Pay negotiations with BT are entering a critical phase, with the union holding out for a fair deal.

CWUHA’s year ended as it began – bringing relief to the innocent victims of Syria’s bloody civil war.

The Voice joined acting outdoor secretary Mark Baulch visiting workers at two delivery offices.

Cold front at BT and POL

Post Office dispute

Openreach separation?
L  the run-up to Christmas we are dealing with two key issues that are fundamental to the future of our members’ jobs, pensions and the industries they work in.

Firstly, the announcement from Ofcom that it intends to move forward with its proposals for what it calls the “legal separation” of Openreach and BT, by giving formal notification of its plans to the EU.

Although Ofcom has left the door open for BT to take action itself to make the two parts of its business more independent, it is clear that this is a significant development and that the regulator is demanding change.

If the proposal does go through, it would effectively mean Openreach having to operate as a separate company under the umbrella of BT Group and this raises serious questions for pensions, job security and BT’s financial position.

The union continues to push Ofcom on this and we will do all we can to defend our members.

Ofcom justifies what it is doing by citing the need to promote competition. But it is increasingly clear that its proposals won’t serve customers or the broader national interest when it comes to the rollout of superfast broadband, nor the tens of thousands of people working in BT.

Our members in Royal Mail have a similar experience of how Ofcom and regulators have operated and we need to come together as a whole union to expose this and make the case for a fundamental change in approach in this country.

The second key issue we face is the dispute in the Post Office. Our campaign has forced the Government into a public consultation on the future of the service – and branches and members across the union have campaigned hard to promote our key demands in response to this.

Alongside industrial action, our political work has helped put pressure on the Government and the Post Office – and, again, it is clear that we need a fundamental change if it is to have a long-term future.

With these challenges, as I have said before, the CWU redesign project is vital in making sure we are effective in standing up for our members and working together as one union.

A lot of work has been done on this over the course of the year and we are now in a position where we will be moving forward on a number of issues. This is all about streamlining our headquarters’ structures and we are undertaking a fundamental review of a number of central departments to make them more focused on the frontline and supporting members.

We will be making announcements on the changes in the New Year and talking to branches about how we can make further progress.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to wish all of our reps and members a Happy Christmas and to thank you for all your work for the CWU and your continued support.

Politics in flux; Tories exposed – could 2017 be Labour’s year?

Amid shocking predictions of an unprecedented post-Brexit pay squeeze, Daily Mirror associate editor Kevin Maguire argues that the need for Labour to reunite behind a progressive agenda is greater than ever before.

S o the earnings of workers and incomes of families are to be squeezed or cut for the next four years as the national debt soars to £2-trillion under the Tories.

The Hammond House of Horrors exposed in Spreadsheet Phil’s mini-Budget, a Chancellor of the Exchequer with the funeral air of a Surrey undertaker delivering a recently deceased Earl for the box, nailed the enduring old lie the Tories were competent if nasty.

Doubling debt, borrowing more than every previous Labour government combined, while simultaneously squeezing living standards, running down the NHS and flogging off, on the cheap, Royal Mail and other parts of the family silver, is decisive proof the Conservatives are both incompetent and nasty.

COST OF AUSTERITY

Austerity was a political choice with disastrous financial consequences, as everybody can see when they look at a bank statement or are told to wait for a doctor’s appointment.

I’ve been writing about the world of work, trade unions and politics for 30+ years and this cynical mob in power are the worst, knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing in a Jamland run for an undeserving landlord few.

Building of affordable homes is at a 20-year low, yet £369m was found to tart up Buckingham Palace - Her Maj doubtless relieved, as a pensioner- to avoid a colossal bedroom tax bill on 239 surplus rooms in Britain’s most prestigious council house.

Many people have good reason to be angry when life’s getting harder and you don’t need to be Harry Edenfill’s teenage but Kevin (I was at York University with Edenfill and still fret about the inspiration for the character’s name) shouting “It’s unfair” to recognise Britain’s on the road to a nastier and meaner place.

Go west and lying racist sexual predator Donald Trump, a billionaire elitist posing as anti-elite, won in the US by promising change which means either Labour gets its act together or the Reactionary Right will thrive here.

Brexite was a warning when Leave campaign’s lies (don’t hold your breath for £350m-a-week extra for the NHS when the exit bill might be £1bn), the hateful racist scaremongering of Trump’s playing Nigel Farage (a privately educated City speculator turned professional politician) and the porinks of Old Etonian great manipulator Boris Johnson come enough to make a difference in a tight result.

Trump and Brexit demonstrate, as did the unexpected Tory majority in last May’s General Election, that polls and pundits can be very wrong.

The next General Election certainly isn’t in the bag for Tedious Theresa and her traditional Tories.

Jeremy Corbyn and Labour aren’t dead certs for 2017 because Jeremy Corbyn and Labour aren’t dead certs for defeat. I’m not predicting a Labour victory. The party has much to do.

Corbyn first needs to raise his game. The party must unite. And people want good reasons to vote for Labour, requiring it to produce attractive credible policies.

But when politics is in enormous flux and the Tories are exposed as a bunch of useless literate racists, to avoid a colossal bedroom tax bill on 239 surplus rooms in Britain’s most prestigious council house.
While still seeking an agreement with BT about what “separate legal incorporation” would look like, Ofcom is preparing for a situation where negotiations fail. In that situation Ofcom would need to secure EU agreement to its proposals.

The changes to the Board and governance aren’t problematic for the CWU. The post-BT situation where negotiations fail is more complex. It would be absolutely unacceptable for our Openreach members to no longer be active members of the BTPS. Ofcom says it believes a framework to avoid that scenario is possible, and this is encouraging.

We need absolute clarity on that front, and the CWU is also impressing, on Ofcom and BT, our strong preference for a ‘June’ start to address pay disparities in BT’s annual pay round of 2017 – the 2017 pay round. The CWU is also setting out for a fully consolidated above-RPI inflation-plus rise is affordable and sustainable.

The Voice went to press, with the union’s national officers meeting last week as strike action saved 18 jobs in Belfast and a number of negotiations are ongoing. CWU members are proving exceptionally complex due to the landscape of outsourcing, offshoring and the regulator has upped the stakes.

Long may this tradition continue, but we all know our industry faces some real challenges to protect our jobs from the threats of passive ambition, aggressive competition and vindictive regulation.

Long may this tradition continue, but we also know our industry faces some real challenges to protect our jobs from the threats of passive ambition, aggressive competition and vindictive regulation. Nobody likes change but we must deliver严厉打击. With the range of issues to cover, offering some 130,000 workers, it has been agreed that these challenges split into three key strands, which reflect the union’s priority policy areas.

Terry will lead on the Pay/Conditions/Shorter Working Week, Current Agreements, Pensions and Vision/Charter strands, while income secretary Davie Robertson and acting outdoor secretary Mark Bauch will jointly lead for the union on Resourcing, Pipeline and More Human. Assistant secretaries Roy Ellis and Andy Furey will support Terry on Pensions and Pay/Conditions/Shorter Working Week, and Ray will assist the DGSP’s work on Current Agreements.

We’re fielding our strongest team ever, and we’re excited that our efforts ended in securing our objectives – on pensions, the shorter working week, an extension to current agreements and legal protections, and a rethink being proposed by top-level management.

Whilst we are all committed to industrial stability, we cannot allow this moment to slip away without such clear and strong mutual interests in place. I’d like to wish all CWU members and their families a happy and peaceful Christmas, and in the New Year, let’s get back in the gym and prepare for the tough struggle ahead.

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Long may this tradition continue, but we also know our industry faces some real challenges to protect our jobs from the threats of passive ambition, aggressive competition and vindictive regulation. Nobody likes change but we must deliver

Terry Pullinger  
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

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Long may this tradition continue, but we also know our industry faces some real challenges to protect our jobs from the threats of passive ambition, aggressive competition and vindictive regulation.

Pay talks with BT are entering a critical phase, with the CWU holding out for a fully consolidated above-RPI settlement for all grades.

The fourth meeting between company and union negotiators in as many weeks had just taken place as the Voice went to press, with the union’s national officers meeting last week as strike action saved 18 jobs in Belfast and a number of negotiations are ongoing. CWU members are proving exceptionally complex due to the landscape of outsourcing, offshoring and the regulator has upped the stakes.

Long may this tradition continue, but we all know our industry faces some real challenges to protect our jobs from the threats of passive ambition, aggressive competition and vindictive regulation.
Suspensions lifted after walkout

The strikers picketing outside the delivery office vindicated after suspensions against members of staff were lifted following appeals. Hundreds of postal workers across four Luton post codes – LU1, LU2, LU3, and LU4 – went on strike in October in protest against the management action, in a walkout which followed an over 92 per cent vote for action. The dispute was sparked when two Leagrave delivery members were suspended by local management and a Luton member was also suspended in a separate matter – suspensions which the union argued had arisen due to the business using a delivery systems measuring tool to create disciplinary conduct cases against individuals in breach of national agreements. All three suspensions have now been lifted, following the formal appeal process. CWU Anglia division rep Steve Butts explained that the “rock-solid” walkouts, had taken place as a result of “the membership reacting to the company’s attempt to use the conduct code in the wrong way.” And his fellow Anglia division rep Barry Jennings agreed, saying “the actions of the members at Luton and Leagrave were totally vindicated.”

Tributes paid to ‘inspirational’ Paul

much to Paul, his family and the Birmingham District Amal Branch. Steve Reid, Birmingham Branch secretary, said “What can you say about Paul Maloney? He is one of the bravest most inspirational people I have ever known. Never at any time did he complain about his plight, just how grateful he was for our NHS and the ambulance and he kept his sense of humour and dignity right to the end. He will be sorely missed by all of us who had the pleasure of knowing him.”

Allan Thomas 1948 – 2016

South East Wales Amal Branch secretary Amarjit Singh told Voice that he was “devastated that Allan’s gone.” Amarjit added: “We’re all very sad and we’ll all at least miss Alan. As well as being a great comrade and friend, he was also such a key player in the branch.”


Western Counties Branch secretary Paul Watton said that John’s passing was “a great loss to family and friends alike. John strived constantly to improve the health and safety of the members and he was also a good friend and colleague, always giving great support to the branch.”

JOBS LOSS UNACCEPTABLE

The CWU has pledged to fight the closure of IPSL’s cheque processing operation in Merseyside following the company’s announcement of ‘unfinalised’ plans to shut seven of its nine sites, including Bootle, sometime during 2018.

National officer Nigel Cotgrove told The Voice: “This is the most serious situation that our members have faced since transferring to IPSL from A&L/Girobank and we are seeking urgent talks with senior management. “The Government’s drive to digitise cheque handling was always going to raise serious issues, but the loss of 180 quality jobs in an area that desperately needs them is unacceptable. “We’re absolutely opposed to the closure of Bootle and want to explore all ways of keeping the site open.”

An already tense situation looked to be worsening as The Voice went to press, however, after a local management attempt to make three individuals compulsorily redundant forced the union to lodge a national grievance.

“The CWU has consistently opposed compulsory redundancies in Bootle and we’ve worked with IPSL over the years to successfully achieve this goal. Our approach has not changed,” stressed Nigel. IPSL Bootle branch secretary Gerry Culigan pointed out that a voluntary redundancy exercise, with which the CWU is fully co-operating, is already underway.

“IPSL is saying that no final decisions have yet been made and, as such, we want proper negotiations to try to save as many jobs on the site as we can,” Gerry concluded.

Pay up at Swiss Post amid re-tendering jitters

Members in Swiss Post have received mixed pre-Christmas news as the larger than expected closure in the real Living Wage coincided with an announcement that Santander UK is “exploring the market” before deciding whether to re-tender the contract to provide mailroom and scanning services. That news inevitably took the edge off last month’s 2.4 per cent Living Wage pay rise, which brought the total year-on-year pay rises received by many between November 2015 to November 2016 to almost 20 per cent.

Assistant secretary John East told The Voice: “Good news on pay rises in comparison to big ticket questions like contract renewal which, despite the safeguards provided by TUPE legislation, inevitably cause individuals to question their job security.”

“The CWU has already raised this issue direct with Santander UK and is determined to ensure that staff don’t suffer a prolonged period of uncertainty. “At present Santander is only inviting possible rival bidders to answer a series of questions, which may or may not be the precursor to a formal re-tendering exercise – but either way we’re keeping very close tabs on developments.”
DELIVERING SOLUTIONS ON THE FRONT LINE

Under-resourcing continues to be a problem at delivery offices, where pressures on our members are rising as workloads increase. The Voice joined acting outdoor secretary Mark Baulch on his recent fact-finding visits to the Mansfield and Swindon offices...

Unit rep Rob Alcock represents some 170 members at the Mansfield office, which has seen a sharp upward trend in the number of delivery points in the past couple of years. “We cover the NG post codes 18, 19 and 21 and there are around 98,000 delivery points in total,” he explains, “which is an increase of about two to three thousand since 2013.” But recruitment has not kept pace, he continues, pointing out: “We’ve had no more duties implemented and there are currently 11 vacancies, which is building a lot of pressure on the duties.”

The union is not accepting this, however, and a formal disagreement has been lodged, in accordance with the industrial relations (IR) procedures, over the company’s failure to fill vacancies.

“As well as this, we’ve also put in another disagreement about annual leave, because they’re trying to reduce the annual leave slots for our members,” Rob says, adding that this problem is exacerbated by the ongoing under-resourcing.

Area delivery rep Darren Glebocki tells The Voice that the filling of full-time vacancies is “the burning issue” across his patch, which covers some 1,800 members working in 17 delivery offices and a further 13 scale payment delivery offices (SPDOs).

USING IR PROCEDURES

“We currently have a number of disagreements in with the employer at this time,” Darren explains, adding that Royal Mail management appear to be attempting to frustrate the union’s efforts to resolve these difficulties.

“Their tactic seems to be one of trying to delay or frustrate the process,” he comments.

The disagreement lodged at Mansfield is currently at Stage Three, which means that, unless a resolution is found at this point, the next stage could be a formal request to the CWU postal executive from the branch for an industrial action ballot.

At national level, the CWU has made it clear that it is fully supportive of units and branches making full use of the formal IR procedure to ensure that staffing levels are maintained.

Speaking to The Voice, acting outdoor secretary Mark Baulch insists: “We’re urging branches to challenge under-resourcing using the IR framework, along with the agreed national joint statement – as Rob and Darren have done here.

“And, if management refuses to resolve the issue, we’ll support a ballot for industrial action,” Mark warns.

Down in Swindon, delivery office workers are hoping that the atmosphere within their unit will start to improve, following a detailed joint review of industrial relations involving senior CWU officials and high-level regional company leaders.

The review was initiated after both the union and the company agreed to step back from an industrial action ballot, which had been submitted to the executive back in April, following repeated complaints from members over harassment by management and accusations of bullying in the workplace.

The ballot request was made over deepening concerns with management behaviours within the unit,” Mark Baulch explains, saying that these behaviours had “started to cause unrest in terms of relationships within the office.”

As well as over 200 delivery workers, this site also features the Swindon Mail Centre, with all of its various functions, and the Post Office Admin Stock Centre – making this one of the company’s larger locations, employing around 2,000 people altogether.

JOINT WORKPLACE REVIEW

“We’ve had two offices joined together and it’s been quite challenging at times,” delivery office unit rep Steve Cox tells us, adding: “We had several issues, including some bullying and harassment in the unit.”

“When the ballot request came into headquarters, Royal Mail management asked us to participate in a joint review of IR and ER procedures, in order to avoid a dispute,” Mark continued, adding: “Agreed, hoping that this would bring about a resolution and improve working conditions for our members in Swindon.”

The union nominated executive member Tony Bouch to head the CWU side in this process, while Royal Mail was represented by the company’s Regional IR head.

“This involved one-to-one discussions, group sessions, an employee opinion survey and joint discussions – which resulted in a number of agreed recommendations for the way forward,” says Tony.

Summarising the key action points, Tony told us: “There’s a commitment to review the revision activity planned to date – including the delivery point expansion in the plans – and a pledge to ensure annual leave is completed on time and displayed across the unit.”

There will also be an urgent review of the current “culture” within the unit, with several positive ideas for improving the overall day-to-day atmosphere at Swindon.

These recommendations are now being progressed and will be reviewed monthly by the company’s delivery director and our divisional rep. Tony explained, and also monitored at a national level to “ensure the IR climate in the unit has improved and remains on track.”

Other recommendations that require more in-depth discussions, are still being jointly worked through, he added.

Steve Cox explains that he has also been part of the review process and adds: “Now we’ve got the recommendations, I’ve sat down with the manager and we’ve worked on how we’re going to bring these in and hopefully, things will now improve in the unit.”

The two visits to Mansfield and Swindon have been “extremely informative and useful in terms of illustrating how important it is to make full use of the agreed national IR procedures,” reflected Mark.

“At Swindon, the persistence of the local and area reps – supported by the union at national level – in pursuing members’ genuine grievances and seeking lasting and concrete solutions has resulted in the company committing to a set of planned improvements.

“There will need to be ongoing monitoring to ensure that the recommendations from the review are actually carried out and adhered to,” Mark added.

“And at Mansfield, our local and area reps have kept the pressure on the business to make sure that the national agreements on resourcing are honoured – and here as well, they have the full support from the union at national level in this matter.”

Speaking directly to The Voice readers, Mark urged: “If you have these problems occurring at your workplace, then bring it to the attention of your local rep and make sure this is taken up.

“We have a robust national IR procedure agreed at national level – but it’s up to everyone to make sure that these agreements are sustained.”
Growing in Capita as pay talks begin

At the same time, the union is making the case for a decent and long average pay rise at Deanne Valley, in Yorkshire, where members have not had an increase for four years. Meanwhile, wider efforts are continuing to grow membership at not just the unrecognised sites, like Deanne Valley, but also where the CWU has longstanding recognition agreements. Particularly innovative and effective CWU profile-raising drives took place at the Preston Brook and Bury call centres during the CWU’s annual ‘Action Month’ organising and recruitment drive in October – resulting in dozens of new membership applications. (See pages 16 & 17 for more information.) The CWU’s total telecoms and financial services sector membership in Capita now tops 15,000, but there still is huge potential for growth.

**Full story at** [www.cwu.org/voice/](http://www.cwu.org/voice/)

**STRENGTH IN NUMBERS**

As The Voice went to press, pay negotiations were getting underway with Capita for both Tesco Mobile and O₂ contract employees. The claim is for a fully consolidated settlement that is above RPI plus 1% for all grades, through to all allowances and increments including pay and pension protection.

Assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien said: “For the Tesco Mobile employees, this will be the first pay settlement they will have received under Capita since they were TUE’d over from Telefonica in August 2016. Members will be quite rightly interested in how their new employer values them.”

**Full story at** [www.cwu.org/voice/](http://www.cwu.org/voice/)

New collective grievance at VM

**LATEST STAFF BETRAYAL**

The CWU is assisting a group of VM project managers in a collective grievance they have lodged over a planned TUPE transfer which looks set to cost them valuable contractual benefits – in apparent violation of the spirit of TUPE legislation. As part of an accounting manoeuvre to reduce its headline operating costs, VM is moving ahead with plans to transfer 352 relatively senior staff to NTT of Japan, to which it has subcontracted the work, so that it appears as a capital item on company accounts as opposed to operating expenditure.

The problem for the eleven individuals who have so far fought the CWU’s help, however, is that, while they ostensibly transfer with their terms and conditions intact, both VM and NTT have conspired to use the TUPE to invoke notice on generous redundancy terms while simultaneously revealing that the work is time-limited. Assistant secretary John East told The Voice: “In short, this TUPE opens up a raft of worrying uncertainties for all affected employees, and is yet another example of VM’s clear intention to make redundant and lay off loyal workers who’ve served the Corporation. Additionally, VM and Liberty Cladding’s plan to simultaneously reveal redundancy terms while making the work time-limited directly from a BBC decision is clearly a contraction of the contract – legal protections that technically provide safeguards for staff in such situations count for little, as all three companies ultimately intend sending the work overseas.”

Dismay at ‘cavalier’ treatment of loyal workers

**BBC BLASTED BY CWU**

The CWU has hit out at the “cavalier” treatment of loyal workers who’ve been declared expendable yet simultaneously indispensable as BBC bosses slap them in the face for striking an “excellent deal” for the Corporation.

Following on from BBC senior management’s decision to terminate a longstanding contract with Sopra Steria to provide themselves on finance, accounting and payroll services, the CWU members in question are also facing redundancy consultations at the same time as being told that they can’t go yet because currently no-one else can do their jobs. Although the highly experienced workers have just been TUPE’d transferred to three companies – led by IBM, which is formally taking over the contract – legal protections that technically provide safeguards for staff in such situations count for little, as all three companies ultimately intend sending the work overseas.

Birmingham and Manchester based CWU members who’ve been subcontracting at either Ricoh or Northgate – two companies to which IBM is subcontracting part of the work – have already been told there’s a need for “knowledge transfer” before any redundancies are concluded. Meanwhile, IBM has said that, although roles may be roles for the one Manchester-based and two Birmingham-based employees who’ve been TUPE’d into that company, necessary ‘offshoring’ of deskwork.

Dave explained: “If a job can be done offshore, it can be done anywhere in the UK. We’ll be working closely with the company to make sure that we maintain jobs here.”

A final issue is apprenticeships. While welcoming the recent around 250 apprenticeships that will be recruited this year, the CWU would like to see a more rounded scheme for them.

Dave concluded: “We would like a learning journey that sees apprentices get an appreciation of every function within Openreach. Building a solid foundation for their working futures.”

**Full story at** [www.cwu.org/voice/](http://www.cwu.org/voice/)

CWU presses for more jobs at Openreach

**UNION ARGUES CASE FOR MORE DIRECT LABOUR**

The CWU is continuing to press Openreach to switch more jobs from contract to direct labour by creating far more roles within the company.

Assistant secretary Davie Bowman said: “We are pleased that over the last few years we have had some success in encouraging the company to take on more recruits – over 3,500 to date – but more is needed as the demand for broadband and quick repairs grows.”

The CWU is stressing that the ongoing use of third party labour, from firms like Kelly’s and Quinn, in theory to cover peak times, proves that permanent opportunities in Openreach are necessary.

Davie explained: “Clearly they are needed. During less busy times, these extra direct employees could be doing fault volume reduction (FVR) work, making networks more resilient for the future.”

At the same time, the union is working to put limits on contractual overtime and make sure this is only used as a last resort. Strict minimum service levels and new customer service deals often mean issues must be resolved by the next working day. For some this has also meant an increase in Saturday working.

Dave said: “This is not acceptable and, again, more resource would resolve the problem. In the coming months, we’ll be pressing hard to get this figure back down to a maximum of 12 Saturdays a year.”

The CWU is also working with Openreach to discourage unnecessary ‘offshoring’ of deskwork.

**Full story at** [www.cwu.org/voice/](http://www.cwu.org/voice/)

**IN THE PINK IN BOOTLE**

More than £100 was raised for breast cancer research by Swiss Post members at the massive Sontander site in Merseyside at a special awareness day mounted by the Bootle Financial Services branch in October.

Apart from highlighting the breast cancer symptoms to watch out for, CWU Swiss Post rep and HBS officer Beverley Kenyon used the event to launch a new ‘Wellbeing’ newsletter that will cover other issues that members are concerned about in the future.

**CWU HITS O₂ SHOPS**

The CWU is undertaking a major recruitment drive to sign up new members working in O₂ stores to make sure their voice is heard and their workplace issues addressed.

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge told The Voice: “Our message to non-members is simple. We know that you are under a lot of pressure from working in such a competitive environment but the CWU is here to help you.”

**Full story at** [www.cwu.org/voice/](http://www.cwu.org/voice/)

**IN BRIEF**

**AIRWAVE BALLOT**

As The Voice went to press, members in Airwave were voting on a CWU-brokered deal which improves on most terms and conditions and safeguards other as Motorola moves to align policies at the secure communications network provider with those in the rest of the Motorola organisation.

**Full story at** [www.cwu.org/voice/](http://www.cwu.org/voice/)

**INDUSTRY NEWS**

**Telecoms & Financial Services**

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**Full story at** [www.cwu.org/voice/](http://www.cwu.org/voice/)
As The Voice went to press, the CWU postal executive had just scheduled a new set of Post Office strikes to take place in the days leading up to Christmas. Here, we report on the action taken so far...

In early December, thousands of hard-working Post Office staff braved freezing temperatures to come out on the high streets of the UK and show the company that their determination to win a fair deal is stronger than ever.

Speaking from a busy protest at Dalston Kingsland Crown Office in east London, CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey (pictured below right) reported that the day of action—the third nationwide Post Office strike—had been “the best-supported action we’ve had to date. “Once again, I’m bowled over by the loyalty, solidarity and fighting spirit of our magnificent striking members—a big thank you and big respect to each and every one of them,” he said.

“And it’s great to welcome Diane Abbott to our picket here this morning, showing that our fight to save jobs, pensions and the Crown Network is fully supported by the local MP as well as residents.” General secretary Dave Ward was at the Walworth Road picket in south London, outside a Crown Office that’s fighting for its life against an ongoing closure threat, and the MP for the area, Neil Coyle, has been to every one of the many protests that have taken place.

Huge public support
“Many thanks to Neil for his great support and thanks also to the many hundreds of local people who’ve been signing the CWU post cards,” said Dave.

“Today’s action has been excellent and, as Andy reports, support is getting stronger. “Across the nation as a whole, there must be sign the cards, speaking to work colleagues, our reps, activists and members worked really hard getting as many people as possible to join the picket.”

The CWU deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger headed out to the Kent coast, to support strikers and protesters at the Crown Office in Sheerness.

“Here, as in towns and cities all across the country, our members have walked out on strike once again, in a dispute that’s winning more and more backing every time,” he said.

“Our Post Office members have been fantastic and so have the Great British public, bearing a short, sharp message highlighting the crisis that the Post Office is in and urging intervention by the Government—specifically, Margot James MP, the Government Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility. Andy Furey told The Voice: “On the third strike day, and in the period leading up to it, our reps, activists and members worked really hard getting as many people as possible to sign the cards, speaking to work colleagues, family members, friends and neighbours, as well as local councillors and MPs.”

Others have been out and about at railway stations, high streets and shopping centres around the UK and thousands of people have signed the post cards.

As The Voice went to press, plans were under way to deliver the cards to the Minister. “Well done to all for their hard work in this campaign and many thanks to everyone who’s supported us—let’s hope it persuades Ms James to change the Post Office’s direction,” said Andy.

Last month, as the post card campaign was gathering pace, dozens of MPs demanded that Post Office bosses be held accountable for the growing crisis in the company during a lively Parliamentary Debate at Westminster.

And Conservative Members were as vociferous in their defence of the Crown network as Labour MPs were, while Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Parliamentarians also weighed into the discussion, leaving Ms James in no doubt that every political party and every part of the UK is determined to fight for the nation’s Post Office network.

Around the country
The November and December activities followed the union’s nationwide ‘Halloween’ strike, which saw a lively demonstration through central London that included an old-style, home-drawn ‘coffin’ and a jazz band, while there was a similar theme to the union’s protest in Liverpool, where the ‘Grim Reaper of the North West’ and several ‘witches’ gathered at the city’s Liverpool One Shopping Centre.

Neil Barry, the union’s area rep for Post Office workers in North Wales and North West, said: “We went from Liverpool One and then marched through Liverpool to the Coron Exchange Crown Office, which was shut by the strike, along with all the other Crowns in the city. “Up in Scotland, CWU territorial rep Dave Bowmaker reported similarly strong backing for the union, saying: “At the main Glasgow Crown office, they had notices outside saying: ‘Limited service’, but also stating that counter services were not provided.

Across his area of responsibility as a whole—Scotland, Northern Ireland and the North East—support for the strike had been strong and was growing, Dave added.

In the South West and South Wales, the strike “held up well in Crown offices and CWU members resolve is equally as strong as on Day One,” he explained, adding that members resolve is equally as strong as on Day One.

“There has been a gathering pace, dozens of MPs demanded that

The CWU and the people

Across his area of responsibility as a whole—Scotland, Northern Ireland and the North East—support for the strike had been strong and was growing, Dave added.

In the South West and South Wales, the strike “held up well in Crown offices and CWU members resolve is equally as strong as on Day One,” he explained, adding that members have walked out on strike once again, in a dispute that’s winning more and more backing every time,” he said.

“Our Post Office members have been fantastic and so have the Great British public, bearing a short, sharp message highlighting the crisis that the Post Office is in and urging intervention by the Government—specifically, Margot James MP, the Government Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility. Andy Furey told The Voice: “On the third strike day, and in the period leading up to it, our reps, activists and members worked really hard getting as many people as possible to sign the cards, speaking to work colleagues, family members, friends and neighbours, as well as local councillors and MPs.”

Others have been out and about at railway stations, high streets and shopping centres around the UK and thousands of people have signed the post cards.

As The Voice went to press, plans were under way to deliver the cards to the Minister. “Well done to all for their hard work in this campaign and many thanks to everyone who’s supported us—let’s hope it persuades Ms James to change the Post Office’s direction,” said Andy.

Last month, as the post card campaign was gathering pace, dozens of MPs demanded that Post Office bosses be held accountable for the growing crisis in the company during a lively Parliamentary Debate at Westminster.

And Conservative Members were as vociferous in their defence of the Crown network as Labour MPs were, while Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Parliamentarians also weighed into the discussion, leaving Ms James in no doubt that every political party and every part of the UK is determined to fight for the nation’s Post Office network.

Across his area of responsibility as a whole—the third nationwide Post Office strike—had been “the best-supported action we’ve had to date.”

“All membership reports and from what I’ve seen and heard myself, most of our members came out on strike across the area on Day One,” he explained, adding that he was looking forward to “thank our members for their support.”

CWU deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger told The Voice: “I think the Post Office bosses should be held accountable for the growing crisis in the company…now we all need to stay united and keep up the pressure.”
A major CWU Humanitarian Aid effort to alleviate the desperate plight of the innocent victims of Syria’s bloody civil war was drawing to its conclusion as The Voice went to press. Following on from a massive consignment of medical supplies that CWUHA sent to the besieged Syrian city of Aleppo in February, by the time of reading the union’s charity aid was aimed in response to an earlier refugee crisis in Bosnia, Simon Alford reports on another busy year of giving.

CWUHA’s 2016 ended as it began – bringing desperately needed relief to the innocent victims of the bloody civil war in Syria. 21 years after the union’s humanitarian aid charity was founded in response to an earlier refugee crisis in Bosnia, Simon Alford reports on another busy year of giving.

Delivering hope

The CWUHA way...

The youngest always rank amongst the most vulnerable, and that’s why this appeal was so important

DAVID LEWIS

working in conjunction with Liverpool-based charity MercyAid, admitted she’d been “overwhelmed” by not just the response of seasoned CWUHA supporters but also the Muslim community in Preston.

Other key contributors included a raft of CWU North West branches, charity workers who worked round the clock to complete a herculean sorting and packing exercise in the nick of time.

Also in 2016...

On top of its emergency initiatives for besieged families in Syria that bookended the year, CWUHA’s routine work has carried on as normal – making 2016 one of the charity’s busiest years yet.

In May a five-lorry convoy – including an 18-tonner packed with medical supplies – was despatched to Moldova and the desperately poor disputed territory of Transnistria.

As well as delivering more equipment to the Phoenix Centre for disabled youngsters, which CWUHA opened last year to mark its 20th anniversary, volunteers distributed aid, including toys for seriously deprived children, to a series of orphanages and hospitals the charity has visited previously.

While in Rîșcani, CWUHA organised a special football tournament, including the first competitive girls’ football match ever to be held in Moldova, for 120 local youngsters. Trophies for the winning teams were presented by the UK’s Ambassador to Moldova, Phill Bateson who, just weeks earlier, had commended CWUHA for showcasing the “best of British values” during a special visit to CWU Annual Conference in Bournemouth.

The charity was also able to showcase the Phoenix Centre to a delegation of senior BT managers who’d travelled out specially to see the remarkable work now being carried out at a facility that was part-funded by BT’s generous on-going support for CWUHA.

Meanwhile, throughout 2016 CWUHA has continued to financially support the construction of a computer room and library at the Musha School in Tanzania – a project that is now nearing its completion. When CWUHA first ‘adopted’ the school it was simply a bone farmer’s philanthropic attempt to provide rudimentary education to the children of rural villagers in a makeshift outbuilding – yet today it is a purpose-built five-floor facility with running water, proper toilet blocks, and electricity.

Apart from funding the physical improvements CWUHA pays the salary of one full-time teacher and operates a ‘sponsor a child’ initiative which now allows dozens of youngsters from particularly poor families to attend school.

In September CWUHA despatched its second and biggest convoy of the year to desperate Toamasiroa schools – yet today it is a purpose-built five-floor facility with running water, proper toilet blocks, and electricity.

CWUHA chair Carl Webb explains: “We’re aiming to provide the Phoenix Centre with a permanent revenue stream so it can be self-financing without ever having to charge the families of the disabled youngsters it helps. The idea is to open an old folks’ residential home in a wing of the Centre which is currently disused, with the fees charged by a facility that we’ve been assured there will be a strong demand for, being ploughed straight back into the Phoenix Centre itself.”

Plans for 2017

Phase 2 of the Phoenix Centre already looks certain to keep CWUHA busy in 2017 – but that’s in addition to major aid convoys to children’s homes and hospitals in Moldova and Lithuania in May and September, on-going support of the Mozhi School and probable additional mercy-missions for Syrian refugees.

As that wasn’t ambitious enough, in April around 20 disadvantaged youngsters from Moldova will be treated to a ‘holiday to remember’ at the union’s Alvescot Lodge residential education centre in Oxfordshire.

Carl concludes: “CWUHA has achieved amazing things over the past 21 years and those achievements bear testament to the fantastic relationship the charity has with both Royal Mail and BT – something that I would never have dreamed of, nor would we have been able to achieve without the on-going support of the union’s fund-raising efforts.”

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Find out more about CWUHA and the different ways in which you can get involved at www.cwu.org
Big Numbers in EE and BT

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr paid tribute to the large number of branches that had netted impressive numbers of new joiners as a result of their activities. Amongst the biggest ‘new member’ tallies were Tyne & Wear Clerical with 96, Lincs & South Yorks with more than 50 and Northern Ireland Telecoms branch with 38. A raft of branches signed up more than 30 new members. These included Edinburgh, Dundee & Borders branch, which targeted BT’s Dundee call centre, and Scotland No.1 branch which operated ‘access’ events at EE in Greenock and at three BT sites.

EE was a particular focus for Tyne & Wear Clerical which had recruiters out in force in the foyers of the company’s Doxford, North Tyneside and Darlington call centres - while still fitting in no less than eight separate specially themed CWU promotion days at BT’s Gosforth and South Shields sites.

Branch secretary Jo Shotton told The Voice: “Working alongside our on-site EE reps we recruited 47 new EE members, but also made sure that existing members are better informed of their membership rights.”

Other EE sites targeted during Action Month included Morthyd Tydfill and Plymouth – meaning that monthly ‘access events’ are now fully back on course after a wobble in September.

Andy concludes: “Perhaps the most important thing of all about Action Month is the visibility it gives the CWU. Engagement recruits new people, but it keeps people in the union as well.”

Action Month, and the increasing number of Action Weeks we’re now holding across the recognised sector the recruitment purposes were blitzed by recognise the CWU for collective bargaining.

Ambitious in Capita

Two of the highest profile Action Month events took place in Capita’s Preston Brook and Bury call centres, where membership growth potential is immense.

Given the barriers that exist to recruiting members working on contracts outside the C& Tesco Mobile accounts where the union is recognised, the branch opted for colourful events which combined raffles for Hotel Chocolat hampers with fundraising for Macmillan Cancer Care – all laced with the promotion of CWU membership benefits and a raft of giveaways.

“We positioned ourselves right by the main entrance where we couldn’t be missed – and the idea was to make it a flag waving ‘we’re here’ type of event to create a bit of a buzz,” explained Lawrence Mcintosh.

It worked, because on a single day in Preston Brook 34 new members signed on the dotted line. As The Voice went to press, follow-up events were already being planned including a pre-Christmas ‘Mince Pie Mingle’ and a Valentine’s Day extravaganza.

GUY FAWKES IN BOOTLE

Also pushing out the boat for Action Month once again was Bootle Financial Services branch, which has a well-deserved reputation for laying on lively events. This year branch activists donned Guy Fawkes masks and, in between promoting the union’s work on behalf of members, doled out toffee apples, traditional sweets and encouraged participation in quizzes and games with Bonfire Night-themed prizes handed out.

With percentage membership levels at Santander in Bootle already well above the 90s, and of pockets of missing members already largely resolved by previous events, branch secretary Tracey Griffiths stressed that in Bootle the event is now primarily about positive engagement with members and rewarding their support in a fun way. The Guy Fawkes event still, however, managed to bring in 13 new members.

Three, Danny Coleby, Callum Cleaves & Samantha Woods (pictured left to right in the below photo) joined at a ‘meet the union’ session during their company induction that morning – all giving the “security” that membership provides as their key reason.

“It’s great knowing you have the safety and support of such a strong union in the workplace,” stressed Samantha.

EPIC ORGANISATION SAYS "POWER TO THE PEOPLE: CWU MEMBERS TAKE PART IN ACTION MONTH"

While organisations that do not currently recognise the CWU for collective bargaining purposes were blitzed by squads of leafleters outside the site gates, across the recognised sector the recruitment initiatives took place inside – often accompanied by something of a party atmosphere.

South East Central branch took the “party” theme to its logical conclusion at BT’s Centre of Excellence in Sevenoaks, laying on a singer and putting on lunch at an Action Month event that combined a celebration of the opening of a new branch office at the site with a concerted effort to engage with young members. (See report at www.cwu.org/voice/

Young members were also the focus of a special lunch event at BT’s Crawley site, jointly organised by the Meridian and Parkinson, West Sussex & Isle of Wight branches – while the South London, Surrey & North Hampshire branch laid on a social evening for young BT members in Croydon.

At BT’s Truro call centre, Somerset, Devon & Cornwall branch used Action Month as an opportunity to discuss a range of issues affecting employees in an informal setting, with a buffet laid on to attract members and non-members alike to the CWU’s stall.

Other branches, including South East Anglia, Meridian and Glasgow & Motherwell took a different approach, opting for ring-rounds of young members in keeping with this year’s Action Month’s focus on young workers.

David McClune of Glasgow & Motherwell branch told Voice: “It can seem a lot of work to call all young members in a branch, but once you get started it’s very encouraging and rewarding.”

Lincs & South Yorks branch was similarly enthusiastic about Action Month, netting over 50 new joiners on a single day at a dual purpose information and recruitment stand at BT’s Doncaster call centre.

Assistant branch secretary Kirsty Lenham explains: “It helps keep us on top of recruitment but also keeps us engaged with long-standing members.”

Sky’s huge contact centre in Osterley was a particular target for Greater London Combined branch activists, whose leafleting of the site secured 35 new membership applications.

Meanwhile, Manchester Clerical branch activists and their Northern Ireland Telecoms counterparts mirrored similar kerfuffle drops at their respective local Convening centres – again resulting in a clutch of new membership applications from a largely un-unionised workforce.

Amidst a raft of branch activities, the month also saw unprecedented and engaging recruitment activity across large parts of the industry where collective bargaining rights are yet to be reached.

As such, teams of CWU leafleters conducted high-profile recruitment events outside Virgin Media sites in Reading, Wytchhaven and Baguley - very publicly making the point that their company’s current union-busting stance is only serving to increase the CWU’s resolve to organise and recruit.

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TOUGH TRANSITION

The CWU is pushing hard to ensure that its members in Ericsson get the best possible business conditions.

Recent union successes have included personal use cars retained for legacy O

out of their own pocket. Both these breakthroughs came after a long period of tough union negotiations.

Assistant secretary Allan Eldred (pictured above) said: “We’ve seen progress on many fronts. Another key gain was that, following the offshoring of Field Centres, all impacted members were secured new posts internally or in the field without any loss of pay.

The CWU has also ensured that our members have received better pay deals than those in non-recognised areas of the company. In successive pay negotiations we’ve also reduced the gap between the lowest and highest paid field engineers, while also securing pay increases for them all.

“Going further back, three years ago we reached a very favourable agreement with Ericsson that saw the field engineers, all of whom had been TUPE’d over from other companies, get consolidated terms and conditions, with at least as good pay and benefits as previously.”

However, the company is still adjusting to the tough transition from an equipment-based to a service-based operation, and challenges remain for the union.

Under a voluntary release scheme, Ericsson is seeking to reduce its field staff by 25%, replacing them with new staff taken on with worse terms and conditions.

Allan explained: “The CWU will continue to do everything we can to ensure new employees enjoy the same benefits as our existing members. This is a major priority for the union.”

Elections for two further reps will be held in January to help take the CWU’s negotiating agenda forward at this busy time. An update will appear in the next issue of The Voice.

See full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Driver alert - beware barrier gates

HAZARD WARNING

All driving members have been warned of the potential dangers of barrier gates, after a Yorkshire postal worker sustained serious injuries.

The Keighley member was hospitalised after the loose barrier gate smashed though his vehicle’s windscreen, causing him head and facial injuries.

Dave Joyce told The Voice that he has asked all of the union’s area safety reps to ensure that all members who drive as part of their job are aware of the dangers posed by unsecured ‘swing-arm’ barrier gates.

“This incident, which occurred in October, was bad enough,” Dave said. “But a Somerset postal worker tragically lost his life back in 2011 in similar circumstances and still the right lessons do not appear to have been learnt by the owners and managers of premises with these type of gates.

These injuries have occurred when barriers have been inadequately secured so that they have partially opened and presented a least visible end-on profile of the protruding barrier,” he explained, “which may not be clearly visible to the oncoming driver – particularly in the early hours when it often still dark.”

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has told premises owners to take suitable precautions and Royal Mail has joined the CWU in alerting all drivers to the potential hazards.

Advice to all Royal Mail drivers:

1. When entering premises where a manual swing barrier/gate is in place check it is secured.

2. Slow down when approaching the barrier and stop if it appears to be unsecured.

3. Identify and report to your manager any unsecured gate hazards that present a risk.

Glasgow Mail Centre celebrates Diwali

Glasgow Amal Branch Secretary Jim McAlenchie told The Voice that he was “really pleased” that Glasgow Mail Centre celebrated this year’s Diwali Festival of Light.

“It was great that everyone came together to mark the occasion,” he said, adding: “This was the first time they’ve celebrated the event at that site and I hope this will continue.”

The festival is traditionally celebrated by people from the Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities – and also by some Buddhists – and falling as it does towards the end of autumn and just before the onset of winter, Diwali often coincides with the Halloween and Bonfire Night period.

As well as falling at the same time of year, the Diwali Festival’s celebration of the triumph of good over evil forces could be considered as having some similarities with the original Halloween traditions – and there are also fireworks at some Diwali events too.

Glasgow Amal Branch equality officer Rabial Khan, who works at the mail centre and organised the event, said: “It was great to have Diwali celebrated here for the first time and this kind of activity really helps to bring people from different communities and traditions together.

“I hope we can do something similar next year.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Marking Diwali at Glasgow Mail Centre

Glasgow Mail Centre celebrates Diwali

MULTI-CULTURAL FIRST

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HSE SAFETY CHIEFS TELL SITE OWNERS TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS

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Openreach from BT was reaching its climax at the time of printing.

Openreach against to the wire

explains: “If Ofcom pushes ahead with to split Openreach from BT could potentially understand just how damaging any attempt its political muscles to make sure MPs the time of printing, while up and down broadband infrastructure in jeopardy.

These questions, the answers of which will determine the CWU’s ultimate response, include what effect, if any, ‘separate legal incorporation’ would have on the continuity of employment of members in Openreach, any impact it would have on the viability of BT’s various pension schemes and of employment of members in Openreach, incorporation’ would have on the continuity of how it would impact in practice. ‘separate legal incorporation’ would actually entail, and BT, the CWU was quick to point out that it first made public in July.

Meanwhile, the CWU has itself been meeting with Ofcom, highlighting the potentially devastating impact a bungled ‘separation’ could have. “Any move to separate BT and Openreach’s assets would potentially have profound implications on the financial situation of BT Group,” explains deputy general secretary Andy Kerr. “Apart from the complexities and uncertainties that would accompany the biggest TUPE transfer of all time, the upheaval would place a profound question mark over BT’s ability to support its liabilities in the BT Pension Scheme. At a time when we already have the most competitive telecoms market in Europe, it’s now vital that Ofcom and politicians ask themselves one really crucial question,” Andy stresses: “Does it really make sense to embark on a major governance change in Openreach that will inevitably slow down any further investment in high-speed broadband - all in the name of creating extra competition by companies that haven’t exactly rushed to make the necessary investment themselves?”

High stakes

With the all-important talks between BT and Ofcom now clearly at a crucial stage, BT is itself unilaterally pressing ahead with measures to beef up the current functional separation of BT and Openreach. Responding to concerns raised by Ofcom and others about a perceived preferential treatment by Openreach of other BT divisions as opposed to competitors - claims that have been always been vehemently denied by BT - the reorganisation involves the establishment of an independent Openreach Board, the majority of whose members will be wholly independent of BT Group. Ironically it was on the very day that BT announced the appointment of former Ofcom director, Mike McTighe, as Openreach’s first ever chairman that Ofcom declared BT’s proposals as ‘still falling short’ - yet the CWU is convinced that any remaining gap between the regulator and BT is far narrower than many commentators are acknowledging.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr concludes: “Despite Ofcom starting the formal process of legal separation the CWU holds out hope that a voluntary agreement can still be reached between the regulator and BT that ensures our members are protected and investment in the UK can thrive.”

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As well as upping our game industrially the CWU is stepping up the pace with its political work

A major part of the union’s recent work has focused on defending our Crown Post Office network, and the CWU’s group of supported MPs have been helpful in raising the issue in Parliament and winning widespread support for our aims and objectives, Dave said.

The effectiveness of the CWU’s political work was evident in the last month, when a significant lobbying effort from the union secured a full Parliamentary debate – putting the UK’s Post Office network high up on the national political agenda.

“That debate was particularly helpful in really exposing the crisis in the Post Office,” says Dave. “Eighteen of the twenty MPs who attended the debate were briefed by the union and there was cross-party support for our key arguments against franchising, on the need for a new concept in the Post Office, for stronger regulations to ensure the quality of the service provided by the Post Office and for the establishment of a Post Bank.

“The Post Office and Government came in for a great deal of criticism and this political work has been important in putting further pressure on them. The spread of support from all parts of the UK – and across parties – is a signal to the Government that it needs to think again.

Alongside the debate, Gareth Thomas and Alison McGovern – two MPs the union has been working with on the issue – published articles calling for a change of direction from the Post Office and the union has received backing from MPs on social media, helping to publicise the dispute further.

In Parliament, the union has also been working closely with MPs on an early day motion (EDM 571) and parliamentary questions on the Post Office, and work is continuing with the Labour front bench in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. “The Post Office campaign is an example of how our political work, alongside industrial activity, can move forward our agenda,” said Dave. “This is a key part of making sure we are effective as a union.”

Politics in your local region

Political work is not just about the national Parliament. The CWU is also working at a regional level to advance the interests of members.

“In Merseyside, the union is focused on next year’s mayoral election for Liverpool City Region and is working with Labour’s candidate Steve Rotheram who we’ve nominated for this,” reports Carl Webb, CWU North West Region secretary.

“Steve’s been a solid and loyal supporter of the CWU and has backed our campaigns in the past – in particular, joining us in campaigning against the closure of Virgin Media at Albert Dock.”

The CWU is working hard to ensure our members’ views are heard, in particular when it comes to the telecoms, postal and financial services industries, and that employment standards and investment are at the heart of Steve’s agenda.

“There are clear benefits to our members in political work at regional level,” explains Dave Ward, “and we’re urging members to become involved.

“The more members who participate, the stronger voice we all have in shaping policy for the New Deal for workers that we need to see in the future.”

Another area where CWU regions, branches and individual members are particularly active at present involves the lobbying of MPs at a constituency level to highlight the serious risks associated with some of the proposals concerning Openreach’s future that are presently being considered under Ofcom’s Digital Communications Review.

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Women ‘crucial to future of TU movement’

Last month’s annual Women’s Conference in Leicester proved to be the busiest to date with nearly 200 people in attendance, representing 86 branches across the UK.

Last month’s annual Women’s Conference in Leicester proved to be the busiest to date declared Kate Hudson, National President of CWU women, as was proved on June 12 in Orlando when 49 people lost their lives.

Catherine Ward (left) stressed the importance of the role of the LGBT community in shaping the future of the union. “Our message is very simple that, from the leadership of the union right through to our representatives, LGBT values are trade union values, our values and my values and we have to get that message across in the workplace and show leadership in that area,” she stressed.

Dave continued. “We have to think and work harder, then we will be a stronger industrial and political union and we’ll have a greater voice in bringing about change in society.”

Dave went on to warn of the growing inequality across the UK and throughout the world and talked about how the CWU can lead the way on tackling this.

“If you look at the world of work, I cannot remember a time in my working life where workers, whatever industry they are in, are facing more pressure to work harder, faster and longer for less,” he concluded.

The buzz at this year’s National Youth Education Event was buoyed by solidarity against austerity and Brexit, and a determination to help the labour movement strengthen and grow.

The annual gathering at the Youth Education Event was buoyed by solidarity against austerity and Brexit, and a determination to help the labour movement strengthen and grow.

Young people demanded to be heard throughout the union’s structure, and given chances to step up where possible. There was little sympathy for a failure to engage, with calls for branch rebates to be docked if they fell to send anyone to either the National Youth Education Event or Youth Conference.

Jim Brown on behalf of the Youth Committee and the CWU said, “We know there’s a lot more participation that could be had by young members in the union. We need to show leadership in the workplace. We have a historic opportunity... young people are more politicised than they have ever been for generations.”

Shadow Cabinet member and chair of Labour’s Election Co-ordinating Committee, Jen Trickett MP, who also chairs the group of CWU-supported MPs, encouraged young members to help political representation stay a true reflection of society. “Too many MPs come from privileged backgrounds. We need to change that, our MPs will lose contact with ordinary people.”

Guest speaker, Shadow Secretary of State for Voter Engagement and Young People, Cat Smith MP, contrasted Tony cutts and grammar schools obsession with Labour’s plans for young people. “We want a society that will support future generations in education, training and the workplace. We have a historic opportunity... young people are more politicised than they have ever been for generations.”

Getting involved with a union is about making change for good. Your time is now.

Tony Kearns, CWU National Youth Education Event in Sheffield signalled a determination to take on the new Government, austerity, Brexit fallout and bad employment contracts.

Delegates listening to debate at the Women’s Conference.

Delegates listening to debate at the Women’s Conference.

Still much to fight for, LGBT Conference insists

The CWU head of equality Linda Roy described the delegates as “truly inspirational” and highlighted the work that can still be done.

“In some areas of society the glass ceiling still remains intact. Although the representation of women in public roles has improved over the last five years, there is still more we can do to close the gender power gap,” she told Conference.

In her speech to delegates, general secretary Dave Ward praised the role that women have always had within the union and how that can be utilised going forward. “I believe that women are going to be absolutely crucial to securing a truly future of the trade union movement,” he stressed.

“If we get more women active in our union and in the workplace, then we will be a stronger industrial and political union and we’ll have a greater voice in bringing about change in society.”

The union’s head of equality Linda Roy criticised the role that political parties have played in flanning the flames of discrimination, and accused “both UKIP and Conservative MEPs” of having “some of the worst records on supporting LGBT rights in the European Parliament. Now UKIP seem to be in the same boat. And the CWU will be doing all we can to hasten their demise.”

Amongst motions which confronted both industrial and national issues were subjects including same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland, transgender issues, the tackling of hate crime, and a motion to expand the LGBT description to “LGBT+” in order to increase inclusivity.

Getting involved with a union is about making change for good. Your time is now.
COMMUNICATE

Union veterans rally at Westminster

CWU retired members joined retired representatives of several other trade unions at a high-profile event at Westminster last month to lobby the Government over pensions, social care and housing.

More than 100 people crammed into a Parliamentary meeting hall last month to hear union and labour movement leaders spell out a growing crisis in a range of issues affecting older people.

The event – organised by the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) – lashed out at a “perfect storm” in social care that is already resulting in scandalous outcomes across the country. Speakers also highlighted mounting concerns over issues ranging from pensions to housing.

Among the speakers was the very own retired member Brian Lee, who represented postal workers for many years and is now a CWU national officer.

At the event, the CWU and the NPC as “long and fruitful,” Norman said: “The relevance of the NPC’s work has never been more important.”

Mr McDonnell, adding: “Care in our country is on a tipping point of a real crisis which we haven’t seen since WW2; four million children are living in poverty; millions of people rely on food banks; levels of homelessness are rising and the scale of repossession of homes are at record levels.”

A topic of interest from the floor was the issue of housing provision and the withdrawal of housing benefits, and Labour MP Kelvin Hopkins focused on this during his speech.

“We have to do something about the rented sector, with rents and controls and we must get landlords under control and stop the sale of council houses,” explained the Luton North MP.

Kelvin also called for a new government-led pension scheme, which he felt needed to be state pension as “disgraciously low compared to other countries across Europe.

“The state should provide a platform on which we can all stand and make sure everybody can live a decent life.”

“The state pension,” he continued, “has to be raised to a substantially higher figure, so that everybody can be guaranteed at least the most basic of comforts in old age.

“We need a compulsory national state earnings-related system, underwritten by government and the fund could then also be used for investment in infrastructure to the benefit of all.”

Reflecting on the day, CWU retired member Brian Lee said: “We have got to get across to the trade union movement, through the TUC, the importance of standing alongside the NPC and sustaining the fight for decent state pensions.”

Full report at www.cwu.org

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D2D TRIAL FEEDBACK

PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES

I’d like to comment on the D2D trial that was reported in the last edition of The Voice - in particular the practical difficulties that I can envisage, given what was written. The article mentions people having bundles of sorted D2D items and them delivering them where there is mail to deliver, thereby avoiding or reducing D2D ‘cold-calling’. My point applies to any solution that does not include putting the D2D items into the frame in a systematic way, as is done currently. How would anyone know which addresses have already been delivered to, and which ones have yet to receive a particular D2D item? There would have to be a procedure in place - for example somehow noting each receiving address and checking that list every day thereafter. Maybe there could be an automated solution involving a PDA (postal digital assistant) D2D ‘app’, though that would require some PDA interaction at every address, and might create difficulties if the walk was not always delivered in the same order. It would also mean that, in his opinion, it would have extremely accurate and current information on all addresses (including multiple occupancies) and presumably each postperson would have to download the correct walk data to the PDA.

I hope that other people have mentioned these issues and that they are given some consideration.

Steve Philcox, East Oxford DO

BAD TO WORSE?

Oh please God, no! How can anyone possibly think that restricting D2D delivery to three days is going to make a bad situation anything other than worse? I cannot believe it even got to the trial stage.

James Touse, North East Lincolnshire

CONFUSED ON ‘COLD-CALLING’

The article about the D2D trial in the last issue of The Voice talks about ‘cold-calling’ and this has confused me. As far as I’m aware, D2D is live mail and should be treated at 1st class mail (in fact, arguably it’s more important than 1st class mail as D2D items are RM’s biggest earners). Finally, I understood D2D prep’d on any given day be 20% per day Mon-Fri must be delivered that day or alternatively you can get a Stage I for wilful delay of the mail.

So my question is how can we be ‘cold calling’?

Merrick Brittik, Suffolk

Acting assistant secretary Mark Bouch responds: Thanks Steve, Jason and Merrick for your comments on the trial. Working with Royal Mail to try different ways of growing the D2D product is where we are at that point of time and, at least, because of all things meaningful, we need to trial and test them. Your points will be taken on board during the evaluation and, indeed, have already been raised by ourselves as part of the trial before anything is moved forward. Reps at all levels are involved in the overseeing of the trial and are asking many of the same questions as you, as are Royal Mail themselves and seeing the operation first-hand will no doubt have answered some and also ruled out certain things for the future. We will no doubt be providing further reports regarding this issue in the future and thank you for writing in.

BT BUSINESS CONVERSIONS?

I keep reading about contract conversations in BT Consumer and, whilst that’s pleasing to see, it’s disappointing that the same isn’t happening in BT Business.

People who haven’t been in BT Consumer very long get BT jobs, yet long-serving and loyal manpower colleagues working in BT Business (who work in the same building) are still being used and not given the same chance of secure employment and a career within BT just because of the line of business they work for. How demoralising!

There’s still no sign of BT contracts. It seems that nothing is being done for them. I’d like to know why there are double standards in BT and why this is allowed to happen. Isn’t that time this inequality was stopped, or are those in BT Business forever the poor relations compared to their colleagues in Consumer?

Malc O’Brien, Lincoln

Assistant secretary Allan Eldred responds: We agree with the sentiments expressed and can confirm that the National Team has been pressing BPS’ management for agency conversions for a considerable amount of time. The company were reluctant to make conversions in light of their ongoing reorganisation of work and the subsequent need for the grading of roles to be evaluated. We recently saw some conversions of agency staff into ordinary grades but this is far from ideal and not something we feel comfortable with.

The historical and continued use of agency staff in BT Consumer has not been replicated in BT Business in the same way. Therefore our representation has needed to be framed differently.

We have made progress on the issue recently and hope to see conversions as a result of this work. The situation is clear that the current situation cannot be allowed to continue.

XMAS ATTENDANCE SHAMBLES

I want to draw attention to the appalling shambles BT has made of the Christmas attendances in BT Connections. Despite Christmas coming around at the same time this year, we were told we had to be prepared to work every Bank Holiday over Christmas and the New Year, only finding out on November 25th if we would be working or not, leaving it too late to book anything with family and friends as everywhere will now be fully booked. BT pledges its support for ‘work-life balance’ but, when it comes to Christmas, merely pays it lip service.

BT clearly does not understand the distress and anger that the ‘not knowing’ has caused. Managers don’t have to get stressed and worry about planning Christmas, they can do it around the time of the school holidays. BT needs to provide some understanding that the current situation cannot be allowed to continue.

20-YEAR SNUB

In October this year I reached my milestone of 20 years’ service for Royal Mail. Upon receiving my pin badge and certificate I awaited my gift of vouchers or similar as all my colleagues had received in previous years. I couldn’t get any information from line managers or managers at Swindon Delivery Office so I rang HR, where a very rude man on the end of the phone told me the gift for 20 years’ service had stopped in 2005. When I said that I thought that was strange they told me it was right. It wasn’t. I can only think that was because he’d served nowhere near 20 years!

I was keen to know whether Royal Mail announced this to long-serving staff and, if they did, when that was and how they determined a cut-off point? Does the company no longer wish to recognise the long service, loyalty and hard work of their employees or is this just another cost-cutting project? Either way can’t see the irony when it’s celebrating 50 years of service to the public?

Sharon Midwinter, Swindon Delivery Office

Deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger responds: The previous system was replaced in April 2005 when Royal Mail unilaterally decided (without any agreement with the CWU) to make changes to the system of long service awards. At the time, RM justified the change on the basis of a so-called consultation exercise with staff (not shared with the union) in which some employees were reported as saying they would prefer to mark their milestone with an event rather than a cash payment. Clearly this is not a view shared by Sharon or the CWU. Our view is that the awards are an important sign to many of our members that their long service has been properly recognised and a substantial reduction in the cash awards will inevitably be seen as an unfair cost-cutting measure.

As such, many staff reaching 20 years’ service are now left feeling disappointed and demoralised. However, while the gift voucher for 20 years’ service was scrapped in April 2005, RM’s own guidelines say employees should still be invited to a local service celebration event. So, while Sharon’s local HR Manager may have been unaware of the local celebration events, she should have been contacted in future inviting her to a local event to celebrate her 20-year milestone.

Terry’s full response and a detailed explanation of the new long service awards system can be viewed in Letters Extra at www.cwu.org/voice/
What are unions good for? Are they relevant today? Aren’t they out of date?

Finished? The Voice posed these ‘Devil’s Advocate’ questions to CWU senior deputy general secretary (SDGS) Tony Kearns and, not surprisingly, he was having none of it…

"It is only trade unions that workers can rely on to advance their interests, he began, and then asked: “If not the unions, then who? Certainly not Theresa May.”

The day we interviewed Tony was the same day that the Prime Minister performed a very public U-turn at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) conference on the promise she had made when she first became Premier to put workers on the boards of companies.

No firm will now be forced to have employees on their board and this will be purely voluntary, Mrs May assured business leaders, who had been worried about her pledges of just a few months ago to fight for “working-class families.”

For our SDGS, this was proof that the notion that the Tories are the ‘party of the workers’ and the people who will look after the interests of ‘working class’ families is now “dead in the water – a pledge from May that is just as much meaningless rhetoric as was her predecessor’s ‘we’re all in it together’ nonsense.”

And the protection of workers cannot be solely reliant on the goodwill of employers either, he continues, citing the recent, notorious, examples of Sports Direct and Uber – companies which have both been publicly exposed for breaking employment law in their treatment of workers.

“These are extreme examples, and of course not all employers are as unscrupulous as these two,” Tony explains, but adds that “without trade union organisation, there is no force to prevent commercial competitive pressures squeezing workers’ pay, terms and conditions ever tighter, the fact is power concedes nothing without demands.

“That being the case,” he continues, “who is there left to fight for wages and addressing economic inequality? Who really has workers’ interests at heart? Who are the best people to act in the interests of workers?” asks our SDGS, rhetorically, and answers: “It’s the workers themselves, organised in trade unions.”

At the end of the 1970s, the UK was “a more equal society,” he continues, citing economic measures of inequality that were “much closer at that time.”

UNIONS REDUCE INEQUALITY

And this widening inequality has coincided with a significant reduction in the numbers of workers belonging to trade unions – down from over 12 million to a little over six million over the same period.

“It’s also clear that, since the 2008 financial crash, the real value of wages has gone down in the UK – the only other countries in Europe with similar levels of decline over that period being Portugal and Greece – and the wage increases that have been achieved during this recent period have all been achieved through organised trade unionism.

“Workers in unions are, on average, around 15 per cent better paid than non-unionised workers in comparable jobs, but now, forecasts show that there will be no overall wage growth and a devaluing of wages for the foreseeable future.”

Going back to the example of Sports Direct, Tony pointed out that this firm and other, similar enterprises “set up shop in areas of high unemployment – deliberately chosen so that the workforce will be, they hope and expect, fully compliant and exploitable.

“After all, what choice does a worker in a former mining town, or a former steel town have if there are no other employment opportunities in their area, where every advertised job receives multiple applications, and where the only alternative to compulsory and often unpaid overtime is the sack?” he asks.

“This is the future of the world of work and is precisely why the trade union movement is relevant today, because workers need it.

“That is why part of the redesign of our union is a redesign of our recruitment strategy. As well as strengthening in our existing companies, we need to be looking to unionise workers at new companies too.

“That’s where the CWU needs to be and that’s where the CWU will be, offering union membership – and the active solidarity of nearly 200,000 organised workers – fighting their corner, and helping them organise to fight collectively for justice, dignity and fairness at work,” Tony pledges.

“Yes, of course unions have a purpose in today’s economy and in today’s workplace – unions have never been more sorely needed than today.”