“Starting with a blank piece of paper
tell us how we re-design your union”

Dave Ward.
The re-design project is the most important debate we have ever had about the future of our union. And as the front cover indicates, we now want your input and ideas, starting from a blank piece of paper, on how you want to reshape the CWU.

Like almost all unions in this country, we need to face up to a decline in our membership as our industries have changed. But re-design is about much more than making sure we are in a financially stable position in response to those trends, crucial as that is.

Re-ASSIGNING T VALUES

As I said when I stood to be general secretary, I want you to be at the forefront of the trade union movement in the UK and do more to support our members and frontline representatives. I want us to grow our membership and I want us to lead the way in re-assessing trade union values in this country. Re-design is about delivering on all of this.

You will have seen some of the things we are already doing here. We have changed the way we campaign, we have changed the way we communicate and we are bringing our industrial and political agendas together. All of these things have made us more effective in standing up for our members.

Alongside this we are developing a more ambitious recruitment and organising strategy. This means looking at new areas where the CWU should have a presence and putting together a new range of membership benefits – like the possibility of offering a family membership package.

And we have started the process of delivering major change at CWU headquarters. We are working with our staff-side unions to reduce our costs and the next stage is a fundamental review of how departments operate and what we can do to improve.

As we do this, and as we start the process of talking to branches and regions about the rest of the union’s structures, your input is key. Everything is in scope and this is your opportunity to shape the future of the CWU.

I want to hear your opinions on the change you want to see – you can send your views in to re-design@cwu.org.

With the changes in the world of work, we all know the challenges the union movement and our members face today. So there has never been a time in living memory when trade unions have been more important – and there has never been a more important time for us to make sure the CWU is effective in standing up for you.

T he Post Office is under serious threat, with the Crown Office network being decimated, but there could be a positive future if only the Government would support the establishment of a Post Bank.

Splitting the Post Office from Royal Mail was unprecedented – no other government has separated the retail arm from the rest of the mail operation, and it hit Post Office revenues hard financially and operationally.

It’s now five years since separation, but government promises to make the network a “front office for government services” have not been honoured and, as a consequence, the Post Office is in an increasing crisis.

Revenues from government services have fallen by some 40 per cent in six years, and annual government funding has been cut from £210 million in 2012 to £70 million for next year.

EVERYONE’S LOSING OUT

As CWU members know well, total numbers of Crown Offices have reduced from 373 to 285 – with government funding has been cut from £210 million in 2012 to £70 million for next year.

The massive decline in high street banks is surely a massive opportunity for the Post Office to provide a local banking presence.

There is no reason why the UK cannot set out to make our Post Office a world leader and, with its own 11,000 outlets, this is the sort of model a Post Bank in the UK should adopt.

Villages have long lost their banks, along with their pubs, shops and now their post offices. Local council front offices have closed under the pressure of government cuts. Public service access directly with the public is disappearing.

Thousands of bank branches in towns throughout the UK are being remorselessly closed. Glastonbury in Somerset with its 9,000 population – and many more in nearby villages – now has no high street banks at all. The worst hit are elderly customers who do not drive or go online.

The massive decline in high street banks is surely a massive opportunity for the Post Office to step in to provide a local banking presence in communities throughout the UK, if only the Government would back this.
Crunch time for BT performance management

BT was poised to launch a significantly changed approach to performance management (PM) as The Voice went to press. However, CWU hopes that a perennial industrial relations flashpoint may be close to being neutralised as management was understood to have rejected a revised offer at last year’s CWU Annual Conference in which speaker declared PM in its current form a ‘rating’ banding system that should, in theory, result in far fewer people being identified as underperforming.

The CWU has pushed BT for members to have just one formal appraisal each year, and a reduction in the number of ‘rating’ bands which should, in theory, result in far fewer people being identified as underperforming.

Union concerns are rising, however, that final intentions will come to nothing if the actual procedures and policies underpinning the new approach mitigate against the fundamental change of managerial cultures that all parties agree is vital to lancet BT’s PM boil.

Assistant secretary Dave Jukes commented: “We stood by our guns on the validity of the RPI inflation measure and I’m absolutely convinced we pushed BT as far as we could.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/
So Mark, you are now a national officer, how does that feel?

It’s a huge honour and I thank CWU branches and members for the faith they’ve placed in me. It’s also a massive responsibility and I pledge to carry out the role to the best of my ability. I have been a delivery postal worker and a rep at every level of the union and the CWU and the mentality of our frontline members is engrained in me. Outdoor secretary is one of the biggest jobs in the union and delivery members make up the biggest section of the membership. I’m looking forward to leading our strategy in this area.

Tell us about your plans? Will you be making any changes to the way we do things?

Yes. Of course. Every person does things differently when they pick up a role like this. My predecessor Bob Glasgow did a fantastic job for the union and should be commended for the service and dedication he gave to our members.

I want to embrace the history of the union, but also have my own ideas and I will be using new technology more – such as social media – to get messages out there quickly, but I will be mapping on reinvigorating some of our traditional methods. Nothing beats speaking to the members face to face and I will lead on this by visiting as many offices as I can – and I will be asking reps across the union to do the same. We need to engage more with the members.

I want to deal with issues that seem to have built up over a period of time; absorption, annual leave, uniform, the lack of equipment and the abuse of part-time members. None of this will happen overnight, but I intend to tackle these issues head-on in negotiations with Royal Mail.

Talking of negotiations, what can CWU members expect to see coming out of the ongoing talks with Royal Mail?

The company will have and clearly have had an agenda for many years. I prefer to focus on our agenda as a union. We must be looking at securing full-time work, improving conditions for part-time members, ridding the workplace of the crisis culture which drives an obsession with absorption and laying off, and delivering a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay. As the talks unfold, I will be engaging with our delivery members online and in the workplace to ensure the views from the frontline are brought onto the national negotiating table.

There will be change – and the pace of it, with digital technology, will be greater than ever – but we have dealt with change before and we will do so again.

I would encourage all members to support the union’s Four Pillars campaign – the greater the backing we have in the field, the more likely it is we can deliver the right agreements for our members.

We hear about lots of issues in deliveries. Is the union still an effective force in the workplace?

Yes, and we are going to get stronger.

For every unit struggling with difficult managers, pressures at work and the slash and burn culture, we have units dealing with these things. Local reps and branches are meeting members, organising, using the IR framework and ridding the workplace of these issues – and I’m determined this approach will spread across the union.

We don’t have to sit back and simply accept Royal Mail dictat – I will support any office standing up for itself.

I don’t want to hear: ‘We don’t have to sit back and simply accept Royal Mail dictat’ – I will support any office standing up for itself.

Finally, a little bird tells us your taste in football teams is not as good as your taste in unions.!

Well, I am a lifelong Spurs supporter. It could be worse. I could follow A**** or even Chelsea like our general secretary.

BT break-up averted

CWU relief as Ofcom’s Digital Communications Review has stopped short of demanding BT’s break-up is tempered by unanswered questions over what precisely the ‘legal separation’ demanded by the regulator will mean in practice for staff.

Simon Alford reports

While the worst case scenario of ‘full structural separation’ of BT and Openreach that had been demanded by some competitor companies has now certainly been ruled out, the complex deal struck between BT and Ofcom last month will still regrettably necessitate the biggest TUPE of all time.

Under the terms of the settlement agreement - which stipulates that Openreach will become a distinct, legally separate business within BT Group - no fewer than 32,000 members of staff will need to be formally transferred from BT Group to Openreach Limited, a new wholly-owned subsidiary of BT Group.

Crucially that process will not commence until a series of pre-conditions are in place, including the extension of the pension protections that were introduced at the equalised momentous time of BT’s privatisation in 1984.

Under the so-called ‘Crown Guarantee’, the then Thatcher government assumed responsibility for liabilities associated with the BT Pension Scheme (BTPS) - safeguarding employees in the unlikely event of BT ever becoming insolvent.

Last month the Government confirmed it has tabled an amendment to the Digital Economy Bill to ensure that the guarantee continues to apply to BTPS members who are transferred into Openreach Limited.

Further pre-conditions that have to be met before the TUPE can occur include:

- Arrangements being set in place for transferring Openreach employees to be able to continue active membership of whichever BT pension they are contributing towards.
- Consent being given by the BTPS Trustees to Openreach Limited becoming a participating employer in the pension scheme.
- Consultation with the CWU and Prospect relating to the TUPE transfer of 32,000 people to Openreach Limited.

CWU deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told The Voice: “While the CWU would have far preferred this TUPE not to be happening and left that had to be done so on the basis of legal opinion that indicated the transfer of staff was not legally necessary because Openreach’s assets will continue to sit with BT Group - ultimately it became clear that Ofcom was not going to budge on this fundamental issue.”

“The outcome can be welcomed,” but however, on the basis of the vital assurances on pensions that have already been agreed in principle for transferses, and further safeguards the CWU and Prospect are intent on securing during the course of the forthcoming TUPE consultation.

“TUPE protections do not normally flow through to pensions yet the regulator has clearly listened to the arguments presented by the CWU and others as to why it was essential they did in this instance.”

At the time of printing, the CWU’s main focus was on the TUPE consultation that BT is now legally obliged to conduct with recognised trade unions.

Top of the CWU’s wish-list are cast iron assurances on T&Cs, job security, the continued supremacy of BT Group level agreements, redeployment opportunities across BT Group and the maintenance of one set of pay negotiations for all NewGRID grade grades.

Andy concludes: “The Digital Communications Review has been a white knuckle ride from the outset and we’re pleased that months of nail-biting uncertainty for our members has now come to an end.

While we didn’t get everything we wanted, the outcome can only be welcomed in that it has decisively rejected the forced break-up of BT that some vested interests were demanding despite the devastating consequences that would have had for not just our members but for the national rollout of superfast broadband as well.

“The many CWU members and branches who participated in the union’s political campaigning on this issue can be proud of the fact that they clearly influenced the ultimate outcome.”

A detailed Q&A can be viewed at at www.cwu.org/vocal/ and also watch out for updates at www.cwu.org
As The Voice went to press earlier this month, senior CWU postal negotiators were warning that this year’s national talks would be “extremely tough”, after Royal Mail chiefs set out a “hardline” opening position.

“Growing from six consecutive days of negotiations with the business, deputy general secretary postal (DGSP) Terry Pullinger said that the attitude of the company was “quite shocking so far.”

“The company has almost admitted defeat on growth and on increasing revenue,” he explained, adding: “It seems Royal Mail has capitulated to ideas of maximising the cutting of costs rather than going for growth.”

Terry reported that, in the national talks, the company’s senior negotiating team have set out a list of longstanding agreements, allowances, premium payments and other proposals that they want to either remove or sharply reduce and he noted that this opening position reflects Royal Mail’s strategic orientation towards business contraction and cost-cutting.

GROWTH: ROUTE TO SUCCESS

“They want to take us backwards and unravel every agreement we’ve ever had,” he said and added that the CWU negotiating team told the company: “You can’t cut your way to success – you can only grow your way to success.”

Recalling the premises and pledges made by people at the top of the business at the time of privatisation, Terry said: “Back in 2013, Moya Greene (chief executive) and Jon Millidge (Group HR director) were talking about growth and new markets – but it hasn’t materialised.”

By contrast, Germany’s postal operator Deutsche Post DHL had adopted a growth strategy, proving that expansion within this sector is a viable option, he continued, pointing to the fact that the company “now operates in 200 countries and employs half a million people – they’ve even recently bought UK Mail.”

At a national briefing of reps, field and branch officials last month, our DGSP and the union’s three national Royal Mail officers Ray Ellis, Mark Baulch and Davie Robertson gave delegates a full report from each of the separate negotiating strands and an update on progress in the CWU’s Four Pillars campaign.

Opening the event, Terry thanked the hundreds of attendees for “this terrific turnout” and said: “Look at our army out there. This union has got the power to change Royal Mail’s direction – we can kick them out of their complacency and my confidence grows as I speak to meetings, like today, and visit other meetings of reps and members around the country.”

“The purpose of today is to update you – and we want you to leave here inspired, angry and determined,” added Terry.

The company’s response to the union’s pay claim – for a pay rise at or above prevailing RPI – and the CWU’s shorter working week proposal – for a phased reduction, without loss of pay, from 39 hours to 35 hours per week – was to argue that any offer must be “self-funding,” the briefing heard.

And this was when the list of allowances, shift premia and other payments that the company wants to axe was revealed to the meeting – an agenda which includes every change to the agreed industrial relations framework, removing protections over operational trials, and significant reductions to MTfP rights as well.

CWU assistant secretary Ray Ellis said that the list of company proposals was both “absurd” and “negative from beginning to end.

“It’s a neat and branch attack on some agreements that have defended our members for the past couple of decades and we have to get these issues out there and raise awareness of them with members.”

EXTEND AFG PROTECTIONS

Reminding everyone of the CWU’s position, Ray added: “We want the commitments made in the 2013 Agenda for Growth agreements to be consolidated and extended.”

In their joint negotiating strand, our indoor and outdoor secretaries have been trying to persuade the business to redesign the operational pipeline in order to prepare for growth and revenue generation – but both Davie Robertson and Mark Baulch report that Royal Mail is presenting a negative attitude at this time.

This strand has been organised into three separate categories – customers, employees, and cost-efficiency – “and it quickly became apparent that the third category was the only one that counts for Royal Mail,” explained Davie.

“The lack of vision from the company is appalling. Senior managers seem to have given up.”

Mark agreed with Dave’s analysis, saying: “Shoestring, it’s a gloomy picture from the business.”

And he also expressed concerns at the potential lack of detailed knowledge and operational experience of the company’s team in this strand, pointing out that “the people leading the company in these talks are from a consultant background.”

A pension solution for all is the first of the CWU’s Four Pillars and this subject dominated proceedings at the London briefing, where Hilary Salt from First Actuarial gave a detailed presentation on the union’s ground-breaking WinRS proposal.

The last edition of The Voice reported that Royal Mail had announced its intention to close WinRS has also been discussed more widely among financial analysts, with a detailed article on the plan by Michael Poole of the Financial Times, in which he quoted the previous Government’s Pensions Minister Steve Webb, who currently serves as director of policy at Royal London, saying that the proposed scheme was new to him, but that its sharing of risk “could make it an attractive option.”

“It’s caused quite a stir in the world of pensions,” remarked Terry, “and if we can achieve this, it could be an inspiration to many others.”

Summing up the current situation, Terry told The Voice: “We’ve faced up to the challenges of our time and set out our own clear agenda – on pensions as well as on pipeline redesign, the shorter working week and our legally binding protections – and that has put us in a strong position.

“What is needed now, as I said at the London briefing last month, is to get our Four Pillars petition into every Royal Mail workplace in the country and getting every member to sign up their support,” he urged.

“We’re fighting for a decent and secure future and what we’re fighting for will mobilise everyone in the union, as well as giving heart to other workers in wider society along the way.”

IT’S GONNA BE TOUGH

GET BATTLE-READY

We need our army of activists getting our Four Pillars petition into every single Royal Mail workplace in the country

TERRY PULLINGER

©CWUNews

March/April 2017

THE VOICE

www.cwu.org

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CAPITA / O₂ PAY UP

More than 1,000 Capita/ O₂ partnership employees in Preston Brook, Bury and Leeds are to receive an across the board 2 per cent pay rise, backdated to January 1.

Following members’ acceptance of the CWU-brokered rise last month, assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien points out that the settlement is substantially better than that being offered in unrecognised parts of Capita – with employees on the O₂ contract at the Dearne Valley site in South Yorkshire only getting the 1 per cent rise that Capita is paying across all of its other contracts. “Sadly we’ve been unable to negotiate on behalf of our fast-growing membership in Dearne Valley, because it falls outside the scope of the recognition agreement covering Preston Brook, Bury and Leeds,” Brendan explains. “That’s why it’s imperative that we continue to grow membership in Dearne Valley with the ultimate aim of extending our recognition agreement.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

HOONOURING GERRY

CWU regional honorary membership has been bestowed on Gerry Robinson, who recently retired from his role as the union’s education coordinator in Northern Ireland. Commenting on Gerry’s huge contribution to the union in many capacities over more than 33 years, retiring NI secretary Lawrence Huston told The Voice “Gerry worked tirelessly through the most difficult of times, across all the CWU membership in NI. His help and support to the region over many years is greatly appreciated.”

Cost of living pay claim lodged at BTFS

Note

The CWU has lodged a claim for a cost of living pay rise of 3.5%. The claim has been rejected by BT and the CWU is now preparing for further talks. The CWU is continuing to seek a decent pay rise for its members at BTFS.

Pay impasse at Gather & Gather

MARKED TIME PAY ROW

A formal protest has been lodged with Gather & Gather at the outset of the catering company to award any salary increases whatsoever to anyone who gets paid more than the national minimum wage.

The firm is legally obliged to increase the pay of the vast majority of its staff in Capita canteens in line with April’s 30p-per-hour (4.16 per cent) uplift. The company’s stance effectively puts anyone paid above the new minimum wage rate of £7.50 on marked time pay – pointing out that the move contravenes the spirit of the recognition agreement covering the Preston Brook, Gloucester, Leeds and Bury canteens to which the union’s bargaining unit extends.

At the time of writing the CWU was awaiting Gather & Gather’s response.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

£7.50

THE MINIMUM WAGE IS NOW EFFECTIVELY A PAY CEILING

in the national living wage, it has rejected the union’s arguments that no-one should have to forgo a pay rise at all.

The CWU has expressed its dismay that the company’s stance effectively puts anyone paid above the new minimum wage rate of £7.50 on marked time pay - pointing out that the move contravenes the spirit of the recognition agreement covering the Preston Brook, Gloucester, Leeds and Bury canteens to which the union’s bargaining unit extends.

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Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

FIGHTING FOR MERSEYSIDE JOBS

The CWU will continue to campaign to save 170 Bootle jobs at cheque processing company iPSL, as the body that manages the cheque clearing system (the Cheque & Credit Clearing Company) confirmed that the move to the digital processing of cheques will commence in October.

iPSL announced last year that, due to the digital switch over, its current planning assumption is that the Bootle site will close sometime during 2018, as part of a site closure programme which would move more than 1,000 employees from the Midland sites for all three members and, as a result, a planned union demonstration outside the Bootle site was cancelled.

iPSL and the CWU will now be entering into further talks about the implications of the move to digital imaging and the future of the Bootle site.

“Our message is clear: we remain committed to doing whatever we can to keep iPSL work in Bootle and securing quality jobs for Merseyside,” insists CWU assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

BIG BALLOT MAJORITY

Members in iPSL have voted by more than nine to one in favour of the company’s final offer of a 2.25 per cent pay rise, and will receive the award in their April salaries.

The CWU-brokered deal – which flows to all allowances, including pay and pension protection – was clinched following Telefónica’s agreement to operate the same performance-related pay progression arrangements for those on O₂ contracts as were applied last year.

THE DEAL INCLUDES PAY PROGRESSION ARRANGEMENTS

Those payments – which are negotiated annually in tandem with pay on behalf of those members who don’t benefit from the contractual pay progression arrangements contained in older NewGRID contracts - are worth between 0.5 and 1.6 per cent, dependent on performance ratings.

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge said “This is undoubtedly the best we could have achieved by negotiating above average settlements and stacking up well against those being achieved elsewhere in the telecoms sector. “Crucially – and at the CWU’s insistence – it builds in pay progression for T&E, Tech Spec and Business Support grades which match last year’s payments, themselves fully consolidated.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/
INVEST IN GROWTH FOR STABILITY & SUCCESS

The Voice joined CWU assistant secretary Davie Robertson on a visit to Swindon Mail Centre last month (March) to review progress on the trial activity on the new parcel sorting machine (PSM) and its impact on the workforce and the operation.

T his mail centre serves all of the Swindon (B41), Oxford (OX1) and Reading (RG) post code areas – some 850,000 residential and business addresses in total – and handles approximately 1.6 million items of mail every day.

Some 820 people are employed in the mail centre, which has been the location for several previous trials and tests of new equipment and working methods.

The PSM trial arose from the Royal Mail Parcel Processing strategy (PPS) which was a key part of the 2013 Agenda for Growth, Stability and Long-term Success agreement, and also builds on joint commitments made in the previous Business Transformation agreement of 2010, explains Davie.

The aim of the parcel automation project is to develop a future parcel processing plan, including automated and manual solutions for all bar-coded parcels in the Royal Mail operation. Following ‘proof of concept’ work, which was a key part of the 2013 Agenda for Growth, Stability and Long-term Success agreement, and also builds on joint commitments made in the previous Business Transformation agreement of 2010, explains Davie.

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SORTING MACHINE IN ACTION

Two york tippers lift and empty input york containers onto a conveyor that takes the parcels up to the operators at the top, who place the machinable parcels onto the system.

The parcels travel through a reader which uses optical character recognition (OCR) and reads bar codes to select the correct destination – the parcels move onto a circular sorter, and when each item reaches its correct output, a drop-tray sorter will drop it into its designated output york.

The PSM currently operates on the morning, late and night shifts during the week, with a minimum of 31 people working on it at any one time on each of the respective shifts. When The Voice visited, weekend operation had not yet begun and operational training for the weekend crew was scheduled to start in early April.

“Speaking with some of the members who work on the machine, there’s a lot of enthusiasm for the work they’re doing – they all tell me they enjoy the work – but there’s also some frustration with the current problems in the tipping process,” says Davie.

Unfortunately, the trial has exposed some issues with the protective red-sleeve lining in yorks, which catches items of mail during the tipping process. In tests, a significant number of items have to be removed manually because of this. Discussions have concluded, involving the CWU postal and health and safety departments, on a smooth-sided alternative, which is now also currently under trial at the site.

Davie continues: “Solid-sided yorks can reliably deposit everything in one tip, but the sleeve-lining is there for a purpose. Discussions have concluded, involving the CWU postal and health and safety departments, on a smooth-sided alternative, which is now also currently under trial at the site.

A CHANGED WORKPLACE

Robbie’s colleague Sandra Abasalom, deputy early shift rep, has also seen a lot of changes during her 30 years of Royal Mail service.

“We used to be in a different building in Swindon town centre and over time we’ve taken on Oxford and Reading and we’ve gone from a small centre to a super centre.”

On the PSM trial and other new equipment, she says: “It’s important for the CWU this is involved to embrace new things. The more work we get, the better it is.”

And Robbie agrees, saying: “The company’s telling us it’s all about growth, to attract new business and bring more customers in – more parcels coming in through Royal Mail rather than the competition.

“I hope members get what they deserve and this is growth and job security,” Davie points out, adding: “Swindon in particular has been involved in a number in recent years.

“My belief is important that we acknowledge the amount of change people at this particular site have had to deal with in a relatively short period of time and thank them for the excellent way that they have risen to the challenge.”

Summing up the visit Davie says: “Within our Four Pillars of Security policy, we see the mail centre network as a key integral element of a successful operational pipeline and we will continue to press this point in national discussions.

FOREFRONT OF OUR INDUSTRY

“It’s crucial that the network can prosper, attract new business, new volume, and additional traffic – in order to maintain and secure jobs for our members going forward – and agreed joint trial activity, providing real safeguards for our members, plays a vital role in that respect and allows us to identity issues and address them with the aim of achieving mutual interest solutions,” he explains.

The union sees the PSM trial as important, as it enables an understanding of the capabilities of the machine, ensures that it can deliver what has been promised and that it provides the right way forward for the company and CWU members with regards to parcel sorting and growth opportunities.

Successful deployment of this machine has the potential to put Royal Mail at the forefront of the industry – and ahead of the competition, which is of crucial importance for members.

“We recognise, as a union, the effort our members put into trial activities,” Davie points out, adding: “Swindon in particular has been involved in a number in recent years.

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Successful deployment of this machine has the potential to put Royal Mail at the forefront of the industry – and ahead of the competition, which is of crucial importance for members.

“We recognise, as a union, the effort our members put into trial activities,” Davie points out, adding: “Swindon in particular has been involved in a number in recent years.

“I believe it’s important that we acknowledge the amount of change people at this particular site have had to deal with in a relatively short period of time and thank them for the excellent way that they have risen to the challenge.”

Summing up the visit Davie says: “Within our Four Pillars of Security policy, we see the mail centre network as a key integral element of successful operational pipeline and we will continue to press this point in national discussions.

FOREFRONT OF OUR INDUSTRY

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WE'RE GETTING INTO SHAPE FOR THE FUTURE

Re-design has been the central aim of general secretary Dave Ward since he took over the post in 2015. The Voice reports here on progress so far and asks you, the members, for your contributions.

"This union exists for one reason and one reason only – to defend and advance the pay, terms and conditions of our members at work," Dave Ward tells us, spelling out the basic fundamentals of this organisation.

When the CWU was created through the merger of the UCW postal union and the NCU telecoms union back in 1995, the aim at that time had been to bring overall membership up from some 260,000 members up to 300,000.

And the CWU’s structure that was created in the late 1990s had been designed on the basis of that projection.

"However," Dave explains, "CWU membership did not rise to 300,000. As numbers of staff in post reduced significantly over the past 20 years in Royal Mail and BT, our union’s membership declined significantly over the past 20 years in Royal Mail and BT, our union’s membership did not rise to 300,000.

The challenge of adapting its own structure and organisational model to meet the needs of its members, providing that organisational model belongs to its members, that meets the needs of its members, is retained.

And significant organisational or major restructuring recommendations made by the Re-design board will be taken to a future CWU Annual Conference or a specially convened CWU conference.

WE NEED YOUR INPUT

Speaking to Th' Voice after the briefing, Dave Ward said: "We want Voice readers to get in touch, set out your concerns, your aspirations for this union and what your opinions on Re-design are.

Specifically, we need to know about work being done out there in the localities in recruitment – successes and challenges?

Are there non-CWU members in your workplace?

Are there any vacancies for workplace rep positions in your workplace? Would you be interested in training to become a CWU rep?

We want your suggestions for future recruitment campaigns – are there new companies in your area operating in the communications and/or delivery and logistics sectors?

What significant change would you like to see to this union?

I want to hear your opinions on the change you want to see – you can send your views in to re-design@cwu.org

DAVE WARD"
PAY UP AT ISBAN

Members at Santander’s Isban subsidiary have overwhelming accepted a CWU-brokered pay deal that provides for fully consolidated pay rises of a minimum of 2.2 per cent for anyone below the midpoint of their salary range, and a minimum of 2.1 per cent for anyone above. Hot on the heels of members’ earlier acceptance of a comprehensive pay and grading harmonisation in which there were no losers and some significant winners, the pay rises took effect from March 1, and were included in March salaries.

Crucially, as agreed in the earlier harmonisation deal, the pay award applies in full to members of staff who currently sit above the max of their pay scale.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Anomalies resolved as pay rises

PAY UP AT PRODUBAN

Members in Santander’s Produban subsidiary have voted by more than nine to one in favour of a CWU-brokered pay increase which provides everyone in membership with a fully consolidated rise of at least 2.2 per cent. The deal – which achieved 94 per cent support in a ballot in which 74 per cent of members participated – secures high performers a 2.6 per cent increase, 2.4 per cent for those with an ‘above expectation’ rating and starts to address pay anomalies adversely affecting key employees on legacy ASL contracts.

Following the company’s agreement to abolish the old ‘Band H’ grade and move everyone in it to Band G, eight individuals have emerged as major winners – with one receiving a £5,000 increase.

Assistant secretary John East explains: “The CWU has long argued that the eight members in question were significantly underpaid, as the work they conduct is exactly the same as that conducted by G grade employees, and sometimes even F grade staff.”

This year’s pay talks provided the perfect opportunity to address this particular anomaly.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Member at Airwave have benefited from the major deals in the last four months

APRIL PAY CHEER

Members in Airwave have overwhelmingly accepted a 2 per cent pay increase that combined with a series of benefits secured in a recent harmonisation deal to provide a significant boost to salaries from April 1.

On an 80 per cent turn-out, 95 per cent of members at the secure communications provider voted in favour of the fully consolidated rise in an electronic ballot last month.

The deal flows through to on-call and shift allowances, applies to several individuals who were not previously included in the bargaining unit and also benefits staff currently paid above the G2 salary maximum, so long as their salary was deemed ‘protected’ under the ‘Securing Tomorrow’ agreement.

CWU assistant secretary John East explains: “While the headline increase of 2 per cent received by the vast majority of our members in Airwave as a result of the 2017 pay review is a little below the relevant RPI rate of 2.5 per cent, it needs to be considered in the context of other significant salary increases stemming from December’s harmonisation deal.”

“The fact is some people received 2 per cent plus 3.85 per cent plus 15 per cent on April 1 – and that achievement has clearly been recognised by members.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Overwhelming ‘yes’ to Airwave pay deal

Joint union approach to Capita

RESPONSE AWAITED

The CWU has thrown its weight behind a joint union request to Capita for one set of national discussions on pension changes that are currently out to consultation – rather than each union seeking its own talks.

This move comes amid a growing awareness that many of the issues affecting a multitude of different bargaining units across Capita often have their root in the same Group-level policies. Early this year the CWU met with UNITE, PCS, GMB and Prospect to discuss the scope for some talks to be held collectively rather than separately within individual bargaining units.

Subsequently a formal request was lodged for joint discussions to be held where appropriate – starting with the pensions issue.

Assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien explains: “We’ve pointed out the inefficiency and duplication caused by the company taking to a host of recognised unions individually about the pension changes. Instead it could present the rationale for its proposals to all the recognised unions across the company in one go, and those changes could then be discussed in one set of collective discussions.

“It’s easy to see that there could be other areas where collective discussions would make sense, including, for instance, over various Group-wide policies.”

At the time of printing a company response had not yet been received.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

SWISS POST PAY TALKS

Pay negotiations were just beginning at Swiss Post at the time of printing, with the CWU arguing the case for an RPI-plus rise.

Assistant secretary John East told The Voice: “A complicating factor in this year’s pay talks is that there are effectively two groups of workers with different pay dates. Legacy staff who were TUPE’d out of Geoban have a long-established pay date of April 1, but staff recruited direct to Swiss Post, including former agency workers at the Bradford site, had their last uplift in November as a result of the company’s recent signing of a new improved union recognition agreement.

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Compelling feedback from Capita/Tesco Mobile members over the importance of their 2017 pay rise keeping pace with rising prices has been credited with helping to secure an revised offer from Capita which had just been accepted by 87 per cent of those participating in a consultative ballot as The Voice went to press.

Negotiations following the CWU’s rejection of a 1.25 per cent pro-rata offer – but following the presentation to to management of feedback from members collected by CWU reps at the Bury and Preston Brook sites, the company tabled an improved offer that equates to 2 per cent for the nine-month period in question as a result of the pay date being moved forward from April to January 1.

Assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien said: “In an increasingly tough negotiating environment it’s hugely helpful when members speak out like this – demonstrating not just that they care passionately about pay but that they stand firmly behind their union negotiators.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/
Capita TVL pay ballot

Members working for Capita TVL at Bristol and Darwen were voting on a pay deal negotiated by the CWU as we went to press. The agreement would mean a consolidated 4.2 per cent rise in minimum salary levels with effect from January 1 this year, rising further after six months and 12 months respectively.

For most staff it will rise by 2 per cent (consolidated), while those on highest grades receive a £300 lump sum on top of their consolidated 4 per cent increase.

As well as pay, the business has agreed in principle to negotiate a new career progression plan and has committed to a feasibility study on a future reduction in the working week.

Post Office 4% wage claim

A 4 per cent consolidated pay claim, with pension improvements and other benefits has been submitted to the Post Office by the CWU. The union is calling for a joint review of incentive schemes, scheduled attendance rates for crew members, and annual leave equality.

Speaking to The Voice, assistant secretary Andy Furey said: “In light of the recent membership survey, showing widespread discontent across the business, we hope the senior management will respond positively and promptly to our claim. In recent years our Post Office members have been forced into industrial action over pay and we firmly believe that our hard-working members deserve a fair deal.”

Praise for hero postman Darren Dickson

Clear Caleb McCandless’s airway when the 15-month-old went into a seizure. Caleb’s panicked mother, Megan, had rushed out of her Coleraine home with the youngster - fortunately just when Darren was in the vicinity conducting his morning deliveries.

Writing in the Belfast Telegraph, reporter Allan Preston quoted Megan saying that Caleb started to roll and he went into seizure. “I honestly thought he was dead.’’ Darren got Caleb to come back around” she continued. “I was just so glad he was there. I couldn’t thank him enough. I was just so grateful for everything he did.”

Darren, who works at Coleraine Delivery Office, told the paper: “I was doing my rounds, and Megan came running and shouting with Caleb in her arms and he was limp and lifeless. I put my finger in his mouth and pulled his tongue forward. I think it was blocking his airway. I got his airway cleared and he started to come round a bit.”

After a few minutes, Caleb started coughing and screaming, by which time an ambulance had arrived and took him to hospital.

“I’m just glad I could help the wee boy,” Darren stressed. Darren’s CWU branch, Northern Ireland East, told The Voice that they were “extremely proud of him.”

Branch secretary Davy Moffett said: “I recently attended the Coleraine Delivery Office and gave a presentation to Darren on behalf of the CWU for his prompt action.”

“Darren’s been rightly praised by his colleagues and others and of course we’re delighted for little Caleb.”

Award for computer 'newbie' Jim Bell

Educational & Learning

Retired CWU member Jim Bell picked up a prestigious accolade in this year’s Learning for Life awards for his online skills, despite being a complete newcomer to the digital age.

A member of the union’s Gloucestershire Amal Branch, and with 40 years’ service in the postal industry, Jim had never used a computer until his CWU union learning rep Katy Hartland suggested it to him soon after his retirement.

He was sceptical at first, but he told The Voice that, once he began learning, “it didn’t take long, and after just a couple of months I was getting the internet at home and picking out my first laptop.”

Having the support of his ULR made all the difference, clear Caleb McCandless’s airway when the 15-month-old went into a seizure. Caleb’s panicked mother, Megan, had rushed out of her Coleraine home with the youngster - fortunately just when Darren was in the vicinity conducting his morning deliveries.

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Jim Bell, who has won the award for computer 'newbie', said: “I was so proud of myself for learning, and for the improvement it has made to my life.”

World of work increasingly exploitative and insecure

Today only around 100 such individuals are self-employed, out of a total of 2.5 million working in BT call centres - the dramatic drop in zero-hour contracts has been driven by the Government’s introduction of a 'National Living Wage'.

The Office for National Statistics has revealed that the number of UK workers on controversial zero-hour contracts that do not guarantee hours of work has reached a record high of 910,000. The rapid rise in the prevalence of zero-hour contracts is highlighted by the fact that, since 2005 - when the CWU’s iconic Euro-trashed campaign for equal treatment of agency workers was focussing on the dramatically lower pay of thousands of zero-hour contract workers in BT call centres - the number of such contracts has increased by tenfold.

Interestingly, however, the number of CWU agency members working on BT assignments on what technically constitute zero-hour contracts (even though, unusually, those contracts did and do offer guaranteed regular hours) - has bucked the national trend. Today only around 100 such individuals are left - with Pay Between Assignment (PBA) contracts becoming prevalent since 2011 on account of their exclusion from the terms of an EU directive which gave other agency workers the right to equal pay to that of their directly employed counterparts after 12 weeks in a given job.

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge explains: “Within the BT call centre arena the zero-hour contracts formerly offered by Manpower were far less insecure than the ones that are typically offered by employers today, because they defined the number of hours worked each week. “As such, our Manpower members on zero-hour contracts were major beneficiaries of the Temporary Agency Workers Directive in terms of their pay - hence the reason that, after 2011, PBA contracts became the norm for new agency workers in BT and the number of zero-hour contracts has dwindled.

“Most zero-hour contracts being issued today are terrible for the employee because of the collective lack of security. Champions of the so-called 'flexible labour market' may have been wrong to believe that they can be flexibly employed as their contract allows; instead workers are forced into working in conditions that are worse than those that previously existed, with employers being able to sack them at any time they please.”

Quick fix demanded to alleviate agency injustice

A forceful moral case is being made to Manpower to act NOW to address pitifully low pay rates for agency workers at a significant number of BT sites amid new evidence of the prevalence of exploitative employment models across the UK.

Simon Alford reports
Remembering the big winter strike

This January marked 30 years since the landmark all-out strike in BT. Charlie Pullinger explores the legacy of a bitter four-week showdown which arguably paved the way for a transformed industrial relations climate that has persisted ever since.

Just two years after privatisation, and well before the commencement of one of the biggest redundancies and reorganisation programmes in UK industrial history, it’s interesting to reflect that the last truly ‘national’ strike in BT began with the company’s rejection of the NCU’s demand to reinstate engineers who had been suspended during a dispute over pay and a subsequent nationwide overtime ban.

British Telecom – which in 1986 had declared pre-tax profits of over £1bn – had offered a broadly inflation-based 5 per cent pay rise to engineers, rejecting a 13 per cent demand that had been lodged by the union in the belief that the workforce deserved a better share of the company’s burgeoning profitability.

The overtime ban that followed and the suspension of workers for their action secured one of the largest walkouts in the industry’s history.

**SOLID FROM THE START**

There was overwhelming support for the strike from the outset, with mass meetings being held to express anger and outrage over the suspensions and hundreds of clerical workers walking out in solidarity.

The effect on the infrastructure of the UK was evident right from the start, with the newly computerised City of London witnessing a near complete breakdown. Domestic telephone lines were out of order, people were unable to dial 999 for emergency services and police stations were cut off.

BT began advising customers not to use their phones unless it was ‘completely essential’ and, with international calls starting to be impacted, it was clear the network was teetering on the brink.

January 1987 saw some of the coldest temperatures and heaviest snowfall of the decade and this added to the impact of the dispute, as snow and strong winds pounded parts of the UK.

With prior lines across the country gathering in strength and the network starting to buckle, BT tried to blame the union for the dispute, accusing the NCU of trying to ‘damage’ the reputation of the newly privatised company and placing its own members’ jobs at risk in the process.

But the union rejected the company’s stance, insisting that the dispute was not solely over the suspensions or pay, but was part of a wider issue involving the protection of jobs and maintaining services to the public.

**BLOODY NOSE**

NCU leaders warned that the network would face a “total breakdown unless BT agreed to re-open talks and famously claimed that BT management ‘wanted a roughhouse’ but that the dispute would leave them with a ‘bloody nose’.

Reflecting on the dispute in The Independent some seven years later, Mike Bett – managing director of BT’s UK operations at the time of the strike – admitted to “making mistakes”, particularly in underestimating how quickly the public perception would change to BT.

“The problem for us was that we hadn’t had any engineers working for about four weeks, and with 120,000 engineers that was a lot of ‘working’ to do, to be done,” he wrote. “We just didn’t have the resources to carry out maintenance and installation work. We found that, after the strike the tide turned against us. BT was talked about as the most reviled public institution in Britain. In our defence, we lost around 6,000 man years of engineering time, but the public didn’t appreciate that.”

**LASTING LEGACY**

Reflecting on the significance of the dispute deputy general secretary Andy Kerr said “It’s fair to say that the union’s stand against the hardline approach taken by the newly-privatised BT, and the manner of its action taken, resulted in far more than simply a resolution to this particular dispute.

“The lasting legacy, which still resonates today, is the way the union and BT negotiated and went to negotiate. The union maintained its strong voice, membership base and negotiating position, and BT and this is due to the strong position we took three decades ago.”

Laura Snell and Scott Hartles spoke for their generation when they informed the 2017 Youth Conference that suicide is the biggest killer among young people, but is preventable, and that the CWU can help directly by linking up with the suicide prevention charity, Papyrus.

**POSITIVE ACTION**

By sharing their own stories of the “silent killer”, the two Youth Conference members have now helped forge the union’s relationship with Papyrus, which specialises in the prevention of suicide in children, teenagers and young people up to the age of 25.

This follows support from the union’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Conference and the CWU’s National Health, Safety and Environment Department – and the link is likely to include the CWU promoting Papyrus in awareness campaigns, fundraising and inviting the charity to speak at events.

“The Youth Committee and branches of the union internationally recognised “mental health first aid” course for branch youth officers and youth reps earlier this month.

Laura Eastern (No 4 branch) found out about Papyrus while researching for a speech at a union skills course after attending the funeral of a former school friend. “It interests me because I’ve had families and friends kill themselves. I thought it would be good to get the statistics known and get people talking about important issues, particularly mental health.”

“The motions Scott and I put forward got people talking about their experiences, which is a good thing because suicide has a stigma around it and people find it hard to talk.

“The people at Papyrus are trained to talk to young people, the charity is aimed at helping them specifically, and you can text them if you prefer.”

Scott (Scotland No 3) added, “I started to suffer anxiety attacks and developed depression when I first moved out of my family home. It’s amazing how your mind wanders in simple situations or tasks and how you automatically think of the worst thing possible.”

Pointing out that “suicide is the biggest killer of men under 45”, with an average of 13 men taking their own lives everyday, Scott told The Voice: “The hardest part is recognising you have a problem and seeking the help you need. You can’t do it all yourself, but it has to start with you.”

Speaking passionately on the issue at the union’s Youth Conference in January, Scott said: “We need to ensure those in distress are recognised and signposted to professional help.”

Papyrus provides confidential help and advice to young people and anyone worried about a young person. It helps others prevent young suicide by working with individuals, professionals, and contacts campaigns and influences national policy.

**STOPPING THE SILENT KILLER**

The union’s youngest members are tackling the tragic growth in suicides among people aged under 35, and the wider CWU family is supporting their aim to forge links with a charity that stop these preventable deaths.

Laura Snell and Scott Hartles

Laura Snell and Scott Hartles
Matt Call is the first to admit his first reaction on being asked to appear on the Jeremy Kyle Show with his transgender identical twin sister, Allysa, was to run a mile. Despite his deep-seated conviction that society at large is far more accepting of ‘difference’ than bigots like to believe – borne of his own positive experience of ‘coming out’ at the age of 23 – the 35-year-old Western Counties branch member needed persuading that a notoriously confrontational reality TV show was the right platform for a sympathetic airing of complex transgender issues that still represent a taboo for many. In the event, neither Matt, nor Allysa (pictured below on TV), need have worried. The interview was sympathetic, the studio audience warm and the reaction of viewers (pictured below on TV), need have worried.

Matt Call at work

STANDING UP TO BE COUNTED...

It takes courage to stand up for diversity in a world that can be unforgiving to those who dare to be different – but CWU member Matt Call is convinced that speaking out for what you know is right is the ultimate weapon in the fight against ignorance and bigotry. But his journey from his appearance on the Jeremy Kyle show with his trans gender twin sister, the Exeter postman told Simon Alford how their ten minutes of TV fame has reinforced their faith in the tolerance of Britain’s silent majority.

Matt Call is the first to admit his first reaction on being asked to appear on the Jeremy Kyle Show with his transgender identical twin sister, Allysa, was to run a mile. Despite his deep-seated conviction that society at large is far more accepting of ‘difference’ than bigots like to believe – borne of his own positive experience of ‘coming out’ at the age of 23 – the 35-year-old Western Counties branch member needed persuading that a notoriously confrontational reality TV show was the right platform for a sympathetic airing of complex transgender issues that still represent a taboo for many. In the event, neither Matt, nor Allysa (pictured below on TV), need have worried. The interview was sympathetic, the studio audience warm and the reaction of viewers (pictured below on TV), need have worried.

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24   THE VOICE

something Robbie first heard about as summer school for working class musicians, the Workers’ Music Association (WMA). That came out of the 1940s - the Workers’ participation in another musical institution - and now he’s hoping to strike a chord that began as a wartime morale-booster the hugely popular BBC radio programme CALLING BUDDING MUSICIANS...

For more than 70 years the labour movement-rooted WMA has organised a summer school for working class musicians, something Robbie first heard about as a trade union activist and amateur jazz musician while working as a engineer for Royal Mail. “I decided to enrol - and it changed my life!” he told The Voice. (See full story at www.cwu.org/voice/)

Robbie is keen that other trade unionists get the same chance to maximise their musical potential - and is adamant that no-one should feel deterred for lack of formal musical training.

Find out more about the WMA’s 2017 Summer School, which runs from August 20-27 at Ingestre Hall in Staffordshire, at www.wmasummer-schools-of-music.co.uk

UKIP derailed in Stoke!

Midland No. 7 branch more than played its part in thwarting UKIP’s hopes of an electoral breakthrough at the Stoke-on-Trent Central by-election - helping secure a triumphant night for Labour.

With UKIP showing everything it had into a constituency it had dubbed the country’s ‘Brexit Capital’, the branch’s first brainwave was to contact ‘Chunky Mark’ - the high profile Assistant Taxi Driver blogger who’d previously worked with the CWU on the People’s Post campaign.

The internet phenomenon visited Stoke in February, filming CWU members at the branch office and outside Paul Nuttall’s campaign HQ in Hanley town centre for a video project entitled ‘Brexit: The Movie’. One of the videos went viral, receiving over 230,000 views at the last count. Meanwhile, Longton DIO rep Joe McClusky came up with a great hashtag for a social media campaign (#PiesNotLies) after he recalled that the premises UKIP had chosen for its Hanley base had formerly been occupied by a bakery.

The rest, as they say, is history - and helping our members stand, and need to do something about this.

As the detailed article on page 7 explains, there have been some concrete steps forward as a result of the campaigning and lobbying that the union has engaged in across the country.

In Wales, for example, all Members of Parliament have been sent details of the CWU’s position and the union has been lobbying senior members of the devolved authority, and assembly members (AMs), reports CWU Wales secretary Gary Watkins.

“The briefing we’ve sent out has gone to every MP and AM in Wales,” he said, adding that this was linked into Welsh administration’s Superfast Cymru initiative.

“Our document makes the point that breaking up BT and Openreach would be bad for Wales, bad for superfast broadband targets and bad for customers and the workforce.

“We want to raise awareness of this issue – and establish firmly that a split is not a good idea,” Gary added. Gary, along with CWU Wales telecom branch secretaries, and the union’s senior BT Wales rep, made their case direct to the regulator in February, at an Ofcom Open Forum event and the CWU delegation has also met with Business West AM Julie James, who serves as the assembly’s minister for skills and technology.

“She told us she deals with BT on a daily basis and that the problem she has is a lack of clarity,” he told The Voice, adding: “We explained to her that splitting up BT and Openreach is not going to help.

“Our next step in our campaign is to get members of all three CWU telecom branches that operate in Wales to write to their MPs and AMs – particularly in rural areas where Superfast Cymru rollout will rely on direct intervention.”

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Great pensions divide

Regarding Ivan Chester’s letter about the two-tier workforce ‘in BT, I understand his and his fellow workers’ concerns but I believe pensions represent an even greater issue. The divide between those in the generous BTPS and those, like myself, in the BTRSS is grossly unfair and needless to say BTRSS members are not happy. I have a very personal interest in this as I will be 60 this year. BTPS/ Standard Life have told me I can ‘enjoy’ a pension of under £1,800 a year nothing less than an insult. I’ve worked two terms of service in BT, returning to the company in 2000, initially on a two-year contract, and when I was offered a full-term contract I’d fail one of the cut-off dates to enter the BTPS by days. I am working outside colleague who’ve worked 37 years who will get £13,000 a year, yet I will only get £1,200 a year! I do hope the union recognises there is a lot of under-riding unrest at the unfairness, and that it fights to get BTRSS members a better deal.

Michael Sturgeon, Orpington, Kent

Deputy general secretary, Andy Kerr responds: Michael raises an important issue that the CWU is keen to address – but it’s very important that care is taken before jumping to assumptions about the relative benefits of different pension schemes on the basis of a projected pension. Because so many variables are at play.
That said, the CWU has long been concerned that some BTRSS members may not be fully aware of the amount they need to put in to achieve a decent income in retirement, as is the case with any money purchase scheme. Over the years the CWU has repeatedly sought, with some success, to improve the BTRSS scheme to narrow the difference between it and the BTPS – and the way the CWU structured this year’s pay deal (out to ballot as The Voice went to press) is a clear demonstration of the important the union places on this issue. This, however, is just the start of a new focus on this important area which will be given new impetus at next week’s CWU Annual Conference where a motion tabled by the T&FS Executive will call for various improvements to the BTRSS including higher BT contribution levels, an increase in the minimum company payment, pensionability of allowances and improved medical retirement. That debate will be reported in the next issue of The Voice.

MEANINGLESS PROMISE

On the back page of the last edition of The Voice, in the ‘Last Word’ article about the than eminent Health Campaigner Tessa Jowell’s ‘Save our NHS’ demonstration, Tony Kearns asks “where is the £350 million per week for the NHS we were promised”?
Promised by whom? In the run-up to the EU Referendum the bus that bore the ‘We sent the EU £350 million a week – let’s fund our NHS instead’ slogan was part of the ‘Leave’ campaign and no promises were made by Government or Opposition.
I’m ambivalent about Brexit, but as far as I know Britain is still a member of the EU and presumably continuing to contribute the agreed amount until we leave?

John Dow, Erdington, Birmingham

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns responds: John’s observation is a technical point but what’s abundantly clear was that senior Tories in top Cabinet positions, including Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, were amongst those championing the vote-winning pledge which has now been conveniently forgotten by all involved.
I’m ambivalent about Brexit, but as far as I know Britain is still a member of the EU and presumably continuing to contribute the agreed amount until we leave?

More letters can be viewed online at www.cwu.org/voice/
Most estimates put the numbers on the big London march above the 200,000 mark, with the Daily Mail and Daily Mirror quoting 250,000.

And the CWU contingent – complete with our giant union balloons – marched along proudly with everyone else, demanding that the Government put extra cash into the NHS.

“The turnout for the national NHS Crisis march was marvellous, and there was a great speech from Dave Ward,” says Tony, who explained how our general secretary had used the ‘taking back control’ theme to apply to our NHS, to our other public services and to our workplaces.

“He also made the point that the NHS is more than a service, it’s a fundamental principle of this country – which keeps us and our families alive.”

Tony praised CWU members for turning out for the march, saying that this showed “how much value our members place on the service the NHS provides.

“We need to take stock of the things we value – such as our health service – and realise that these can be taken away unless we’re prepared to stand up and fight for them,” he urged.

The timing of the demonstration (March 4) scheduled it for the weekend before this year’s Budget, with the aim of trying to persuade Chancellor Philip Hammond to significantly raise the NHS funding programme – both in the longer term and with an emergency injection of cash.

When the Chancellor revealed the Budget to the House of Commons a few days later, he pledged £2 billion over the next three years for the NHS, with a further £325 million set aside for “sustainability and transformation plans” and £100m to place more GPs in accident and emergency departments for next winter.

The Voice asked Tony for his reaction to the Budget announcements and whether he thought the controversy that followed Mr Hammond’s national insurance proposals could impact upon his NHS funding pledges.

“We’ve seen the Chancellor’s attempts to deal with this issue in the Budget unravel before our eyes,” said our SDGS, who noted that, as a result of the withdrawal of the planned national insurance changes, “there is now a £2bn hole in his calculations around social care and no plan in place to fill it.”

“This shows the breath-taking incompetence of this Government on this extremely important issue.”

Tony continued: “People take to the streets to voice their anger and frustration and demand the Government acts to protect the health of the people of our nation and what is their response? U-turns, funding shortfalls and no plans to deal with the problem.

“The shambolic approach is symptomatic of their underlying position. When it comes to the NHS and looking after the less well off in our country they simply can’t be bothered to do the right thing.”

In response to the question of where the movement should go from here in our NHS campaigning, our SDGS insisted that “the fight must be stepped up.

“We need to take that fighting spirit from the national demonstration back into our communities. Join up with local hospital campaigns and fight for these services at a local level,” he concluded.