Your union needs you!

See page 3
Belonging to a trade union is about using our collective strength to defend and enhance the jobs, terms and conditions of workers. Elsewhere in this edition of The Voice you will hear of the challenges we face in the postal, telecommunications and financial services industries and the work led by Terry Pullinger in the postal sector and Andy Kerr in the TPS sector to meet those challenges. Protecting your interests is what we exist for as a union.

In the coming weeks and months we will be talking to you about how we redesign our union from top to bottom. It’s time for us to show a willingness to bring new ideas and energy to the trade union movement. So redesign is fundamentally about rejuvenating our representatives and members to take action and collectively reassert trade union values at work and in wider society. Recruiting new members into the union makes our position stronger which is why we are determined that everyone should play their part in strengthening our recruitment strategy.

Any union is only as strong as its membership.

Dave Ward and Tony Kearns
General secretary and senior deputy general secretary respectively

GS Column

This is a defining time for the trade union and wider labour movement. I cannot recall a period when the future seems so uncertain and potentially divisive and where the challenge to reassert trade union values industrially and politically, appears so complex and difficult.

Brexit, Trump, the future world of work and a whole generation set to miss out on decent jobs, homes and pensions – these are very difficult times. Simultaneously we are seeing the public services we rely on - hospitals, care, schools and housing - suffering from severe strain, lack of investment and no plan for the future.

And as in-work poverty grows, through an explosion of insecure employment models, the beginning of March heralds a whole new set of restrictions on workers’ ability to stand up for themselves as the Trade Union Act takes effect.

The decision to exit the European Union has been made. The debate now is how we build a progressive country. We must take our stand by bringing workers together and make greater demands for jobs that provide higher living standards, radical solutions to housing and for investment in the services that the vast majority of people rely on.

Fighting for you

For our union, the right starting point is of course to take a very strong stance against the pressures our own members face in postal, telecommunications and financial services. Whether it’s insecure employment, pay, pensions or relentless efficiency targets – what united us - I am convinced responsibility for this and are being allowed to present the debate about the future as nothing more than Leave or Remain.

The challenge to exit the European Union has been made. The debate now is how we build a more equal society. We need to confront some hard truths.

CLEAR VISION NEEDS ARTICULATING

We aren’t talking through with a simple vision and a clear alternative to the path the country is on. Nor is the trade union movement doing enough to mobilise our members to deliver a fair deal for workers everywhere have in common is increasing pressure to work harder, faster and cheaper for less. But this is also what unites us - I am convinced that fighting for a new deal for workers will be the catalyst for a new political settlement and a fairer and more equal society.

Dave Ward
GENERAL SECRETARY

Over recent issues we have seen some very high profile figures write in The Voice as our guest columnist. This is set to continue. However, now is the appropriate time to hand the page over to the membership. Never before has it been more important for the union to be strong in all sectors and industries where we have members. Today, we are asking for your help with this – we want you to recruit any non-members in your workplace to the CWU.

Below is a message to you from the general secretary and senior deputy general secretary
In an uncertain world, where the normal rules of politics and economics are in an increasing state of flux, the CWU’s priority remains protecting and promoting the interests of our members.

In the face of some serious challenges, the union’s Four Pillars of Security aim to deliver a long-term settlement with Royal Mail based on a coherent and purposeful national strategy backed by the union’s industrial strength. The talks with Royal Mail will be critical in not only securing a pensions solution for all, but protecting the future jobs, standard of living and retirement security of all our members in the Royal Mail Group (including Parcelforce).

The best defence against the continued threats to our DB pension, the failures of the inadequate DC scheme and issues around resourcing, automation and future growth is to secure the four vital safeguards that DB and DC members need around pensions, a shorter working week, extension of all our current agreements and legal protections and redesign of Royal Mail’s pipeline to drive long-term growth.

But any agreement will only be secured with your full and active support. We are therefore calling on all members to join and support the CWU’s campaign and help us build the Four Key Pillars of Security we need and deserve.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

Get real on pay, BT told, as talks hit impasse

Pay talks with BT have entered a tense phase following the CWU’s outright rejection of a real-term pay cut and the company’s current insistence that the time-honoured Retail Price Index (RPI) measure of inflation is “out of date”, irrelevant and unaffordable.

Despite achieving 3.3 per cent growth in revenue over the last 12 months, recording pre-tax profits of £1.83bn for the year to date and promising 10 per cent dividend increases to investors in both 2017 and 2018 – BT is currently saying the most it can offer team members this year is an overall 1.8 per cent rise, with only 0.7 per cent of this pensionable for members in the BT Pension Scheme.

This was immediately dismissed as insufficient by CWU negotiators. While consolidated for everyone, fully pensionable for all non-BTPS members and potentially worth more for Workforce 2020 grades – as a result of CWU policy to reduce to revenue pay disparities between new and legacy grades – for the vast majority of CWU members in BT the offer represents at least a 0.7 per cent shortfall on the December RPI rate of 2.5 per cent.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told The Voice: “We know inflation is going in the wrong direction for us this year – and we also accept there are serious concerns around the BTPS deficit that need to be addressed – but both these factors make it even more important that all our members receive a real-term increase based on the relevant December RPI rate.”

Reacting BT’s claims that RPI is effectively defunct, and CPI (1.6 per cent in December) is the inflation measure to use, Andy continued: “It’s interesting, isn’t it, that the Government chooses to use RPI when it suits, for things like student loans and rail fares, yet applies CPI for things like pensions and benefits – even though CPI excludes many of the price changes that affect ordinary people the most – such as housing.

“We know BT is under pressure with the massive fraud investigation in Italy, but the truth is it can easily afford to pay a rise that helps UK employees keep pace with the actual cost of living. There’s no reason whatsoever why CWU members should have to pick up the tab for the “Italian job!”

CWU members should have to pick up the tab for the “Italian job!”

CWH News

Our fight to save the nation’s Crown Post Office network is being stepped up, with plans to open new “battlefronts” to increase the pressure on the company’s Post Office network is being stepped up, with plans to open new “battlefronts” to increase the pressure on the company’s Postbank is among the union’s strongly supported campaigns. Days of Action will take the campaign in a positive alternative proposals to the leadership – and make this a high-profile national campaign and help us build the Four Key Pillars of Security we need and deserve.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

Andy Kerr
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (T&FS)

New ‘battlefronts’ open in Post Office campaign

September, our Crown Offices and Admin members have taken six days of strike action, while in Supply Chain, our members have struck four times.

And deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger praised members for the action taken so far, saying: “It’s fantastic to see such unity and determination from our members.”

There will also be further industrial action, which will aim at “focusing attention on the Post Office’s lack of vision and will, wherever possible, be co-ordinated with members of the Unite union,” Terry explained.

“We’ve said from the beginning that this is an extremely difficult dispute and the whole union must rally round our Post Office members with a renewed strategy and enthusiasm.”

Assistant secretary Andy Furey agreed that members’ action had been “brilliant” and added that “support from our colleagues in the public sector is hugley positive.

“We are confident that this is not the end of our fight and that our campaign will continue to grow. We are proud of the members who have worked in the interest of our members and we are proud of the CWU’s achievements so far.”

Andy explains: “When the union working as hard as it is to try to prevent the wrong decisions being made in Ofcom’s current review (see page 24), and the vital contribution being made by CWU members to ensure BT secures the customer service and broadband rollout levels that desperately needs – my message to senior management is simple. Don’t take us for granted!”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/
Agonising wait at Fujitsu

Members at Fujitsu - who were placed en masse at risk of either redundancy or TUPE transfer in November - are still no clearer about their fate despite strenuous efforts by the CWU to secure answers from the company in a chaotic consultation process that has bordered on farce. Four months on from the shock announcement that the Japanese multinational wanted to commence the dismissal of 1,800 of its 9,100 UK employees on February 17, CWU members at the company’s Belfast and Birmingham repair sites have now been told no decision will be made about their future until March at the earliest.

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LATEST DOWNSIZING

Members in O2 are caught up in the company’s latest downsizing initiative - the bumpy start to 2017 following on from a perverse pre-Xmas announcement that the CWU has branded “cruel”.

In the immediate run-up to the festive season, chief executive Mark Evans delivered an astonishing video message to staff in which he revealed the company would be parting ways with 5 per cent of its employees in the New Year. At the time, the CWU registered its dismay at the extraordinary timing, pointing out that the ambiguity of its content and the lack of detail about where the job losses would fall was bound to leave many of O2’s workers fearful for the future over Christmas.

It was only on January 10 that detailed plans were unveiled to place 1,800 CWU-represented grade employees at risk of redundancy. Of the 180, the CWU understands that 118 will ultimately stay with the company, five new roles will be created and 49 will leave by the end of March under discretionary voluntary redundancy (DVR).

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge said: “The CWU is working hard to ensure that individuals are treated fairly and that their rights are respected in full. We are actively seeking information regarding suitable alternative roles for those that want to stay.”

Sally added that the CWU is challenging the assumptions being made about timelines, the readiness of new systems and whether employees ultimately required to do the job. The union’s biggest misgiving at present, however, surrounds the “unacceptable and deeply offensive” way the news was broken to staff just before Christmas.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Accrington members’ action wins fair solution

WORKERS at a delivery office in Lancashire returned to work just days after the CWU members at their striking union resulted in a manager being transferred out of the office.

Difficulties at Accrington Delivery Office had included people alleging that they had been shouted and sworn at during their duties, being refused annual leave requests, and being compelled to take extra walks and to perform compulsory overtime - with further allegations that overtime payments were sometimes withheld.

After a long period in which various initiatives were attempted, and the negotiating procedure fully utilised, the problems continued. Members at the unit were left with no alternative but to ballot for strike action.

Two walkouts took place towards the end of 2016 and a third was scheduled for two days before Christmas, but a last-minute proposal was received from the company.

Assistant secretary Ray Ellis told The Voice: “On December 22nd, we received confirmation that the manager would not be returning to the office after 1st January.”

“We relayed this to the branch and at a gate meeting on the morning of the 23rd the members agreed to go back to work.”

Praising the Accrington members, Roy said: “Their achievement here should not be underestimated. Full credit goes to them for standing up to the bullying management culture.”

And North West divisional sub-reg Mark Balton also praised the Accrington members, saying: “This just shows what can be done when people all stand up and stand together.”

He also thanked the local MP Graham Jones for coming along to the picket and backing the fight for justice, and to CWU members across the country for their support.

Payroll controversy

Post Office bossled management change from weekly to monthly pay represents an “unacceptable, unilateral change to contracts of employment,” according to CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey.

The controversial move, which was announced by the business early in the New Year, following what Andy describes as a “stomach-turning” consultation, is opposed by the union, which has advised members they are “under no legal obligation to accept this contractual change.”

As well as opposing, in principle, the imposition of this change, the union has also recommended a strike pay-off in order to mitigate the financial disruption caused to members.

The company was only prepared to offer a bridging loan in the circumstances. But, while the union’s claim was not met, the strength of the union’s representations, and the complaints from members have shifted the Post Office’s position to a certain degree, with the terms of the bridging loan being revised to allow it to be paid off over a longer period or, alternatively when individuals leave Post Office employment.

As The Voice went to press, the union was taking legal advice on the potential for a group claim for damages from the Post Office.

See letter on page 27

Best wishes to our Bob

On a personal note, I know from working with Bob over many years, that above all else, he has always put the interests of our members first.”

Deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger described Bob as a “person of honour and high principle, who has spent his life standing up for and defending working people in a forthright and determined manner.”

“He has, without question, made a positive and consistent difference to members’ working lives.”

POST OFFICE

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Payroll controversy POST OFFICE
Agency injustice belatedly resolved

SWISS POST

The CWU’s Euro-Trashed campaign now has new beneficiaries, though the wider fight to close loopholes in the UK’s agency regulations goes on.

CUW perseverance on behalf of a small group of former agency members at Swiss Post who were ‘converted’ to permanent contracts in April 2015 looks set to finally right a long-running agency injustice.

More than 30 months after the CWU first identified that the workers had been underpaid by Office Angels for a period of 2.9 per cent. In Geoban all pay scales are included, many per cent pay hike on March 1 - vast majority of members will have already heard from us in brief

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION IN LABOUR ISSUES

the pay scales.

VINDICATION FOR CWU

A resolute CWU response to a Santander subsidiary’s plans to make seven compulsory redundancies has resulted in the company back-tracking and the unionchenging in a voluntary approach.

Originally Produban bosses wanted to hand pick four individuals for redundancy at Bootle and three at Carlton Park – but, following decisive intervention by the CWU, five volunteers came forward at Bootle and two at Carlton Park – all of whom left the business, on significantly enhanced redundancy terms, on December 31.

All those involved worked on legacy ABIL IT systems that are in the process of being decommissioned.

Compulsory redundancies avoided at Producuban

LEAVE-BOOKING HELL

High hopes that a chronic shortage of summer period leave slots was about to be resolved for Capita Q2 contract employees have been dashed amid apparent confusion within the company.

The payments, which comprise just over £1 per hour for every hour worked between April 2014 to April 2015 are in compensation for the fact that Office Angels failed to adhere to rules on agency pay levels contained within the EU’s Temporary Agency Workers Directive – which was implemented in UK law in the dying days of the last Labour government, following a major trade union campaign spearheaded by the CWU – requires agency workers on some types of contract to be paid the same as direct labour employees conducting comparable roles.

New jobs at BT Consumer amid Convergys concerns...

This jobs will further increase the proportion of direct labour and underline the progress the union has made in securing permanent BT jobs since the 2015 Transformation Agreement on job security and attendance patterns.

Last welcome, however, was Consumer’s subsequent announcement last month that it had engaged Convergys – a third party provider of outsourced call centre service – to handle ‘Help’ calls from its Stockport and Dublin contact centres for an “initial” six-month period.

Consumer claims that extra short-term resource is needed to deal with higher than expected call volumes and to help facilitate the shift of work back to the UK – but the CWU has raised serious concerns at the move to use a third-party provider.

“Could set an unacceptable precedent for the future, especially as one of the sites is not in the UK,” Nigel told The Voice – stressing that the announcement had “undermined the positive progress we have made.”

He continued, “The CWU view continues to be that excellent customer service is best delivered by BT UK employees. That, indeed, is what the Transformation Agreement was all about. The CWU will be looking sure that BT abides by the commitment to achieve 80 per cent of direct labour in Sales and 90 per cent in Service, and that Convergys is not used as a Trojan horse.”

FULL STORY AT www.cwu.org.uk/cwu/
Since the New Year, we’ve met with the business several times and at this point, the talks are at a very early stage,” Terry told us.

“We’ve written to every Royal Mail member explaining the strategy and the thinking behind what we’re calling the Four Pillars of Security and the feedback has been enormously positive so far.”

The Four Pillars represent the four key aims of the CWU – a decent wage in retirement, a shorter working week, a reshaping of the company’s pipeline, and the extension of current agreements.


“Achieving our aims will not be easy, as our policies are a direct challenge to the current conventional wisdom in the world of work,” he warned.

“That’s good because we have a robust policy position – thoroughly debated and agreed within the CWU. We’ve unified and we all know what direction we want to move in and that is very powerful.”

Since the New Year, we’ve met with the business several times and at this point, the talks are at a very early stage.

TERRY PULLINGER

PENSIONS

The company opened with the news that Royal Mail wants to close the defined benefit (DB) pension scheme to future accrual from March 2018 and that future pension benefit accrual for all will be on a defined contribution (DC) basis.

Newer recruits at Royal Mail – those who started after 2008 – already belong to the company’s DC pension scheme and the CWU has sought to improve these members’ retirement package due to concerns that the benefits offered are insufficient.

At last year’s CWU policy forum, the union resolved to step up efforts to improve DC scheme member benefits and to defend the existing rights of DB members ‘by all means necessary, including national industrial action’.

Terry explains that the union’s objective is to reach agreement with Royal Mail and that, in the ongoing discussions, the union is seeking to “achieve a pension solution for all – a lasting solution delivering a decent benefit Wage in Retirement Scheme for everyone,” he pledges.

DRIVE TO 35

A reduction without loss of pay in the basic working week, from the current 39 hours down to 35 hours will, Terry continues, “help us tackle the urgent problems and pressures that are affecting hard-working members at workplaces right across the country. This again will be industry leading and a huge challenge.”

And he notes that, as well as being a benefit in itself which improves work-life balance, it will also help address the impact of emerging technologies – which are being described as the fourth industrial revolution – that are going to seriously affect full-time jobs and secure employment.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS

The 2013 Agenda for Growth national agreement provided robust legal protections guaranteeing the future mutual interest culture of the company, maintaining the job security clauses of the 2010 Business Transformation agreement, setting out clear terms of reference on resourcing, and reaffirming full recognition of our CWU representative structure, national IR framework and procedures.

“These agreements have served members well and it’s a priority aim that we extend these protections – and their legal underpinning – through the period of the next national agreement as well,” Terry explained.

“Particular existing national agreement - MTST is, according to assistant secretary Ray Ellis, ‘absolutely crucial to future job security.’ Ray explained: “MTST has been the mainstay agreement for protecting terms and conditions of our members through periods of major business change since 2003, including no compulsory redundancies throughout the 16/17 years of its existence.”

Clearly, the next few years will see further periods of major change in Royal Mail, and the principles of the MTST will be needed once again to see our members protected through those periods.”

PIPELINE

The union’s focus is on all four of the Pillars of Security with equal status, including the call for a redesign of the industry’s pipeline.

Explaining the union’s strategy here, Terry explained to The Voice the need for Royal Mail to maximise the potential of its core USO delivery to provide new commercial products and services alongside it – “and that means developing an operational structure that can offer delivery throughout the day.”

As well as opening up greater commercial opportunities, a redesigned workplan can also develop a range of other services and tap into other markets maximise the fleet and haulage capability and fleet maintenance services, he cites, as examples.

The DGSP has asked our indoor secretary Davie Robertson and acting outdoor secretary Mark Balch to head up the Resource & Pipeline negotiating strand that will specifically deal with this subject and Terry said that we asked them for some operational specifics in terms of the union’s negotiating agenda in this area of the national talks.

Davie and Mark reported that they have met the business several times on this issue so far and that there are more regular meetings scheduled going forward.

“We’re testing business thinking on future design against the policies we agreed at our policy forum last March,” Davie tells us, adding that, disappointingly, the company’s current strategy is based on short-term cost objectives rather than longer-term development for growth.

According to Mark, the company wants to make use of automation in order to “continually cut down on indoor prep-time and tasks in delivery offices – eventually reaching a situation in which all the mail reaches the delivery workforce already sequenced, prepped and ready for the delivery staff to take out.”

The union is not opposed to automation, but argues that, rather than using it for cutting jobs and emptying buildings, it should be used positively, in order to take full advantage of opportunities in the growing parts of the home delivery sector.

Unless this is grasped, then the changes to processing will, Davie warns, “inevitably squeeze the processing window, moving sequencing back in the phase, adversely affecting attendance patterns in mail centres – with the knock on effect of mail not being ready for delivery until later in the day.”

And for the delivery part of the business, Mark points out that this would mean daily deliveries becoming later and later, with “a ‘post code lottery’ starting to emerge based on how near people live to where the mail is processed.”

By contrast, the union’s pipeline redesign plan is to invest in automation and earlier delivery – from 7am for example – and also to provide flexibility to the public and business customers right through the day.

“This depends on the business investing in the proper kit and equipment to enable customer choice on delivery times – which is what Royal Mail’s main parcel competitors are able to do,” explains Davie.

“Automation has to serve a coherent plan – not disconnected plans,” Mark adds that, in delivery, “there are real opportunities for growth of the business – and automation must be used to help achieve the shorter week, and protect jobs through the development of new products and services – earlier delivery, all-day delivery and even same-day premium products.

“The company has to change and innovate, and the CWU wants to drive that change in a positive direction.”

Join in with the discussion on Facebook facebook.com/TheCommunicationsUnion

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BT performance management talks

The present round of talks began last September triggered by the unanimous carrage of Motion B6 at last year’s CWU Annual Conference following a barn-stormer of a debate in which speaker after speaker declared PM in its current form ‘simply irredeemable’.

Dave concludes: “On the plus side, BT does now seem to accept at a Group level that things have to change, and it is encouraging to see the progress that is currently being made in Openreach. (See pages 14 & 15)

“If we can secure a similarly transformed approach to PM in the rest of BT that would be a major step forward - but the CWU’s eyes are wide open to the fact that it’s the end result that counts - and we’re certainly not there yet.”

DONCASTER TRIAL CONCERNS

Meanwhile, the CWU has raised serious PM concerns over the introduction of a new KPI (key performance indicator) measure that is being trialled in BT Consumer.

Linked to a trial of a new way of operating sales bonuses for around 50 acquisition advisors at the company’s Doncaster contact centre, the union’s particular concern relates to the complexity of how three different KPI measures - two of which compare relative performance and only one of which is based on individual performance - are being combined to produce a score that determines what bonuses are paid.

Assistant secretary Nigel Catgrovve explains that an individual’s position in the rankings can vary each week even when their personal performance is unchanged - making it nigh on impossible for advisors to understand how they can achieve a good KPI score.

“We do not believe that this is consistent with the BT Group approach to performance management which requires that everyone should be clear about what is required in their job and the expected standards of performance,” Nigel concludes.

Progress in Openreach: See pages 14 & 15

USA postal workers defeat franchising plan

The heads of the United States Postal Service had chosen stationary supplier Staples as its franchising partner – similar to the use of WHSmith by the Post Office. But, a vigorous, APWU-led Stop Staples campaign, which included boycotts among other public protests, eventually resulted in the announcement in January that the programme would be discontinued.

Delighted APWU president Mark Dimondstein said “I salute and commend every member and supporter who made this victory possible.” And Dave Ward offered the CWU’s congratulations to them on their fantastic victory. “This is a great boost to our own fight against franchising.”

Assistant secretary Andy Furey agreed, saying “This great success that’s been achieved by our American comrades proves that franchising and outsourcing can be defeated by determined, innovative and broad-based campaigning.”

Save our Crowns – spring campaign

Campaigners are already fighting against the latest round of closures and franchises in response to the Post Office’s New Year statement that a further 37 Crowns are under threat.

Protests have already kicked off in several areas of the UK, with strong support from residents, councillors and Members of Parliament, and the union is urging members to take up the challenge in all localities.

Up in Yorkshire, local MP Mary Creagh spent the day with members of our Leeds Nidd branch in the town of Ossett (pictured top centre), after its much-needed Crown office was put on company bosses’ hit list.

“Great Khan, the branch political officer, told The Voice that the threat was ‘yet another blow to local residents, who have been affected by the closure of the Ossett delivery office recently. Local residents think Ossett Crown Post Office is essential to the local community and value its services immensely with a large number of elderly and vulnerable people relying on its services’, explained Asghar.

Another MP on the other side of the country has been instrumental in galvanising the community in defence of the Liverton Crown Office in Cumbria (pictured top left): John Woodcock MP, town mayor. Mark Wilson.

Labour Party activists and other townpeople gathered at the under-threat facility to send their own ‘Save our Post Office’ message to company chiefs. CWU Post Office rep for the area Neil Barry said that “This campaign is up and running and local support has been excellent.

“It’s brilliant that the MP and the mayor have taken such a pro-active role in this and we’re determined to keep the pressure on the Post Office to reconsider.”

Social support has come from across the political divide – it’s a fight for the People’s Post Office.

INDUSTRY NEWS Telecoms & Financial Services

PROGRESS AMID NEW CONCERNS IN CONSUMER

Negotiations with BT over deep-seated CWU concerns about the Group-wide application of performance management (PM) processes that have soured industrial relations for years are entering a crucial phase.

With both union and management negotiators hoping to reach agreement on the broad principles that will govern relations for years are entering a crucial phase.

Campaign groups have addressed a perennial problem.

Don’t miss out on company bosses’ hit list.

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Dave concludes: “On the plus side, BT does now seem to accept at a Group level that things have to change, and it is encouraging to see the progress that is currently being made in Openreach. (See pages 14 & 15)

“If we can secure a similarly transformed approach to PM in the rest of BT that would be a major step forward - but the CWU’s eyes are wide open to the fact that it’s the end result that counts - and we’re certainly not there yet.”

USA postal workers defeat franchising plan

The heads of the United States Postal Service had chosen stationary supplier Staples as its franchising partner – similar to the use of WHSmith by the Post Office. But, a vigorous, APWU-led Stop Staples campaign, which included boycotts among other public protests, eventually resulted in the announcement in January that the programme would be discontinued.

Delighted APWU president Mark Dimondstein said “I salute and commend every member and supporter who made this victory possible.” And Dave Ward offered the CWU’s congratulations to them on their fantastic victory. “This is a great boost to our own fight against franchising.”

Assistant secretary Andy Furey agreed, saying “This great success that’s been achieved by our American comrades proves that franchising and outsourcing can be defeated by determined, innovative and broad-based campaigning.”

Save our Crowns – spring campaign

Campaigners are already fighting against the latest round of closures and franchises in response to the Post Office’s New Year statement that a further 37 Crowns are under threat.

Protests have already kicked off in several areas of the UK, with strong support from residents, councillors and Members of Parliament, and the union is urging members to take up the challenge in all localities.

Up in Yorkshire, local MP Mary Creagh spent the day with members of our Leeds Nidd branch in the town of Ossett (pictured top centre), after its much-needed Crown office was put on company bosses’ hit list.

“Asghar Khan, the branch political officer, told The Voice that the threat was ‘yet another blow to local residents, who have been affected by the closure of the Ossett delivery office recently. Local residents think Ossett Crown Post Office is essential to the local community and value its services immensely with a large number of elderly and vulnerable people relying on its services’, explained Asghar.

Another MP on the other side of the country has been instrumental in galvanising the community in defence of the Liverton Crown Office in Cumbria (pictured top left): John Woodcock MP, town mayor. Mark Wilson.

Labour Party activists and other townpeople gathered at the under-threat facility to send their own ‘Save our Post Office’ message to company chiefs. CWU Post Office rep for the area Neil Barry said that “This campaign is up and running and local support has been excellent.

“It’s brilliant that the MP and the mayor have taken such a pro-active role in this and we’re determined to keep the pressure on the Post Office to reconsider.”

Social support has come from across the political divide – it’s a fight for the People’s Post Office.

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As The Voice went to press the final details of an all-new approach to performance management in Openreach Service Delivery were being thrashed out between company and union negotiators – thanks in part to the devastating verdict delivered on a flawed and oppressive system that was handed to bosses a year ago by a bunch of Merseyside engineers. Simon Alford reports...

 Featured on Openreach

Twice those threats were only rescinded following eleventh-hour deals that appeared, at face value, to hold out genuine hope that the worst elements of PM could be mitigated. The truth, however, is that hope that the worst elements of PM could be mitigated. The truth, however, is that the PM ‘monster’ has proved remarkably resistant to taming.

Now, however, a radical new attempt to do just that is underway in Openreach – and, at the time of printing, CWU and management were in the process of fine-tuning the details of a fundamentally ‘reset’ PM regime in Service Delivery which will totally shift the performance focus away from individuals and towards the team – hopefully transforming the working lives of thousands of field engineers.

For years the CWU has argued the relentless targeting of individuals has been disastrous for not just members but BT as a whole - creating a hellish and self-defeating working environment in which customer service and staff morale has been sacrificed at the altar of meaningless statistical measurements that have themselves driven perverse and counter-productive behaviours and actively mitigated against committed staff wanting to do their jobs properly.

Viewed against the context of what has gone before, CWU national officer for Openreach, Davie Bowman, is convinced that a new team-based ‘Dashboard’ of reset performance measures in Service Delivery (which were due to be finalised in a special workshop with senior management on February 7 prior to being briefed out across the company) provide genuine hope for a better future.

Given previous ‘false dawns’, however, Davie stresses he accepts many members will be deeply sceptical - insisting the onus is now squarely on the company to prove that the leopard really can change its spots.

“At present, we are concerned that our management colleagues are looking for a form of PM approach that will suit them - but not the people they manage,” he explains. “The concern is that we won’t have a new PM system which will be more team-based, and which can mitigate against the worst elements of PM which have been around for many years. We need a system that helps people work together.

“If they stop picking on individuals, respect and productivity will follow. Our members deserve credit for helping to transform the way BT does business, but it can’t just be the eight of us on the TEC to give their initial response to the team-based approach has been put to the test. CWU members have voted in principle, and CWU’s Openreach national team!”

Despite those doubts, however, the agreement to reserve its judgement until the implementation of the team-based approach has been put to the test. Despite any unexpected delays, that verdict will be delivered in the May/June issue of The Voice.
Delivery office mergers have been taking place all around the country in recent years, as smaller, older offices close and merge into larger facilities and Royal Mail continue to review their estate in order to reduce cost. The Voice joined acting outdoor secretary Mark Baulch as he visited two of these larger, merged workplaces.

Mark Baulch and NEC member Tony Bouch visited the Blackpool office in January, they met with area delivery rep Rick Wright and unit rep Trevor Kay, as well as unit and area managers and members of staff. Mark told The Voice that, “the successful resolution to the canteen facility issue is a good example of how the IR framework procedures can and should be used to solve workplace problems when they arise.”

Although this success has improved the working day for staff, Ally points to other difficulties which could affect operations, such as the limited internal working space.

“The way Croydon is developing, we would struggle to put any more frames in this building,” he warns.

VEHICLE PARKING PROBLEMS

Parking is an acute problem as well, with many delivery vehicles having to be parked under the nearby A236 flyover by arrangement with Croydon Council due to lack of space in the yard. Because of this, the office going out on delivery needs to be staggered, Geoff explains, adding that, as well as his delivery duties and unit rep responsibilities, he is also the site’s yard marshall.

“Addiscome and East go out first, then Thornton Heath go out and then South Croydon go out,” he says, adding that his priority is that vehicles are able to go out on time and safely each morning. George explains that, when members moved into this site, a delivery revision took place and an extra 15 minutes was built into duty times to account for this.

“If parcels are growing and we want to compete, we shouldn’t have been moved into a smaller place,” he points out.

Ian says that parking had not been a problem at the previous site.

“We had enough space there. We had an unobstructed view, everyone could get to work better because it was right next to East Croydon Station and the tram and bus stops, beforehand, then relocations and amalgamations can work well. “But if problems are left unresolved, and the company pay lip service to the national D.O. Mergers/Closures agreement, then this is when difficulties can arise and this is when the IR framework should be used.”

AS UNITS GROW IS IT BETTER TO BE BIGGER?

Delivery office mergers have been taking place all around the country in recent years, as smaller, older offices close and merge into larger facilities and Royal Mail continue to review their estate in order to reduce cost. The Voice joined acting outdoor secretary Mark Baulch as he visited two of these larger, merged workplaces.

Built and opened in October 2013, the new Blackpool Delivery Office is approximately four miles from the town centre and encompasses the former offices of Blackpool South Shore and Poulton-le-Fylde.

The 235 staff in post here will be joined by another 50 colleagues from the nearby Thornton-Cleveleys office – a further amalgamation, which will add 21,000 new delivery points to the 84,000 residential and business addresses already being served by this office.

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Incentivised at BT Fleet?

FLAWED BONUS SCHEME

Talks have begun with BT Fleet over the deeply flawed ‘incentive’ scheme that was imposed by management last September, with the CWU arguing that the unagreed programme needs a fundamental rethink.

Problems became apparent as the first payments began to trickle through in the run-up to Christmas, with many employees venting their dismay at bonuses that fell well short of what they had been led to believe they would receive.

The scale of the sense of let-down felt by staff became apparent in a series of conferences that all Fleet employees have attended in recent weeks.

Assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien told The Voice: “The company has recognised that it has a problem and has already written to members saying that they are going to change the scheme based on the feedback.

‘The original scheme was introduced without any agreement from the CWU so we are prepared to work with management to improve the scheme and resolve any barriers to that agreement.’

‘As such we are now in talks, basing the CWU’s approach on what members have identified as the key pitfalls of the current system’.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

HARMONISATION

2017 has got off to a flying start for members at Airwave, with staff digesting the full scale and scope of a comprehensive set of protections secured by the CWU during the course of complex negotiations over the harmonisation of contracts.

Those talks, which commenced last September following Motorola’s takeover of the struggling secure communications provider, culminated in a wide-ranging deal on new contracts of employment that was put out to ballot just before Christmas.

In a rare show of workforce unanimity, an amazing 83 per cent of members cast their vote and unanimously backed the CWU-brokered agreement that ensures there are no losers and plenty of gainers as a result of the harmonisation.

Covering a wide range of T&Cs including annual leave entitlement, pay progression, sick pay & income protection, maternity, paternity & adoptive pay and notice periods, the protections are enshrined in new contracts which were signed and Airwave transferred on December 13.

Some of the biggest winners stem from the CWU’s determination to ensure that Airwave employees were adversely affected by Motorola’s decision to do away with formal six monthly performance management appraisals and have hitherto provided a mechanism for fast-tracked pay progression for ‘better than average’ performers.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

ROYAL MAIL FLEET

Expansion by Royal Mail Fleet into the external market is “good news for jobs and earnings,” reports CWU assistant secretary Ray Ellis.

A pilot of service, maintenance and repair for commercial vehicles in the external market began in 2015 - initially six and then 20 workshops - and contracts have been won with British Gas, Leaseplan, Zurich and the RAI.

And, following the success of this trial, a decision has been made, in agreement with the CWU, to extend this operation right across the business, which Ray describes as “good news for our members.

‘Royal Mail Fleet can become a major force in this sector, leading to sustained growth, increased earnings and secure jobs going forward,’ he added.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Good reasons for New Year’s cheer at Airwave

Keeping the emergency services talking

ROYAL MAIL VEHICLES - SAFETY ALWAYS FIRST

VEHICLE SAFETY WEEK

‘According to official Royal Mail stats, there were 112 handbrake-related vehicle ‘incidents’ over the last 12 months,’ is a total of 533 since 2003’ CWU national health, safety and environment officer Dave Joyce told The Voice.

The week commencing Monday 20th February is Royal Mail vehicle safety week and this year’s campaign is focussed specifically on warning of the dangers of handbrake-related rollaways.

A range of posters giving information and advice are being displayed prominently in workplaces across the country throughout the week and this will also be flagged up during worktime learning sessions.

CWU assistant secretary Dave Robertson told The Voice that the union’s postal department “fully supports the campaign.

‘Pressures on our drivers have never been greater and their safety is of paramount importance,’ he continued.

In recent years we have also had to deal with a number of conduct cases relating to rollaways, so it’s imperative that our members fully understand the correct procedures to protect themselves, other road users and the general public.”

Dave Joyce warned that, ‘a van weighing several tons running out of control can cause death, danger and significant damage to people and property – and we don’t want our members learning the hard way how important it is to park their vans safely on a hill or slope and even on the slightest of inclines or gradients.

‘Drivers are sometimes in a rush or have other things on their mind whilst performing their deliveries or collections working within a busy schedule, but we want our members never to forget that safety must always come first,’ he concluded.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/
Formal complaint lodged over BBC's 'dreadful' treatment of CWU members

LOYAL STAFF BETRAYED

The continued failure of the BBC to respond to repeated CWU demands for an explanation of the 'dreadful' treatment dished out to 12 former CWU members has triggered the union to issue a formal complaint to the Corporation's governing body.

Following four months for the BBC's human resources department to reply to successive requests for information as to why a public-service broadcaster had seen fit to consign a total of 10 long-serving workers to certain redundancy - while senior managers simultaneously bragged openly about striking services and to award the work instead to IBM - the CWU in turn subcontracted much of the work to two other companies - neither of which ever made any secret of their intention to handle the contract overseas, meaning that virtually all the former CWU staff were TUPE'd into an inevitable redundancy situation.

At the heart of the CWU's dispute with the BBC is senior management's decision last year to terminate a longstanding contract with CWU to provide outsourced finance, accounting and payroll services, and to award the work instead to IBM. IBM in turn subcontracted much of the work to two other companies - neither of which ever made any secret of their intention to handle the contract overseas, meaning that virtually all the former CWU staff were TUPE'd into an inevitable redundancy situation.

The process – which is already complete for the vast majority of Sophia St area transfers - is now drawing to its conclusion for the final four Manchester-based CWU members affected.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Peterloo painting comes home

In 1819 one of the CWU’s predecessor unions, the POEU, ran a members’ painting competition. The winner was Peter Burton who had submitted a striking image of the Peterloo massacre in 1819 when unarmed protestors were brutally beaten by government troops – many died.

Peter’s prize was presented by the POEU deputy general secretary Laurie Sapper – who was duly given safe custody of the painting. This followed Laurie from the POEU to the AUT (where he was general secretary until 1983) to his home. On Laurie’s sadly early death in 1989, the picture passed to our own national officer, and Laurie’s nephew, Simon Sopper, where it hung on his office wall until his own departure from the CWU at the end of last year.

Pictured is Simon presenting the picture to DGS (TFS) Andy Kerr. “I feel it has now been restored to its rightful owner,” said Simon.

Welcoming hand of help for refugees

CWU members at Bristol Mail Centre have clubbed together to collect £1,800 for a local initiative that helps refugees and people fleeing persecution – and thanks to match-funding by First Bus, the total raised was £1,800. All proceeds of the highly successful workplace cash collection, organised by the CWU’s Bristol Ethnic Minorities Advisory Committee, have gone to the Bristol City of Sanctuary project’s Transport Fund. It will be used to provide practical support to sanctuary seekers in the form of free bus tickets to allow cash-strapped refugees the freedom to travel around Bristol and the surrounding area.

Bristol & District branch secretary Rob Watherspoon said: “It’s tremendously heartening in such divided times to see the effort our colleagues have put into raising money for people who are facing very difficult circumstances.”

Bristol City of Sanctuary chair, the Rev Richard McKay praised all those involved for the “compassion and care shown for those whom many in our society reject.”
Young members showed every sign of rising to the challenge to re-energise the union and reshape wider society at the CWU’s Youth Conference in Manchester last month – passing motions addressing mental health, homelessness, pensions and structural change.

More time would enable us to spend more time with branches and get non-members into the union

Nick Moore

In response, Michael pointed to the inaccuracy of the media reports and the need to stand up for peace, something that Corbyn did in preparing the way for the peace process in Northern Ireland.

The second motion highlighted how suicide was the biggest killer of men under 45 (13 take their lives every day) – and called for the creation of a safe environment for people to share their problems.

There was also lively debate on a motion calling for efforts to counter the media reports and the inaccuracy of the ruling, explaining how the decision amounted to age discrimination. “The decision of the NEC to abolish our rights is not consistent with what is in the rule book,” he argued, highlighting that retired members are still able to vote in elections for the general secretary, treasurer, health and safety and equalities officers.

“Raising the media’s perception of this case act,” said Nick, “is too generous. The decision of the NEC to abolish our rights is not consistent with what is in the rule book,” he argued, explaining how the decision amounted to age discrimination. The decision of the NEC to abolish our rights is not consistent with what is in the rule book,” he argued, highlighting that retired members are still able to vote in elections for the general secretary, treasurer, health and safety and equalities officers. Mick Jones, retired members’ secretary for the Midlands pointed out that the legal advice was paid for with union funds, arguing that members had every right to see it. “We’re not stupid, we’re not children,” said Mick.

Tony Kearns, senior deputy general secretary, responded to the passing of the motion calling for a reversal of the ruling, explaining how the changes had based their opinion on the rule book which classified retired members as ex-members. “The rule book lists what members can do but it can’t apply to retired members because they are ex-members,” he stressed – urging the passions of the debate to be redirected to the “real enemy” – namely the Tory government.

Services in crisis

There was also passionate support for motions calling on Government to address problems in social care and the NHS.

Peter Robinson of South and Down Services in crisis

January/February 2017 www.cwu.org 23
Tense wait at Openreach as lobbying goes on

Meanwhile, BT has continued to beef up the current functional separation between Openreach and BT via a newly formed Openreach Board designed to make the company more transparent and autonomous. Its chair, Mike Tighe, is already showing signs of being independent of BT Group with his insistence that BT should invest more in the network.

The latest development is the appointment of former TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber to the new Board. Welcoming the move, which answers previous CWU requests for a worker representative to be included, Andy Kerr concludes: “Brendan is a man of integrity and his appointment will hopefully ensure that some of the debates at Board level, particularly relating to service delivery, give consideration to front-line workers.

“Now more than ever I’d urge Ofcom to give due consideration to the enhanced structural separation of Openreach that BT is already putting in place.”

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Politics around the regions - London

A new deal for housing is another critical issue, and is particularly acute in London, where property prices have skyrocketed and pushed affordable housing out of the reach of many. The CWU’s London Region has been particularly active on this issue, and CWU regional secretary Ian Murphy told The Voice about the successful work of union members in the capital.

Through the regional TUC, Ian and the regional chair of Unite set up a sub-committee to co-ordinate trade union efforts in the successful campaign against the so-called “pay-to-stay” clauses of the Government’s Housing and Planning Act, clauses which the Government announced in December that it was abandoning.

But, despite this victory, Ian insists that “the campaigning goes on,” for affordable housing for all Londoners, pointing out, “to Londoner on an average wage looking for a mortgage needs to find a provider willing to lend 14 times their salary.”

Making the CWU’s voice heard on the issues that matter

BUILDING A WORKERS’ AGENDA

Amidst the Brexit Parliamentary debates and negotiations, it is crucial that the union turns the spotlight towards the domestic issues affecting people at work and the CWU’s New Deal for Workers initiative, which meets those challenges.
The Post Office’s decision to change my union properly.

The lack of compassion and understanding exposes their real attitude, which is to dismantle our terms and conditions, destroy our spirit and our union. All Post Office members must unite behind the CWU as we must not let them get away with this!

Phil Gower, crew member, London East Depot

Assistant secretary Andy Fury responds:

Thank you for your support and for highlighting the callous attitude of the Post Office. Unfortunately all contributions from our members seeking to retain weekly pay were effectively ignored. As you say, the consultation was completely phoney as they had made their minds up from the outset. The Post Office of today is phoney as they had made their minds up from the outset. The Post Office of today is phoney as they had made their minds up from the outset. The Post Office of today is phoney as they had made their minds up from the outset. The Post Office of today is phoney as they had made their minds up from the outset.

Ivan Chester, Hampshire

Assistant secretary Davie Bowman responds:

The CWU reached agreement with the company in September 2014 which introduced different terms and conditions for new employees across BT Group. At the point at which you joined the company, the terms and conditions relating to pay, hours, sick pay etc were all substantially inferior to those subsequently negotiated by the union and you would have benefited from those changes at that time.

Since then we have agreed a new pay point (CSE) in Service Delivery, which recognises, in line with the agreement, the additional skills, responsibilities and complexity of CSEs. We are continuing to discuss the creation of similar roles in the other business units. The issue is too complex to explain in a response to a letter which is why we have asked all branches to arrange specific meetings for our members who have joined the company since April 2014.

Those which have taken place to date have been well attended and have allowed representatives on the national team to explain in far greater detail the reasons for change, the benefits which were realised by reaching agreement and also what the understanding exposes their real attitude, which is to dismantle our terms and conditions, destroy our spirit and our union. All Post Office members must unite behind the CWU as we must not let them get away with this!

Assistant secretary Davie Bowman responds:

The CWU reached agreement with the company in September 2014 which introduced different terms and conditions for new employees across BT Group. At the point at which you joined the company, the terms and conditions relating to pay, hours, sick pay etc were all substantially inferior to those subsequently negotiated by the union and you would have benefited from those changes at that time.

Since then we have agreed a new pay point (CSE) in Service Delivery, which recognises, in line with the agreement, the additional skills, responsibilities and complexity of CSEs. We are continuing to discuss the creation of similar roles in the other business units. The issue is too complex to explain in a response to a letter which is why we have asked all branches to arrange specific meetings for our members who have joined the company since April 2014.

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At some point in our lives, we all need the service of the NHS – and that’s why the crisis in our NHS is an enormously important issue for all CWU members and their families,” he begins.

“In fact, it’s fair to say the health of the NHS is probably the single most important subject for everyone in the UK, and that’s why the demonstration that’s been called for Saturday 4th March is starting to look like it could be one of the largest protests we’ve seen for several years.”

Health Campaigns Together (HCT), which has called the protest, is a national network of over 30 campaigning organisations and unions working in co-ordination to defend our health service and the march is strongly supported by the health workers’ unions, particularly UNISON, as well as other unions including the CWU.

“Make no mistake about it, there most definitely is a crisis,” Tony continues, “as HCT rightly states on its website: ‘Our National Health Service is at breaking point’. And, Tony adds: ‘If the people of this country want a government with a commitment to providing a public service to look after the nation’s health – it’s not Theresa May and her government.’

Commenting on the Prime Minister’s January speech, in which she set out her Government’s ‘Brexit’ strategy, our SDGS criticised her “fatuous rhetoric” about ‘going it alone’ and ‘making Britain great again’ and asks: “Where was the mention of the health of the people of this nation?

“It wasn’t there - and it wasn’t there because this Government would rather pander to a false insecurity about immigration and grovel to Trump than say or do anything positive about the health of you and your family,” he points out.

During last year’s EU referendum campaign, it was claimed that leaving the EU could free up £350 million per week for our health service and, recalling this, Tony asks: “Where is the £350 million per week for the NHS we were promised?

“An extra £350m per week now would make a huge difference to our beleaguered NHS.

“So please come along to the 4th March demonstration and let’s all demand that money for our NHS now – let’s put our demand in huge letters on the side of a big London bus,” he concludes.

The CWU is giving its full support to the HCT Save our NHS demonstration in central London on March 4th.

If you want to come, and need assistance with transport, please contact your regional secretary for details of arrangements in your area.

‘NHS in crisis’...’Patients left for hours on trolleys’...’Record A&E waiting times’...were the themes of our New Year headlines. No surprises then that CWU SDGS Tony Kearns chose the NHS and the campaign for more funding as the subject for ‘The Last Word’...