The Voice
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One union, one magazine, one voice

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One Union
One Voice
For all CWU members in postal, telecoms and financial services
I am pleased to be writing this foreword for a new format of The Voice, which now brings together news for all CWU members in the one magazine.

Whatever industry or company you work in, there is a great deal of common ground across the union over the issues we all face and the strategies we need to adopt in order to deal with these.

The most obvious example at the moment is Ofcom and the way the biggest companies our members work in are regulated. In both BT and Royal Mail we have had to fight off proposals – for the break-up of BT and for the introduction of new and even harsher efficiency targets on Royal Mail – which were designed with no regard to the impact on workers in the industry.

In these companies and others across the telecoms and financial services sector in particular, when it comes to day-to-day life in work, excessive performance management and unrealistic targets are being used to put huge pressure on staff to work harder and faster for longer.

And of course in all of our industries, like the rest of the economy, the growth of insecure employment models is a big problem we have to confront.

So it is important to learn from each other how we can deal with these issues industrially – and it is vital that we come together and have the full weight of the union behind us when we want to campaign on them politically.

One of the biggest issues we are dealing with at the moment is the crisis in the Post Office where – at the time of writing – our members have just voted overwhelmingly for industrial action.

With a programme of privatisation and cost-cutting in the Post Office, this year we have the prospect of 2,000 job losses, the closure of the DB pension scheme and a strategy that if unchecked will result in terminal decline for the company.

I would urge the whole union to show solidarity with our members in the Post Office and get behind our campaign to secure a new political settlement with fresh thinking from the board and the Government to secure the future of this important public service.

For a number of years Jeremy Corbyn has joined the CWU in calling for a proper strategy from the Government to support the Post Office and this is one reason why we have decided to nominate him in the Labour leadership election this year.

Alongside this he has supported our other campaigns from Closing the Agency Workers Loophole to the People’s Post and we are working closely with him to develop and call for a new deal for workers across the country as Labour’s flagship policy for the future.

This is an agenda all CWU members can unite around and if you have a vote in the election, I would urge you to vote for Jeremy Corbyn.
As a kid, I was obsessed with making the world a happier, kinder place. The planet we call home is so beautiful, and life is so unique in our cold universe, that I couldn’t understand why the human race wasn’t spending its time jumping with joy at the wonder of existence, or making sure that everyone who was lucky enough to be born had the opportunity to flourish.

I couldn’t fathom why some people would inflict suffering on others, why wars raged, why children starved, and why concepts such as money, economies and borders trumped happiness and equality for all.

Over the years, I’ve come to believe that a large part of the problem has been our tendency to elevate the wrong kind of people to power. Those who rise to the top are often the most cut-throat, ambitious and devious.

To put it bluntly, the power-hungry bullies have the most influence in our world, so it’s no surprise that the societies they’ve created promote competition over community, and inequality over social harmony.

We grant this world-shaping power to those who “look snappy” and shout the loudest, so no wonder there’s such disunity, environmental destruction and exploitation across the globe.

We celebrate cleverness while overlooking morality, but some of the worst crimes in history have been committed by really brainy people.

It’s time we demanded different qualities of our elected representatives, the same qualities that we try to instill in our children – kindness, compassion and honesty. Politics should be built on what we collectively value.

That’s why I, and many others, have been so inspired by Jeremy Corbyn. For the first time in my life, we have a leader who has spent his life campaigning for peace, justice and equality. It’s a rare thing to have a politician whose keen intellect is matched by real ethical integrity, and whose own life and actions inspire trust.

Like many people, I had lost faith in politics, concluding that the gulf between what politicians said and did was just a depressing fact of life. But when my disabled friends were fighting for their human rights, two politicians turned up to their demos and signed every petition: Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell.

When I travelled the country speaking at meetings for the People’s Assembly Against Austerity, Corbyn and McDonnell were there too, lending their support to local communities who were being hit by the cuts. The list of causes they have tirelessly supported over the years goes on and on.

Every human right we enjoy today was won by men and women like Jeremy Corbyn who dedicated their lives to fighting for a better world.

Every one of them has been attacked and smeared by the establishment of the day.

Those in power always try to crush those who demand change. Social progress always takes a fight.

We now have a rare opportunity to elect a new kind of leader, one whose lived life demonstrates a genuine desire to serve the majority, the voiceless, the people who are ignored by our corrupt economic system.

When I cast my vote, I remember that a kinder, fairer world can only be created by kinder, fairer people.
At the time of writing, we’ve recently seen Ofcom’s consultation on the future of Openreach. Although they haven’t opted for full structural separation, we do believe that the proposals, which involve turning Openreach into a wholly owned subsidiary, represent a step too far and could have huge implications not only for our Openreach members but for every member working in BT.

Specifically, it would involve legally transferring 32,000 employees to Openreach as well as potentially affecting career prospects and redeployment opportunities for the whole of the BT workforce.

The Ofcom plan would also impact on the pension scheme, which would require separation of assets and the creation of two separate schemes, potentially increasing the current £10 billion deficit.

But Ofcom seem to face both ways on this. They state their core aim is to minimise costs and lessen the impact on BT’s investment programme. They therefore suggest an ‘employee service agreement’ – where employees stay within BT but work entirely within Openreach – as an option to consider.

However, there are no firm details on this proposal and we’re not sure if it will address our concerns, so, as well as writing to Ofcom for clarification on their proposals, we’ve also sought legal advice.

As developments evolve, your union will be doing all it can to ensure the best deal for our members.

Andy Kerr
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (T&FS)

Openreach ‘legal separation’ call sparks CWU concerns

A recommendation by Ofcom for legal separation of Openreach from BT could have serious implications for public service as well as for members of staff, the CWU has warned.

The union is submitting a formal report of its own in response to the regulator’s July document – ‘Strengthening Openreach’s strategic and operational independence’ – which is now out for consultation among all of the industry’s stakeholders.

As well as the CWU, this group includes the other main trade union within the sector, Prospect, consumer and voluntary organisations, and the UK’s major communications companies, BT and its key competitors.

The CWU is concerned that the proposals could have implications for public service as well as for members of staff.

Testing times. Ofcom’s proposals have huge implications.

‘Review Blackburn closure’ urges union

CWU negotiators criticised BT’s plan to close its Blackburn contact centre last month, on the grounds that the business had not carried out a proper consultation.

Around 100 are affected by the planned relocation of work to Accrington in November, with directly employed staff facing a daily commute to the new site and agency workers set to lose their jobs altogether.

Assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien told The Voice: “We’re dismayed at BT’s decision to close this busy and high-achieving contact centre in what appears to be an ill-thought cost-cutting exercise.

“Less than adequate consultation has taken place with the CWU and we believe alternative solutions could have been found.

“We’re calling on BT to review this closure plan pending proper consultation.”

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge added: “We’re deeply concerned at the effect this closure will have on the 50 agency staff, some of whom have 10 years’ service.

“We are strongly urging the company to do the right thing by these workers.”
They say “a week is a long time in politics” but over the past three months, as I’ve been sidelined by unfortunate health issues, we’ve witnessed a remarkable meltdown of the UK’s political establishment and a democratic revolution from a growing number of people who feel disenfranchised by politicians and victims of corporate excess.

This voice has turned the political and economic landscape of this country (and others) upside down and it is this voice that trade unions and the wider labour movement should embrace as a signal of change to deliver a better deal for working people in the 21st century.

Politicians are all too aware that the neo-liberal economics of wealth generation with profits for the few at the expense of the many, which has appeared unhindered despite economies still teetering on the brink of recession, has finally disenfranchised too many and people have turned against it.

Suddenly even right-wing Tory politicians like Theresa May are acknowledging that low-paid jobs and growing employment insecurity have to be addressed via an economic approach that “works for all” and allows “everyone to share in the nation’s prosperity.”

They avoid being specific, but what they are really talking about is a fundamental change in how wealth is shared.

But while we may all welcome the new narrative from politicians, it will be a long time before we actually trust any of them to deliver a change to the greed mentality that has driven the behaviours of employers like BHS and Sports Direct.

The Voice, like everyone in the CWU, is delighted to welcome Terry Pullinger back, and we asked him how the CWU and the wider labour movement should best respond to the “changed political narrative” he refers to in his column.

“The changing narrative should also inspire trade unions to increase their membership and stand up stronger than ever for the very principles of a decent job, secure employment, affordable homes and dignity in retirement.

At the same time, there is a growing debate that we are in the early stages of another industrial revolution, that technology needs to serve the cause of human progress – not substitute for it – and that everybody needs to benefit from economic growth in order to sustain it.

It is easy to imagine driverless vehicles, robotics replacing all manual operations, drones used for delivery and more and more faceless interactions, but equally it is also easy to imagine the consequences in terms of mass unemployment and greater inequality.

Politicians may seek to win favour by calling for economic reforms and changes to the way businesses act, with a greater focus on corporate responsibility, but, in my view, it’s trade unions that need to be defending and campaigning on these matters now more than ever.

For the CWU, that means defending and supporting our members in the Post Office where the worst examples of short-term corporate thinking – lack of investment, lack of innovation and attacks on members’ terms and conditions – are taking place.

The attack on the pension scheme is as disgraceful as it is unethical and the union will use every means at our disposal to oppose the Post Office proposal to close the scheme and hold them to account on the pensions promise earned by our members over many years of loyal employment.

In Royal Mail, we have set our policy for future vision via our policy forum held in March and our Annual Conference in April. Our determination to influence the design of the business and ensure our members benefit from the introduction of new technology and future growth in respect of reward, a shorter working week and pensions, is absolute.

In the light of the new political narrative, the Post Office and Royal Mail have to reflect on the union’s position and understand that a strategy designed simply to maximise profit will be unacceptable to our members.

The policies we have set around a positive future for Royal Mail now appear particularly profound in the light of this new political thinking and we should now all increase our efforts to achieve them.

It’s not new ideas we are afraid of it’s the ability of management to move away from old ones.”
Post office workers vote 83% for strike action

Thousands of Post Office workers are preparing for possible strikes against attacks on their job security and pensions, and in defence of the Crown network and Supply Chain

POST OFFICE NATIONAL DISPUTE

Up to 2,000 jobs are under threat across the company’s operations, including nine depot closures in Supply Chain, while dozens of Crown offices are set for privatisation and the defined benefit pensions scheme is earmarked for closure.

The union’s postal executive was set to decide whether and when to formally serve notice to the business following last month’s overwhelming 83 per cent strike vote by members.

Speaking to The Voice just a few days after the ballot result came in, CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey said: “Our immediate response was to call for high-level talks with senior Post Office management, in order to achieve a new national agreement and avoid a strike. And we’ve also reiterated the calls after the ballot result came in, CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey said.

“Our immediate response was to call for high-level talks with senior Post Office management, in order to achieve a new national agreement and avoid a strike. And we’ve also reiterated the calls made during last month’s Big Red Battlebus campaign (see campaign report on P12/13) for urgent intervention from the Government, as the ultimate owner of the company.”

By the last full week of August, no real progress had yet been made odds shortened on a full-scale national strike taking effect in September.

The immediate reaction to the ballot result from the Post Office was to play down the effectiveness of CWU action, by claiming that most of the network would remain unaffected.

But Andy Furey pointed out that, although the total volume of Post Office business carried out by Crown offices is indeed between one fifth and one quarter of the total number of transactions, the work done by Crowns accounts for far more than that in terms of its proportion of the total monetary value of Post Office business.

“And furthermore,” Andy added: “The involvement of our Admin and Supply Chain grades members in this dispute means that every single UK post office – whether it’s a Crown or a sub – will indeed be affected immediately.

“Our Admin members perform support duties for every single post office and our Supply Chain members deliver stock and cash to every single post office. If the Post Office refuse to engage seriously with the union, and if the Government continues to abdicate responsibility, then we’ll have no alternative but to strike.

“And when we strike, we strike solid.”

Whole union stands united

SOLIDARITY ACROSS CWU

Terry Pullinger, deputy general secretary postal (DGSP), has pledged “100 per cent solidarity and support from the whole union” for any action taken by Post Office members.

Terry Pullinger told The Voice: “No-one should underestimate our determination, or the strength of feeling demonstrated by this ballot result” and added that he was “absolutely confident that our members have massive support from the public we serve.”

The Post Office is “one of this country’s great institutions,” he continued, condemning what he described as “a massive attack” on it “as a consequence of being left for dead by Post Office management and the Government.”

As well as winning a new national agreement, which will defend job security and pensions, the ongoing future of the company depends on “product imagination, investment and inspired thinking” which can “ensure that the Post Office remains a fundamental community and national asset,” explains the DGSP.

“We cannot allow this to be a Great British institution which is only spoken about in an historical context. It is and must remain part of this country’s future infrastructure.”

General secretary: 'PM must act'

General secretary Dave Ward has set out more details of the intervention that the union is calling for, insisting that the Government “cannot wash its hands of this and simply stand by while the Post Office goes under.”

In a strong criticism of the policies of successive governments, Dave compared the neglect of the Post Office to the indifference shown to other key sectors of the nation’s economy, saying: “Just as we have seen with Tata steel, this is another clear example of the Government having no plan whatsoever to stand up for British industry.

“The Government separated the Post Office from Royal Mail and declared it would be safe in public hands. But, in reality, we have seen public funding being withdrawn, falling from £210 million in 2013 to £80m this year.

“The Post Office is at crisis point and the Government has to stop in, convene a summit of key stakeholders and hammer out with us and the board a strategy that will give the Post Office a future.”

Watch video

Join in the discussion on Facebook

facebook.com/ThecommunicationsUnion

Watch video

-238 NUMBER OF CROWN OFFICES DOWN FROM 458 IN 2007 TO PROJECTED 220 IN 2017

2,000 PROJECTED JOB LOSSES

£133M PENSION SCHEME SURPLUS

£130M FUNDING DOWN FROM £210M 2013 TO £80M 2016
Cautious optimism over new Capita TUPE

An unusually far-reaching set of safeguards, commitments and guarantees secured by the union on behalf of 500 former O2 members who transferred to Capita on August 1 have gone some way to alleviate serious staff concerns.

TESCO MOBILE TRANSFER

In the wake of more than 700 recent voluntary redundancies amongst the 2,000 previously outsourced O2 workers who were TUPE’d to Capita in 2014, news of the latest mass outsourcing sparked understandable anxiety when it was announced on June 29.

Yet following intensive discussions with not just Capita and O2, but also Tesco Mobile, the CWU is now as confident as it can be that every possible protection has been put in place for the Tesco Mobile contract workers, in Preston Brook and Bury, involved in the latest TUPE.

Crucially, the CWU has secured guarantees from Tesco Mobile itself that it’s determined that Capita maintains the unique culture that makes the Tesco Mobile contract so popular with employees - and that its own managers will remain on site and continue to be central to the decision-making process on both people and business issues.

Further commitments from Tesco Mobile include:
- An unequivocal two-year job security guarantee
- No change in job content or location from Preston Brook or Bury
- A guarantee on the quality of the working environment going forward - including the size of workstations and the space afforded to employees.

Apart from full adherence to TUPE safeguards to existing terms and conditions Capita’s undertakings to the union include:
- A new January-based pay date that effectively increases the value of this year’s pay settlement
- A cast-iron commitment never to transfer Tesco Mobile work offshore or to any other UK site
- A new recognition agreement that is specific to the Tesco Mobile contract that will also cover new joiners
- Immediate talks to agree Capita contracts of employment for new joiners - expected to start with the ‘conversion’ of a significant number of existing agency workers
- Pension arrangements that mirror those currently held by staff.

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge, who conducted the negotiations alongside assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien (who now takes over as the CWU’s new national officer for Capita) concedes that widespread anxieties still persist amongst members. She points out, however, that, in order to make the TUPE a success for Tesco Mobile, the onus rests squarely on Capita to disprove those employee fears.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Job security talks at Airwave

As The Voice went to press the CWU had just opened discussions with the new management of Airwave following a tumultuous time at the company.

MOTOROLA TAKEOVER

With Motorola’s takeover of the secure communications provider finally confirmed after an eleventh-hour hiccup that resulted from its surprise referral to the Competition and Markets Authority, the CWU is demanding job security assurances for members who’ve been naturally unsettled by a series of dramatic developments in recent times.

These have included the last Government decision to serve notice on the remainder of the emergency services’ contracts on which Airwave has always relied; the sudden question mark over the Motorola takeover that provided a degree of salvation by way of a three-year contract extension - and, finally, the mass resignation of the former Airwave board in July.

“It’s obviously unnerving for employees when the entire management chain disappears overnight - especially when most of our members are doing jobs that they know won’t ultimately exist when the current emergency services contract draws to a close in 2019,” explains assistant secretary John East.

“That’s why, now the Motorola takeover has finally been confirmed, the CWU’s biggest priority is to make sure that new work is identified for our members in the three years before the next generation network contract commences.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/
New worries at iPSL despite good news on pay

iPSL Bootle branch secretary Gerry Culligan

JOBS SECURITY FEARS

Relief at the end of a long pay freeze has been tempered by new job security fears at iPSL in Bootle. Members at the cheque processing company might be celebrating their first pay rise in four years – but uncertainty over the speed and scope of Government plans to force the digitalisation of cheque handling in 2017 are exacerbating concerns for the future amid a long-term decline in cheque usage. At its peak the cheque processing operation, which sits within Santander’s massive Merseyside site - both housed in the former HQ of Girobank – employed more than 1,000.

Today, however, just 180 staunchly loyal CWU-represented grade employees remain at iPSL following the recent conclusion of around 25 voluntary redundancies initiated by the company immediately after the expiry of a three-year job security agreement. The latest job losses were a direct response to a continuing decline in cheque volumes, which are falling by about 10 per cent year-on-year.

Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove told the Voice: “Pay talks this year were complicated by the continued decline in work volumes and the associated staff surplus, but ultimately we were able to recommend to members a straightforward and no-strings attached 2 per cent pay deal.”

iPSL Bootle branch secretary Gerry Culligan added: “After four years of no pay rises members are glad we’ve been able to achieve a decent increase this year, but we still feel as if we’re hanging on by our fingernails.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

10%
THE YEAR-ON-YEAR DECLINE IN CHEQUE USAGE IS TAKING ITS TOLL ON JOBS

BTFS pay boost amid further talks

ADDRESSING ANOMALIES...

Around 1,500 BT Facilities Services workers have received wage increases of up to 6.6 per cent following their overwhelming acceptance of a CWU-negotiated pay package that starts to address a confusing contractual morass that developed during the years facilities management was outsourced to Monterey.

CWU executive member Tracey Fussey, who led the talks, explains: “The deal reflects the joint efforts of the CWU and BTFS to start to bring some logic to the overall pay structure. It’s a complex agreement, but it moves us significantly in the right direction.”

Since the pay ballot, which returned a 72 per cent ‘Yes’ vote, CWU officerial responsibility for BTFS has shifted to assistant secretary Sally Bridge who told The Voice: “The 2016 pay deal has set firm foundations on which the CWU is determined to build.”

At the time of printing, talks had just commenced on the performance related element of the pay deal and how it will operate in relation to the Development and Performance Review (DPR) process.

STOP PRESS...STOP PRESS...
At the time of printing, an agreement had just been reached on a new skills-based structure for Fabric Technician roles which the union believes has the potential to resolve a number of pay anomalies and provide a framework for individuals to progress to higher salaries.

More on both the pay deal and the Fabric Technician development at www.cwu.org/voice/
ROYAL MAIL PENSIONS

Terry Pullinger has warned Royal Mail that the CWU will use “every means at our disposal, including strike action, to defend our members’ future pensions and prevent massive cuts to their incomes in retirement.”

The CWU deputy general secretary postal (DGSP) was responding to reports of a potential threat to the pensions of Royal Mail members, which emerged in the national press as Post Office workers were balloting on industrial action over various issues including defence of pensions.

During mid-August, senior correspondents at the Guardian, The Times and Financial Times newspapers penned articles suggesting that the company is considering an unprecedented attack on the retirement funds of hard-working postmen and women.

Guardian money editor Patrick Collinson claimed that “nearly 100,000 workers at Royal Mail and the Post Office are likely to fall victim to market turmoil as they plan large cuts to their ‘simply unaffordable’ schemes” and that “managers say the collapse in bond yields means they must cut pension projections.”

Michael Pooler, industrial correspondent for the Financial Times, wrote: “Royal Mail’s ‘gold-standard’ pension scheme is at risk of closure,” while The Times’s industrial editor Robert Lea commented: “After months of stalled negotiations, Royal Mail indicated that it planned to shut down its present retirement scheme, which pays pensions based on average salaries of members, in 2018.”

But the DGSP cautioned both the press and the business not to “give an impression of a fait accompli” and reminded the media and Royal Mail that “at our policy forum in March, the CWU reaffirmed our policy ‘to protect the defined benefit scheme (DB) and seek to extend the current guarantees beyond 2018’.”

Terry continued: “We also agreed policy to improve the current defined contribution (DC) scheme and the forum also agreed that, if Royal Mail announced under the legal consultation process their intention to close the DB scheme post-2018, then ‘the CWU will launch a campaign to stop Royal Mail, including an industrial action ballot.’

◆ The union will also hold Royal Mail to the legally binding commitments on pensions set out in the 2013 Agenda for Growth agreement and its commitment that the CWU and Royal Mail will ‘jointly develop future pension strategy’.

MDEC bonus

INCENTIVE SCHEME

Hundreds of staff working at Royal Mail’s three manual data entry centres are currently voting on a bonus scheme that has been negotiated by the CWU.

Postal executive member Dave Wilshire told us: “These units are in Plymouth, Stoke and Farnworth (near Bolton) and altogether there are nearly 500 people involved.

“We’ve held several sessions of talks with the business and it’s our view that this bonus and incentive scheme is the best that can be achieved through negotiation.

“The proposed scheme meets our pre-set criteria, which included increased payments for ‘key strokes per hour’, additional money for quality steps, and £25 per month consolidation,” Dave said, adding that, “in our view, the current proposals meet these criteria, as well as harmonising bonus arrangements across the sites.”

Capita TVL pay deal

FIELD AGREEMENT

A repackaged pay deal for field employees has been agreed between Capita TVL and CWU negotiators, taking into account the concerns expressed by this group of workers at the original proposals that were put to them earlier this year.

CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey told The Voice: “Although our non-field members at the Bristol and Darwen sites overwhelmingly approved the original deal, the feedback from our field members was less positive.

“In response to this, the company’s field operations director Colin Jones and myself arranged further meetings between our respective negotiating teams and, together, we’ve come up with an improved package.

“The new deal has been formally endorsed by the postal executive and is currently ‘out to ballot’ among our field members, with a ‘Yes’ recommendation from the union,” Andy explained.
Developed jointly by the CWU postal and the education and training departments, the course covers the 2013 Agenda for Growth agreement, with a particular focus on the legally binding protection clauses, and also provides training on the key principles of the IR framework.

Deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger told The Voice: “A clear need to up-skill our representatives was the key overall finding from a survey conducted last year by the education and training department at our request and this course represents a solid step forward in addressing this and meeting the needs that have been identified.

“As well as ensuring our Royal Mail reps are fully conversant with our current national agreement, the course also sets out the roles, responsibilities and facilities of CWU representatives and, crucially, how to achieve local agreements,” he added.

The course was initiated and rolled out by a working group jointly led by Terry and the union’s head of education and training Trish Lavelle, and also including senior reps and members of departmental staff.

Trish explains: “Once the joint group had agreed the structure of the course, its content and the training materials, each division nominated a ‘lead’ rep to co-ordinate within their divisions and several tutor reps – a total of 38 altogether – to deliver the training and we then held three ‘train the trainer’ days.

“After these sessions, the divisions were ready to start the courses, which were made available to all reps within each area,” she said, and added that this course is “a great addition to the courses we offer reps at Alvescot Lodge, regionally and online via CWU Left Click.”

Steve Haliwell is the divisional lead for the North East, and liaises with six tutor reps across his patch.

“We’ve carried out about 15 or 16 of these courses since we started here in March,” says Steve, who goes on to explain that each course usually consists of around 10 people.

“I really appreciate the reps who’ve volunteered as tutors,” he continues, adding that “we’re really keen on this training up here and we do the courses in a variety of locations, usually at branch offices.

“More localised training makes it more accessible and the people who do the courses have found them very useful – they go back to the workplace with a lot more confidence and it’s definitely a positive initiative.”

Down in London, John Simkins carries out the same lead role across the capital, and he also has nothing but praise for the efforts of his volunteer tutors.

“We’ve had about 40 people through this course so far,” he reports, explaining that the London training began in May.

“From the end of August, we’ll be training 10 people each week and we’re hoping to get a larger venue for the sessions.”

John echoes Steve’s views in his judgement of the initiative, agreeing that the course increases the confidence of front line reps in dealing with issues at the workplace, adding that it is particularly helpful for newer activists.

“Another benefit is that new reps are put in touch with more experienced people who they can then contact in the future for advice and assistance,” he adds.

Dave Wilshire is the postal executive representative on the joint training working group and he tells The Voice that “over 500 people have been through these courses so far across the nine divisions.

“That’s roughly a quarter of the total number of Royal Mail reps in just a few months,” he points out, describing the programme as “very successful so far and the feedback has been extremely positive.”

Terry Pullinger told The Voice that he was pleased to hear the positive early reports.

“IT’s clear this course is meeting a real need out there on the front line – and we’re aiming for every one of our reps to have completed this within the next few months.

“I’d like to thank all of the leads and tutors for volunteering their time on this. A confident, well-trained rep in the workplace makes the union so much stronger and more effective,” Terry said.
BT Consumer deal still delivering...

JOBS AND ATTENDANCES

Last year’s far-reaching ‘Transformation’ agreement with BT Consumer continues to bear fruit with the latest tranche of 155 permanent new UK-based jobs and 95 agency conversions just announced as The Voice went to press.

That’s on top of the 300 agency conversions, 100 new apprentices and 100 new directly employed positions in Swansea that were agreed at the start of the year – and is part of the company’s earlier pledge to increase the overall UK-based Customer Care workforce by at least 700.

Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove commented: “BT has now confirmed direct recruitment for permanent jobs at all Sales sites as well as at its Service sites in Swansea, Aberdeen, Exeter, Liverpool and Stoke. There are more agency conversions and work is coming back from overseas.”

Meanwhile, significant progress has also been made on the major programme of attendance changes throughout BT Consumer that stemmed from the need to have more UK staff rostered to answer evening and weekend calls that have hitherto been dealt with overseas. Under the new approach late and weekend attendances are being shared out across the workforce.

Conscious that the attendance changes required by the company would prove problematic for some members, the CWU took care from the outset to ensure that the Transformation Agreement enshrined a wide range of protections – especially for those with caring, travel or health issues.

Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove, in formulating the union’s response, told The Voice: “This is a strange method of resourcing which will generate ill-feeling and confusion. Above everything it sends out a perverse message to loyal and long-standing employees about where they stand in the pecking order.”

To date, more than 95 per cent of individuals going through the process have been offered their first preference in terms of the number of days worked – that number being boosted by the union’s intervention to ensure the range of attendance options being offered is as wide as it possibly can be.

Nigel concludes: “There was a hiccup at the start, but we reached an agreement on rest break arrangements which allowed the company to offer more three and four day weeks than were originally on the table.

“The fact that more than nine out of ten of our members are currently getting their first choice of weekly attendances is very positive – and the CWU continues to work hard nationally and locally to ensure that as many people as possible get what they want.”

Dismay at new Manpower short-term contracts

NEW PAY DISCREPANCIES

The CWU has expressed real concern at Manpower’s decision to press ahead with new short-term agency contracts that are exacerbating existing pay discrepancies at BT.

The CWU, however, has pointed out the danger of confusion and ill-feeling amongst Manpower members who are now potentially subject to three different pay rates for near identical work.

Despite CWU calls for a rethink, recruitment on the new short-term contracts (STCs) commenced in Doncaster and Canterbury on July 18 and is now in the process of being rolled out to other sites.

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge, who’s been working closely with the national officer for BT Consumer, Nigel Cotgrove, in formulating the union’s response, told The Voice: “This is a strange method of resourcing which enshrines a wide range of protections – especially for those with caring, travel or health issues.

Manpower’s new short-term contracts are exacerbating the pay discrepancies that the CWU’s long-running ‘Closing the Loopholes’ campaign is seeking to address.

£1

THE PREMIUM BEING PAID TO NEW RECRUITS IS EXACERBATING EXISTING UNEQUAL TREATMENT

Consumer’s call centres.

Manpower says the six-month contracts – which are generally paying £1-an-hour more than the PBA contract and a whopping £1.50 more at Canterbury – are being deliberately targeted at a ‘different kind of recruit’, namely individuals who want some call centre experience but who aren’t necessarily interested in a career.

The CWU, however, has pointed out the danger of confusion and ill-feeling amongst Manpower members who are now potentially subject to three different pay rates for near identical work.

Despite CWU calls for a rethink, recruitment on the new short-term contracts (STCs) commenced in Doncaster and Canterbury on July 18 and is now in the process of being rolled out to other sites.

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge, who’s been working closely with the national officer for BT Consumer, Nigel Cotgrove, in formulating the union’s response, told The Voice: “This is a strange method of resourcing which will generate ill-feeling and confusion. Above everything it sends out a perverse message to loyal and long-standing employees about where they stand in the pecking order.”
In a one-week whirlwind tour of Britain, the CWU’s Big Red Battlebus visited the capitals of Scotland and Wales and some of the biggest cities of England, winning support from thousands of people.

At every stop along the way, the campaign team unrolled a 20ft high postcard down the side of the bus and asked residents to sign their names to a message urging the Government to take urgent action to save the People’s Post Office.

With dozens of Crown Offices targeted for either closure or privatisation already this year, and further deep cuts to Post Office admin, supply chain and cash-in-transit operations threatening some 2,000 jobs across the business, fears have increased that this iconic British institution is being wilfully run down.

The UK’s Crown Office network, which totalled 458 in 2007, will be left barely half that size by 2017 if the company’s current programme is carried out in full.

CWU general secretary Dave Ward explains that the root of the crisis lie in the “anti-public service dogma of successive governments.” They have withdrawn revenue-generating activities from the Post Office, separated it from Royal Mail, cut public funding and then told the network it has to make a profit,” he said, adding: “Income from providing government services has fallen every single year.”

Assistant secretary Andy Furey told The Voice that the union’s response to this challenge has been to call for a new, over-arching agreement between the union and senior Post Office management, aimed at “working together to win new contracts, develop new products, protect jobs and services and give this business a fighting chance.”

But instead of taking the opportunity to work with the union towards a positive future, the response of the Post Office has been, Andy pointed out, “to cut jobs, close offices withdraw from external contracts and essentially carry out a policy of managed decline.

“We urgently need the Government, which is responsible for this company, to intervene, halt the decline and start to rebuild the UK’s Post Office network in the interests of all the people.”

July’s mini-tour of Britain was aimed at informing the nation of the dire state of affairs and of the very real danger that this Great British public service is facing a deepening crisis and taking the people’s reaction back to the Government in London. Day One was in Scotland, where campaigners visited Edinburgh – a morning stop at Frederick Street Crown Office – and Glasgow – an afternoon session in St George’s Square – and then made a short trip to another under-threat office in nearby Paisley, with residents queuing up to sign their names on the CWU’s giant postcard each time.

“It’s been great today and the response...
from people has been fantastic,” said the union’s Scotland secretary John Brown. “It’s only the first day and already we’ve got hundreds of signatures.

“The message today has been loud and clear – Scotland says: ‘No to franchising, no to privatisation and Yes to saving our network.’”

Carl Webb hosted the next day’s activities, as CWU regional secretary for the North West, where the union’s Big Red Battlebus called in at Manchester and Merseyside. “Hundreds of people have been signing the postcard – it was just non-stop,” he said, adding that, as well as the solidarity visits from local politicians, representatives from the UNISON and GMB unions had pledged their full support too.

“We’re raising the vitally important issue of the post office network and we’re also taking the TU movement out on the road. The other unions were really impressed with what we’re doing.”

Birmingham and Bromsgrove were the bus stops in the Midlands, the latter having been chosen as its Crown Office is one of those on the company’s hit list, explained Midlands Regional secretary Kate Hudson.

“The Government has got to listen to the people, stop this back-door privatisation and halt the decline of the post office network,” she insisted.

Wales and the South West were on Thursday’s Battlebus route, with sessions at Cardiff Town Hall and Bristol’s Castle Green. By this fourth day, the giant postcard was nearly full and people supporting the People’s Post Office campaign climbed to the upper deck and signed from the top.

“Everyone, young and old, loves coming up on the bus,” said CWU Wales secretary Gary Watkins. “It’s been brilliant hosting the Battlebus and the campaign this morning – when we explain the important issues at stake, people are keen to sign.”

And on the English side of the River Severn, newly elected Bristol mayor Marvin Rees was proud to add his name to the thousands of others from around the country, saying: “Post offices are essential social assets that help to anchor communities – and that’s why I strongly support the campaign to save them.”

Friday saw the Big Red Bus return to London and, as the Battlebus passed the Houses of Parliament on the final leg of its journey, CWU general secretary Dave Ward took the microphone and said: “The people in that House over there are letting down the public. The people elected them to stand up for British jobs and British industries and they’re not doing it.”

Other vehicles hooted their horns in support and passing Londoners and visitors to the capital waved as the bus circled Parliament Green, before turning towards Victoria Street, to deliver the giant postcard petition to Secretary of State Greg Clark at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. #CWUNews

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

Corbyn for PM

On the morning after the EU referendum, David Cameron resigned as Prime Minister, the Conservatives were in disarray, the nation was looking for leadership and direction, and the stage was set for Labour to seize the political initiative...

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn was preparing to sit down with his senior colleagues to set out Labour’s Brexit plan.

But anti-leadership elements within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) chose that moment to launch an attempted coup, in a plot led by one of the Labour Party’s most senior MPs, Hilary Benn, who began conspiring with other members of Labour’s Shadow Cabinet to remove Jeremy.

Unfortunately for the plotters, their plans were discovered and Mr Benn was sacked early on the Sunday morning, leaving his fellow conspirators with no alternative but to resign their front bench positions – resignations that they co-ordinated on an hourly basis, to try to maximise their impact.

The party leader calmly appointed replacements to the vacant Shadow Cabinet positions and continued to lead the Official Opposition.

The coup plotters tried to hit back with a formal ‘vote of no confidence’ in Jeremy Corbyn – a provocation that sparked fury among Labour Party members and supporters, who spontaneously rallied outside the House of Commons in his defence.

As evening fell on Parliament, loyal Labour MPs and leaders of UK trade unions, including CWU general secretary Dave Ward, addressed the gathering crowd.

“At a time when the Prime Minister resigns, and you’ve got the Government in disarray, it’s absolutely disgraceful and appalling that the PLP are organising this coup,” Dave stated, describing the coup attempt as “self-indulgent and self-serving.”

Enthusiastic cheers and applause greeted Dave’s speech, with similar sentiments being voiced by other speakers, and a powerful evening was rounded off when Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn arrived and climbed up to the top of a fire engine to address the audience – which by then had completely filled the green and was starting to spill onto the surrounding road.

Through the rest of June and into July, the PLP, supported by much of the mainstream media, threw everything they had at the elected leader, claims that he had ordered the office window of one of the plotters to be smashed, allegations of “breaking in” to the vacated Shadow Cabinet office of one of the front bench deserters – but Jeremy remained unflappable and his tens of thousands of supporters in the party and wider labour movement remained solid.

The anti-Corbyn clique then selected an MP to challenge the leader and tried to force the National Executive Committee (NEC) to prevent Jeremy from defending the challenge, only to be thwarted again as the committee correctly applied the Party rules and a head-to-head leadership election was on.

Taking his campaign across the nation, Jeremy spoke to packed meetings and outdoor rallies right across the country – thousands rallied to him in Liverpool,
Manchester, York, Leeds, Plymouth, Bristol, Brighton, Hull, Swansea, Merthyr, Dagenham, Oxford, Redruth, Liskeard, Cambridge, Falmouth, Dorset, and many other locations – while his opponents offered little policy and even less inspiration.

In late July, CWU branch officers and delegates met in central London for a national political briefing and invited Jeremy to the afternoon session to formally receive the union’s pledge of continuing support.

At the event, CWU general secretary Dave Ward said that the union had “held a very wide-ranging debate” on the political situation and that he was “very proud” to announce that the union had decided to reaffirm support for “our Labour Party leader and our next Prime Minister, Jeremy Corbyn.”

Dave repeated his condemnation of the attempted coup against Jeremy, noting that “every time he’s attacked, he just gets stronger – and the reason he’s attacked by the establishment is because they know a vote for Corbyn is a vote for serious change. “We need a new deal for workers and Jeremy is going to deliver that,” he added.

Welcomed into the hall with a standing ovation, the Labour Party leader thanked the CWU for its support and spelled out the robust, people-first policy manifesto on which he intends to lead the party into the next general election.

His first policy commitment was that “an incoming Labour Government will bring back Royal Mail into public ownership and support our post offices,” a pledge that he followed up with an attack on the current government for its “neglect” of our communications infrastructure, particularly in broadband accessibility.

Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Government will set up a national investment bank to ensure that our national infrastructure is developed to its maximum potential, he insisted, adding that this would also be the means by which our nation’s manufacturing will be revived and restored.

A Labour victory at the next election will also see the abolition of zero-hours contracts, mandatory trade union recognition at every company with more than 250 employees and the axing of industrial tribunal fees, he continued, adding that housing will be treated as a “national priority.”

Labour will support local authorities building homes at affordable rents and with lifetime tenancies, regulate the private rented sector and enable local authorities to sponsor and fund mortgages for people who want to buy.

Jeremy condemned the Tory Trade Union Act, saying that it “hamstrings our unions” and vowed that an incoming Labour Government will repeal the Act and replace it with positive trade union rights.

Another standing ovation greeted the end of Jeremy’s speech, and, speaking to The Voice later, Dave Ward said: “This political agenda, which addresses the needs of the people of this country, is the reason why this union continues to support Jeremy Corbyn.

“He is the man to drive through the change that ordinary people are crying out for – renationalising Royal Mail, serious investment to expand our communications infrastructure, rebuilding manufacturing and getting Britain back to work, restoring union rights, tackling the housing crisis and repairing our public services,” Dave continued.

“Jeremy is a leader for the millions, not the millionaires, and the CWU is proud to support him.”
TOO SLOW - AM THINKING TOO MUCH. MY AVERAGE TASK TIME IS TOO HIGH.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT CUSTOMERS - Gotta
WORK FASTER, COMPLETE MORE TASKS
SUCCESSFULLY AND IMPROVE MY
CALCULATED PRODUCTIVITY...

INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY

MEET TARGETS

PERFORMANCE

MANAGEMENT

AT CROSSROADS
Hopes are rising in Openreach that the ticking time bomb of performance management (PM) may finally be in the process of being defused. Simon Alford reports on a possible ‘eureka moment’ in Service Delivery as Group-wide talks begin.

It’s rare for companies to say “sorry” to the massed ranks of their staff, so when Openreach did exactly that on Friday July 1 – unreservedly apologising for its recent application of performance management (PM) processes – it was clear that a watershed moment was underway.

For almost as long as anyone can remember, PM has been the perennial industrial relations bugbear across BT. Twice in recent years the CWU has pushed to the brink of Group-wide industrial action ballots amid union despair at the brutal application of statistically driven processes that have left a trail of human misery in their wake.

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

Successive ‘new dawns’ have turned out to be false - and while a series of national agreements, accords and more ‘localised’ discussions covering specific outbreaks of PM abuses in different lines of business or locations have secured some short-term improvements, the problem hasn’t so much ‘gone away’ as ‘lifted, shifted and morphed’.

First wreaking its worst in the call centre environments of BT Retail and then Consumer, in recent times the ever-mutating PM ‘virus’ has become especially entrenched in Openreach.

In large part it was branch anger at an upsurge in the number of performance cases involving highly experienced and respected engineers in Service Delivery that triggered a barn-stormer of a debate at this year’s CWU Annual Conference in which speaker after speaker declared PM in its current form ‘simply irredeemable’.

That message was subsequently rammed home to newly appointed Openreach CEO Clive Selley. Having delivered a special Conference presentation about the future direction of the company – the CEO was left in no doubt about delegates’ strength of feeling during an electric Q&A session.

During his presentation, Clive Selley spoke passionately of his vision for Openreach - one in which a renewed focus on delivering and maintaining the best and most robust possible network, through effective team-working, goes hand-in-hand with a determination to deliver excellent customer service.

That philosophy - which was very much in keeping with his previous approach as CEO of TSO, a part of BT which has been largely untouched by the ravages of performance management - was immediately recognised by the CWU’s national Openreach negotiating team as important new ammunition against a system of performance measurements that has, up to now, been entirely focussed on individual performance.

Assistant secretary Davie Bowman explains: “Clive Selley made it clear he believed that, if you create an environment where customer service is a top priority – and you’re passionate about the network, productivity becomes kind of secondary, because, if you’re doing the first two, the third flows from it.

“That’s remarkably close to what the CWU has been saying for years – but what the CEO had to say about the importance of team-based working gave us the ammunition we needed to tackle the fundamental problem we’ve had with PM from the outset.

“Essentially that problem has centred on people being measured on an individual basis – often creating counter-productive behaviours that directly contradict the outcomes the business now accepts it desperately needs in an increasingly tough regulatory environment.

“After Conference we were able to successfully argue the business as well as the moral case for the company lifting its eyes away from the individual and towards the team. That’s a radical departure, the importance of which is hard to overstate.”

A DEMON SLAYED?
The transformed PM regime in Service Delivery was spelt out to staff by the division’s MD, Roddy Thomson, on July 1.

In a remarkably contrite letter that went out to all 20,000 employees, accompanied by an audio file, the MD admitted: “Last year we pushed too hard on individual performance and were overly focussed on ‘output’. We got the balance wrong, and for that I’m truly sorry.”

He continued: “The feedback you have given me is loud, clear and plentiful; we don’t listen enough, it feels like all we care about is productivity and we’re not supporting you make the right decisions for the good of our customers or for the network, something I know you are passionate about.”

Remedial action already agreed with the CWU includes:

◆ The immediate withdrawal of the individual team member targets that have triggered the vast majority of performance plans
◆ The introduction of wholly team-based measures, all of which will be agreed with the CWU in discussions that are already underway
◆ The removal of all ‘G-banded’ ratings
◆ The immediate cessation of all informal coaching plans, at a stroke alleviating the PM woes of around 300 individuals
◆ A commitment that when managers receive detailed training in how the reset team-based performance measures should be applied, the CWU will be fully involved in the process - allowing the union the maximum possibility to identify and challenge any backsliding.

On top of that, Openreach has agreed to a further review of the 59 residual ‘initial’ and ‘final’ formal warnings (IFWs & FFWs) still in place following the previous review at the start of this year that led to 70 per cent of cases being cancelled. The latest review will be conducted on the principle that:

◆ Where individuals are performing well against their plan, the plan will cease
◆ Where individuals continue to need further support but the plan is based solely on productivity, and no further underlying performance concerns exist, the plan will cease
◆ Where plans are deemed fit to continue - an outcome only anticipated in a small number of cases - those individuals will continue to benefit from forensic CWU scrutiny of their cases.

Davie concludes: “At face value it certainly appears that a Rubicon has been crossed with regards to PM in Service delivery. Now the onus is firmly on management to make good on its promises.

“I appreciate there’s some cynicism about, which is understandable given that previous agreements on PM have failed to stop the abuses.

“My response to that, however, is that, so long as the spirit of this agreement is adhered to, it could make a real and immediate difference in Service Delivery, as well as helping the Openreach national team address serious PM problems in Service Enablement.

“As such, this latest agreement has the potential to make people’s lives better now – and anything extra that comes out of the Group-wide talks on PM that are getting underway can only be a bonus.”

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@CWUNews
Postal workers from Gatwick Mail Centre won the inaugural CWU Cricket Trophy in July, after a “fantastic day of cricket” in Sussex.

In a hard-fought final, the local team held off a determined run chase from a talented Birmingham side, after both had come through a first-round pool and a semi-final.

As well as receiving the trophy, Gatwick MC captain Shahzad Ali also won the ‘Golden Batsman’ award after hitting 110 runs through the four limited-over matches. Joint tournament organiser Abdur Rasheed, a CWU rep at Gatwick, said: “It’s been a brilliant day and everyone’s really enjoyed themselves. Many thanks to all the teams, from Peterborough, Jubilee, and Birmingham mail centres, from the local Crawley Delivery Office, and of course, the two teams who entered from Gatwick, who all made this a fantastic day of cricket.”

Birmingham captain Mahmood Ali, who jointly organised the event with Rasheed, said: “Congratulations to Gatwick for winning a great game, although we ran them close and nearly caught them.”

Rowland Hill Fund is now in its 135th year and is “still going strong” in its efforts to provide help and assistance to Royal Mail Group and Post Office workers, retirees and their families.

The Fund, which was named after the founder of the modern postal service, exists for exactly this purpose and has helped many thousands of individuals in all manner of difficulties and all manner of situations since it was first set up way back in 1882.

“We offer a varied service,” Fund manager Mary Jeffrey explained, “ranging from help with budgeting to housing and other issues and there is a confidential helpline available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.”

Giving us examples of two people the Fund has been able to help recently, Mary cited two delivery workers – David Salter from Blackheath (London) and Sarah Phillips from Bath.

“David had two surgery dates cancelled and was unable to work whilst he was awaiting a hip operation and as a result of the delay to his surgery, he was reduced to half pay,” the Fund manager explained, adding that he had fallen into rent arrears as a consequence. “Rowland Hill Fund was able to award a grant of £2,500 to assist him and he is now back at work and thankful for the support he received at a critical time.”

Sarah was struggling to pay her bills after a diagnosis of breast cancer, an operation and chemotherapy sharply changed her life.

“We were able to pay £1,300 towards her household arrears and give her a regular grant of £100 for 12 months,” said Mary. “To all Royal Mail colleagues past and present, in hardship and in need, we say – please contact us and we’ll do our very best to help you if we can.”

A Surrey postman has been shortlisted for a St John Ambulance Everyday Heroes Award after giving first aid to a road accident victim.

Tony Peet, a Wokingham Delivery Office worker, ran to assist Jack Walker, who had been hit by a car and sent head first into a brick wall while crossing a road.

Finding Mr Walker unconscious and bleeding heavily, Tony used the first-aid skills he had learned, checking the man’s breathing, clearing his airway, and stemming the bleeding with his scarf.

He stayed with Mr Walker until the arrival of paramedics, who took him to hospital.

The St John Ambulance charity holds an awards event every year to recognise people who have saved a life with first-aid. The 2016 award winners’ event will take place in September.
Recruitment blitz on call centres across the UK

BUSY MONTH AHEAD...

Plans are coming together to make this year’s CWU Contact Centre Action Month the biggest and best to date – with organisers and branches hoping to build on the good work last year.

Once again running throughout October, the now annual focus on call centre organising will see multiple CWU profile-raising events taking place in not just the call centres where the union has long been recognised for collective bargaining purposes – but also outside a large number of unrecognised sites where managements have displayed varying degrees of hostility to trade union organisation.

Given the preponderance of younger people working in the call centre industry, this year’s Contact Centre Action Month has adopted the same ‘youth’ orientated theme as the simultaneous but shorter Contact Centre Action Week being organised by UNI Global Union – the international trade union federation to which the CWU is affiliated.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr said: “Once again we wanted to support UNI’s campaigning in the call centre arena, but felt that the scale of CWU activity we are planning lent itself to being spread out over an entire month. The young worker theme to the month means that branches can still get involved and organise young members in their area even if they do not cover call centres.

“Given the highly successful previous Contact Centre Action Months we held in October 2015 and 2016, and the various Action Weeks we’ve held at different times of the year, branches have set themselves a high benchmark to beat, but I have every faith in them doing so!”

Independence Day in Bootle

FORETASTE OF CONTACT CENTRE ACTION MONTH

As the UK digested the political fallout from the Brexit vote the entrance to the canteen of the massive Santander complex on Merseyside was bedecked in red, white and blue for entirely different reasons. On Monday July 4 - American Independence Day – CWU activists donned Uncle Sam-style outfits and even rustled up a Statue of Liberty to celebrate the support the union gives members in every aspect of their working life.

Bootle Financial Services branch has an impressive track record of organising imaginative CWU profile-boosting events - and the latest recruitment extravaganza proved as successful as ever, securing the enthusiastic participation of hundreds of existing members and netting 30 new joiners in the process.

The next recruitment and retention inspired fun day is planned for November 3, when the branch will hold a Guy Fawkes-themed event as its slightly late contribution to the union’s national Contact Centre Action Month activities.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Stepping up to the challenge in EE

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

EE’s six big call centres in Plymouth, Merthyr Tydfil, Darlington, Doxford, North Tyneside and Greenock will be particular focuses for the CWU during Contact Centre Action Month – with the union looking to build even further on the big membership influx that has followed BT’s acquisition of the mobile giant.

MEMBERSHIP IN EE HAS INCREASED BY NEARLY A THIRD IN THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS

Even prior to next month’s recruitment activities the CWU has been stepping up its presence in EE – aided by a new agreement with management which has seen access to the six sites increased from two days every three months to one day a month.

At present that access is still limited to the foyers of the six call centres, though the CWU is currently making the case for the union to be allowed to set up stalls in canteens or other specially designated areas - reflecting the access the union already enjoys in BT.

Assistant secretary John East explains: “While the company’s agreement to an increased number of days when we can hand out leaflets in the foyers is welcome, what we’d really like is to have a table somewhere where people can talk to us at their leisure, rather than when they are rushing in to work.

“Even with the current arrangements, however, membership is growing significantly - up by 30 per cent over the last year alone.”
Gaining ground - and numbers - in VM

The CWU’s fightback at VM is securing results seen to be standing up against unreasonable management dikts, the non-union friends and colleagues of those we have supported take note and vote with their feet.

“We now actually have more members in VM than we did immediately after the initial shock of derecognition.”

Membership amongst the company’s Planners has also continued to increase, with new joiners apparently drawn to the union as a result of the spirited fight waged by the CWU on behalf of 42 Access Planners who’d been forced to accept a change of role and the associated loss of a company car with minimal notice and no compensation.

MEMBERSHIP SURGE

The support and advice being offered to members in union-hostile Virgin Media has been reflected in a sharp upturn in the number of CWU membership applications being made by the company’s employees.

After a long period of slow but steady membership attrition that followed the initial shock of the company’s decision to derecognise the CWU in November 2012, recent months have seen a significant clawing back of members – apparently driven by the support the union is providing to embattled part-time members in VM call centres.

Assistant secretary John East told the Voice: “The union has represented a number of individuals in hearings over the imposition of revised attendance patterns that were simply impossible for child-care or other caring reasons. As ever, when the CWU is clearly

Summer-long protection in ISBAN!

Employees across Santander subsidiary ISBAN have enjoyed a different kind of protection from the CWU this summer thanks to the union’s participation in a pioneering ‘sunsafe’ initiative.

At the invitation of management, the CWU took the lead on a special awareness campaign highlighting the risks associated with excessive exposure to sunshine – resulting in every employee receiving a free tube of sun cream and a CWU health and safety department leaflet.

National officer for Santander Group John East told the Voice: “We hope this clear demonstration of the union working in partnership with management for the benefit of staff will demonstrate to even more ISBAN workers that recognised trade unions offer important protections for workers in a wide variety of ways.”

Meanwhile, initial talks have just got underway over the feasibility of attempting to harmonise grades and pay scales in ISBAN – something the union believes could provide opportunities to resolve some irksome pay anomalies amongst F and G-graded employees at the former A&L sites in Bootle and Leicester.
Durham and Tolpuddle

CWU members were out in force at this summer’s big two labour movement festivals and Paul Clays and Kevin Beazer, our North East and South West regional secretaries, report from Durham and Tolpuddle respectively.

This July’s 132nd Durham Miners’ Gala attracted an estimated 160,000 trade unionists, labour movement activists and their families and friends and, as usual, the CWU had a strong presence, with the iconic giant inflatable post and telephone boxes bringing Gala-goers to the union’s stall.

“It’s with a mixture of pride and sadness that I report on this year’s gala,” Paul told us. “Pride that the CWU is once again at the forefront of supporting trade unions, with our big red inflatables standing proud and becoming a photo opportunity for politicians, the public and the visitors from far and wide.

“This event is often seen as a message of defiance to governments that the mines have gone but the comradeship, solidarity and pride is still alive and well,” he explained.

Paul’s sadness is, of course, at the news just a week after the event of the death of Gala organiser Dave Hopper, who he described as a “stalwart of the Big Meeting.

“His efforts in recent years to ensure that the Gala would be enshrined in history and have a place every year in the future of the trade union movement will never be forgotten.

“Davey will be missed but never forgotten because his legacy will live on in the gala,” Paul continued, adding that he had attended Mr Hopper’s funeral alongside “at least a thousand other people whose lives had been enlightened by Davey.”

ALSO AT TOLPUDDLE...

A few weeks after the Durham event, many thousands of people gathered at the tiny Dorset village of Tolpuddle for the annual tribute to some of our movement’s earliest pioneers – a group of brave agricultural workers who set up one of the UK’s first trade unions way back in the early Victorian era.

In 1834, local labourers James Brine, James Hammett, George Loveless, James Loveless, Thomas Standfield, and John Standfield were arrested, tried, and sentenced to seven years penal servitude in Australia for organising themselves into a Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers in response to their employer cutting their pay.

The workers were eventually released from exile after a mass campaign among the British people, which included huge demonstrations and a petition bearing nearly one million signatures.

Kevin Beazer told The Voice: “Tolpuddle 2016 was not only one of the hottest festivals weather wise but also the crowds were the biggest ever in my experience of attending the event.

“The main event on the Sunday was absolutely packed with people and the atmosphere was great with brilliant speeches from Marvin Rees Labour Mayor of Bristol and a thumping speech from our Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn.

“It was a great festival and the CWU again played a part in this.”
equalities

Fighting for equality on the front line

Is the CWU making progress towards equality and proportionality? The Voice asked national executive and postal executive member Mahmood Ali, and national president Beryl Shepherd, who is also a longstanding member of our telecoms and financial services executive, about their experiences...

◆ BERYL: As a telephone billing clerk, I first became active as a committee member of the Middlesbrough Branch of CPSA (PET Section) in 1982. The spark for me was when I was turned down for an internal vacancy because the management doubted my "commitment" as I’d recently returned to work from maternity leave. Coming back to work after a baby was extremely rare then – I think I was one of the first at my workplace to do it.

Early in my involvement, one of the first issues I dealt with was to get someone reinstated after dismissal and that case is something I think back to when I need to remind myself why I’m doing this.

We didn’t have any equality structures back then, but where I worked, it was a mostly female workforce and there were already women reps, so I wasn’t unusual.

But, as I met people more widely in the union, I did notice other women didn’t get the same support I’d had and that made me realise I needed to do more to help other women.

Things have changed enormously since then and our equality structures have played a positive role in that – but those structures need to evolve to reflect that change and meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Are there enough women speakers at CWU events? Or proposing motions and taking leading roles within the union? Or perhaps most importantly, acting as workplace reps?

All of our equality bodies, representing all of the equality strands, need to produce positive answers to those questions in the period ahead.

"CPSA was a civil-service union, most of which became PCS, but Beryl’s section of CPSA went into the CWU.

◆ MAHMOOD: I joined Royal Mail back in 1991 and joined the union on my first day. Originally, my plan was to work for Royal Mail for three months, save one thousand pounds and buy a Ford Capri. But, after 25 years in Royal Mail, I have not yet been able to save £1,000 and never owned a Capri.

I’d grown up in a politically active family in Kashmir and I took part in student politics, mainly in resistance against martial-law and restoration of democracy – so standing up for collective rights was an inbuilt habit.

In 1998 I was elected as the late shift unit representative in Birmingham Mail Centre, I felt welcomed and supported by the union. My strengths were recognised and support was offered to enhance my skills and overcome my weaknesses.

A few years later, I became area processing rep and with the help of branch and division I established a strong processing committee of 15 representatives. I also served the union as a branch political officer and Employment Tribunal Panelist before being elected onto the postal executive in 2011.

My view, based on my experience, is that the CWU is an inclusive union; however during my CWU journey, I have also experienced occasional racism and prejudice, mostly unintentional and in the form of ignorance rather than active and deliberately intended.

I believe there is a pressing need for our union to be reflective of the makeup of its membership on all tiers. In my view, although our equality structures have been successful in raising the profile of equality issues, we are far from achieving the intended objectives of equal representation in the mainstream. Therefore, any review in the equality policy, rules and structures must ensure equal representation is visible in the mainstream union.

It is an honour to be part of a trade union that is knitted with its membership, effective at work and plays an important role in the bigger movement, fighting for working class people.

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

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Pride of place: LGBT rights represent just one of the CWU’s equalities strands. Full Pride story at www.cwu.org/voice/
Get online and get involved

NEW WEBSITE

A dedicated site for our 17,000 retired members was launched in June and is already proving a major success, says senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns.

The site features news, reports, a calendar of upcoming events, and a forum where retired members can keep in touch and debate issues of the day.

A publications page contains copies of the Link magazine and a history page, which has a photo gallery, tributes to fallen comrades and some fascinating articles about the union in days gone by.

And of course, there are the full range of social media links and connections.

Tony explains: “Our retired members bring a wealth of experience to this union and they are an integral part of it. This website is proving to be an extremely useful tool for not just retired members but also for the union as a whole.”

Brian Lee and Norman Candy are the two retired section members with responsibility for the site and both of them are encouraging their fellow retirees to get online and get involved.

“I know us older folk are often assumed to have no interest in e-communications, but nothing could be further from the truth,” says Norman. “I’m on Facebook and Twitter and so is Brian – it’s a great way to keep in touch.”

Brian adds: “Having our own dedicated retired members’ website is a great step forward for us all. It certainly shows once again that the CWU puts its members first.”

Join in with the discussion on the web: cwurm.org/ or Facebook facebook.com/ThecommunicationsUnion/

No more waiting for decent social care!

NATIONAL PENSIONERS CONVENTION

Next month the National Pensioners Convention (NPC), to which the CWU is affiliated, will make an eye-catching stand against the desperate state of social care in the UK using provocative skull and skeleton imagery.

The simple but stark message - “We want decent social care now before its too late” - will be delivered to politicians and the public alike on Saturday October 1, with many of the ghoulishly clad protestors expected to gather outside town halls and care homes in prominent town centre locations.

Billed as the NPC’s contribution to the United Nation’s ‘International Older People’s Day’ campaigning, the aim is to highlight the need for a National Health & Care Service, funded through taxation, as the best way of improving the standards and quality of care, along with securing better terms & conditions for staff.

“If asked why we’re using skeletons in the protest, we’ll be saying that pensioners only make the headlines when they die, but that the failure of our care system is going on every day and needs to be addressed as a matter of priority,” concludes NPC national officer Neil Duncan-Jordan.

For more information visit: npcuk.org/?s=international+older+peoples+day&submit=GoThecommunicationsUnion/

Did you know that the CWU has a thriving retired members’ section that campaigns on the issues that matter to pensioners?

Barring workplace representation, retired members enjoy all the benefits of ordinary membership including free expert legal advice if required.

Subs, which (from January 1, 2016) stand at £1.34 per week or £5.80 per month for those contributing to the political fund (£1.14 weekly or £4.93 monthly for those contracted-out), also mean you’ll continue to receive The Voice in addition to a designated magazine for retired members – The Link.

For more information please call 0800 731 7434 or email joinunion@cwu.org
GUERRILLA CAMPAIGNING

The audacious and eye-catching projection on the side of the Houses of Parliament that marked the climax of the CWU’s spring offensive against the Trade Union Bill has won high acclaim at the TUC’s prestigious annual Communications Awards.

The union secured a special commendation in the ‘Best Designed Communication’ category for the ‘SAY NO TO THE TU BILL’ illumination in which an image of Croydon CWU member Liam Farnfield working up a telegraph pole was projected on to the world famous Gothic façade in February.

For nearly 10 minutes the CWU astonished tourists and homebound commuters passing by the world heritage site by shining its poignant and unmissable ‘Stand up for the millions – not the millionaires’ message on the very seat of UK Government.

More importantly, the stunt attracted widespread media attention and huge social media interest – the “huge impact” of which was acknowledged by the Awards judges.

Given high security around Parliament the textbook piece of ‘guerrilla campaigning’ had required an intricately planned and extensively reckoned covert operation.

That necessitated bulky projection equipment being sneakily dropped off and set up on Westminster Bridge under the cover of partial darkness, and the swift execution of the projection that the union always knew would solicit a swift security services response.

In the event, however, the CWU communications ‘crack squad’ pulled off the stunt with clockwork precision – disappearing into the night just as police arrived on the bridge!

Congratulating the team for their derring-do, CWU general secretary Dave Ward said: “Thanks to a carefully devised, well-executed and daringly audacious communications department team effort, the CWU managed to give its opposition to the Tu Bill a profile that was unrivalled in the trade union movement.”

Full report at media/news/2016/july/08/cwu-success-at-trade-union-communication-awards/
Despite efforts to block a major humanitarian convoy to the notorious ‘Jungle’ refugee camp in Calais earlier this summer, one CWU contingent managed to slip through the net. West London Postal branch activist Katie Dunning recounts a profoundly moving experience...

HUMANITY AND BENEVOLENCE amongst fear and horror; that’s the only way to describe the Calais ‘Jungle’. Stripped of their wealth, their worth and their dignity, over 5,000 people desperately await asylum after conflict and economic destruction have forced them to flee their homes, communities and jobs.

Isolated and left to rot by most European governments, the innocent victims of the current refugee crisis rely heavily on a determined humanitarian response - and it was precisely to play its part in that aid effort that the CWU joined the People’s Assembly’s ‘Convoy to Calais’ on June 18.

The journey began with over 250 aid-laden vehicles occupying central London. A sea of green flags reading ‘Refugees Welcome!’ could be seen for miles along Whitehall. Amid early indications that the authorities were planning to block the aid convoy, the People’s Assembly concluded a short rally by insisting it was the convoy’s intention to proceed to Calais with the tonnes of aid that had been collected up and down the country.

We arrived in Calais around 2pm to learn the majority of vans, lorries and cars had been stopped in Dover. The French authorities had invoked a ‘state of emergency’, citing recent terrorist attacks and football hooliganism as its rationale for preventing aid reaching desperate refugees. There couldn’t have been a clearer demonstration of EU governments’ failure to accept their responsibilities for the political and economic decisions that have created such a disastrous humanitarian crisis.

In the hope that others had made it to Calais, we made our way to the ‘Waterhouse’ - the main aid processing and distribution hub - where we were warmly greeted. Shortly afterwards an articulated lorry that had fortunately got through Folkestone arrived and we quickly set to work unloading the cargo.

What was abundantly apparent and extremely frustrating was just how empty the storage units were. Even the huge load that had just arrived had little impact on filling an area that had been full just a fortnight earlier - yet so much desperately needed aid had been blocked in Dover! What an injustice!

Undeterred by rumours the police were refusing to let anyone into the ‘Jungle’ we set off. The desolate mile-long road leading up to the camp’s entrance segregates the refugees from any attempts of integration or cohabitation with local communities. Lost looking refugees stood around with hopelessness and uncertainty in their eyes.

At the entrance we were approached by three French police officers, but fortunately they allowed us through. What we discovered inside was something you’d never expect to find in a rich Western country. Poverty and poor sanitation was plain to see. Men, women and children were segregated into different camps - families torn apart.

Dead rats lay on the ground - we were told that at sunrise they swarm the ‘Jungle’, running freely over sleeping refugees. Yet, despite the squalor, the sense of solidarity and community amongst refugees from different countries was overwhelming.

Using discarded pallets and plywood the refugees have built a community from scratch. Shops, restaurants and even a barbers stood along the strip leading to the main campsites. These people don’t want hand-outs. All they want is the opportunity to work.

We all left the camp with a humbling sense of how lucky and privileged we are. How can it be so easy for us to freely move around Europe when the people of the Calais ‘Jungle’ are trapped in the filth and squalor of a lawless no-man’s-land?

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Full report, video and more pictures at www.cwu.org/voice/
Unquestionably, the best form of communication for us as a union will always be in the workplaces – members and representatives talking to each other. Alongside this, we need to maximise every opportunity to engage with the membership and social media offers us an avenue to do this.

Over the last six months, we have dramatically increased our online profile, with huge increases in our followers, likes and connections. We have trended several times, held the biggest live Q&A sessions in the history of the trade union movement and allowed members to receive the latest news within seconds, direct to smartphones, tablets and PCs.

When posting on CWU-related matters, use #TheCWU as this gives us a better chance of picking up your contributions and sharing them. We ask that to ensure the widest possible level of engagement, you share these key accounts with your colleagues in the workplace and ask everyone who uses social media to follow and like the CWU accounts. Social media has proven to be a very powerful communications tool for political parties, businesses and individuals. The potential for us to engage with our members is huge – but we need your support to maximise it – get involved.

Every CWU member can get involved online and our key accounts at the moment are: Facebook Page – The Communications Union, Facebook Group – Dave Ward CWU and Twitter @CWUNews @DaveWardGS

### OFFICIAL Vauxhall Test Data

Find out more: www.partnersprogramme.co.uk/mokka or visit your local Vauxhall Retailer.

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TUC awards for CWU learning reps

Darren Rowbotham and George White were congratulated for their dedicated work on behalf of members after the pair picked up TUC Community and Workplace Learning Awards.

GONGS FOR CWU EDUCATION

Darren, who serves as a CWU learning rep (ULR) at Exeter Mail Centre, and George – ULR at the Mount Pleasant site in Farrington – received the accolades from TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady during the annual Union Learning Conference in July.

Darren told The Voice that he had been “shocked” to win the award and said: “I’ve just been doing what I was meant to do, like lots of other ULRs all around the country.”

“We’ve got a learning facility in the workplace and another one at our branch office (Western Counties) and the courses provided – with assistance from Learn Devon – range from functional maths to IT and photography,” Darren added.

“Our on-site learning centre works in partnership with The College of Haringey, Enfield & North East London College and West London College,” explained George, who has served as a ULR for 10 years.

“Our courses include various ICT subjects, functional skills and business administration,” he added, saying that he was “surprised, but proud” of his award and praising the work of all the union’s ULRs.

Both award winners thanked the CWU education and training department, as well as their respective branches for the support – and also expressed their appreciation for the support of the business.

CWU head of education and training Trish Lavelle congratulated Darren and George, saying: “They’ve both done an excellent job and it’s great to see two of our hard-working ULRs recognised in this way.

“This is also a tribute to the CWU’s focus on the importance of education and training,” she continued, adding: “There are over 100 CWU-represented workplaces around the UK that have onsite learning centres and, working with both Royal Mail and BT, the union is instrumental in providing education and learning to some 6,000 workers each year through facilities such as these and the dedication of learning reps,” Trish explained.

LETTERS...LETTERS...LETTERS...LETTERS...LETTERS...LETTERS...LETTERS

SHORT MEMORIES

I was surprised to receive a letter from the CWU urging me to vote to stay in the detested European Union in the referendum.

To me, this seemed to be another case of short memories. From what I remember, after we had elected Tony Blair and his lot in 1997, having then been urged to do so by the union, it was the EU that poked its nose in and told Mr Blair (who had promised to safeguard the postal service) that he must have competition in the postal service.

Of course, Mr Blair then immediately turned somersaults in rushing to obey. This opened the door for the cherry pickers, such as TNT, DHL etc, all to come in and take the profitable work, leaving Royal Mail with the unprofitable work, thereby putting the universal service at risk.

I am sorry, but not having believed Heath’s pack of lies in 1975, I waited 40 years for a chance to kick the EU into touch - as was done in the referendum.

Don Foster, Retired member, Derbyshire

◆ CWU general secretary Dave Ward responds: Thank you for your letter Mr Foster. In April, CWU Conference held a full and robust debate on this issue and, as part of our democratic process, ultimately voted that the union should recommend a vote to remain. While the damaging way in which postal competition was introduced here (allowing cherry-picking through downstream access) was down to the UK Government, the CWU was clear that, if we stayed in, the status quo in the EU was not acceptable and we would join with unions across Europe to push for reform.

The key factor behind the union’s recommendation was employment rights. In the wake of the leave vote, the priority for the labour movement must now be to come together – however people voted – and unite around protecting and enhancing these for our members.

BLACKBURN AGENCY BETRAYAL

I am a Manpower employee working at BT’s operator site in Blackburn.

Myself and approximately 50 Manpower colleagues have been advised that our service to BT is no longer required and we will soon no longer have a job. BT has decided to close its Blackburn Operator Centre and transfer its BT employees to Consumer in Accrington.

So, what about us? Most of us have given over 10 years of service to BT – does our loyalty and service mean nothing?

It appears we are still very much second class and treated as such, despite BT’s claims to the contrary.

We will, no doubt, be expected to jump through a myriad of hoops to gain another role working to BT. We’ve provided consistent service to BT’s customers for years, including handling 999 emergency calls, yet it seems that counts for nothing.

This has to stop, BT! Employ people properly and give them real futures and lives!

Name and address supplied
The binary, ‘Yes/No’ nature of referendums means that they are not, Tony argues, a good way of resolving complex issues such as the EU. “Referendums are not the answer,” he says. “We live in a representative democracy and the role of those elected is to decide, based on a wider view, what is right for the people, and the people have the chance to either re-elect them or elect a new government based on the whole package of the different parties’ programmes.

“By contrast, a referendum focuses on a narrow view – ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, ‘Leave’ or ‘Remain’ – and so, in the immediate aftermath of the vote, there was a political vacuum and those who had campaigned for ‘Leave’ could not explain exactly what leaving was going to mean in a wider sense.”

After a change of Prime Minister, and the appointment of a new Cabinet, the ‘Brexit’ negotiations are set to begin, but Tony warns of the danger that this process could be “seized upon by the right-wing as an opportunity to shore up and protect an ever-smaller, richer elite.”

As an example, Tony says that, although the ‘Brexit’ vote represented a setback to the controversial Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), there is now a danger that the new Secretary of State for International Trade, Liam Fox, may try to take the UK into the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which could be equally damaging to our public services.

“This elite want to use this opportunity to create further inequality and smash workers’ organisations and their rights,” he continues, and asks rhetorically: “How do we know this? By looking at the record in government of the people leading this negotiation – Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liam Fox and David Davis.”

The CWU recommended a ‘Remain’ vote in the referendum and Tony says that his initial response to the result was deep disappointment. “Going forward, of course our day-to-day battles with the employer will carry on as normal – hence the strike ballot across POL for example.

“And in the longer term, we need to build a stronger trade union movement to defend workers’ rights from attack and to advance our industrial agenda,” he pointed out, adding: “The Labour Party must press the Government hard to guarantee more rights for workers and end the race to the bottom.

“If the interests of the poorer in society are sacrificed in favour of the interests of big business, and if workers’ rights are ignored, then Labour must oppose such a deal in Parliament,” Tony insists, and calls for the public to have the opportunity to make a democratic judgement on the terms negotiated by the Government “as these will have far-reaching consequences for the people of this country and the right to have a say on these issues is simply a point of democracy.”

The most negative aspect of the referendum campaign and its immediate aftermath, according to Tony, was the alarming increase in incidents of xenophobia and even outright racism, much of which, he believes, was generated by the focus on issues around immigration.

“There is absolutely no doubt that this was the cause of the upsurge in racism and race hate attacks,” he insists, pointing to official police statistics confirming this.

The constant negative focus on immigration “gave courage to cowards” Tony explained, adding that, those who abused and attacked people felt that they were justified in this as they interpreted the ‘Leave’ vote as a vote to ‘send back’ people from other countries.

“Our response has been to step up our anti-racism activity, in the workplace, in the union and in society as a whole – it’s as simple as that.

“And it’s vital that the Government stops playing games over the future of EU nationals who settled here, completely legally, under the ‘free-movement’ regulations,” Tony pointed out.

“These people’s rights must be guaranteed – and then if racist idiots ignorantly tell them to ‘go home’, they can reply: ‘We are home and we’ve got the right to stay’.