

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

LOCAL HERO

To understand the policies and practices of the company and how to fully appreciate how the union operates.

To have insight into how the policies of government impact upon the work of your company and your union.

To be formidable in debate, logical in argument and fearless in confrontation, to be a lawyer, actor, mathematician, sage, a philosopher, sociologist, an economist.

To be pleasing, to forgive the apathetic member, to accept the views of the member who does nothing, until something has been done, then criticises the same.

To make a good case of no case and yet stand your ground.

To find yourself in the middle, between local management and your local members.

To be accused of not being hard enough on local management, whilst at the same time the business regard you as something of a trouble maker.

To have to perform your

paid employment with little or no time off for your trade union duties, added to the normal day-to-day domestic responsibilities.

Unsung stars in our ranks
We ask much of our local representatives on the front line.

Invariably, members will berate the union's national leadership to the local rep, for this or that.

No matter what the majority is for a particular agreement, it is usually the local rep's fate to meet everyone of the minority who didn't vote for the agreement.

And all of this, he or she is expected to take with good grace.

It is, nonetheless, heartening to see that – despite the scale of commitment demanded of the generally unsung army of local representatives – the CWU continues to recruit volunteers to the cause.

Our unpaid army of activists is what makes the CWU what it is and, in many ways, gives the union its great strength.

The role of the local

representative was powerfully brought home to me recently when I attended a function to pay tribute to a CWU representative. He had been a rep for his office for 39 years and, like many, he has stood by the union through thick and thin.

Never frightened to question the local area, or national, leadership when he thought it wrong, but always standing by the union and making the case for CWU members.

In the next 12 months, we need to look again at our structures to see how we can give greater support and recognition to our CWU local heroes.

PS: With apologies to "anon" for plagiarising the Shop Stewards Prayer.

IT'S A FACT!
Liverpool has Europe's longest-established Chinese community. In the 1900s, ships had a direct connection from Liverpool to China, trading tea, silk and cotton. Many sailors stayed.



CWU in the news...

The CWU is now making its own news. We are about to launch CWUTV – our very own TV programme where we will bring you the latest news and features about everything that affects you in and outside of work. This is, effectively, CWU Voice transferred to TV, where you can watch the latest developments in your own front room.

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

This doesn't mean you won't still get *Voice* – you will. It just means that we are adding a communications tool to our portfolio that gives you another opportunity and another avenue to find out what's happening in your industry. The falling cost of TV technology means that we can now make TV programmes at an affordable cost. One programme of CWUTV actually costs less than one issue of *Voice* magazine. So, hopefully, in 2009 you will get *Voice* and CWUTV updating you consistently on developments affecting you at work and more. We are

the first union to make TV as a way to communicate with you. For now, we are making three pilot programmes to be aired from August 31, up to the end of November. The show will be 30 minutes long, and be shown on Information TV (Sky channel 167). If you don't have access to Sky, although many of you will with 8 million set top boxes in the UK, you can watch CWUTV on the CWU website at www.cwu.org

The first show will be aired on August 31 2008 and be repeated 15 times per month, including every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday, with new programmes each month.

There is an insert in this magazine giving you details. The first show covers liberalisation of Royal Mail, pensions and the work of the youth movement alongside news and discussion. Other shows will cover Orange, agency workers, dangerous dogs and the campaign for a successful future for Royal Mail. I am looking for a number of people who would like to take part in a "viewers panel" who feed back their views to us on each programme so that we can improve future shows. If you are interested in taking part email me at kslocombe@cwu.org or call me on 020 8971 7497





Images credits: Paris Jefferson

UNITE TO SAVE OUR MAIL

Ever since Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform John Hutton commissioned an independent review into the UK postal industry last December, the CWU has consistently set the agenda. Only our union has asked the difficult questions and suggested viable answers and it is no surprise that support for our ideas has continued to grow...

This summer saw support continue to grow for the CWU campaign to save Britain's postal industry, as the government-commissioned review prepared to make its final recommendations in the autumn.

Key themes of the CWU campaign have been the fight to keep the whole of Royal Mail within the public sector, end the unfair market advantage enjoyed by private mail competitors and protect Britain's post office network.

At annual conference in June, CWU delegates unanimously backed the union's stance, vowed to take the campaign back to their localities and demanded that the government reject any calls to either part-privatise the company or separate Post Office Limited from Royal Mail Group.

Speaking to the main resolution on the subject, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes said: "This lines up the industrial and political sides of the issue."

In reference to review team chairman Richard Hooper's interim report, which roundly criticised the current state of the industry, Billy said: "Mr Hooper shares our analysis, but, just two years ago, only the CWU was saying this. The CWU has been proved right."

But he also gave a stark warning to the Labour Party, when he drew attention to the part of the motion which promised a ballot on continuing links with the party if Royal Mail is privatised.

"There won't be any blank cheques and no cheques in the post if you dare to renege," he cautioned.

Across the country, campaign activities – special branch and area meetings and talks with local politicians and businesses – have taken place, with postal executive committee (PEC) members given responsibility for supporting the campaigning work of CWU regional secretaries in their localities.

Each meeting of the union's national executive committee and PEC has heard reports from regions, while Billy, deputy general secretary Dave Ward and PEC chairwoman Jane Loftus have co-ordinated national activities.

After meeting Mr Hooper and his review team with the general secretary in July, Dave explained that Mr Hooper was aiming for a consensus among industry stakeholders – the union, Royal Mail, regulator Postcomm and consumer watchdog Postwatch – before submitting his final report to government.

And this meant that the union's campaign is "currently at a critical point," insisted Dave.

"Everyone knows what we are against, but the task for us is to make everyone – our own members, other stakeholders, politicians and the public – fully aware of what we are for."

And, with suggestions of part-privatisation, or so-called "joint ventures," coming from some quarters, the question of ownership could become critical, he warned, if the next general election brings a change of government.

"The Tories would want to privatise Royal Mail and what we need is a model – a fresh model – that's robust enough to keep the Tories at bay, something that they will not dismantle," Dave added.

Maintaining the momentum of this busy summer, the CWU also organised a high-profile reception for Members of Parliament in July with the theme: A Positive Future for Royal Mail.

And, illustrating just how politically important the issue is now becoming, dozens of MPs, including ministers and former ministers, turned up to hear both Billy and Dave hammer home the union's case, while Mr Hooper also took time out of his busy schedule to speak at the event.

"A healthy postal sector is vital for our economic welfare and to the social cohesion of the whole nation," explained the man heading this crucial review.

"We on the review team are acutely aware of our huge responsibility – it's about people's lives," Mr Hooper added.

Former CWU general secretary Alan Johnson – now of course Secretary of State for Health – headed a list of senior political figures attending the function, along with former environment minister Michael Meacher and one-time work and pensions secretary Peter Hain. ▼

▲ Left: Neath MP Peter Hain
Centre: Oldham West and Royton MP Michael Meacher, CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward and CWU general secretary Billy Hayes
Right: Secretary of State for Health Alan Johnson

Major report featuring on



Review chairman Richard Hooper

CWU success at Warwick

At this year's crucial pre-general election meeting of the Labour Party's National Policy Forum (NPF), our union won a key commitment to maintain a publicly owned Royal Mail...

In the run-up to this year's Labour Party conference, the CWU has made full use of its organisational links with the party to put forward, and win support for, a key proposal to the party's National Policy Forum and also to circulate a "model resolution" to each of the party's 600-plus constituency organisations (CLPs) urging the forthcoming party conference to support the union's position.

Warwick weekend

The first proposal was submitted by the CWU to the three-day NPF gathering in Warwick in July and was the subject of what were later described as "lengthy, full and frank discussions." Towards the end of day three of the forum, the following form of words were agreed.

"Households and businesses in Britain should have access to reliable and high-quality postal services underpinned by a strong universal service. We have set out a vision of a wholly publicly owned, integrated Royal Mail Group in good health, providing customers with an excellent service and its employees with rewarding employment. The government has established the Hooper Review to look at how the Royal Mail can succeed in a world where electronic and

other forms of communication provide increasingly attractive alternatives to the mail and where there is more competition in postal markets.

"The Labour government has provided significant financial support to the post office network. We recognise its contribution to the life of many communities, but also understand that the network needs to adapt as people's lifestyles change. To help create a network that is more viable for the future, the Post Office is undertaking a significant rationalisation of its size. This has involved tough and difficult decisions. For the future, the network needs to continue to develop new financial service products and seek out new business opportunities."

On to the next election

After having been agreed by the NPF for inclusion within the Labour Party's "Prosperity and Work" policy document, this will, when endorsed by conference, form part of the party's policy manifesto on which it will fight the next general election. Commenting on the outcome of the discussions, after an intensive weekend's work on behalf of CWU

members across the UK, general secretary Billy Hayes said that he was "delighted" that the party's senior policy-making body had endorsed the principal positions of the union.

"Once again, this proves the benefit of our union's organisational links with the Labour Party," he said, adding: "Now we've all got to go out and make sure our party wins a fourth term."

Rank-and-file campaign

As well as receiving a resolution on the issue from the CWU, the forum had also been sent amendments urging support for the union's position from many Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) from across the country and Billy also expressed his appreciation for their support.

"Our negotiating position at Warwick was hugely strengthened by the support from grassroots members of the party," Billy continued.

CWU members praised

Much of this rank-and-file support was won by CWU activists within the party, who ensured that the union's model resolution – explaining and backing the union's position – was discussed at their local CLP meetings across the country.



Determined CWU delegates applauding deputy general secretary Dave Ward's hard-hitting conference speech

Veteran Dave bids farewell

CWU postal department policy adviser Dave Percival gave an emotional farewell to his comrades at the end of his last conference before retiring in September.

Dave, who has served the union as a rank-and-file rep and at HQ over several decades of change, struggle and upheaval, has won respect and admiration right across the union for his integrity, patience, kindness and good humour and will be missed by all of us.

Wishing him the very best of luck for the future, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes - who has been a close personal friend of Dave's for many years - recalled two of his strongest passions.

"I'll never forget the daily sight of Dave, walking up Wimbledon Broadway at lunchtime with a copy of the Socialist Worker in one pocket and the Racing Post in the other," he quipped.

And, in a clear reference to both his trademark beard and his kindly nature, assistant secretary Bob Gibson, for whom Dave has worked for 14 years, joked: "We've just had confirmation from Harrods that Dave'll be their Father Christmas this year."

Bob went on to detail the valued service that Dave had given to the CWU at various levels of the union and throughout some of its toughest times, including his personal involvement in the difficult national disputes of 1971, 1988, 1995 and, of course, the strike that took place last autumn.

"Dave has a wealth of experience and skill and I remember the many political discussions that have taken place between us late into the night after meetings and demonstrations," he recalled.

In reply, Dave thanked conference and wished CWU members good luck in their future endeavours, reminding delegates: "Our union must rely on its own strengths and there's no substitute for the class struggle."

Closure shock sparks fury

CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward has condemned Royal Mail's shock announcement of hundreds of job losses and major sorting office closures across north-west England as "irresponsible."

An estimated 300 postal workers in sites at Liverpool, Oldham, Bolton, Stockport and Crewe face the axe under the plan, the knock-on effect of which is also set to impact on significant numbers of workers across other parts of the network.

"Royal Mail has reneged on an agreed process," Dave explained, adding: "The consultation has not come to an end and the company's plans are flawed."

"Of course changes are needed, but social and economic concerns and service standards need to be met as well as the business plan."

The shock jobs blow came just weeks after CWU conference

unanimously backed the leadership's strategy of national change through national negotiation and thoroughly rejected Royal Mail's "piecemeal" approach to the process.

A comprehensive resolution instructed the incoming postal executive committee (PEC) to negotiate a new national agreement protecting members' jobs, terms and conditions and securing the long-term future of the post office network, mail delivery and distribution.

This can only be done, the motion continued, by "the government providing Royal Mail with the funding required" and, amid widespread criticism of the company's present leadership, the resolution also demanded "changes to the Post Office Board, with new leaders who support the company's social obligations."

The resolution authorises the PEC

to link the issue of a new national agreement on the structure of the industry to the existing dispute over pensions and, speaking to the debate, Dave Ward warned: "We will have to ballot our members unless agreement is reached over the next couple of months."

Following conference, national postal officials have engaged in intensive work aimed at hammering out the union's own vision for a modern postal business, a plan for the future that will not only feed into the government-commissioned independent review of the industry currently being undertaken by Richard Hooper, but will also form the basis of CWU industrial strategy going forward.

Each national postal officer - Bob Gibson, Ray Ellis, Terry Pullinger, Martin Collins and Andy Furey - has been asked to put forward ideas and

proposals suggesting solutions to the problems faced by their own respective part of the sector and positive initiatives for taking the business forward.

However, as each of the national officers has pointed out, such work is hampered by Royal Mail's stubborn refusal to abandon its piecemeal approach to the business, the latest round of closures, in particular, threatening network viability.

And, warning that the union's patience with the company is beginning to run out, Dave Ward explained: "While we are seeking national negotiations and a comprehensive national agreement, Royal Mail are still moving forward on a piecemeal basis."

Dave warned: "We will not meet them on a piecemeal, local area basis."

"Conference policy says no piecemeal closures."

CWU members face anxious wait for card account ruling

As Voice went to press, workers in post offices up and down the country were anxiously awaiting the government's decision over whether they will keep the crucial contract to administer the Post Office Card Account (POCA).

An estimated 3,000 offices could close if Secretary of State for Work and Pensions James Purnell hands the contract to another company, warned CWU general secretary Billy Hayes in a letter to the Minister.

"The account is vital for the future stability of the Post Office," Billy spelled out, pointing out that awarding the contract elsewhere

could "sound the death-knell for the country's network of post offices."

"Losing the contract would impact greatest on the most vulnerable in society, those least able to travel to an alternative outlet due to poor transport availability, economic or geographic factors, in addition to more job losses," he continued.

"The CWU calls upon the Secretary of State to end the uncertainty that exists for all users of post office services as soon as possible."

With over four million account holders, an estimated 6.5 million post office visits per week are generated by POCA, creating annual so-called

"foot-fall" income of approximately £2 billion.

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey, who is the national officer responsible for the union's Post Office Limited (POL) employees, agreed with Billy's analysis, describing renewal of the contract as "critical" to the future of the network.

"We require the political will from government to put more of its services into post offices in the future," Andy continued.

"The new arrangements for driving licences, for benefits registration at post offices and the expected launch of the new ISA

could all bring more work into post offices."

Looking ahead to the future of UK crown post offices, he explained that the union has "secured agreement for a crown office network of 373 crown offices until at least 2011."

"We have begun dialogue with Alan Cook, the POL managing director, with the aim of influencing the POL strategic plan and policy beyond 2011."

"Our objective is to influence the future of the POL beyond 2011 both directly and through government," he concluded.



Assistant secretary Andy Furey (left) joining post office protesters earlier this year

The Closure shock story is featuring on



ROMECC provokes strike warning

Assistant secretary Ray Ellis condemned ROMECC bosses' "outrageous attempt to change working patterns without any negotiations at any level with the union" and warned of strikes involving up to 800 CWU members unless the company thinks again.

As part of the 2007 ROMECC pay deal, both the union and the company formally agreed that, "immediately upon conclusion of the pay agreement, talks will commence on new attendance, callout and travel-to-work arrangements."

These talks had been timetabled to conclude by December 31 2007, but, far from moving straight into negotiations as promised, the company did not meet to discuss the matter with Ray and the CWU negotiating team until February 26, at which, Ray recalls, ROMECC were only able to suggest "some very sketchy ideas."

Nothing further was heard until national and regional engineering reps were invited to a presentation in July, at which plans were outlined to roll out revised attendance patterns without further talks with the union, Ray continued.

Engineers were then briefed on how the plans would affect them and told that individual "one-to-one" meetings with line managers would then commence.

ROMECC advised CWU reps that the company had no plans for shift or unsocial hours payments - other than NDA on hours worked after

8pm - and that engineers were expected to be available for call-out rotas, with attendance patterns structured over five days out of seven with no weekend premium payments.

During several exchanges with ROMECC people and organisational development director John Fisher, Ray has repeatedly requested that the company suspend implementation of the changes pending further negotiations, but, although Mr Fisher has agreed to new talks with the union, the company has not yet halted the roll out of the controversial new work patterns.

Following these latest developments, the CWU has accused ROMECC of breaching the 2007 Pay and Modernisation Agreement, the 1981 Shorter Working Week Agreement and the Industrial Relations Framework Agreement.

Summing up the union's view of ROMECC bosses' behaviour, Ray concluded:

"This is an outrageous attempt by ROMECC management to change working patterns without engaging in negotiations with us.

"If ROMECC proceeds further, I'm confident that our members will support an industrial action ballot."

As Voice went to press, the postal executive committee had unanimously endorsed Ray's request for an industrial action ballot of members involved and preparations were under way for the formal dispute process to commence.



Assistant secretary Ray Ellis

Court rejects PO closure appeal

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey has expressed his "deep disappointment" at the High Court's rejection of a last-ditch appeal aimed at saving London's under-threat post offices.

The courts turned down an application from the London Mayor's office for a judicial review on the closure of 162 post offices across the capital, which had been launched earlier this year by former mayor Ken Livingstone.

London's appeal had cited the shortened consultation period of only six weeks that was used during the process, which appeared to breach official Cabinet Office guidelines that recommend a 12-week consultation period for public service providers.

Andy Furey voiced the anger of many Londoners when he described the judge's ruling as "a further blow to the post office network, which is crucial to the social cohesion of our communities.

"Once again, the legal system has failed the public," he added.

And current Mayor Boris Johnson, who had continued with Mr Livingstone's legal action, said that he was "disappointed" by the verdict.

"Post offices provide a vital local service and they must be protected.

"I will continue with every enthusiasm to support the people of London who are campaigning against local post office closures across the city," he added.

Postal workers step up 'bite-back' struggle

Postal delivery workers won unanimous support from CWU annual conference and backing from key political figures as they stepped up their determined fight for new laws against dangerous dogs.

At conference, delegates backed demands that Royal Mail adopt a new "get-tough" approach towards owners of dogs that attack their colleagues in the course of their duties, insisting that the company must "as a matter of policy, prosecute all dog attacks."

A hard-hitting resolution instructed the postal executive committee (PEC) to seek agreement with Royal Mail for a major change of emphasis, taking the responsibility for such prosecutions away from the individual concerned and automatically seeking legal redress in all such incidents, estimated by the CWU at around 6,000 per year.



Yorkshire and District Branch representative Mick Gray told delegates that, "since we've gone to later deliveries, dog attacks have increased significantly. We've got to get Royal Mail to take responsibility."

John Andy, from South Wales, complained that he had been bitten three times, but, as the incidents had occurred on private property, they were not prosecuted under the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act.

Glasgow delegate Peter Grill warned that the public at large did not yet take the problem seriously enough, pointing out: "Everyone thinks it's a joke - but it's not. It's an extremely serious matter," while Nathan Brown, from Portsmouth, spoke for delivery workers everywhere when he insisted: "Postal workers have the right to do their jobs without fear of attacks."

In his reply to the debate, CWU national health and safety officer Dave Joyce

backed the motion and went on to outline the work that the union's national leadership has carried out in seeking changes to the law, which would close the "private-property loophole" and impose a new duty of care on those looking after dogs on behalf of owners.

"Our campaign is going forward and I want every branch to contact local MPs to win support from them for our aims," said Dave, adding: "The government must act."

Since conference, Dave has held a series of high-level meetings with politicians, at which the case has been made for the key changes that the union demands - accompanied, at one of the meetings, by dog attack victim Paul Coleman, whose horrific injuries were featured in the last edition of Voice.

The CWU group of MPs has promised to back the campaign and work with the union's national leadership in drafting a Private Members' Bill, which would go before Parliament to amend the law as required, while MPs also plan to raise the issue during Prime Minister's Question Time in the House.

"There are some encouraging signs of progress in our campaign," said Dave, adding: "We've raised our concerns with political leaders at the highest levels and, now that we've raised it up the political agenda, they're clearly taking this very seriously.

"I'm confident that we'll win for our own postal workers and for all other workers who have to enter private premises in the course of their duties, the protection that they all deserve," he predicted.



National health and safety officer Dave Joyce

InBrief

Helping into work

PEC member Katrina Quirke has welcomed the new Royal Mail Assisted Recruitment Scheme, which aims to help people with learning difficulties and other disabilities into suitable employment with the company. "I attended the launch today, which went extremely well," explained Katrina, after the July event, which, it is suggested, will be followed up by quarterly meetings chaired by Royal Mail operations director Ninian Wilson and also involving managers' union CMA/Unite and specialist employment services company REMPLY.

"This would ensure the continued success of the scheme and I believe this is exactly the kind of initiative that we, as a union, should be involved with," added Katrina, who also serves on the CWU national executive committee.

Bike ride success

CWU youth empowerment strategy project worker Steve Ratcliffe has passed on a "hearty thank you" to union members from the St Catherine's Hospice Charity after a sponsored 60-mile bike ride raised £14,000 for the organisation. Early on a July Sunday morning, 25 riders from Preston Mail Centre joined thousands of others who met up at Manchester's Albert Square and set off to cycle to Blackpool. "At 7.45am we all set off," said Steve "and, early in the afternoon, we finally crossed the finishing line on Blackpool promenade, where thousands of people had gathered to welcome all riders with a warm cheer." "I want to thank everyone who supported us," Steve added.

Phase Three agreed

Assistant secretary Ray Ellis has reported that agreement has now been reached with Royal Mail Engineering on Phase Three of the 2007 Pay and Modernisation Agreement, enabling payment of the 1.5 per cent wage increase with effect from April 7 2008. "Payment is expected to be made in July salaries," Ray informed the postal executive last month, explaining that the trigger for the payment was based on progress made in trials of corrective maintenance response systems, dynamic asset care procedures and engineering cover.

POL new work streams

Assistant secretary Andy Furey has advised supply chain members of new and renewed external contracts which will, he predicts: "increase revenue and help to ensure job security for our members." These include a new two-year deal with retailer Woolworths, an extension to the existing agreement with skin care company Crabtree & Evelyn and the securing of further work with major bookseller Waterstones.

LETTER OF THE MONTH



Government not helping us

I think that Shaun Shute (Voice letters March/April) should read the daily papers and listen to radio and TV news to find out what is happening in this country today. Diesel in my area is £6.44 a gallon and council tax in my band is up around £100 per year. Gas and electricity prices are sky high and food prices are up. Record numbers are going to lose their homes but Gordon Brown says he will help. Shades of fiddling while Rome burns comes to mind.

I would have had to wait 22 months to see a specialist but for my membership of Benenden, when I suffered Carpel Tunnel Syndrome and nerve damage to my arm and shoulder.

The Labour government

banished hand guns, but now we have an epidemic of murders with guns, we have a part-time defence secretary, while we fight wars in countries in which we have no interest, while not providing the troops with helicopters and flack jackets.

Extremists are granted asylum and murderers cannot be sent back to their own countries because of their human rights, while Ghurkhas who fought and died for this country are threatened with deportation.

And, by the way, who brought in Postcomm to ruin our wonderful postal service that we gave the world?

Roll on the election, when we can get rid of this lot.

James Crawford, retired postman, Carmarthen

Unfair Quadrant

I would like to know why we at Quadrant have no voice. I have worked for the Post Office for over 20 years and we were told that, when we were put into Quadrant, our terms and conditions of employment would stay the same.

So, why are we not treated the same as we were before? We get far less now and the postmen and women get more. I expect you will not put this in Voice.

Mrs P Weeren, Gloucestershire

Assistant secretary Terry Pullinger replies: This union provides the highest standard of representation of our Quadrant members and our unsung heroes are our area and local CWU representatives, who perform amazing work under very difficult circumstances.

Thanks in large part to their efforts, our Quadrant members are amongst the highest paid in the catering industry with a shorter working week – 38 hours compared to 40 – than colleagues in Royal Mail. Quadrant's family-friendly arrangements are some of the best across the Royal Mail Group and industry leading when compared with other, similar companies. As an example, we achieved an agreement whereby Quadrant employees receive 39 weeks full pay for both maternity and adoptive leave, whereas a Royal Mail employee receives 18 weeks full pay at present for both these benefits.

Terry's full letter of reply can be read online

Well done Voice

I would like to thank Voice for publishing Steve Higginson's bitter letter in your last edition, but I would also like to thank Tony Kearns even more for his reasoned reply, which addressed the issues without meaningless personal abuse.

We must beware of what I call the Jeremy Clarkson Syndrome whereby all people who believe in making the world a better place to live are dubbed with insulting names such as treehuggers, beardy wierdies, shorts-and-sandals brigade etc.

We are all different and we all have our own priorities and agendas, but, if we are to stop the Tories getting back in, we must stop this nonsense.

The nonsense that says that, to be a

true socialist, you must not live in Islington, drink wine, eat in posh restaurants, hate dumbed-down telly, support green issues, hate Bush, Clarkson, overpaid footballers and the list goes on and on.

Does Mr Higginson really think that it was the chattering classes who voted Ken Livingston out and the awful Boris Johnson in, or does he admit that it was the Sun-reading genuine working-class voter?

Finally, I would say to Mr Higginson that surely it is better to have a posh person who votes Labour than a posh person who votes Tory and surely he must realise, without working-class Tory voters, the Conservatives would never get in.

Live and let live Mr Higginson, like a true member of the working and socialist classes.

Malcolm Ferguson, postal officer retired

New shift confusion

I understand that the time limit for town deliveries is 2pm and 3pm for rural deliveries as agreed by Royal Mail. In practice, would this mean that no letter should be delivered or duty end after 3pm?

The new later starts and "geo-route" are 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? Will you clarify this and inform regions and branches as to correct procedure?

After geo-route, some walks were increased, thus taking them over their 3.5-hour time limit. In our office, the walking staff deliver for the required 3.5hrs, then cut off and make their way back to the office with their surplus mail.

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

Name and address supplied

Assistant secretary Bob Gibson replies:

Yes, Royal Mail's delivery specification completion time is 2pm in towns and 3pm in rural areas. All duties should be planned to complete by these times, by geo-route or any

other system, but there may be individual days where it cannot be achieved and delivery staff can work later if they volunteer to do overtime. If you cannot complete and do not wish to do overtime, you must tell the manager so that he or she can make other arrangements to deliver any excess mail. Foot and cycle deliveries in towns must not be planned to take more than three hours and 30 minutes, so I am sure that your branch will be looking at the length of delivery spans in your office.

Many thanks Billy

I wish to express my gratitude to the National Executive Council for awarding me the gold badge of the union. I would also like to express my appreciation to our general secretary Billy Hayes for travelling to Northern Ireland to present the award. My appreciation also goes to John Martin the organiser of the event and to all my old colleagues who attended the occasion.

Paul Grace, retired general officer

Handbook for members

Would it not be a good idea to issue a general rule book each year instead of a diary? A rule book could inform of present pay scales, meal-relief entitlement, attendance procedure, conduct code and bullying and harassment rulings and other information of benefit to the membership.

Not everyone has access to the CWU website and a rule book could be most helpful.

Mr C Garnham Ipswich

Head of communications Kevin Slocombe replies: Unfortunately, it simply would not be practical to produce a book for every member, each year, listing all of the information that he asks for, as our union represents members working for more than 30 different companies, at each of which there are a myriad of varying terms and conditions of employment. However, this information is available, on request, from your branch secretary.

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

CWU enters digital TV age with CWU TV

CWU TV will launch on Sunday August 31, providing CWU members with a monthly 30 minute broadcast television programme providing news, views, features and your feedback on the issues that concern you the most.

CWU TV will be broadcast on Information TV, Sky Digital channel 167, three times a week appearing on Tuesdays at 10.00 am, Thursdays at 4.00 pm and on Sundays at 6.00 pm.

By broadcasting the programme frequently and at different times each month we are providing you with many alternative times to watch it.

If you don't have Sky Digital but have access to broadband Internet, you can watch the programme live, online at these times at www.information.tv. Remember this is a television made by the CWU for you, the membership, so tune in and watch it - and don't forget to give us your feedback, so we cover the topics that matter most to you.



Images credit: Janina Struk

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Members will be receiving their pensions illustrations from the Royal Mail Pensions Scheme trustees. Please be advised that it is an annual, statutory requirement for the trustees

to do this and it does not in any way affect the current CWU campaign against the company's unagreed changes to your pensions. You will receive a special pensions communication from the union soon.



FIGHT FOR FAIR PENSIONS

From CWU national conference to the corridors of power at Westminster, members of our union have been keeping up the pressure on both Royal Mail and the government, urging them to abandon their attacks on the pension rights of hard-working postmen and women and give postal workers the same rights as all other public-service workers...



Pressure continued to mount on both Royal Mail and the government over the summer months after CWU conference delegates unanimously backed calls for national strike action to win back members' pension rights.

And MPs took up the Parliamentary cudgels on behalf of hard-working postmen and women by launching an Early Day Motion (EDM) in the House of Commons urging government to ensure "a just agreement between the Royal Mail and the trade unions on the issue of pensions."

The current pensions impasse between Royal Mail and the CWU – one which also involves Royal Mail managers' union Unite – echoes the series of disputes which erupted back in 2005/06, when public-sector employers announced plans to end final salary pension schemes and raise retirement ages for local government workers, civil servants, NHS staff, teachers, firefighters, police and police staff.

The wave of protests and strikes with which those workers responded back then was only ended by agreements which, in the main, protected existing pensions scheme members' rights while limiting the changes to new employees.

And, mindful of that, the EDM currently before Parliament calls for parity for postal workers.

"Any settlement reached must be at least as good as those arrived at elsewhere in the public sector in terms of protecting the rights of existing members," the MPs insist.

A similar point was made in the strongest of terms during debate at CWU annual conference in Liverpool in June, divisional reps Mark Palfrey and Martin Walsh both giving voice to the sheer anger and sense of unfairness that their members feel at the attacks on their pensions.

"The government and Royal Mail got their sums wrong and we're now under the greatest threat ever seen," pointed out Martin, who added: "It's the only public-sector company that's closed its final salary scheme to existing members."

And in his contribution, Mark warned that winning a fair deal on pensions would be no easy task. "We have a fight on our hands, but fight we must," he explained, "this is the last chance to defend our pensions."

But Mark insisted that there was no reason why the CWU could not achieve its objectives as other unions had, as he reminded fellow delegates that "a number of final salary schemes have been saved in the public sector."

According to the resolution adopted by conference, the union's postal executive committee (PEC) is now authorised to call a ballot for industrial action over pensions "at its discretion," with the "timetable designed to maximise pressure on the company and the government."

With clear authorisation to call a strike vote – one which the overwhelming rejection of the company's position in April's consultative ballot indicates that the union would be highly confident of winning – CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward has warned both Royal Mail and the government that time is running out for a negotiated solution.

"We have repeatedly urged Royal Mail to reopen talks with the CWU and Unite to find a solution to the pensions crisis and we have repeatedly reminded the government of its moral and legal obligations, as the owner of the company," he explained.

"Our members who work in Royal Mail are public servants and, as such, they deserve equal treatment on pensions with other public servants, who have won protection for their final salary pension schemes.

"If Royal Mail and the government give us no alternative but to activate this year's national conference decision authorising an industrial action ballot, the result of the vote will demonstrate, better than my words can, the sheer anger that our members feel at the blatant unfairness of how we have been treated compared to the rest of the public sector," Dave warned. ▼

▲ **Public purse:** Government must fund postal workers' pensions, insists the CWU



General secretary Billy Hayes



Deputy general secretary Dave Ward

EARLY DAY MOTION 2136

The following Early Day Motion was formally tabled, or proposed, by Selby MP John Grogan, who leads the group of CWU-supported MPs at Westminster. Our Parliamentary group works hard to win support among their colleagues for our union's campaigns...

"That this House believes that securing a just agreement between the Royal Mail and the trade unions on the issue of pensions is crucial to the future of the postal service; recognises that the trade unions are adopting a reasonable negotiating stance acknowledging that the present status quo is not sustainable; further believes that any settlement reached must be at least as good as those arrived at elsewhere in the public sector in terms both of protecting the rights of existing members and giving hope for reasonable pensions in retirement to new entrants to the postal service; urges Royal Mail to re-open pension negotiations with the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and Unite; further urges the Government to review the 2007 commercial deal to ensure that the £1.2 billion set aside for a Colleague Share scheme is redistributed to support improved pension reform for all Royal Mail group employees; calls on the Government to undertake a full review of Royal Mail's

reported accounts to ensure that there is more transparency and that further consideration is given to whether the existing £1 billion pensions escrow account can be drawn upon now; and strongly hopes that the Hooper Review of Competition and the future of Royal Mail will make appropriate recommendations on the issue of pensions."

CWU urges support
CWU general secretary Billy Hayes has welcomed the initiative and has expressed his appreciation for the support that Mr Grogan's EDM has already won from other CWU-supported MPs John Cruddas (Dagenham), Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale), Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk), Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) and others.

Nationwide campaign
"We have emailed all MPs at the House of Commons as well as at their constituency offices to ask them to support John's EDM," explained Billy,

urging CWU branches to "lobby MPs in their locality, via their constituency offices and ask them to sign up."

Parliamentary allies
Other CWU-supported MPs, from whom the union is confident of gaining support are: Joe Benton (Bootle), Malcolm Wicks (Croydon North), Peter Hain (Neath), Sadiq Khan (Tooting) and Bob Laxton (Derby North)
The union is also hopeful that both Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) and Bob Marshall-Andrews (Medway), both of whom have worked closely with the CWU in several of its campaigns, will back Mr Grogan's EDM.

Unite backing
Royal Mail managers, through their union Unite, have also objected to the company's imposed changes to the pension scheme.
If all of the MPs who are supported by the giant Unite union add their names to Mr Grogan's EDM, Parliamentary support will top the 100 mark.

WE'RE CWU: WE WON'T BE BULLIED

CWU members across the nation are refusing to accept Royal Mail's increasing use of the Bullying and Harassment Procedures to victimise hard-working postmen and women...

Backed by the unanimous support of annual conference, the CWU has stepped up its campaign to end the victimisation of hard-working postmen and postwomen by Royal Mail under its notorious "Bullying and Harassment Procedure."

From Bristol in the south west to Burslem in the north and Morden down in the south east, CWU members are still fighting for justice after being accused – often on the basis of mere hearsay – under the company's controversial code.

Previous editions of Voice have featured the dispute at Burslem, where CWU members took five weeks of strike action and marched through the town earlier this year in protest when 12 of their colleagues were sacked or suspended.

Although six of the 12 have secured a return to work, their remaining colleagues still face further months of uncertainty, while their cases proceed through the long and tortuous system.

ANGER SPREADING

Voice has also reported on the cases of nine members at Morden in Surrey – including a unit rep with 20 years service – who have faced disciplinary hearings for "offences" as trivial as "staring the wrong way," while similar cases have affected members at Oxford, Bude in Cornwall and elsewhere.

Amid ever-growing anger among members across the country, who feel that the company is abusing the Bullying and Harassment (BH) code in order to launch a concerted attack on the union, June's national conference heard a moving and defiant speech from sacked Burslem CWU member Paul Malyan.

Outlining the values that first inspired him and continue to inspire him as a trade unionist, Paul explained: "I've

always thought, if something's wrong, you've got to stand up and say it's wrong.

"There's a fire that ignites and you think: 'I'm not going to have that – we'll stand up for ourselves' and that's why people like us get picked off, because you're prepared to stand up to these people.

"You get down sometimes and that fire nearly extinguishes sometimes, because it's such a long road. But you think: 'No, that fire's still there'.

"You've got to keep the fire going," he concluded, to a lengthy and emotional standing ovation.

DETERMINED TO RESIST

Determined to prevent further attacks on men such as Paul and his Burslem comrades, delegates went on to give their full backing to a resolution demanding a "fundamental review" of the procedures.

Moved by Midlands No. 7 Branch, which covers the Burslem area, and seconded by 10 other branches and three divisional committees, the hard-hitting motion took a swipe at what members see as "corrupt investigations of cases manufactured against the CWU.

"These actions are nothing more than union-busting tactics by Royal Mail," the resolution asserted, going on to call for "an end to the sham, so-called 'independent investigators'" and for future cases to be dealt with jointly by the appropriate manager and CWU representative.

Introducing the motion, Midlands regional secretary Lee Barron, who has been deeply involved in the fight for justice at Burslem, said that Royal Mail bosses had "used a procedure aimed at protecting workers and abused it to try to take the union out of the workplace."

But, Lee insisted: "Don't carry this motion out of sympathy for the Burslem



men – carry it to ensure it never happens again."

SOLUTION URGENT

South West regional secretary Kevin Beazer informed delegates of the gathering storm in his area over the use of the infamous code to sack three members in Bristol, despite video evidence which utterly clears two of them, while the third was dismissed merely for posting comments on a discussion website.

"We've got a manager who trawled through that web chat site and another who crossed a picket line and then complained about two pickets, even though the video shows that they were nowhere near his vehicle," Kevin explained.

In his contribution, South East divisional rep Steve Wisely explained the ongoing situation at Morden Delivery Office in Surrey, where a CWU rep has had to face disciplinary action after trying to take steps to reduce post-dispute tensions in his own workplace.

"This has been a total attack on our union and its members," Steve stormed.

"Our rep at the Morden office is no different from the reps who've been victimised by the company elsewhere. Like them, he's passionate and loyal to this union and its members."

And Paul Garraway, from South Central No. 1 Branch, called the company's attack on an Oxford rep "one of the most vindictive acts I've seen."

Replying to the debate, deputy general secretary Dave Ward warned: "Unless we find a solution to this, there's no prospect of this union having any relationship with Royal Mail and no prospect of ever having dignity and respect at work.

"This union needs to reclaim the dignity and respect agenda," he added, promising: "The postal executive will

prioritise this issue."

SEEKING TALKS

Since conference, Dave Ward and assistant secretary Ray Ellis have led the union's attempts to engage the company in serious national negotiations aimed at carrying out members' wishes, but, despite Royal Mail agreeing to discuss the issue at national level – as reported in the last edition of Voice – ongoing problems at local offices remain.

"It seems that they want to be seen to be being reasonable at a national level while giving local managers the green light to continued what's almost becoming a ground-level guerrilla war against our union and our members," reflected Dave.

"Our members have endured attacks by local management, supported by territorial managers who have been brought in under the regime of Allan Leighton and Adam Crozier, who talk about 'rooting out bullying and harassment' but actually use our support for that – for genuine and honest reasons – to bully and harass our CWU representatives.

"It's a deliberate strategy and it's all about breaking down collectivism. It's about making it hard for our reps to engage with members," he explained.

And, as if to prove Dave's analysis, the industrial relations temperature raised dramatically earlier this month, when 300 postal workers marched through Bristol demanding "justice for the innocent three" as the CWU stepped up its fight for full reinstatement for the sacked workers that Kevin Beazer had spoken of to conference.

CRISIS AT BRISTOL

A high-profile campaign by CWU Bristol AMAL Branch, fully supported by the national union, has forced the company



Sacked Burslem CWU rep Paul Malyan



Bristol CWU branch secretary Dave Wilshire

This story is featuring on



▲ **Left: Bristol postal workers rallying for their sacked comrades**
Right: CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward addressing protesters in Bristol



Image credits: Paris Jefferson

to compromise, offering to reinstate the three – Colin Tucker, Kay Gibbs and Paula Franklin – but at the Weston-super-mare delivery office some 30 miles away from the city.

But the members, and their branch, insist that, as they are innocent of the "charges," nothing other than full reinstatement back in their own city is acceptable.

Dave Ward told protesters that Colin, Kay and Paula had been sacked for "no more than standing up for trade unionism" and it is the company, he insisted, who is guilty of "bullying our members every day in the workplace."

After explaining why the current conditions set by the company for their reinstatement were not acceptable, and pledging the full support of the national union for their struggle, the deputy general secretary concluded: "Therefore, the fight must continue."

Bristol AMAL Branch secretary Dave Wilshire praised the "courage that these three have shown. It's been second to none and we want them back at Bristol."

"Royal Mail have the cheek to talk about bullying and harassment when the reality is that, at Bristol, Burslem and elsewhere, the only bullies are Royal Mail managers," he added.

NEGOTIATIONS ONGOING

As Voice went to press, the Bristol situation remained unclear, with the three planning to take their cases to a tribunal, while their branch has warned the company that strike action across the city remains an option if an acceptable solution is not reached.

Returning to the national picture, Dave Ward has explained that, even if reinstatement is won here, at Burslem and elsewhere, a longer term solution is desperately needed to deal in a more constructive and positive manner with

work relationship problems.

"It cannot be right, for example, that the person who makes the complaint is automatically believed and that the person complained about is automatically assumed to be guilty."

As well as the unfairness in the way that Royal Mail applies the procedure, and the suspicions of union members as to the company's true agenda, another problem is caused by the habit that managers seem to have fallen into of using BH almost as a "default" option when problems arise.

Not only does this mean that BH takes on many, essentially trivial cases, which could be resolved through what Dave describes as "common-sense solutions," it also causes a huge backlog within the system, meaning that the more serious cases take many months to reach a solution.

"We're trying to find a different way to deal with many of these situations," Dave said, pointing out that, overall, "over 90 per cent of these cases are about straightforward rows at work and relate to the breakdown of working relationships."

"We need to get back to common-sense solutions and that means separating the genuine grievances from the work-relationship breakdowns."

GOING FORWARD

Instead of automatically putting complaints straight into the BH procedure, the union wants Royal Mail to try to resolve the majority of complaints at an earlier stage, through mediation.

"Serious complaints, of course, must be dealt with seriously, but people refusing to talk to each other, or just having an argument – these can, and should, be dealt with through mediation." ▼

Restoration or mediation?

Voice looks in detail at one initiative currently being looked at by Royal Mail with the aim of improving workplace-based relationships that have broken down for various reasons...

One alternative method of dealing with workplace-based problems that Royal Mail appears to be trialling is "Restorative Conferencing."

Although not a part of the formal Industrial Relations Framework Agreement, or of any other agreement with the CWU, restorative practices are increasingly a part of the company's people-management agenda.

Partnership with US firm

In partnership with US-founded International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP), the company has organised training sessions for managers in such techniques and, more recently, has invited CWU reps to take part.

Voice spoke to CWU South West London Branch secretary Greg Charles and area delivery rep Nick Carter, who attended a recent "facilitators" course and asked them for their views on the idea and their reflections on the course.

Both agreed that the four-day course had been "fairly intensive," with the IIRP

organisers keen to emphasise restoration, rather than mediation.

"They say that the process is the most important thing," began Greg, "getting people who've done harm together with those who've been harmed."

Restoration explained

Under a restorative system, both parties – the complainant and the person of whom the complaint is being made – need to agree to the process, the "facilitator's" role being to approach them with the initial suggestion.

"The idea is to get people to acknowledge the harm that their actions have caused, try to get agreement between the parties on how to move forward and then get them to sign up to an agreement – this is called a 'bridging process'," explained the branch secretary.

Reservations from CWU

Nick explained that the purpose of restorative conferencing appeared to be to move from a punitive towards a corrective

process, but that problems could arise in the future if, as appears to have happened under BH, this system were introduced and then abused by the company.

"One potential problem, from our point of view, is that if management get hold of it and use it and perhaps try to manipulate it for their own ends," he cautioned.

Commenting, Dave Ward restated that restorative conferencing is not a part of the current formally agreed Industrial Relations Framework Agreement, or the BH procedure.

"We remain willing to listen to, consider and respond to any suggestions from the company on the way forward," said Dave, "but there can be no changes to the current IR framework without the full agreement of the CWU."

"We would like to engage in meaningful discussions with Royal Mail over how we can move industrial relations forward, but my feelings are more towards mediation rather than restorative conferencing, which seems to require the prior admission of guilt."

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*Based on Department for Transport figures.

The BT and Santander stories are featuring on



Stark warning to BT

CWU has fired a warning shot to BT, making clear that any changes to the pension scheme will have to be agreed with the union or the company will face strike action.

The gauntlet was thrown down by delegates at CWU annual conference in Liverpool who overwhelmingly supported an emergency motion tabled by the Telecoms Executive after the company gave notice in May that it is planning to review the final salary BT Pension Scheme (BTPS) and the money purchase BT Retirement Plan (BTRP)

Drawing clear lines in the sand on three issues which the union insists will be critical to any negotiated changes, delegates were united that the company would have to:

- Retain a defined benefit pension for all those in the BTPS

- Give an unequivocal commitment to ensure the BTPS is properly funded
- Increase its contribution levels to the BTRP- the defined contribution/ money purchase scheme that was opened for anyone joining the company since 2001. For some time the CWU has been arguing that company contributions to that scheme are too low and need to be improved to ensure decent pension provision for BTRP members

The only disagreement at Conference was whether those demands went far enough, with some delegates urging backing for two alternative emergency motions which rejected any changes being made to the current scheme at all.

Following passionate debate, however, most delegates agreed that the Executive's motion struck the right balance - and that the worst scenario of all would be a policy of non-engagement on the issue which would give the company an excuse to act unilaterally.

Assurances have already been received from BT that it does not intend closing the BTPS - though

as the Voice went to press no definitive set of company proposals for change had been received.

Before the company can implement significant changes to a pension scheme, by law it has to complete a statutory consultation exercise with employees which takes around 60 days.

It is not bound by the outcome of that consultation, but once the exercise has been carried out the company's ability to unilaterally implement changes is significantly increased.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told the Voice: "The CWU has expressed to BT in no uncertain terms the union's intention to ballot for industrial action if the company seeks to unilaterally move to a statutory consultation exercise. We have also made it clear that there will be no deal without improvements to the BTRP."

"So far all that's happened is that we've had a presentation from BT explaining, in their view, the need to review the BTPS to make cost savings. On the back of that we've asked for loads of data which we're going to analyse in close detail - and they're starting to provide that.

"I'd like to reassure members that we've been keeping very close tabs on this and that the conference motion has drawn some very clear lines in the sand that the company has been made acutely aware of."



Santander swoops on A&L

The CWU is demanding assurances from Alliance & Leicester over the impact the proposed take-over of the bank by Spanish banking giant Santander would have on the company's 8,000-strong workforce across the UK.

Immediately after the shock announcement that the take-over bid was being recommended by the A&L's Board, the CWU expressed "grave concern" at the development. These were reinforced as Santander - which already owns Abbey in the UK - stated it expects the acquisition to generate efficiency savings of £180 million over three years.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told the Voice: "This is potentially a very serious situation for CWU members in A&L. A take-over by any company already active in the UK could mean a large number of job losses. Staff at A&L deserve to have answers about their future and we urge the company to be upfront about their intentions and to provide assurances about our members' job security."

One potential source of comfort for some CWU members at A&L, however, is that Abbey wants to

expand its branch network, and does not have a commercial banking operation similar to A&L's.

Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove, national officer with responsibility for members in A&L, stressed that above everything the CWU is seeking clarification and reassurance on job security, pensions, and terms and conditions. He conceded, however, that given the uncertainty surrounding take-over bids, and the potential for rival bidders emerging, A&L employees will not know where they stand for several months.

"Even if the take-over goes ahead it isn't going to happen until mid-October at the earliest. At that point Santander will own two banks in the UK and we do not yet know what Santander's plans are.

"This is clearly going to be an unsettling period but the CWU will be doing all it can to secure a long term future for our A&L members."



Andy Kerr: staff need answers

Remembering the victims



Flowers for the fallen: CWU protesters outside the Iranian Embassy in London

A triangular wreath of pink carnations was laid outside the Iranian Embassy in London in a poignant ceremony to highlight the continuing persecution of homosexuals across the world.

The location for the CWU-organised protest - held to mark International Day Against Homophobia - was significant because of Iran's continuing use of the death penalty against practising homosexuals.

International revulsion at what amounts to state-sanctioned murder has mushroomed after a series of executions were forthrightly supported by a senior Iranian politician.

In November last year The Times reported that the politician had told British politicians attending a peace conference that homosexuals deserve to be executed or tortured - or both.

His chilling remarks, which were in marked contrast to an earlier statement by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that "there are no homosexuals in Iran," came after harrowing footage of the public hanging of two underage boys was posted on the internet.

Some international gay rights groups accuse Tehran of having executed more than 4,000 lesbians and gay men since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

CWU national equal opportunities officer Linda Roy told the Voice:

"At the last count there were still 86 countries that legitimise persecution of LGBT people in some way, shape or form. We need to challenge this publicly and that is what IDAHO Day is all about."

The continuing scourge of homophobia both at home and abroad will be discussed in detail at the CWU's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Conference in Swansea on November 15. Full details for anyone interested in attending can be viewed at www.cwu.org/links/lgbtac

TELECOMS

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

■ Loud and clear on agency pay

The CWU's long-running campaign against the unequal treatment of agency workers is now being augmented with a separate but related campaign seeking immediate pay rises for thousands of agency members - many of whom have not received a pay rise for years. Naming and shaming the prime culprit - BT - is the aim and that began at the company's AGM.



■ Grim resignation at Fujitsu

Disguised Fujitsu members in the West Midlands have reluctantly accepted the company's final offer on redundancy terms after exhaustive negotiations narrowly failed to clinch a deal that, at one stage, looked set to save the vast majority of 140 endangered manufacturing jobs in Birmingham.



■ Outlook stormy at BT?

With tensions mounting over a series of interrelated disagreements with BT, the industrial relations outlook could be stormy - unless the company can be persuaded to return to the spirit of partnership that has typified the CWU/BT relationship for years. With potential flashpoints looming on several fronts, deputy general secretary Andy Kerr is urging the company "to work with us, not against us."



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INFORMATION

COLUMBIA'S SHAME

The sheer danger of being a trade unionist in Colombia was starkly revealed once again in July, when the dead body of Guillermo Rivera Fuquene was discovered in the provincial town of Ibague.

President of public-service union Sinservpub in the nation's capital Bogota, Mr Fuquene had also been an active member of the Colombian political opposition movement, Democratic and Alternative Pole. After taking his young daughter to school in Bogota on April 22, Mr Fuquene was never seen alive again, although witnesses claim to have seen him getting into a Bogota Metropolitan Police car later in the day, claims that appear to be confirmed by footage from nearby CCTV cameras.

Accusations by trade unionists, political opponents and solidarity campaigners that Colombia's

government is either behind the killings, or happy to turn a blind eye to them, are given extra credence by the shocking statistic that, since Mr Uribe came to power in 2002, over 500 union members have been murdered, with no prosecutions being mounted in 97 per cent of cases.

Just weeks before, in an emotional speech to CWU conference, public-sector union Fenaltrase president Ana Lucia Pinzon had expressed her increasing concern at “the disappearances of my comrade Guillermo Rivera” and urged the British TU movement to put pressure on the UK government to end military aid to her country.

Such aid, she pointed out, “only intensifies the violence and the human rights abuses in my country.”

As the most high-profile female trade unionist in her country, Ms Pinzon herself survived an assassination attempt in 2001 when she was shot twice in the back by gunmen.

Responding to Ms Pinzon, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes offered his “personal apologies that

the British government continues to supply the Colombian military” and pledged to redouble his and the union's efforts to bring this to an end. “Trade union solidarity doesn't end at international borders and we will not stand idly by when we know these injustices are taking place,” he said.

Practical help

Steve Jones, the CWU NEC member responsible for co-ordinating the union's work in Colombia, describes the trade unionists he met there on a recent visit as “a true inspiration”.

“One can only imagine what they have to go through to carry out work we take for granted,” he explains. Steve urges CWU branches and individual members to support the union's sponsored project, Rehabilitating Trade Union Victims of Violence.

The project aims to provide assistance to the children of trade unionists who have been murdered – often in front of the children – and to union members and their families who have survived assassination attempts, been tortured or physically attacked.

Please send donations and messages of support to John Baldwin at CWU HQ.

Image credit: Janina Struk



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The TUC has created an online mosaic of two silenced Zimbabwean trade unionists from photos sent in by well-wishers and supporters in the UK

Zimbabwe's repression goes on

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes has called on "trade unionists in the UK and across the world" to bring pressure to bear on the Zimbabwean government to end its harassment of union leaders Lovemore Matombo and Wellington Chibebe.

Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) president Mr Matombo and general secretary Mr Chibebe were summoned to appear in court in July to face allegations of "communicating falsehoods" and "inciting the public to rise against the

government."

Since their arrest, following speeches made to a Mayday rally of thousands of workers at the Dzivaresekwa Stadium in the nation's capital Harare, stringent bail conditions have forbidden the pair, who utterly reject the charges, from addressing any political gathering or from staying at any address other than their home address.

Responding to the news, Billy Hayes said: "This is an outrageous abuse of the judicial system and an

appalling way to treat honest, hard-working trade union leaders.

"Lovemore and Wellington have spent their lives fighting for the rights of Zimbabwean workers and that's certainly not a crime," he continued.

"Trade unionists here in the UK, across Europe and all over the world must unite to demand an end to this outrageous repression."

● The image can be viewed in detail at <http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-14995-f0.cfm>

Save the NHS from Poly-Clinics!

Cutbacks and closures across the NHS are bound to intensify if new plans for 'Poly-Clinics' - which the Government intends to put out to tender to private companies - get the go-ahead. CWU annual conference delegates committed the union to increase its support for campaigns against 'creeping privatisation'.

Judy Griffiths of Coventry branch pointed out that despite Labour's promises in opposition to end the 'internal market' in the NHS implemented by the Tories, the 'creeping privatisation' has actually been taken to a whole new level.

"Isn't it tragic that the Tories are now able to posture as the party that will save the NHS," she said - adding it was "little wonder" that Labour was "massacred" in recent local elections.

Andy Gibb of Northern Ireland Engineering branch insisted the CWU has a responsibility to defend the "single most important institution" created by the post-war Labour Government - adding he was certain Aneurin Bevan would have been 'sick to the core' at what is happening now.

InBrief

Remembering Giles

A permanent memorial has been erected to Giles Hart - a BT engineer who died in July 7 2005 London bombings who, in the 1980s, had been a founder member of the Polish Solidarity Campaign of Great Britain. The Central London branch member was a passionate supporter of the growth of the independent Polish union confederation Solidarnosc (NSZZ) and throughout the 1980s was in close contact with the union's leader, Lech Walesa. More at www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article4283257.ece

International solidarity

The CWU is to set up a special 'International Development Fund' to help ensure that workers in countries with developing economies are recruited into trade unions. Backing the executive's proposal for a designated fund to assist in this aim, CWU general conference delegates admitted that, as well as being right in principle, the unionisation of those in developing economies would help protect workers in all parts of the world from the risk of a 'race to the bottom' inherent in an increasingly global economy.

Oppressed of Burma

Trade unionists in the UK have a duty to support those being oppressed by Burma's brutal military regime - CWU general conference delegates agreed. Committing the union to an active programme of protest and campaigning to raise awareness about the ongoing repression of pro-democracy groups, the Mount Pleasant International branch proposal was welcomed by NEC member Mark Taggart who pointed out that Britain had a responsibility to help having left Burma with "only the shakiest democratic structures" at the end of the colonial era.

Water to Africa

The full weight of the CWU is to be thrown behind an initiative to bring clean drinking water to a remote village in Africa. General conference delegates unanimously committed the union to provide "every possible practical support" to an initiative already being championed by the union's unique humanitarian aid charity, CWUHA, to dig a well for the people of Moshi in Tanzania. More at www.cwu.org/links/well

HSE boost welcomed

The CWU's Health, Safety and Environment Department has strongly welcomed the Health & Safety Executive's (HSE) announcement that it has recruited 40 more inspectors. However, the CWU believes the HSE needs more inspectors and needs to do more to ensure the safety of staff in the workplace. National Health and Safety Officer Dave Joyce said: "The decision is a step in the right direction but further action needs to be taken." More at www.cwu.org/links/hseboost

Tough times ahead



Tony Kearns: difficult decisions lie ahead

Difficult and sometimes unpalatable decisions will need to have been made by the end of the year to ensure the survival of the CWU as a stand-alone union in the communications sector. The stark warning was delivered to CWU annual conference by senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns in his keynote speech on the state of the union's finances.

Despite major savings made in the union's expenditure between 2001 and 2005, costs associated with last year's postal dispute have once again stretched the union's finances at a time when membership income is coming under intense pressure.

Amid strong signals from some of the biggest employers of CWU members that headcounts will fall in the coming months and years, Tony admitted the union's record on recruitment needs rapid improvement.

"The only single reason that

membership income went up last year is that we raised headline subscription rates on January 1," he explained.

"We're not increasing membership income by recruiting - that's a fact," he added, stressing it is now imperative that the union sees "a return on the investment we have put into organising and recruitment."

"This is not an emotional debate - it's a rational debate," Tony stressed - revealing that directly after Conference he would be writing to budget holders asking them to identify areas for savings.

"We have until the end of 2008 to plan a course for the survival of the CWU," Tony concluded. "The choices we face are going to be radical and unpalatable - but, importantly for our members, they are going to be necessary."

Tony stressed, however, that employers would be making a huge mistake if they assumed the CWU wouldn't dig deep to protect members' interests whenever necessary.

"During the postal dispute the employer egged us on, took us on and we stood up and faced up to them. We were able to find every single penny that was required of us to fight that dispute...and if it comes to it again this year, we'll find the money again.

"Let Royal Mail - or whoever else - be in no doubt that if they take us on we will do whatever is necessary to ensure we are in a position to fight on behalf of our members."

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GENERAL NEWS

InBrief

Kicking out homophobia

The CWU's pioneering campaign to tackle homophobia in football is to be stepped up – just one of many issues that will be discussed at the CWU's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Conference in Swansea on November 15. Full details for anyone interested in attending, a detailed report about homophobia in football - as well as pictures from the London Pride, Bournemouth and Brighton Pride events - can be seen at www.cwu.org/links/lgbtac

Obsessive? Compulsive?

Advice is to be given to members with regards to a disease which is all too often written off as a comic eccentricity - often with tragic effects. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is one of many issues that will be discussed at the forthcoming CWU Disability & Special Needs Conference in Birmingham on October 25. Full conference details - as well a report of the CWU annual conference debate on the need to raise OCD awareness - can be viewed at www.cwu.org/links/dsnac

UK pensions scandal

The daily hardship faced by millions of pensioners struggling to make ends meet on the basic state pension has been branded a 'national scandal' by CWU annual conference.

Delegates committed the union to campaign within the Labour movement, the voluntary sector and the National Pensioners' Convention for an increase in the state pension to bring it above the official poverty rate.

Urgent help is also needed, conference unanimously agreed, for the UK's current pensioner population.

Citing the shocking statistic that one in five pensioners are currently forced to scrape an existence below the poverty line in one of the world's richest economies, Gerry Ryan of Capital branch stressed the urgent need to heap pressure on the Labour Government to act without delay.

Brian Kenny of Liverpool Clerical agreed, pointing out that with massive under-saving for pensions across the population – and the fact that only a third of 20-year-olds are currently saving for a pension at all

– the present situation is set to get worse.

"This is a major issue for millions of people in this country," he said.

Retired Members' Advisory Committee member Ernie Purkiss blasted the Government's refusal to solve the problem by using the massive surplus in the National Insurance 'kitty'.

"The link to earnings should be provided now – not in 2012 if it ever comes at all. It's a national scandal," he said.

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns agreed, pointing out it would only cost £11 billion of the £38-£40 billion surplus to raise the basic state pension above the poverty level.

His advice to the Government was pointed: "Maybe you should stop spending £4 billion a year on an illegal war in Iraq – and if you did, maybe we would have the money!"

"It's an absolute disgrace that one of the richest countries in the world has one of the worst pension levels in Europe."

Recalling Tolpuddle...



Image credit: Derek Clash

There was no missing the CWU's presence at Tolpuddle this year thanks to an array of banners

CWU members were out in force in the Dorset village of Tolpuddle for the annual celebration of the brave stand made by six farm labourers in 1834 - one of the pivotal episodes in the British trade union movement.

The union's presence was colourfully proclaimed by a raft of banners during the traditional

march through the tiny village which passes many of the key sites connected with the main protagonists involved in the seminal showdown over poverty pay which continues to inspire trade unionists the world over.

● Full story at www.cwu.org/links/tolpuddle08

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Marion's brave stand

It takes courage to make a strong public stand on a deeply emotive issue – but as CWU member Marion Brain puts it, there are times when the stakes are so high that if you really believe in something "there's a need to speak out".

For the Birmingham, Black Country and Worcester branch proposals to cut the normal legal time limit for abortions from the current 24 weeks to 22, 20, 16 or even 12 weeks – proposals that struck horror into the heart of a woman who is certain she would never have had the opportunities she enjoys today had her ability to have an abortion at the age of 19 been restricted. "I know I would never have been able to have progressed with my union work or felt able to speak in public if I hadn't finished my education – and there's no way I would have finished my education if

I'd been forced to continue with the pregnancy," Marion told the Voice.

Appalled by the potential consequences for women in a similar situation if their 'right to choose' was curtailed, Marion decided she just had to speak out.

Having contacted a pro-choice campaign group and volunteering herself as a 'case study' for interviews, Marion was plunged into a media maelstrom, appearing on both the BBC 6 o'clock 10 o'clock news, ITN, More 4 and a raft of bulletins across the Midlands.

In so doing, Marion believes that in a small way she helped influence the public debate prior to the Parliamentary vote which left the current 24 week limit in place – something which she believes is a "great victory for women".

"It was clear to me that that up until then the debate had focussed on the rights of the foetus and not enough attention had been given to the rights of the woman," she said.

"Sometimes there's a need for the greater good that you're prepared to expose yourself a bit."

Plea for hope - rally



Gee and Dominique Walker at CWU conference

Thousands, including many CWU members, took part in a national march and rally against racism and fascism in London on Saturday June 21.

MPs, MEPs, trade union & faith leaders, and campaigners joined pop stars and celebrities on the march and 'carnival parade' from London's City Hall – where the British National Party's Richard Barnbrook is now an Assembly Member – to Trafalgar Square.

With the BNP clearly buoyed up by recent local election gains and next year's European elections looming, CWU general secretary Billy Hayes

warned that it was crucial to mobilise now against the forces of hate.

"We're going to have a big struggle on our hands...but we stopped them at Cable Street, we stopped them at Lewisham and we're going to stop them now."

Billy was speaking at a fringe meeting at CWU annual conference following a poignant plea for hope, humanity and faith by the family of black teenager Anthony Walker who was murdered on July 29, 2005.

Speaking at the packed Liverpool fringe meeting, Anthony's mother, Gee Walker, told of her joy at all the "white faces in the room – something which shows this is not a black thing any more", and her optimism for the future given that "a black man is now running for President of the USA."

Commenting briefly on the reason she had chosen to publicly forgive Anthony's killers, Gee said: "If I had perpetuated that hate, what would have happened? Looking at you guys I know that something positive has come out of this."

● More at www.cwu.org/links/againsthate

InBrief

Top that at Alvescot!

The future of CWU learning is taking shape in bricks and mortar at Alvescot – the latest milestone in the Oxfordshire education centre's transformation being the 'topping out' of a new accommodation and restaurant block. The new facility, specially designed to be carbon neutral, is replacing the infamously spartan 'chalets' that had long been a source of amusement, if not comfort, for successive generations of Alvescot 'campers'. Full story and pictures at www.cwueducation.org

Mike's MND rollercoaster

One man's courage and determination to ensure that something positive comes out of his personal fight against Motor Neurone Disease inspired delegates attending a fringe meeting at CWU annual conference. CWU retired member Mike Findley, former North East Divisional rep, told of a rollercoaster ride since doctors broke the devastating news that he was suffering from the incurable degenerative condition in 2005 – and his determination not to allow the disease to defeat him, manifested in his recent election as Mayor of Redcar. Full story at www.cwu.org/links/findley

TUC award hat-trick

Chris Wesson of Birmingham Engineering branch has been named as winner of the TUC Safety Rep's award for 2008. This is the third time that there's been a CWU winner with Barry Gapes (London City West) the winner in 2005 and Pete Eggleston (Birmingham Engineering) in 2007. National health & safety officer Dave Joyce said: "This is fantastic news for the union, with Chris making it a "hat-trick" of wins for the CWU." More at www.cwu.org/links/wesson

Gongs for CWU magazines

Tributes have been paid to the volunteer army of editors and contributors who collectively produce the union's thriving array of branch magazines. Top prize winner in the CWU's annual branch magazine competition – judged by Press Association industrial correspondent Alan Jones and sponsored by Century One Publishing – was Greater Manchester branch's GMR View. Second place went to the Plymouth & East Cornwall Argus, and third place to the humerously titled St Mungo magazine, produced by Glasgow & District Amalgamated Branch. Full story, pictures and judge's report at www.cwu.org/links/bmc08

Do you Know Your Limits?

It's official. Young people in the UK are drinking more than ever before. Not only that, few are aware of the effects of alcohol on their mental and physical health, or of how much their drinking adds up. At a time when drink related hospital admissions are at an all time high, is it really the case that we simply don't know when to stop? More at www.cwu.org/links/kyl

Ferrett gets scalped!

When it comes to showing solidarity with CWU comrades in times of need, few can beat the extrovert and lucrative show of support put on by Youth Advisory Committee vice chair Ralph Ferrett!

So determined was the Plymouth & East Cornwall branch youth officer to raise money for members facing hardship as a result of their stand against bullying behaviour by Royal Mail at Burslem, that Ralph – hitherto renowned for his flowing locks – decided to submit himself to a very public scalping.

The shearing – quite literally as it turned out – took place on the final night of Annual Conference in Liverpool when Celtic Night revelry was augmented by Ralph's ritual humiliation.

Hamming it up to the last, just seconds before the cutting began Ralph was cavorting about on stage, showing off the mighty mane that conference delegates had pledged £1,800 to see reduced to stubble.

Kent Invicta branch alone had stumped up £1,000 to the Burslem hardship fund for the privilege of doing the chopping. "They came at me with garden shears but (CWU vice president) Jane Loftus waded in with clippers when I squealed," Ralph told the Voice.

And does he harbour any regrets about the 'noble sacrifice' which has parted him with his trademark hair and left him chillier round the ears than he's been for many a long year?

Not a bit of it, stresses a man who cheerfully admits that he's always been "something of a shameless



Shearing: Ralph makes his 'noble sacrifice'

attention seeker!"

"The opportunity to raise some money for a good cause and be the centre of attention for a while was too good to pass up," Ralph concedes.

"Most people who have commented seem to think I look slightly less crazy now, so it's possibly a force for good in the world of Ralph to have a more sensible haircut."

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PUMPING UP OUR PRICES

Fuel prices have been one of the issues dominating the recent political agenda, with rising costs sparking the return of protesting lorry drivers to some of Britain's major roads and many pointing to our soaring petrol prices as one of the reasons for the governing Labour Party's electoral misfortunes. Voice 'Back Page' Debate turns the spotlight onto this hot topic...



TAX PAIN

AA public affairs spokesman **Andrew Howard** is adamant that the international oil market is "to blame utterly" for consumer misery, but feels that the Government could and should do more to help...

“The world market causes it,” he insists, explaining: “In the world market, prices and profits fluctuate and, so long as the laws of supply and demand operate as they do, this will continue.”

And, pointing to the recently announced super-profits being made by the world's oil giants, **Andrew** continues: “These companies are making these huge profits. They are certainly making windfall profits.”

Calls for a windfall tax should certainly be listened to and taken on board by the Government, agreed the AA man, although he insisted that his organisation does not have a political agenda as such and limits itself to campaigning for the welfare of its 15 million members.

“We do think that the Government needs to consider the possibility of a windfall tax on these companies, but we would like them to also find the fairest way in which this could be fed back to the ordinary UK motorist,” says **Andrew**.

The AA had, he continued, welcomed the Government's decision not to put an extra 2p tax on petrol, however, there is more that the organisation feels could be done by ministers.

“Britain has some of the highest levels of fuel tax in Europe and petrol prices affect

nearly everyone,” he notes.

“Of course, we are not a political party with a full set of economic policies and we do recognise that there are so many areas that the Government's economic policies and budgets have to address.

“But we do feel that motorists would like to see something done to reduce the tax burden on them.”

Environmental concerns and measures to reduce the amount of CO₂ that we put out are, he insists, “broadly supported” by the AA, although the organisation has objected to the extension of the new VED levy to older vehicles.

And, on road tax, **Andrew** disagrees with calls from some quarters for the abolition of the system and the revenue replaced through petrol tax.

In countries where this has been carried out, he explains, the practical advantages of the tax disc in terms of vehicle records and police checks have quickly become apparent.

“And also, when this has been suggested here in the UK, our members in more rural areas have always raised strong objections,” added **Andrew**.



Although ministers have pointed the finger of blame at oil companies, oil-producing nations and the world economy, opinion polls have indicated that many still hold the Government primarily responsible for their difficulties.

According to a recent BBC study, almost four in ten – 38 per cent – say that they mainly blame the Government, while only one-fifth – 22 and 20 per cent respectively – see the oil producers and refiners as primarily responsible.

Of course, each of the three – the oil producers and refiners, who set wholesale and retail prices and government ministers, who decide upon levels of taxation - share responsibility, but it is to government that people often look in the first instance.

However, the Government has attempted to help consumers by postponing the planned 2p rise in petrol duty.

Significant fuel tax reductions, the Government argues, would lead to economic shortfalls elsewhere in the economy. Indeed, while many may sympathise with lorry drivers and car owners, few would back cuts in funding to the National Health Service or the state education system to fund cheaper petrol.

Treasury Minister **Angela Eagle** has also pointed to the need to keep the UK on track to meet its carbon reduction emissions, for which fuel tax is one lever that government can use and she has spoken of the need to balance these aspirations.

Late July and August saw forecourt prices fall back slightly, but motorists' organisation the AA has pointed out that the average 3 per cent to 4 per cent reduction for consumers fell far short of the 12 per cent drop in wholesale market prices.

And, with major oil companies enjoying bumper profits – BP half-year: £6.7 billion, Royal Dutch Shell second quarter: £5.9bn and Exxon Mobil second quarter: £6bn – calls for another big “windfall” tax have won support.

As Voice went to press, pressure was increasing on the government to apply this one-off charge, although opinion remains divided as to where such revenues should go, while others warn that even a windfall tax is not a long-term solution.

The Government could, in theory, go further, imposing price controls on UK retailers, or even taking these companies into public ownership, but such actions seem unlikely.

The Government could try to apply pressure on the producers through international bodies such as the G8, but oil-rich nations have little incentive to voluntarily reduce their own profits.

Another option could be to take no action and simply allow the market to take its course.

Voice spoke to both AA spokesman **Andrew Howard** and Campaign Against Climate Change (CACC) spokesman **Phil Thornhill**, asking each of them for their organisation's respective views on the matter and suggestions for the future. **V**

ACT NOW

Phil Thornhill, a spokesman for CACC, believes that we must all get used to using our cars less and argues that “tackling climate change is going to cost money one way or another” and this must be the priority...

“But the less time and money we spend now, the more we'll have to spend later,” he adds.

“You can't say this is a serious problem but not deal with it.”

During the early summer, when forecourt prices hit an all-time high, many within the environmental movement – and some government ministers – urged motorists to change their habits, cutting out shorter journeys for example, but **Phil** believes that this did not have much effect.

“It didn't make much difference really,” he replied, arguing that “leaving it wholly to the market is a bad idea.

“I'm not saying that market mechanisms and pricing policy should not be used, but, simply left to itself, the market cannot deal with a crisis of this magnitude.

“Climate change is a looming catastrophe and we need to approach it as we would a national emergency. We need to set about it in a determined way that goes beyond the slight changes in individual behaviour that we've seen.

“If don't do it now, it will be worse for us later.”

Phil and the CACC want government to establish tougher targets for reducing emissions within the context of a rational,

overall plan, which would, he predicts: “Almost certainly involve reducing private car use.

“One obvious measure would be to make rail and other forms of public transport travel a cheaper option by comparison with the private car,” he suggests.

And other measures, such as in some parts of the country where local authorities, or, in some cases, private companies, are setting up car share schemes, are “excellent ideas” says the CACC spokesman.

However, without criticising such initiatives, **Phil** insists that “we need to go beyond well-intended piecemeal measures and have a rational system of overall planning that recognises the seriousness of what we're up against and sets about tackling it in a serious manner.”

But he admits that the question of the financial impact on individuals is one which must be tackled.

“There is a huge issue about addressing this problem in the fairest way possible and ensuring that the poor are not disadvantaged at the expense of the wealthier in society,” **Phil** explains.

“And we at CACC are determined that this process of change must be carried out in the fairest and most just manner possible.”

