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# VOICE



TELECOMS & FINANCIAL SERVICES | AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2008

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Fight for a pay rise  
taken to BT AGM



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**BILLY HAYES**  
GENERAL SECRETARY

The GS column can always be viewed prior to publication of the VOICE, along with daily updates on recent events at Billy's weblog: [www.billyhayes.co.uk](http://www.billyhayes.co.uk)

## 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](mailto: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](http://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](mailto:kslocombe@cwu.org) or call me on 020 8971 7497



# Grim resignation at Fujitsu in Birmingham



**Prophetic message:** workers mounted a spirited campaign, but multinationals are hard to budge

Disgusted 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.

Despite huge headway being made in negotiations with local management over a possible deal which would have saved two

production shifts at the Birmingham Business Park site, the rug was finally pulled on the employees - 100 of whom are CWU grades - when the plan was rejected by the Fujitsu Board in Japan.

At a stroke came the bitter realisation that top bosses at the multinational had no interest whatsoever in trying to save precious jobs in the West Midlands - even though just months earlier they had been lauded by Gordon Brown

during a special Prime Ministerial visit to the plant.

"Once Japan said 'no', both the membership and the negotiating team realised we'd reached the end of the road on the fight for jobs," assistant secretary Grace Mitchell told the Voice.

"I'm proud to say, however, that members' determination to stand firm against Fujitsu's betrayal remained unabated. Three strike days followed and more were scheduled, and I am convinced it was only that which forced the company back to the negotiating table.

"On the back of constructive discussions we suspended any further action and finally reached a final offer which, like the proverbial curate's egg, is good in parts - though we were only able to recommend it to the workforce with a very heavy heart."

The deal comprises the best voluntary redundancy terms ever secured by the CWU in Fujitsu - involving two and a half years pay for anyone with 25 years or more service, and two years pay for any ex-BT employees with under 25 years service. Anyone who joined after Fujitsu took over who volunteers for redundancy will receive a minimum of £5,000 - or three weeks pay for every year of service if that is greater.

Local management has also identified 33 jobs for CWU grades that will remain after telecoms manufacturing ceases at the site late this year. 18 jobs will remain in the production area, essentially carrying out finishing and quality control work, and a further 15 jobs have been identified in a new area - though to the dismay of CWU

negotiators, the company has resolutely refused to extend union collective bargaining rights to those roles.

"This position seems both perverse and stupid - because, as I've repeatedly pointed out, our members didn't solidly vote to go on strike to willingly go for a job that is non-union," said Grace.

"We know our members who remain at Fujitsu will stay loyal, and we thoroughly recommend they do. For those on BT terms in particular there is a huge issue about ensuring the company doesn't try to get them to trade these valuable terms away."

Grace concludes: "Although nobody is pleased with the final outcome, I believe that every single one of our members at Fujitsu Birmingham can be proud at the way they stood up against a ruthless multinational and won at least a partial victory.

"We can't get round the fact that two thirds of the jobs are still going - but the CWU would never have been able to achieve the redundancy terms it has had if not been for members' brave and dignified stand against Fujitsu's betrayal."

● As Voice went to press the CWU had just managed to halt plans for a new night shift at the plant as Fujitsu seeks to build up a stock of the materials made at the site before production shifts to Texas. While the union has accepted the ironic fact that those facing redundancy are busier than they've been for ages - receiving the opportunity to work unprecedented amounts of overtime and near-guaranteed £300 a month production bonuses - CWU negotiators successfully argued that launching a new night shift in the factory's final months would have been piling insult on to injury.

● Trouble at Antrim: see page 11

## Santander swoops on A&L

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

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: "Potentially this is a very serious situation. A take-over by any company already active in the UK could mean a large number of job losses. Staff deserve answers about their future and we urge the company to be upfront about its intentions and to provide assurances about 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.

● Recognition and pay: see page 11

# Stark warning to BT on pensions as bosses seek review

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.

"The CWU is very much on the ball with this, and we're determined to ensure that our members' interests are protected on the back of the Conference proposition. Those positions will not change."

Passionate debate on the pensions issue provided the backdrop for outgoing deputy

general secretary (telecoms) Jeannie Drake's final speech on a major CWU policy issue.

● The edited text of Jeannie's successful call for overwhelming support for the executive's motion can be viewed at [www.cwu.org/links/jde4](http://www.cwu.org/links/jde4)



## NEWS TROUBLE ON THE HORIZON?



Temperatures are rising in a number of areas - most notably in Openreach and BT Retail

# Outlook stormy at BT?

With tensions mounting over a series of vexed interrelated disagreements with BT, the industrial relations outlook could be stormy - unless the company can be persuaded to return to the spirit of partnership which has typified the CWU/BT relationship for years. **Simon Alford** reports...



Andy Kerr: disturbing recurrent themes

Problems are brewing at BT on many fronts - and as yet the jury is out over the company's willingness to defuse mounting tensions by engaging positively with the CWU.

Newly elected deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told the Voice: "This is one of the greatest challenges we face, not least because there are disturbing recurrent themes to many of the problems we are experiencing."

"The experiences of our members in different parts of the business are

remarkably similar - and a common element seems to be a growing tendency on the part of management to push through changes without consulting the CWU first.

"We've always been a progressive union, committed to seeking negotiated solutions, but the company needs to understand that 'partnership' is not a one-way street. If BT is to rise to the challenges it undoubtedly faces, it needs to work with us, not against us."

Since Conference, national level meetings have taken place with Openreach - and BT Retail Customer Service's new CEO Nigel Stagg addressed a special forum at which branch representatives and national officials forcefully expressed their concerns.

The continuing dialogue is encouraging - but ultimately the proof of management's true willingness to listen will be in the way they act.

## Blunt message on performance

Progress in talks with BT over the unagreed implementation of a new performance and appraisal system may have taken some of the heat out of a simmering industrial relations crisis - but boiling point isn't far off if the company fails to address CWU concerns.

That was the warning issued to senior BT management at CWU telecoms and financial services conference where delegates backed an emergency motion tabled by the Telecoms Executive calling for industrial action as a last resort if the company ultimately refuses to budge.

Amongst the red lines already drawn by the union is a categorical refusal to accept that an annual performance review score of "generally satisfactory" should ever

warrant punitive action against an individual.

Delegates committed the union to hold a special branch forum in October to discuss the next steps in the campaign against the unagreed ePerformance system.

Proposing the emergency motion, assistant secretary Simon Sapper told Conference: "Since the very well attended forum in April we've engaged BT in dialogue, and the dialogue has been quite productive. It is fair to say that the knives being wielded around have been either sheathed or the points blunted."

Simon stressed, however, that the union would never accept either an "artificial levelling which corrupts and undermines the appraisal process", or any suggestion that a 'generally satisfactory' APR score

should be the basis for anything but supportive counselling and coaching.

A failure by the company to accept these fundamental points, he stressed, would prove incendiary.

■ In a separate debate delegates unanimously committed the executive to negotiate a national agreement governing the operation of the 'performance management' process that is "respectful, supportive, corrective and not punitive."

Proposing the motion, which demands a ballot for industrial action if such an agreement cannot be reached by the end of this year, Tom O'Sullivan of Coventry branch said: "Members who've never had a need to approach the union are queuing up for advice, reeling with

## Discipline anger boils over

The way in which BT handles disciplinary matters held centre stage at Conference in Liverpool. Anger has been building because of a steep rise in the level of serious misconduct charges brought against CWU members on grounds of quality or manner.

Time and time again, delegates referred to a punitive culture which depresses morale and reduces efficiency. Latest statistics, published following Conference, showed that although the total number of disciplinary cases involving CWU members in BT fell slightly during the last six months of 2007 (down 7.3 per cent to 865 cases), the number of cases resulting in a disciplinary penalty being awarded had increased by 6.1 per cent. This means the chances of no penalty being awarded against you when disciplinary allegations are made has fallen steeply to around one in four cases, as opposed to over one in three for the period before the latest statistics.

Openreach and Retail are the overwhelming contributors to discipline cases, accounting for over 90 per cent of all cases between them. Within Openreach, discipline cases linked to quality and safety have reached endemic proportions, accounting for over 60 per cent of all discipline cases resulting in a penalty in that line of business.

The sense of unfairness was so intense that Conference turned its ire against BT's HR consultants Accenture. Against the advice of the top table, Conference adopted a motion condemning what was seen as a policy by Accenture to "prosecute and punish to the maximum penalty possible", and instructed the Executive to reach an agreement such that Accenture would not be involved in any appeal against a decision that their advisers had been previously involved with.

On behalf of the Executive, assistant secretary Simon Sapper agreed BT's handling of discipline cases was clumsy, crude, counterproductive and lacking in compassion. However, he urged Conference not to let BT off the hook by focussing on BT's agents instead of the real culprits. Despite his exhortation to "nail the bad guys who give Accenture their instructions and pay their wages", Conference voted to see Accenture in the same light as BT, and instructed the Executive to act accordingly.

After the debate, Simon told the Voice: "This resolution is a massive indication that we reject attacks on our members - wherever they come from".

Simon stressed the company should be under no illusion as to the seriousness of the situation it is creating. "There are some times in industrial relations terms when all the ducks line up in a row, the planets are aligned, the clouds brewing and the winds are blowing from the east - and you have all the elements in place for a perfect storm," he warned.



Tom O'Sullivan: staff are being "hounded"

the shock of finding themselves being hounded for productivity or disciplined for minuscule breaches of quality control."

Assistant secretary Grace Mitchell concluded: "Management style has had our members take to the streets before, and BT, if you don't sort this out they will be taking to the streets again."

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

# Grading fury at Openreach



John Donnelly: patience is now 'exhausted'

Fury at Openreach's flat refusal to accept long-standing CWU demands for the regrading of multi-skilled engineers boiled over at CWU Telecoms and Financial Services Conference in Liverpool.

Delegates voted unanimously for industrial action to be given serious consideration if the company continues to refuse to reconsider the decisive 'no' it finally delivered to CWU negotiations who have been pressurising bosses to come clean on their intentions for years.

The magnitude of the gulf between Openreach and the CWU on the issue became clear just before Conference when - far from conceding there was a case for upward regrading - the company dropped the bombshell that it believed "a significant number of roles should be at a lower grade than is currently the case".

Commenting in the last issue of Voice, assistant secretary Ian Cuthbert told of "bitter disappointment and widespread incredulity amongst members," stressing that while the union has always taken a responsible attitude towards industrial relations, management should be aware "we can be pushed too far".

"On attendance patterns, on grading and on disciplines for minor quality failures, management's actions are stoking a fire that may engulf them," he warned.

"Members are saying in ever-more strident tones that enough is

enough. Frankly it would be hard to disagree with them."

That assessment was dramatically borne out by the mood at the CWU's telecoms industry conference in Liverpool in June.

"Our members' patience has long since been exhausted and it is time for us to take this to the next level," argued John Donnelly of Glasgow and Motherwell branch.

Delegates unanimously agreed, committing the executive to hold a special branch forum by the end of October if a final attempt to engage the company in meaningful negotiations is rebuffed.

That forum will include a discussion on the use of industrial action as a means to force the company to take the CWU's demands seriously.

Supporting the motion on behalf of the Executive, Simon Trim warned: "If this is not sorted out by October branches need to be ready to lead their members into some form of industrial action."

# Agency ratio 'insult'

BT Retail must be brought to book for 'fiddling the figures' on agency ratios in a blatant attempt to circumvent one of its key pledges in the 'Resourcing Strategy' agreement with the CWU, telecoms industry conference delegates agreed.

For months concern has been mounting that the company has been 'cooking the books' by placing large numbers of agency workers under the Wholesale Line Rental (WLR3) short term resource banner to help it hit the 90:10 BT/agency ratio it agreed to in the deal that was brokered in 2006.

Despite early assurances by the company that it wasn't trying to "circumvent any commitments within that agreement" by falsely categorising agency workers as WLR3 short term resource, in

February this year it became clear that over 2,000 agency workers had been nominally placed under that banner to enable BT to meet the 90:10 ratio by December 30, 2007.

Blasting the company for "reneging on its part" of the Resourcing Strategy agreement, Simon Edwards of Mid Wales, the Marches & North Staffs branch concluded: "They have not only insulted us but insulted our members with what is effectively a sleight of hand. They should admit they have been caught with their pants down!"

Stuart Williams of South West and Thames Valley branch agreed: "BT think they can get away with it and pull the wool over our eyes....let's send a message that they can't!"

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

# Fight to save flexible working!

Industrial action could be on the cards if BT continues to erode the Flexible Working Hours Agreement (FWHA). Moving the successful motion at CWU annual conference, Brian Kenny of Liverpool Clerical recalled being part of the negotiating team back in 1976 that won the FWHA. "When it was implemented management had to recognise that everyone benefited from flexible working hours," said Brian, who conceded the agreement was constantly under attack from "short sighted managers."

Accusations levied against BT included the imposition of fixed lunch times and core attendance times without CWU agreement.

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

# Culture of fear at Openreach

Engineering members have called on the union to confront "the culture of fear" that has developed at BT/Openreach as a result of the way 10-point failures are being automatically treated as part of the serious discipline procedure.

A series of delegates told CWU engineering conference in Liverpool how members with 20 to 30 years of exemplary service were being hauled through the disciplinary procedure as a result of the way that managers are now interpreting the rules.

Jim Robertson of the Birmingham

branch claimed that the disciplinary approach was all about introducing "a slave ship mentality at Openreach."

"It is a culture of fear that our members have to face on a daily basis," said Jim.

Jan Zablocki of West Midlands branch declared that BT managers were "at war with their own people."

"BT has no confidence in its workforce, it doesn't respect its workforce," said Jan.

Steve Catterall for the Executive directed his remarks to the senior BT human resources managers sitting at

the back of the conference hall.

"There has been a jump from 16 per cent to 33 per cent in disciplinaries for this type of thing. It is a disgrace, the big stick has been replaced by the iron rod," said Steve, who believes that discretion has been taken away from line managers.

■ In a separate debate in the main telecoms and financial services industry conference delegates committed the union to jointly review the quality audit system and its associated processes "with a view to making them more positive and less punitive".

# 'Leading the Way' ...but to where?



Matt Gillett criticised a 'patchy rollout'

Dismay at BT Retail's rollout of the Leading the Way agreement were vented at the main CWU telecoms industry conference where delegates committed the union to rigorously police the deal to ensure the company lives up to what it has promised.

Matt Gillett of South West & Thames Valley branch pointed out that although the agreement is potentially one of the most significant set of guarantees negotiated for call centre workers, its implementation had been "patchy at best".

Stressing the need for BT to be swiftly brought to task about any rollout failures and for the deal to be "relentlessly promoted amongst members", Matt concluded: "The only way to embed this in the culture of the call centres will be to police the whole agreement and promote it with our members. The problem with anything we've done before on management style has largely been a failure to police it and make it stick."

"We owe it to our members to make sure this excellent agreement is fully implemented and to challenge the company whenever it is not."

Jamie Jenkins of South Wales agreed, lambasting "a half-hearted rollout" and "wasted opportunity."

Disappointment at the rollout of the Leading the Way agreement also spilled over at clerical conference with delegates accusing local operational managers and the National Resourcing Centre of effectively conspiring to "circumnavigate" the deal.

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

## Flashpoints

### Where's our 'Better Life'?

Continuing problems with management style across BT Retail are being exacerbated by BT's transformation programme and the rollout of the group-wide Right First Time initiative, CWU clerical conference delegates agreed. Across Customer Service, Business Sales, Business Repair and Consumer Sales many members are still being subjected to "single performance measures" - something that the deal that ended the 'Better Life' dispute of 1999 should have stopped. More at [www.cwu.org/links/better](http://www.cwu.org/links/better)

### Complaint Management

Unilateral moves by BT to introduce and implement an unagreed attendance review in Complaint Management have triggered a tidal wave of anger amongst staff and demands for union pressure "up to and including industrial action" if bosses refuse to budge.

Jamie Jenkins of South Wales branded the company's actions as "an attempt to completely remove any kind of flexibility through the back door." Clerical conference delegates unanimously agreed, bemoaning an "all too familiar story of BT implementing change without proper consultation". More at [www.cwu.org/links/CMfury](http://www.cwu.org/links/CMfury)

### Misusing procedures

BT stands accused of misusing occupational health procedures to force staff out of their jobs. Telecoms delegates at CWU annual conference told of widespread anger about the way medical assessments were being used, with reports of "abrupt questioning, verbal harassment and telephone interview referrals without the member attending an OHS surgery." More at [www.cwu.org/links/sick](http://www.cwu.org/links/sick)

### Vacation Planner farce

The difficulties faced by members in BT Retail attempting to book annual leave using the Vacation Planner system could easily lead anyone to believe it had been purposefully designed to put people off taking days off at all! That was the verdict of CWU clerical conference delegates who committed the union to address once again infuriating problems with a system which, they agreed, simply isn't fit for purpose. Much more at [www.cwu.org/links/unfit](http://www.cwu.org/links/unfit)

### Wholesale downgrading

BT unilateral decision to proceed with a major downgrading of jobs in Exeter Wholesale from C1, C2, C3 and D1 grades to B1CC faced unanimous condemnation at CWU Telecoms and Financial Services Conference as an "abuse" of the NewGRID agreement. Delegates ordered the union's executive to work to ensure that no such further downgrading occurs without full and meaningful consultation with the CWU. "It's not just about what happened to this group in Exeter - it's about the attitude of BT generally," said Steve Baynham of South Wales branch.



Jan Zablocki: bosses are "at war" with staff

Proposing the Edinburgh, Dundee & Borders branch motion, Martin Keenan told of a rising tide of anger amongst members "who have been at the hot end of a process that seriously punishes them for making honest mistakes."

## VOICEMAIL

## CWU enters digital TV age



Image credit: Janina Struk

## Lights...cameras...ACTION!

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](http://www.information.tv).

Remember this is 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.

Episode one includes special feature reports on the challenges posed by postal industry liberalisation, the uncertainty on pensions facing members in both Royal Mail and BT and the contribution made to the union by its increasingly active youth membership.

## Jeannie's a giant

Retired now for nearly twenty years, I watch from a distance, but with passionate interest, the CWU's massive problems brought about by the hateful Thatcher years. To the eternal shame of successive Labour governments they have totally failed to restore even the most basic union rights the Thatcher governments stole. This allied to, and I make no apology for saying this, the total stupidity of some working people who cannot grasp what can be done by getting together, has made the job of unions very difficult. That's why trade union giants must always be remembered. Arthur Willitt was one. When the Post Office and telecoms split he virtually single-handedly converted the head Postmasters manual to what became known as the 'engineering instructions'. But let's get to Jeannie Drake, because in effect she transcended two eras - and in both was massively effective. She truly is a giant in union culture and deserves a long and very happy retirement. In closing I'd just like to touch on one of her earlier achievements. That was the introduction of flex time, and I mean flexitime - not the feeble twittering apology it has now become. All the very best Jeannie.

Alex Woods, ex-branch sec, Chester

## Angry of Middlesbrough

I am not a fan or generally a writer of Mr Angry letters, but...

I worked for BT for 30 years - the happy anniversary being January of this year. BT gave me £500 in high street vouchers. Thank you BT.

They were delivered to my boss by registered mail in January and dropped off by a colleague on my rota day in June. Thank you BT.

On my return from holiday early in June I had a new job - no desk, no phone, no work. Thank you BT.

I'd been thinking about applying for release and was successful - after some false promises and an early morning email leaving me with less than a fortnight's notice. Thanks BT!

I have enjoyed my time with BT in

the main, in particular working with colleagues and the CWU.

My release interview was initially a conference call - then a local manager made sure I was leaving BT without any of its property.

He was diligent and continued business as usual, taking and making calls and consulting his computer. The drive back to collect my car was made entertaining by complaints about the way BT treats managers.

A collective malaise or a series of bad judgements? But what a shower of \*\*\*\* as we say in the trade!

Charlie Rooney, Middlesbrough

## Unfair Openreach

My thanks go to CWU rep Mick Teese who I had cause to call upon recently to discuss a dispute which I had as an employee of BT Openreach. I felt the action that my employer wished to pursue was inappropriate and wholly unfair. I discussed the case with Mick, who was able to present a fully researched and valid argument on my behalf. He contacted all the necessary parties involved and the matter was resolved quickly and fairly, with all parties satisfied.

I've certainly now felt the real benefit of being a union member and was very impressed with the service I received. I would certainly advise any employee to join as, like me, you never know when you may need to call upon them.

Peter Bailey, East Midlands branch

## Little's a star

I am writing to bring to your attention the excellent support I received from my CWU rep, John Little of London City West branch, based at Baynard House.

After 33 years unblemished service with BT, in 2005 I suffered some major personal problems which resulted in BT continually trying to "manage" me out of the company. I was constantly being summoned to meetings with management to review my performance. John was always there with me and gave me the confidence to carry on. Even when I just needed a chat he made himself available.

I've now decided to leave the company on Newstart, and wish to place on record my huge gratitude for John's help over three years.

Ray Prescott

## Follow my advice

I'd like to thank Kevin, Sharon, Roy and everyone at West Midlands & Worcestershire branch for their help in bringing a successful claim against a third party drunk driver who hit me whilst on call out duty. I'm also very grateful to Chris Drayton of Maurice Putsman & Co.

I would also like to thank the branch for their continuing help since I left BT under Newstart. Proof, as if it was needed, as to why

people should continue their membership when retired.

Paul Follows

## Dave's determination

I would like to express my, and possibly other members', thanks to the CWU especially Dave Johnson. I had worked for BT then Xansa/Steria for a total of 38½ years, 34 full time and 4½ part time. When Xansa declared in late 2007 that there was a redundancy package on offer, I was happy to apply, especially as the new set up did not have any vacancies for part-time C2s. The compensation payment to be awarded was calculated on a total of only the part-time salary but Dave's dogged determination ensured that full-time service be taken into consideration. This meant that three months after leaving I received an additional and substantial extra payment which will enable me to enjoy my time until my pension becomes payable.

Irene Garlick, Ashton-under-Lyne

## Evil on our doorstep

I found the May/June copy of 'Voice' very interesting, in particular the articles on Frank Isahak and Leon Greenman. 'Remember the victims of homophobia' was also very disturbing reading, but it reminded me there are other atrocities being committed in this country - not just abroad. Perhaps the worst is the brutal murder of family members, usually a daughter, in the name of so called 'honour killing'.

Our attention has been drawn, quite rightly, to what goes on abroad, but may I suggest that we also focus on some of the evils that go on in our own country.

Bob Harris, retired member, Solent

## Appropriate tribute

Thank you most heartily for including a full page obituary of the late Leon Greenman in the recent May/June edition of the Voice. It was a most appropriate tribute to a truly remarkable person and a very fine human being.

Gary Kenneth Watt, London

## Gold badge gratitude

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 who organised the event, and to all my old colleagues who attended the occasion. I hope this will be accepted by all as a sincere expression of my gratitude.

Paul Grace, retired general officer

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

## Nuclear or not? An argument against...

I was surprised not to read any letters in response to the 'Nuclear or Not' debate on the back page of the March/April issue of Voice. Although we've all got a lot to think about in these difficult times, I believe the danger posed by the number of new reactors planned is huge. Perhaps the following might provoke a reaction to the Government's plan.

The morning of April 26, 1986, was much like any other for my late father-in-law as he prepared for work on his farm in northern Sweden. But, unknown to him, what happened in Chernobyl 1,500 miles away earlier that morning may well have led to his premature death. Following the explosion in nuclear reactor, a plume of deadly radioactive material rose into the sky and, blown by the wind, quickly spread over much of Europe. By the time it had reached northern Sweden my father-in-law had been working in the rain for several hours, unaware that rain contained deadly caesium 137. Over the months that followed he became progressively weaker having been diagnosed with cancer, eventually passing away during October 1986. Thankfully, since Chernobyl, it seems the nuclear industry has improved safety but, as more reactors are built, the odds of another Chernobyl increase. Then of course there is what to do with all the waste products from the reactors - radioactive for half a million years. To put countless future generations in grave peril is immoral - and the reason I believe a Labour government should not be doing it.

John Hughes, Worthing



CAUTION: RADIATION

The Vertex and Pell &amp; Bales stories are featuring on



## Fury at Vertex pay debacle



Image credit: Janina Struk

Chrissie Smith: lent desperate members money

The CWU has secured the agreement of management at Vertex's Contact Birmingham call centre that a catastrophic catalogue of failures following the shambolic introduction of a new payroll system must never be allowed to happen again.

The debacle, which followed on from the company's decision to off-shore human resources to India to cut costs, meant that some staff working

on the Birmingham City Council contract were left virtually penniless when their wages failed to materialise or were paid short in June - with problems continuing into July.

Many others had their basic salaries or overtime paid incorrectly or paid short - but, adding insult to injury, the failure was compounded by an astonishing breakdown in company communications as the full scale of the problem emerged in June.

Following the passing of an emergency proposition at CWU Conference, a special 'drains up' meeting was held between CWU national negotiators and Vertex to establish what went wrong and to set in place measures to prevent a recurrence of a desperate situation which was only alleviated when lead rep Chrissie Smith started lending desperate members her own money.

Speaking after the meeting, assistant secretary Sally Bridge said: "The company apologised to the union and stated that there were a number of factors that had led to the pay problems, including a change of HR system and payroll provider as well as systems and human errors."

By way of compensation, management agreed to reimburse anyone who had incurred bank

charges as a result of the debacle, make a donation to a charity to be chosen locally and provide funding for a special 'celebration day' to "say sorry" for what happened.

Hopes that would have been the end of matter, however, were cruelly dashed in July when further complications arose in the subsequent pay run. Sums deducted direct from salary to cover advances that had been given to staff suffering hardship as a result of the previous pay-run were wrongly calculated. Significant numbers of employees discovered they had paid back far more than they had ever received amid general confusion as to how the 'assessed' repayments had been calculated.

Following the intervention of the CWU the company agreed to bring in a payroll expert to investigate apparent irregularities and explain how the sums had been arrived at.

Sally told the Voice: "We're obviously disappointed that, yet again, individuals have found themselves disadvantaged as a result of payroll irregularities," adding that members' patience was wearing very thin indeed.

● Full story at [cwu.org/links/payfarce](http://cwu.org/links/payfarce)

## No way Manx Telecom!

Workers at Manx Telecom have thrown down the gauntlet to bosses who appear hell-bent on trying to break the long held CWU 'golden rule' that in normal situations wages should always at least keep pace with inflation. As Voice went to press CWU members had just signalled their willingness to take industrial action to progress a 7 per cent pay claim that was met with an under-inflation 'final' offer by the company in June.

Despite the company having performed strongly both last year and in the first quarter of this year, bosses have resolutely refused to budge from a counter-inflationary offer of 4.1 per cent which, although an improvement on a previous offer, is still below that critical inflation figure.

"Manx Telecom's cynical attempt to break this link is highlighted by the fact that at the time it would only have cost the company a total of £15,000 to offer a deal that would have matched inflation," said assistant secretary Grace Mitchell.

"The company was asking for a spanking and it got one."

● Full story at [cwu.org/links/manxtel](http://cwu.org/links/manxtel)

## Defiance pays off at Pell & Bales



The power of protest: Pat Carmody (centre) with CWU vice president Jane Loftus and John Easy

A stark message of defiance and trade union solidarity delivered to the bosses of a London-based call centre has led to the reinstatement of a CWU activist who was sacked for speaking out in support of a suspended colleague.

CWU Capital branch's Pell & Bales

section secretary Pat Carmody was told of his reinstatement this morning - a week after more than 40 protesters gathered outside the Old Street call centre to noisily voice their fury at his dismissal for submitting a short article to a weekly newspaper.

The four sentence article, published in the Socialist Worker, simply and factually accurately reported that a well attended meeting of CWU members at the Old Street call centre had launched a campaign to defend a fellow worker - and that many colleagues had "signed a petition calling for the charges to be dropped".

At the time, CWU national organising secretary John East pointed out that the response was curiously at odds with the generally ethical stance of Pell & Bales, which provides outsourced call centre functions for a host of Third Sector clients.

These include charities Oxfam, Action Aid, Christian Aid, Cancer Research UK, the World Wildlife Fund, the NSPCC and UNICEF - and a number of trade unions including the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

"This is a very disturbing case which highlights many of the workplace problems faced by call centre staff. Pat was carrying out standard trade union activities and has been victimised for this," said John.

Commenting on Pell & Bales' change of heart, John told the Voice the move was "a victory for common sense" - but added he was very doubtful whether it would have occurred had it not been for the CWU's strong response.

## Bootle celebrates charity milestone



Marc (right) and Thomas Gibbons with Dan

The courage and determination of Liverpool member Marc Harden to not just give his seriously disabled son, Dan, the best possible quality of life - but to raise money for other disadvantaged children to boot - has long inspired his workmates at Alliance & Leicester in Bootle.

For almost a decade Marc's big-hearted colleagues have supported a raft of charity initiatives to raise money for Alder Hey Hospital's IMAGINE Appeal.

Numerous charity nights, raffles, bucket collections, book sales and sponsored events later, the Harden's appeal has just passed the £50,000 milestone. What an achievement!

● The Harden family's inspiring story can be viewed in full at [www.cwu.org/links/harden](http://cwu.org/links/harden)

### InBrief

**Going for growth in NI**  
Northern Ireland Clerical branch activists from HCL and Manpower have attended a special team-building and training weekend as part of an ongoing organising and recruitment drive. Branch secretary David Bell rallied everybody with a determined call "to build a vibrant and effective union organisation that will eventually lead to recognition in the HCL Belfast and Armagh sites." More at [www.cwu.org/links/nic](http://www.cwu.org/links/nic)

**Unpaid overtime in O2**  
Negotiations are to be sought with O2 to agree "an easily workable and understandable code of practice" covering log-on and log-off procedures in the company's call centres. Supporting the West Yorkshire branch demand on behalf of the COOC at CWU clerical conference, Karen Rose pointed out that at present large numbers of members are effectively being forced to work unpaid overtime. More at [www.cwu.org/links/otime](http://www.cwu.org/links/otime)

**Review BT Fleet grading!**  
Telecoms conference delegates have called for a full and complete grading review of all CWU represented grades in BT Fleet, against the advice of the Telecoms Executive. Executive member Steve Catterall warned that in the light of the recent loss of some contracts, including one covering the Environment Agency, passing the motion would leave members vulnerable to regional pay and the possible loss of future work. A majority of delegates, however, disagreed.

**G4S offer recommended**  
As Voice went to press the CWU was recommending a staged pay rise in G4S of 3 per cent in July and a further 1 per cent in January 09, together with new minimum rates of pay for BSOs and Vault Officers and revised short term cover arrangements. Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove said: "This offer will lead to a 4 per cent rise in hourly rates which is higher than other G4S increases this year, at a time when private sector pay rises are averaging 3.5 per cent. It also provides for valuable new minimum pay levels for certain grades, and a fairer term cover procedure." More details are available on the members' section at [www.cwu.org](http://www.cwu.org)

**Opportunity at Monteray**  
A golden opportunity exists to massively expand CWU membership in Monteray - but the clock is ticking! Assistant secretary Simon Sapper explained to CWU annual conference delegates that the unique window of opportunity had opened up as a result of the five different parts of the business being merged into one entity - allowing the union to capitalise on the recognition agreement that currently covers just two parts of the business. More Monteray news at [www.cwu.org/links/montopp](http://www.cwu.org/links/montopp)

## FEATURE FIGHT FOR AGENCY JUSTICE TAKEN TO BT'S AGM

This story is featuring on



# TWO-PRONGED ATTACK ON INJUSTICE

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 an increase in years. **Simon Alford** reports...

**N**aming and shaming is the aim - and shame and embarrassment is precisely what BT will get unless it addresses an immediate and pressing injustice in agency pay rates.

For months the CWU has been warning top level management that patience is fast running out over the stark reality that a significant proportion of BT's workforce hasn't had a pay rise for years.

The first of what will become regular public manifestations of that anger was played out in front of shareholders arriving at BT's AGM at the Barbican in central London last month.

The noisy and deliberately eye-catching protest comprised around 50 CWU activists from across the country, including a number of the union's agency members, brandishing placards, flags and a megaphone.

All wearing t-shirts promoting the union's "Power-Up for Agency Pay" campaign, the good-humoured protesters handed out leaflets to shareholders explaining BT's duplicitous position on agency employment - a stance under which it effectively denies any responsibility for thousands of workers in its call centres.

The "Power-Up for Agency Pay" campaign - formally launched at CWU annual conference several weeks earlier - seeks in the first instance a pay rise for the Manpower and Kelly employees who have not received a pay increase in the last 12 months or more.

These employees work alongside, and do exactly the same work as, directly employed BT staff - but are paid at a lower rate, have far inferior terms and conditions, and don't even qualify for an annual pay review.

Many CWU agency members, some of whom have worked continuously at BT sites for up to ten years, haven't had a pay rise at all for over four years.

Prior to the protest, deputy general secretary (telecoms) Andy Kerr told the media: "BT relies on around 8,000 agency workers to deliver key aspects of its business, yet there is no meaningful mechanism in place for implementing pay increases for them. Even where pay increases have happened, they have only been a matter of a few pence per hour which goes nowhere near to addressing



Jamie O'Dowd  
(agency worker)



Andy Kerr  
(CWU DGS telecoms)



Graham Colk  
(NEC member)



Sally Bridge  
(national officer)

current cost of living issues.

"BT is deliberately constraining the pay of agency workers and this is completely unacceptable in a cutting-edge modern blue chip company."

As noisy CWU demonstrators did their utmost outside the AGM to highlight BT's complicity in holding agency wages static, inside the Barbican two CWU members used their right as small shareholders to question the Board directly.

Jamie O'Dowd, a 999 operator and Lincolnshire branch agency member, told the AGM that he was one of over 8,000 agency workers in BT who "make an enormous contribution to BT's success" - but that he personally had not received a pay rise for more than 2 years.

"I know that BT is not the direct employer, but I also know that you constrain the employment agencies from offering us any regular or sufficient pay rise," he told the Board.

"BT spends over 11 million pounds a year on agency recruitment and attrition - wouldn't this be better spent properly rewarding and retaining your 8,000 agency workers?"

Predictably the Board's responses skirted round the issue.

"Firstly, the relationship is with the agency, not the worker," responded BT chairman Michael Rake, who also chairs the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. "We ask the agency to provide the workers. The arrangement gives flexibility, and allows for peaks and troughs to be dealt with."

Recently appointed BT chief executive Ian Livingstone continued: "We're trying to work with the agencies, so as to change the contracts we have, and to change the focus on the level of output rather than the number of workers - so that good output is rewarded."

Unimpressed by the company's determination to persist with the line that it has little or no responsibility for its agency workforce, Jamie O'Dowd used his supplementary question to propose that "until the issue is resolved the BT board defer their own pay rises and bonuses."

Unsurprisingly that suggestion was met with silence!



### POWER-UP FOR AGENCY PAY!

Launching the "Power-Up" campaign at CWU annual conference in June, assistant secretary Sally Bridge stressed the union's aim is to ruthlessly expose BT's complicity in keeping agency pay low.

Despite the company's protestations that the thousands of long-term agency workers who literally keep its operations running in many areas are not technically its employees, BT's upper hand as 'client and customer' in the relationship with the agencies is obvious.

In meetings with both Manpower and Kelly, Sally pointed out, even the agencies admit as much when themselves being pressed to address the fact that people are going without pay rises for years.

"Both have argued that they continue to press BT on the matter of pay on a regular basis - and that they too are concerned at the rates of pay - but that they are constrained by BT in awarding any pay increases," Sally said.

Referring to BT's recent insistence in a letter to the CWU that "in the final analysis the agency establish their pay rates within their own commercial models and against prevailing market conditions", Sally served notice that BT's days as the 'elephant in the room' that no-one talks about are well and truly over.

"It's like listening to a gramophone

where the needle is stuck, and quite frankly BT insult our intelligence by continuing with this old chestnut," she stressed.

"If they are seriously arguing that there is no link between the contract price and the pay rates then they either think we are stupid or they actually believe it - and therefore are naïve in the extreme.

"To date BT has not had a great deal of bad publicity regarding their resourcing model - they play up to the fact that they are a blue chip company, and the public only see this public face, not the detail of the true private face.

"My message to BT is that we did not seek this punch-up - indeed we would like to meet with you and have constructive talks so we can make clear how deeply unhappy our members feel."

Pointing out that it has been the company's unwillingness to enter into meaningful negotiations that has resulted in the launch of the "Power-Up" campaign, Sally concluded: "You have given us no alternative on this matter - so BT, we will be campaigning hard. It will be personal, and it will be in your back yard.

"Our members have suffered this unfairness for too long - they deserve better and they look to their union to mount a strong and successful campaign. We cannot, and will not, let them down."



All image credits: Janina Struk



Image credit: Howard Burns

## Wider campaign goes on...

Two years after the launch of the CWU's 'Justice for Agency Workers' campaign, positive political developments in Westminster and Brussels are giving grounds for hope...

Although the CWU's efforts to improve conditions for agency members are likely to be dominated by the "Power-Up" campaign over the coming weeks and months, the union's sights are still firmly set on the wider and longer-term goals championed in the parallel 'Justice for Agency Workers' campaign.

While the "Power-Up" campaign is seeking an immediate pay rise to mitigate an immediate injustice, it has long been clear that only wider measures to prevent the unequal treatment of agency workers will ultimately rid the UK of agency exploitation.

### Momentous shift

As such, close tabs are being kept on political developments both at home and in Europe - and the last issue of Voice reported a "potentially momentous breakthrough" which came in the form of a joint statement issued by the Government, the CBI and the TUC.

That statement said that in broad terms agreement had been reached on "how fairer treatment for agency workers in the UK should be promoted" - and went on to stipulate that agency workers should be entitled to treatment equal to that of directly employed staff doing comparable work after 12 weeks in the job.

If this translates into

legislation in the way the CWU believes it should, that would have a beneficial effect for thousands of workers. Outgoing deputy general secretary Jeannie Drake cautioned, however, that "there's still much work to do on the detail of any UK legislation - including ensuring there are robust anti-avoidance measures in place so that agency workers really do see the benefit."

### Brussels breakthrough

Since then a further political agreement has been reached in Brussels on the draft EU directive on temporary agency work - which the CWU has long championed - which appears to be leading to the formal adoption of the directive following "legal and linguistic verification" of the text.

Speaking at CWU Conference in Liverpool in response to a motion congratulating "an extremely professional campaign to date", assistant secretary Sally Bridge said she had "no doubt that without the CWU campaign we would not be in the position we are today" - but warned there was no room for complacency.

"We do need to be mindful of the small print," Sally stressed, "...and we will need to have a strong and meaningful definition of what exactly are the exemptions and how they apply if this is to be

meaningful legislation which our members, particularly on the BT contract, are to benefit from.

"It is our intention to get underneath this detail," Sally pledged: "We will shortly be taking extensive legal advice, and we will need to forcefully argue that there should not be loopholes which employment agencies and end users can exploit to avoid the terms of the directive."

Stressing, however, that it was a case of 'so far so good', Sally concluded: "That work will start immediately."

### A case of 'wait and see'

The extent to which employers themselves are uncertain as to where the debate on agency rights is leading was demonstrated at BT's AGM.

Responding to a question posed by CWU NEC member Graham Colk regarding the impact "anticipated legislation on equal treatment" would have on the BT's resourcing profile, BT chief executive Ian Livingstone told the AGM: "We'll have to wait to see how the law will work. We've already made changes on this, including in terms of the number of permanent employees in call centres.

"However, we need to keep some flexibility - some workers prefer this. But we will comply with any equality requirements."

## PERSONAL FACE OF EXPLOITATION

The human cost of agency exploitation was poignantly exposed at CWU annual conference when a series of agency members spoke out about what their 'second class' status really means to them.

Manpower employee and South West & Thames Valley branch member, Heidi Walsh summarised the problem in a nutshell. "I work in Plymouth BT Retail Business Repair as an on-line advisor. I do the same job as my BT colleagues but get £4,000 to £5,000 less pay per year than they do. The last time they increased my pay was in November 2004 - by the princely sum of 50p per hour.

"At each year's pay review we are played off between BT and Manpower - and when they tire of blaming each other we're told 'well you're better paid than other agency CS advisers in the area'."

Turning to what it feels like to receive no pay rise when many of those around you are, Heidi stressed: "The CWU is to be congratulated on achieving a 4.3 per cent pay increase this year for BT employees - but please don't underestimate the impact this is having on the Manpower members, causing low morale and making them feel like second class citizens.

"Nor should we underestimate the outrage amongst BT employees about the way their agency colleagues are treated."

Speaker after speaker pointed out that not receiving a pay rise year after year is



▲ Above: Telecoms executive member Nick Darbyshire explains the issues behind the protest to a BT shareholder  
Main image: Just some of the protesters who gathered outside the Barbican

tantamount to receiving a pay cut. Agency member Jackie Smith of Liverpool Clerical pointed out that while the money she receives didn't seem too bad in 2005, its value in real terms has been dramatically eroded. "How much longer will it be before it's the minimum wage?" she asked.

Mark Kelvin of West Yorkshire branch told how agency members are "fed up of being the ping-pong ball" in the game being played out between the agencies and BT - but it was Jamie O'Dowd of Lincolnshire who most dramatically evoked what it is like to be an agency worker in 2008.

"You are considered as the underclass," he said. "You sit alongside people who do the same job who have worked there for less time than you but who can earn up to £8,000 a year more than you.

"What little disposable income you did have has all but gone and at the current rate of inflation your outgoings will soon be more than your incomings."

The combined effect of agency injustice, Jamie pointed out, becomes especially clear and harrowing to watch when people are teetering on the financial brink and fighting ill health at the same time.

"When you are ill, unpaid sick leave is not an option," he pointed out.

"The distressing sight of people clearly unfit to work suffering, struggling to stay afloat when they should be at home getting well is Dickensian and unacceptable." ▼

## ON THE WEB

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

### ■ 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.



### ■ 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.



### ■ Postal workers bite back

Postal delivery workers have 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. Royal Mail must adopt a new 'get tough' approach and prosecute all dog attacks, delegates agreed.



## Suspicion over C&W ballot upset

The CWU's long-running campaign for recognition at Cable & Wireless has suffered a serious setback after a majority of workers in the company's Field Services division decided they do not want to be afforded the protection stemming from union recognition rights at the present time.

In a ballot organised by the statutory body which rules on recognition issues, 77 members of the potential bargaining unit voted for recognition compared with 254 against. Only 28 individuals did not participate in the ballot.

Both during and after the ballot process - which had been subject to repeated appeals from the company which had engaged 'union avoidance' specialists to run its sophisticated 'vote no to recognition' campaign - a number of CWU members reported what they felt to be unfair pressure being placed on them to vote 'no'.

National organising secretary John East told the Voice of "significant concerns" over the ballot process, stressing: "We will continue to raise these and other concerns with the Central Arbitration Committee, not with a view to overturn the ballot, but to ensure that fair standards are set for other campaigns."

Commenting on the apparent perversity of the result given that the demand for recognition at C&W had been entirely driven by members with the company - not from union headquarters - John added: "The C&W workforce appear to have been taken in by the company's public change of heart over outsourcing plans that were cancelled, and some



Dark days: newspaper stories at the outset of the recognition bid - but has C&W really changed?

changes in management style.

"We remain to be convinced, however, whether the improved management style will prove permanent - or whether the next crisis will lead to them reverting to form and solving their problems at the expense of the workforce.

"If that proves the case, the tragedy is that the CWU will not now be able to try again for recognition for at least the next three years.

"We're not, however, going to walk away from our members in C&W -

we'll still be there to defend members individually, just as we've always done before.

"Although I know that many within the bargaining unit we proposed, and also the growing number of CWU members in other parts of C&W, feel deeply disappointed by what has happened, I'd urge all those who believe workers deserve a say in workplace affairs not to give up. Stick with the CWU - and we'll be here to fight another day."

## Call for clarity on outsourcing



Flashback to an earlier CWU campaign

Clear principles need to be set in place to govern BT's outsourcing and offshoring activities if the livelihoods of CWU members in the UK are not to be placed in jeopardy, CWU telecoms and financial services industry conference delegates decided.

Despite Executive opposition to the demand for negotiations with BT leading to a BT-wide "holistic resourcing principles agreement", a clear majority of delegates agreed that such an agreement should:

- Ensure long-term work undertaken to serve UK customers should be primarily sourced within the UK
- Guarantee that all C and D skill band work remains within BT within the UK

- Ensure that, before any work is transferred offshore, it is made available to CWU members with restricted capabilities who do not have suitable work within their restricted ability
- Enshrine a commitment from BT to maximise long-term employment opportunities within the UK by retaining the knowledge and skills base within the communities in which BT serves its customers.

The motion also demands that, prior to outsourcing any work, BT should first consult with the CWU, giving detailed business reasons for its proposals, and identifying suitable

alternative roles for any members of staff affected.

Proposing the motion, Jan Zablocki of North Midlands branch conceded that outsourcing is "a difficult issue to grapple with", but claimed the criteria being suggested were "reasonable, achievable and practical".

Executive speakers Bernard Roome and Mark Taggart disagreed, warning that there were risks inherent in seeking a company-wide agreement with BT on outsourcing where none exists at present.

One "unintended consequence", they argued, would be to potentially give the green light to outsourcing in the large parts of BT where it isn't presently an issue.

Also opposing the motion, Mike Johnson of Dundee Clerical claimed that the jobs of CWU members in outsourcing companies like Sitel could be placed in jeopardy if the terms of the proposition were fulfilled to the letter.

A majority of delegates, however, disagreed on both counts.

## A skills challenge we cannot ignore

Negotiations are to be sought with BT over a raft of issues thrown up by the ongoing implementation of the 21st Century Network (21CN) - a massive programme of modernisation and upgrading based on internet protocol (IP) technology.

Ultimately 21CN will turn the present analogue copper wire-based network into a digital network. Given the scale of the change this conversion will mean to members' working lives it has become increasingly clear that the union has massive new challenges to face.

These necessitate the setting of new policies to ensure that jobs, sites, terms and conditions and grading are properly dealt with - and crucially that members are equipped with the skills they need to seize the opportunities thrown up by the greatest investment in the UK's communications infrastructure in decades.

The scale of that investment was amplified by a commitment secured by the CWU at the Labour Party Policy Forum in Warwick in July that the party's next manifesto will include a pledge to "promote universal access to the faster generation of broadband to all citizens".

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr, who attended the talks, said: "Following on from the CWU's long-standing 'Demand Broadband' campaign, the pledge cements an ever-widening realisation that there needs to be a social dimension to the communications revolution currently taking place. We're very pleased this commitment is now in place."

Recognising the challenges that lie ahead, delegates at the CWU's telecoms and financial services conference in Liverpool instructed the Telecoms Executive to enter talks with BT with a view to reaching a comprehensive agreement which will include:

- A holistic resourcing agreement which will include principles that will apply when consideration is given to work being offshored

- Sorting out the grading structure to ensure it is fit for purpose in the new environment and gives due credit to the skill-sets that will be needed

- An acceptance on the part of BT that it must retain its skills and knowledge base in the UK and therefore limit the use of contractors and offshoring that would see those skills and knowledge base move out of the company and / or the country

- Restrictions on the exportation of high value skills abroad to prevent de-skilling in the UK - the objective being to retain all C2, C3 and D1 work in the UK, as well as all new front office work

- The clear definition of all the new skills that will be needed in the 21CN environment and for BT to put in place the training required to equip its UK workforce to deliver the new products and services

● Full story at [www.cwu.org/links/skills](http://www.cwu.org/links/skills)

## Emotional farewells...



Image credit: Janina Struk

Massive contribution: Bill McClory makes his final conference speech, flanked by Jeannie Drake

Heartfelt tributes have been paid to two of the brightest stars of the trade union stage - Bill McClory and Jeannie Drake - who made their final CWU Conference curtain call in Liverpool in June.

The last issue of Voice featured a major profile of outgoing deputy general secretary Jeannie Drake, in which she outlined the reasons why she had decided to step down to concentrate on her crucial work in the pensions sphere. Former assistant secretary Bill McClory will also continue his much-respected work in the pensions field, remaining a BT Pension Scheme trustee - and it was that role incoming deputy general secretary (telecoms and financial services) Andy Kerr chose to highlight as he told of the "massive contribution Bill has made during a

career in which he has been the ultimate professional in everything he touches."

Stressing that BTPS members can be reassured that "a very safe pair of hands" is looking after their interests during the current period of uncertainty (see story on page 3), Andy concluded: "Bill has worked tirelessly in this area and there's no doubt in my mind that the BTPS would have been in a hell of a worse state had it not been for people like Bill McClory looking after members' interests."

Turning to Jeannie, Andy's tribute was equally heartfelt and generous: "If I can do half as good a job as Jeannie's done over the years I'll be well pleased. She may only be 4ft 11ins and has very small shoes, but I tell you, they're really big to fill!"

## Strike ballot at Fujitsu Antrim

As Voice went to press members at Fujitsu Antrim were being balloted for industrial action over pay.

Having narrowly rejected the company's 4 per cent pay offer in June - which at the time compared to an inflation rate of 3.8 per cent - attitudes appear to be hardening in the light of subsequent increases in RPI and a general sense that the cost of living is actually rising higher than the official figures suggest.

With the company still refusing to budge from its 4 per cent offer, members attending a special meeting to decide how to respond voted three to one to be balloted for industrial action. That decisive vote prompted the Telecoms Executive to agree to ballot with a 'yes for action' recommendation.

"This has been coming for a long time," assistant secretary Grace Mitchell told the Voice. "Although the company's offer was above inflation when it was originally made, these members are low paid and are seeing all their costs rising sharply.

"Their pay negotiations have been held up by what's been going on at Fujitsu in Birmingham - and during that time inflation has increased sharply, now standing at 4.6 per cent.

"Our members are increasingly determined that they deserve a better pay rise than the one they rejected, and Fujitsu ignores that at its peril.

"The company can't afford to have industrial action and the fact is that the Antrim site is doing well and expanding its business. It's time our members there started to share in that success."

## Standing firm on pay at O<sub>2</sub>

Another above inflation pay rise will be sought for workers at O<sub>2</sub> in the next pay round - but assistant secretary Emma Forrest warned that this year's favourable settlement was not a sign of a 'collective lobotomy' having taken place at the company.

Emma told CWU annual conference delegates how since de-merger, O<sub>2</sub> members pay had fallen well behind their counterparts at BT, with an O<sub>2</sub> B2 grade employee earning just over £3,500 less than their BT counterparts.

While stressing the 4.1 per cent pay rise in the last pay round represented a "historic first" she warned: "O<sub>2</sub> have not had that much-needed lobotomy and their pay philosophy remains exactly the same - a philosophy that is driven by individual performance and market rates.

"Future pay negotiations are set to be even more fraught and challenging," Emma added - but insisted these are "challenges that we can and must win to secure a decent future for our members in O<sub>2</sub>."

Concerns were also expressed at Conference over outsourcing, resulting in calls for the "ring fencing" of work already outsourced to other countries while campaigning against further development of this practice. Frances Burke from West Yorkshire warned the workforce would not sit back and see work outsourced to India. There was also condemnation for the way in which O<sub>2</sub> have been aggressively managing sickness under the Conduct, Attendance and Performance Policy.

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

## InBrief

### More for less at VM

Concern has been expressed about Virgin Media constantly attempting to get "more for less" out of its workforce. CWU telecoms industry conference delegates noted that Virgin Media employees are still expected to complete 12 service calls in 7½ hours, despite the company introducing more types of work and "must do tasks." Steve Browett of Croydon and South London accused the company of causing stress by the way in which they keep piling the load on the workforce. More at [www.cwu.org/links/vmwork](http://www.cwu.org/links/vmwork)

### Pudsey learning gong

The CWU's Charlie Elliot Learning Centre at Pudsey Telephone Exchange has received a prestigious TUC unionlearn award for its successful provision of ICT courses for retired CWU members. After receiving the award from Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, John Denham, lead union learning rep Trish Vollans told the Voice: "Through offering learning to those who would not otherwise have had that opportunity, we are aiming towards a more equal society." Full story at [www.cwu.org/links/pudsey](http://www.cwu.org/links/pudsey)

### Never too late to learn

The CWU's Portsmouth, West Sussex & Isle of Wight Branch has just recruited retired member and octogenarian Don Cornell to be their latest union learning rep. Don, 81, joined the CWU as a GPO Poling Engineer in September 1963. Since then he has played a consistently active role in the branch, and is currently the retired members' secretary. More at [www.cwu.org/links/cornell](http://www.cwu.org/links/cornell)

### H&S in the North West

Two Openreach engineers have just successfully completed a degree-level qualification in occupational safety and health - and are now determined to use the qualification to promote the role of union safety reps in the North West. John Marsh and Jason Morley also hope their achievement will lead to wider recognition of the possibilities of further education and the benefits to Openreach of having highly qualified safety reps. More at [www.cwu.org/links/usrdegree](http://www.cwu.org/links/usrdegree)

### Thanks to Janet...

A charity for people who are disadvantaged in the labour market is quids in thanks to the exceptional contribution made by CWU Meridian branch learning centre tutor, Janet McBride. The branch decided to show its gratitude to Janet by making a special donation to her chosen charity, the Shaw Trust, which provides special training and work opportunities for people who find it difficult to get a job due to disability, ill health or other social circumstances. More at [www.cwu.org/mcbride](http://www.cwu.org/mcbride)

## Double boost on recognition and pay at A&L

The CWU has negotiated the restoration of union bargaining rights for 1500 Band 3 staff at the Alliance & Leicester. The recognition deal, signed in June, comes 14 months after ALGUS members voted en-masse to merge with the CWU - and almost exactly a year after recognition rights were re-established for Band 1 & 2 employees.

Bargaining rights have now been restored for all the grades in Alliance & Leicester whose collective bargaining rights were terminated when the company de-recognised ALGUS in December 2006.

Under the latest agreement, Band 3 employees will now have their own separate and distinct bargaining unit with most of the day-to-day representational activities being conducted by ALGUS National Branch president Debbie Cort.

Debbie told the Voice: "I'm incredibly pleased that our persistence and tenacity has paid off. It wasn't acceptable that this large

group of staff had no collective bargaining rights, and it's a demonstration of their grit that the members stayed with us through troubled times."

National secretary Joe Reynolds agreed: "This is terrific news for our members who have in effect been in limbo for the past 18 months. The work of re-building will now begin."

Deputy general secretary (telecoms and financial services) Andy Kerr added: "This agreement successfully concludes negotiations on recognition and it yet again demonstrates the ability of the CWU's Telecoms and Financial Services Department to work effectively in partnership with employers across the range of telecoms and financial services companies."

● All three Bargaining Units in the Alliance & Leicester have voted overwhelmingly in favour of a two-stage pay increase for the July 2008 pay review. Members in all units voted by over 80 per cent in favour of the agreements, details of which can be viewed at [www.cwu.org/links/alpay](http://www.cwu.org/links/alpay)



Merger bears fruit: Union bargaining rights are now restored and a pay deal concluded

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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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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 CO<sub>2</sub> 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. ▽

## 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.”

