being taken by a workforce for whom the offshoring bombshell represents a very personal betrayal.



■ End of an era in telecoms

For three decades, deputy general secretary Jeannie Drake has played a pivotal role in the representation of the union's telecoms and financial services membership – but, at the end of this month, she hands over the reins to a successor. In a parting interview, she tells of her reasons for going and her hopes for the CWU.



■ On a quest for Chloe

Being told that your child has a serious disability is the nightmare that every new parent dreads, but it is the way that families rise to the challenge that is the ultimate measure of love. BT Openreach engineer Jonathon Elliot is trying to turn his family's personal battle against autism into a learning experience that will, hopefully, help other families in their difficult and often lonely situation.



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INFORMATION

ALL SYSTEMS GO AT CWUHA!

The union's humanitarian aid charity **CWUHA** is as active as ever, with missions to Eastern Europe and Africa that combine new community aid schemes with ongoing help and progress checks on existing projects.

As **Voice** went to press a convoy was returning from Lithuania, a fact-finding mission was going ahead in Tanzania and planning was underway for the September mission to orphanages, schools and hospitals in Bulgaria. Momentously, for the first time this will include volunteers from both the Irish and the UK Communication Workers Unions.

Speaking briefly to **Voice** while on the road with the Lithuania convoy, Eastern regional secretary **Paul Moffat**, said the volunteers delivered essential supplies, provided practical help and witnessed how CWUHA's previous work has helped children in impoverished orphanages and hospitals.

Preparing for the Bulgaria mission, Northwest regional secretary and CWUHA

national secretary, **Carl Webb**, said: "This year is special because for the first time we've got four drivers from Eire and Northern Ireland. We've got sponsored trucks from Eircom and An Post, to add to our usual trucks donated by BT, Royal Mail and Parcel Force. It's fantastic that around half of our 20 volunteers will be new drivers including two drivers from Simpson Millar, proving that we're going from strength to strength, with lots of enthusiasm and inspiration to continue the work that CWUHA has been doing for 13 years."

In Bulgaria, CWUHA works with One Life Bulgaria Charity and The Lora Foundation to help 'the forgotten children of Bulgaria' – those left in bleak hospitals and homes.

Meanwhile, CWUHA organiser **Alex Pearson** has been

checking progress made by the charity's projects in Tanzania, and looking into the possibility of building on past successes. So far, these include rebuilding a health centre and a school, supplying text books and providing wheelchairs for children from communities in and around Moshi.



A match made in... Ukraine!

When CWUHA volunteer Ian Sykes from sponsorship company McBride met CWUHA 'partner charity' worker Tetyana from Everychild, a partnership of a different kind developed during a mission to Ukraine. Love blossomed between Ian and Tetyana and a few months later in July last year, the couple married. To complete the happy story, Tetyana gave birth to their daughter Sofia Anna in April. Ian told the **Voice**: "I've loved working with CWUHA. It's been just wonderful that through them Tetyana and I got together...and having Sofia is just perfect!"



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New frontiers: CWU leafleters target a Carphone Warehouse's site in Northampton – an example of telecoms recruitment by a postal branch

Targeting Carphone Warehouse

The CWU's burgeoning membership in Carphone Warehouse continues to grow - boosted by a new recruitment campaign at the company's call centre in Northampton.

The latest campaign is seeking to build on impressive recruitment successes in Preston and North Acton over the last year - and comes on the back of another successful membership drive at the company's logistics and repair site at Wednesbury.

At Wednesbury the surge of new joiners has been exceptionally marked in recent months amid widespread dismay at a heavy-handed management approach.

"A big issue has been concern at quite aggressive search techniques which have been applied quite heavily and without much consultation," CWU organiser Alan Smith told the Voice.

"Quite recently searches were extended and opened up the potential of people being asked to remove their turbans, which was obviously pretty inflammatory."

One member explained: "We accept the company will carry out random searches - we're just asking them to talk to us about how they're carried

out. At the moment these searches are carried out in OUR time, at the end of a shift, and can delay us leaving the site by up to 15 minutes. This doesn't seem fair, especially given we're docked pay if we're as little as one minute late at the start of a shift.

"People at Wednesbury are joining the CWU to make themselves heard, to make their working lives better".

The latest recruitment drive in Northampton - which unusually is being conducted by the predominantly postal Northamptonshire Amalgamated branch - comes after similarly heavy-handed management interventions which saw two employees suspended for "dissemination of trade union material".

Branch secretary Mick Fitzmaurice explains: "I've recently represented two members, one of whom did nothing but send an email to a colleague with the link to the CWU website. He was immediately suspended but thankfully, with CWU involvement, we got him back with all charges dropped.

"We soon discovered that there are 300 potential CWU members who are screaming out for a trade union to represent their rights in the

workplace.

"Some employees have called us to say that they cannot even discuss the union in the workplace and fear conduct charges if seen to be reading CWU literature."

Urging the Northampton site's managers to allow employees "the right to make their own decision", Mick warned: "The company will soon realise that its employees are intelligent adults who can make a decision for themselves about who can best look after their rights in the workplace."

On April 28 the branch held its first leafleting session of the call centre (pictured), and the CWU member at the centre of the suspension storm - 32-year-old Steve Austin - believes that the company's actions in his case will have encouraged even more to seek the protection of a union than might otherwise have been the case.

"I'd be really surprised if there isn't a really good response," said the first time union member who had only filled in the membership application form days before his suspension.

"I've never been a member of a union before. Up until now I didn't think I'd need it...but I'm certainly glad I joined now."

Building youth involvement

Significant developments towards the involvement of young branch officers in the CWU are in full swing and on course for being a beacon for the entire trade union movement.

At a forum in Edinburgh for CWU youth activists, newly-appointed youth project officer, Steve Ratcliffe, got positive feedback and additional input for his work so far on the union's trail blazing Youth Engagement Strategy (YES).

Steve has been in post since mid-February, thanks to a £80,000 government grant from the Union Modernisation Fund that is being match-funded by the CWU. Headed by assistant secretary Simon Sapper, the CWU's visionary youth strategy will invigorate trade unionism with its sharing of best practice for involving under-30s in recruiting, organising, campaigning and education.

Steve said: "A significant development is the youth officer 'tool kit'. It provides information, advice and guidance on practical activities, contacts and the CWU structure and youth officer development. One great idea that came out of the forum was for young members to be able to register their interest in a particular CWU training course on-line."

He added: "The style and format of the forums is very accessible and informal. They are an excellent opportunity for young members to get involved and shape the approach we take as a union to youth engagement."

"The forums have been a success - each time we have had a number of new young members attending and we have created an environment where young members feel comfortable to address a large group for the first time."

Commenting on the fact that the growth of the CWU's youth structure has consistently outstripped that of most other unions, Steve concludes: "The structure is far from complete, but it's fair to say we're in a better position than most."

InBrief

Sore head?

The CWU has joined forces with Know Your Limits, a government campaign designed to get us thinking about excessive drinking and the risks associated with it. CWU assistant secretary Simon Sapper said: "How many of us have got up in the morning and felt the worse for wear because we've drunk too much the night before? The campaign aims for a better understanding of the recommended daily limits for alcohol consumption to provide people with the facts they need make informed choices." There will be a focus on this issue at the Youth stall at Conference, and further coverage in Voice. Meanwhile, more information is available at www.nhs.uk/units

Moving things on in NI

A special project designed to harness trade union solidarity to make a unique contribution to peace and reconciliation across the island of Ireland has just drawn to a close - and the programme, supported from the outset by the CWU, has been judged a major success. The key conclusion of the 'Moving On' programme, facilitated by the cross border 'City Bridges' project, is that there is a strong appetite amongst trade union activists for open and honest dialogue about sectarian division. CWU general secretary Billy Hayes told the Voice: "I'm glad the CWU has played a prominent role in this programme to underpin the peace process." Full report at www.cwu.org/links/citybridges

Shaping NI's future

Delegates from 36 affiliated trade unions across Northern Ireland held their biennial conference in April with a packed agenda including motions on union organisation, equality and human rights. Delegates heard firm opposition to the neo-liberal trends of the devolved NI administration, but also reassuring words from the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, that "growing the economy is our top priority." Delegates left having agreed an extensive programme of work for the next two years, determined to ensure the trade union movement plays a full role in shaping NI's future. Full report at www.cwu.org/links/NIC-ISTU

Lest we forget...

The equivalent of a jumbo jet-load of passengers dies every fortnight in Britain because of the failure to ensure safe and healthy conditions in workplaces. The shocking statistic was released by RoSPA to mark Workers' Memorial Day (April 28) when those killed or injured in workplace accidents were remembered in ceremonies across the country. This year's event coincided with the latest attempt to force employers to improve on their adherence to health and safety legislation - bolstering the message sent by the new Corporate Manslaughter legislation long demanded by the CWU which came into force on April 5. Full story at www.cwu.org/links/wmd08

Alvescot's infamous 'chalets' meet their end

The infamously austere accommodation 'chalets' at Alvescot Lodge have long been a talking point amongst reps attending schools at the CWU's education and training centre in Oxfordshire.

In April, however, an era ended when the bulldozers moved in to flatten the pre-fab wooden dormitories in phase one of a major redevelopment project which will result in the creation of a brand new accommodation block and restaurant.

CWU head of education and training, Trish Lavelle, admits that news of the 'chalets' demise will probably bring joy to the hearts of many former Alvescot 'campers' - but suspects some former residents

may feel just a twinge of nostalgia at the belated end of an era at Alvescot.

"The chalets were infamous because of the lack of soundproofing, the temperamental plumbing and the vast colony of rabbits who lived a few feet below them," explains Trish.

"We're all looking forward to the completing of the building work in December, but I am sure that there will also be many representatives out there who will feel just a tiny bit sad that part of CWU history is disappearing!"

Alvescot Lodge will re-open in January 2009, but in the meantime a full regional and residential training programme is continuing.



Flattened: Alvescot's chalets were a relic from an age of Hi-De-Hi style holiday camps

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ANOTHER COUNTRY?

Time has done little to numb the shock and horror felt by **Frank Isahak** when he fell foul of one of the now infamous 'No Irish, no coloureds, no dogs' notices in 1950's London. 58 years on, however, the retired BT engineer is adamant that past injustices need to be remembered for the sake of a better future. **Simon Alford** reports...

Fifty-eight years ago this month a 24-year-old apprentice electrician bade arewell to his parents in Georgetown, British Guyana, and boarded a ship bound for England. Several months later, having discovered the hard way that the 'Mother Country' was rather less welcoming than the Colonial Office advertising campaign that had attracted him and thousands of others had suggested, Frank Isahak became the first black employee of GPO Telephones in Oxford.

Not such a very unusual story, maybe, when viewed in the context of the post-Windrush surge of immigration...yet all the new arrivals were undoubtedly pioneers. Now Frank has been invited to tell his remarkable story as part of a social history project being conducted by Oxford's Ruskin College to chart the experiences of a now ageing generation who literally changed the face of Britain.

Speaking to Frank and his wife of 50 years, Deanna, what is most striking is the extent to which they believe things have changed for the better. Beaming out from a photo frame on a shelf in the living room of their Abingdon bungalow, the joyous faces of two newly-weds tell of the love, hope and optimism that the couple still retain to this day. It is only as an aside that Frank and Deanna recall how one woman in a sizeable crowd of onlookers who had gathered to gawp at Abingdon's first mixed marriage shouted out: "It shouldn't be allowed - it will never last!"

A half century later, the couple wryly point out, it is they - not the hostile stranger - who have been proved right!

Much of Frank and Deanna's strength when faced with this and numerous other brushes with racism derives from the way they have responded. "It's all about how you conduct yourself," stresses Deanna. "For us it was with pride and dignity. That demonstrates where the problem is."

Frank agrees: "When I've received any abuse, I always say hold on - that's your problem. It's nothing to do with me."

A 'HALF WON' BATTLE

Above anything, it is a sense of optimism about a 'half won' battle that shines through as Frank recounts his story. In some ways, he points out, the England he arrived at in 1955 was another country to the one we inhabit today.

Certainly the rude awakening received by the young man who had grown up reciting 'Children of the Empire' and 'There will always be an England' in his Guyanan schooldays seems almost inconceivable today. "You've got to remember we arrived with a sense that we were coming to serve the Mother Country in her time of need," stresses Frank. "We thought we'd be welcomed - but then we found that the Mother wasn't in any mood to take us to her bosom.



“THE OBSTACLES YOU MEET CAN SOMETIMES PROVE AN INSPIRATION. THE HARDER THEY ARE THE STRONGER YOU BECOME”



▲ Pioneers: Frank and Deanna Isahak today (main picture) - and Frank shortly after his arrival in Britain

"I remember looking for digs in London and arriving at a place off Oxford Street with a notice at the door saying 'No Irish, no coloureds, no dogs'. I'd never heard of anything like that before, so couldn't interpret what it meant. I knocked on the door and a woman came out, pointed at the sign and said: "What's the matter with you? Can't you f***ing read." I can still hear those despicable words."

Dazed and shocked, Frank walked through the night, yet in retrospect, he insists, he found the experience "an inspiration". "In a funny way it gave me determination," he explains. "I thought, right, I'll get into a position where you guys will respect me."

Mercifully, Frank's luck was about to change. A happy spell in lodgings in the East End did much to restore his faith in British human nature. During that time he learned of a government initiative to employ immigrants in GPO Telephones which was desperately short of engineers.

Several weeks later Frank reported for duty at Telephone House in Oxford assuming that, with his electrical background and high school education, his skills would be seized upon. To his surprise, however, he found himself allotted to a labouring gang. Frank is still convinced that the level of work deemed suitable for him to do had been dictated by a "fixed concept of what colonial immigrants were capable of."

Despite the awkward start, however, Frank settled down happily into the job -

and his wasted potential was finally identified by a training officer who suggested he should register for night classes in telecoms engineering.

It was during that period that Frank met Deanna, and all appeared to be going well until Frank began to realise that, despite excelling in his studies and desperately wanting to put his abilities to good use, he was beginning to hit "glass ceilings".

Throughout the 60s and 70s that continued - every desperately-wanted promotion being a struggle and only being achieved after just about everyone around him had been promoted first.

To this day, Frank is convinced he was held back by his colour - and despite his active involvement in the POEU throughout the 70s and into the 80s - when for a while he edited the branch newsletter - Frank firmly believes the union could and should have done more.

"The whole equal opportunities thing came about 15 years too late for me," Frank explains. "I don't mean to blow my own trumpet, but I was one of the best Strowger engineers - yet I seemed to carry this glass ceiling round with me.

"It was very demoralising - and, to be honest, by the mid-1980s I was frustrated and exhausted."

Dismayed he was never given the opportunity to fulfil his potential, Frank gleefully took retirement in 1991 and threw himself into community, sporting and race relations work which has dominated his life ever since.

MUCH TO CELEBRATE

Given Frank's firm belief that his colour held him back throughout his career, his lack of regret at coming to the UK is initially surprising. The conviction, however, is borne of a sense that he's somehow 'made a difference'.

Even his disappointment that the emphasis on equal opps came too late to help him during his working life is laced with delight at what has been achieved.

"When I read in the Voice about things like the CWU's race advisory committee and the black workers conference I just wish they'd started earlier," he comments.

Although racism still exists, Frank is adamant the progress made against it in recent years should be recognised.

"You can celebrate a milestone before you've reached the end of the road," he stresses.

By taking part in the social history research project, Frank hopes the experiences of the inevitably dwindling numbers of first generation immigrants who arrived in the 1940s and 50s will be kept alive for successive generations of black youth.

"I really hope that an appreciation of how difficult things were then gives a realisation that things are not so bad today, and that, in a sense, they owe it to their ancestors to do well," he concludes.

"If an understanding of what we experienced, and how we responded, can inspire black youth that have gone astray, that can only be to the good." ▼

TRIBUTE LEON GREENMAN



A TRUE HOLOCAUST HERO

The extraordinary life of one of the UK's most effective campaigners against race hate and fascism drew to a close on March 17 when time finally caught up with **Leon Greenman** – a survivor of no less than six Nazi concentration camps who devoted the rest of his life to exposing the horrors of the Holocaust. To mark the first international Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2000, Leon - then aged 89 - was interviewed by Voice journalist **Derek Suffling**. In a special tribute to a true humanitarian who inspired thousands with his very personal plea against the politics of hate, we here reprint that article...

Leon Greenman points at a grainy black and white photograph in the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition.

The picture shows a group of Jews on their hands and knees in the middle of a busy street. Scrubbing brushes in hand, they are being forced to scrub the street clean by Nazi soldiers while a large crowd looks on.

"Look at the faces in the crowd," exclaims the tiny, robust 89-year-old. "They're smiling, laughing – enjoying themselves.

"We're told ordinary people didn't know about Hitler's plans for the Jews, but no-one is protesting in this picture."

Leon realises the horrors he witnessed during three years in Hitler's death camps are unimaginable to most people. But he knows that this picture – which shows one of the many mundane humiliations heaped upon Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, disabled people, trade unionists and other social groups earmarked for extermination by Hitler – is much more recognisable.

There are echoes of the same attitudes in our treatment of asylum seekers today, Leon suggests: "We shouldn't forget that racism and discrimination are what Hitler's fascism was built on."

CRUEL TWIST OF FATE

Born in the east end of London, Leon Greenman was doubly unfortunate to get caught up in the Holocaust.

Family ties with Holland meant he took his honeymoon in Rotterdam, where he remained

while his wife Else nursed a sick relative.

Following the German invasion of Holland, Leon, Else and their baby son, Barney, were rounded up by the SS on October 8, 1942.

From a holding camp in Westerbork, northern Holland, the family was among a party of 750 Jews placed on a train for Auschwitz.

"We thought we were going to Auschwitz to work," says Leon. "But when we got there it turned out to be Birkenau. We had never heard of Birkenau, but it was one of the biggest extermination camps.

"My wife and Barney and I were together in the same carriage.

"We were shouted out of the trains and told to leave everything behind. An SS soldier came along and divided us into two groups; the women went to the right and the men to the left.

"One of the women started to cry and shout 'I want to be with my husband'. She walked away behind the SS soldier, who turned around and let his club come down on her head.

"The woman dropped to the ground and he kicked her in the tummy. Then he turned to us and counted out fifty men by placing the club on our shoulders.

"They marched us away down a long road – Birkenau is a vast piece of land – and we were made to stop by a crossroads as a truck came along.

"The truck stopped in front of us. It was full of women and children, and I saw my wife with our son in her arms. Then the truck went and I never saw either of them again."

Much later Leon learned his wife

and child had been gassed in two converted farmhouses on the outskirts of the camp – early versions of the gas chambers. Rather than being incinerated in the ovens, which were built later, the bodies were simply piled up on the ground outside and burned.

RARE SURVIVOR

Of the 750 people who accompanied Leon on the train from Westerbork, only his 50 fellow workers escaped immediate extermination. Of those, only Leon and one other man survived the camps. Leon's physical strength and fitness meant he was never singled out for extermination, but passed from one work group to the next in the camps of Birkenau, Auschwitz and Monowitz.

Faced with such a terrifying day-to-day reality, Leon admits he almost gave in to despair – especially when he began to realise he would never see his wife and son again. He almost succumbed again during the so-called Death March, when prisoners were trooped back into Germany from the camps by their Nazi captors as Soviet forces swept through Poland.

"We were marched away from Auschwitz in columns," he explains. "The soldiers were under orders from Hitler to shoot anyone who fell, so they couldn't be of use to the Russians or tell them what had happened. If you couldn't walk properly or you fell, you were shot.

"I had gangrene in my feet. A Frenchman saved my life by holding me up when I wanted to fall."

Given what was to follow, we all have much to thank for that unknown Frenchman's humanity...

▲ Leon Greenman, aged 89, pictured in front of a photo of the chillingly iconic gate to Auschwitz

A lifetime's work

The Holocaust completely defined the life of Leon Greenman who devoted the rest of his life to exposing the horror...

Early in Leon's time as a prisoner he saw a fellow Jew brutally beaten by Nazi soldiers. Despite not being a particularly religious person, the experience made him pray to God, promising that if he ever got out he'd devote his energies to telling the outside world about the evils committed.

Leon started to make good on that promise as soon as the camps were liberated in 1945. Stumbling down the road away from Buchenwald, Leon was stopped and interviewed by an Evening Standard reporter anxious to break the incredible story.

For the next 63 years - right up until his death aged 97 on Friday March 5 - he never wavered in his aim of helping people understand what happened during those dark days: "Someone said 'why don't you go into the school and tell the people?' I woke up. I decided that is what I must do," he said.

In 1998 Leon was awarded the OBE for his life's work. As well as numerous visits to schools, colleges and universities he also addressed many other groups, events and conferences including CWU

annual conference.

Leon vehemently believed that everyone should see the death camps at first hand and he took numerous groups himself: "I take people to where I stood, where I worked, where 50 men were hung in front of me," he told the Voice. "The truth is there."

His tireless determination to broadcast the terrible crimes committed by the Nazis earned him the respect and admiration of countless people of every religion and none - but it is perhaps fitting that in death a very special tribute has been paid by the Jewish community itself.

In an exceptional honour to a man who could not have done more to keep memories of the Holocaust alive, Leon's body has been laid to rest free of charge in the United Synagogue's restricted East Ham Cemetery where his father and two of his siblings are also interred.

"He lived most of his life without his family," pointed out Mr Greenman's close friend and confidante Ruth-Anne Lenga in a heartfelt tribute in the Jewish Chronicle. "I felt he needed to rest there."