One union, one magazine, one voice

Read about the CWU’s nationwide campaign tour on Pages 6, 7 & 8

TAKING THE FOUR PILLARS TO THE UK'S FOUR CORNERS

July/Aug 2017

P3 BT WARNED ON PENSIONS
CWU reiterates threat that BTPS closure will be opposed by industrial action if necessary

P14-15 ELECTION 2017 REVIEW
Dave Ward analyses the improved political situation and sets out our plan of action

P25 FOURTH INDUSTRIAL AGE
Unions must get battle-ready to ensure we don’t sleep-walk into a science fiction nightmare
in June’s General Election, I believe we saw a fundamental shift in the balance of forces in this country – and this vindicates the political position the CWU has taken.

With a transformative manifesto – making pledges on our key CWU campaigns – and the beginnings of a mass movement, under Jeremy Corbyn Labour is delivering a new kind of politics. Now the CWU and the rest of the trade union movement must step up and deliver a new kind of trade unionism. As CWU members are well aware, there has rarely been a more important time for workers to stand together. Across our industries we face difficult times, and whether it’s the Four Pillars campaign in Royal Mail, the defence of pensions in BT or the other key things we are fighting for, we will need members to deliver a new kind of engagement with members, representatives and a new generation, and how we listen and act on your concerns as one union.

In the coming weeks we’ll be launching a new website, a new app, a new membership benefits package and we will be prioritising work on a new package of support for our representatives. All of these things are connected. We are pushing for a new politics, a new trade unionism and a new approach in the CWU to meet the challenges our members and workers more generally face today. As the election has shown, this is the moment for us to take bold steps forward.

UNIONLINE

YOUR TRADE UNION LAW FIRM

CWU Legal Services: UNIONLINE 0300 333 0303

UNIONLINE is the CWU’s very own law firm offering members and their families a fast route to free, comprehensive legal advice.

Personal injury claims for members and family
Employment law advice members only
Free legal advice helpline
Free will writing service
The best advice for the best outcomes.

To register a claim or for any legal advice call UNIONLINE on 0300 333 0303.

More information: www.unionline.co.uk

Publications Editor: Simon Alford
Journalist, The Voice: Kaushik Sharma
Stories for The Voice and Communications department: (020) 8971 7447
Published on behalf of CWU by Century One Publishing Ltd.
Tel: 020 8971 8848
www.centuryonepublishing.co.uk
Advertising enquiries: Felicity Dillinger
Tel: 020 733 739 183
info@centuryonepublishing.co.uk
Creative design and production: Hema Sadas
Cover image: CWU

GRENELL:
A DISASTER THAT SHOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED

The scale of the fire at Grenfell Tower was unprecedented. In more than 30 years working within the fire and rescue service, I have never seen firefighters respond to a fire with such a huge threat to life...
IT'S A SERIOUS CONCERN THAT Defined Benefit pension schemes – where benefits are linked through a formula to members' earnings and/or length of pensionable employment – are increasingly being closed to future accrual on the grounds of affordability.

The ongoing shift away from DB pension schemes towards lower earnings and/or length of pensionable employment – are increasingly being seen as significant and improvements to medical retirement.

Andy Kerr
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (T&FS)

The recent CWU tour engaging with all local reps from our nine industrial areas, in briefings held in seven major UK cities, reaffirmed that special this union attracts. It was inspiring to witness first-hand the high degree of loyalty, understanding of the issues and support our unit reps have for the union and the Four Pillars campaign. As well as updating them on the current negotiations, the tour was also a unique opportunity to sincerely thank them for their excellent and incredibly difficult job they do.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

"The clock is ticking," the CWU has warned Royal Mail senior management, as frustration grows among hard-working postal members at the lack of progress in national talks. While the union has put together a robust plan for growing the company, improving services to the public and providing secure, high-quality employment going forward, the business is stubbornly sticking to its short-term "minimise costs/maximise profit" strategy. "Our Four Pillars programme has won enthusiastic backing from the workforce right across the UK," reports deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger, who adds that the CWU's pensions proposal, in particular, "has sparked widespread interest among many people outside our industry as well. "But the response from senior Royal Mail bosses, so far, has been very disappointing to say the least – and it's an attitude that must change." CWU executive members are still hopeful that wiser counsels will prevail at the top of the company, but have warned them that time is not infinite and a change to a positive strategy must happen soon or the union could be forced into consideration of industrial action.

To emphasise the urgency of the situation, Terry and a small delegation from the CWU handed out leaflets to shareholders arriving for the company's annual general meeting (AGM), which was held at a venue near Heathrow Airport last month.

"It was vitally important that we spoke with shareholders and provided them with a summary of our concerns," he told The Voice, adding that he had been accompanied by CWU Divisional Representatives from London and South Central, the union's London political officer, and officers and representatives from the union's South East 5 Branch (pictured above).

Terry was invited into the AGM, where he heard the opening contributions of the chairman Peter Long and the chief executive Moya Greene. "Both of them gave detailed reports on the company's financial situation, their analysis of the current market and future business strategy," he told us afterwards. "Of course the contributions were both self-congratulating and one-sided, which is why it was so important that we expressed a different analysis via our leaflet. "They both thanked the employees and expressed a view that success was impossible without them – I could hear our members screaming: 'Actions speak louder than words,'" Terry commented.

Our DGSP also reported that Ms Greene had "gone to some lengths to explain how generous the current pension proposal is, how employees were gifted shares which they are earning money from, how dividend return would increase by 4 per cent and that the ‘minimise costs/maximise dividend return’ strategy would continue." The union does not dispute that there are serious challenges ahead, but there remains a marked difference in the respective strategic responses proposed by the CWU and the senior management.

Terry concluded that "the very future of our members and our industry are at stake and make no mistake, we will stand and fight for it.”
After a 1,200-mile tour of the UK, engaging directly with over 2,000 CWU reps at seven separate briefings, support for the union’s Four Pillars of Security campaign is now stronger than ever…

The Voice, and our CWU camera crew, followed the tour every step of the way, from Day One in London, to Birmingham, Bristol, Belfast, Glasgow, Liverpool and all the way through to the final leg in Sheffield. Enthusiasm grew, determination strengthened and unity was forged among our union’s rank and file representatives as they answered the call to arms from deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger and his senior team for the coming fight for justice, fairness and service in a race to the bottom.

OUR BIG LONDON LAUNCH

Gathering for the kick-off in Easton were hundreds of activists from units across the London and South East Districts, with some also attending from South Central and Anglia workplaces.

General secretary Dave Ward was the first speaker, and he pledged the union’s full support for the Four Pillars campaign, insisting that “whatever resources Terry Pullinger and his team need will be provided by the union. "What’s the vision from Royal Mail?" he asked rhetorically, answering: “To dictate the future to our members and put profit before service in a race to the bottom.

"But our message – the message of Four Pillars of Security – is that it doesn’t have to be that way.

"Our union, more than any other, is best placed to deal with the challenges of the future and we will continue to do everything that we can to deliver the renationalisation of this industry," he vowed.

Dave made some wider observations about the changed political environment following Labour’s strong gains in the June election and that this “new politics” needed to be matched by a “new unionism” based on strong workplace organisation and a determination to “re-balance the world of work in favour of workers.”

The world of work will be “the number one issue” he continued, adding: “We’ve got to get the whole of the trade union movement to back that up.”

The talks with Royal Mail have achieved no progress so far, and in Terry Pullinger’s detailed update, he spelled out that, unless the company changed course, national industrial action would be the union’s only option.

“They’ve got to move or they know what the consequences will be,” he pointed out, adding: “We are a fighting union and we will defend ourselves.

“And if things don’t change, we will need you reps to deliver a big ballot turnout and a big ‘Yes’ vote.”

In London, as at all the other gatherings, Terry’s opening speech was followed by further updates from the rest of the senior team – national officers Mark Baulch, Davie Robertson, Andy Furey and executive member Carl Maden, who was substituting for Ray Ellis.

And the ensuing contributions from the floor included questions about the whole range of issues that grassroots members are posing, along with reports from workplaces of rising tensions on the front line and strong support for the union’s national policy agenda.

LIVELY IN THE SOUTH WEST

Reps from the South West/South Wales Division gave a lively welcome to the Four Pillars campaign tour at the start of its second week, as it called into the city of Bristol.

After Terry’s rousing opening speech, assistant secretary Andy Furey made a thought-provoking speech in which he pointed out that there were “important lessons to be learned from our dispute in the Post Office.”

The Government’s controversial decision to separate the company’s retail and delivery operations was part of a “divide and conquer” strategy, he explained, adding that the same thinking was behind Royal Mail’s plan to recruit new starters on inferior terms and conditions and the parallel attack on staff pensions.

“Wherever you are in RM, we’re all in this together,” he said, adding: “It impacts on all members and we need to stand very strong against the government.”

And Terry returned to the theme of the two-tier workforce during his responses to the questions and comments from the floor, saying: “Our job is to protect the future for our younger members. “Most other industries haven’t had the security we’ve had in Royal Mail, but we’ve only had it because people before us fought for it. “We’ve got to be able to look our younger members in the eye and fight as hard for them as previous generations fought for us,” he insisted, to loud applause.

Among the many points of view expressed by the activists, Amanjot Singh perhaps best summed up the mood of the meeting when he said: “If we don’t stand up and fight today, there’ll be no tomorrow.”

A NORTHERN IRISH WELCOME

After a journey over the Irish Sea, the Four Pillars banner arrived in Belfast, where the enthusiasm of the reps from all three of the union’s Northern Ireland postal branches more than made up for the relatively small population over here.

It was in Belfast where the liveliest response to our DGSP so far was heard – Terry’s “are you with us?” rallying cry being answered with a loud “YES” sound of “yes”, leaving no doubt at all about the fighting spirit across the smallest of our four nations.

Executive member Carl Maden had given his update on the ‘agreements’ strand of negotiations and apologised for not being able to bring good news, explaining that, “if they won’t give us an agreement, it means they want to take us on - and we have to be prepared to take them on.”

Speaking after the meeting, Northern Ireland Combined Branch secretary Fra Martin said that “if the Four Pillars campaign develops into a dispute, then I’d also expect there’ll be very strong backing for that over here.”
that the delivery operation should span the country. Moving letter start times later will have an attitude of “disrespect from the company.”

and conditions and that the business can’t be trusted.

Four Pillars of Security The industry lies in the membership and the collective strength. We have to stand up.

But Terry urged patience and explained that plans to outsource the repair function to a single site were needed to make the business more efficient.

The Good News, which follows repeated CWU warnings that the union would fight the outsourcing of a highly competitive in-house function every inch of the way, means that the 500 represented grade employees have now been taken out of scope of a massive company reorganisation that has affected almost 1,800 Fujitsu workers across the UK.

From the outset the CWU had argued that plans to outsource the repair function based at the only two Fujitsu sites where the union’s reps and the stalwart work they do for their fellow workers every day, would mean massive job losses.

“We need to achieve a real change of direction now, or it will get worse.”

Outdoor secretary Mark Baulch commented that the business is “not taking us seriously in the North West, and if it keeps getting worse, we will have to stand up.”

Terry Pullinger built on this theme: “This is a straightforward issue between us and the employer,” she said. “It’s about our work, the way we do it, and the place we work at.

Speaking to The Voice after the tour, Terry said: “Our reps are the union’s soldiers on the front line and it was fantastic to be able to visit every single division of this great union and speak to so many of them directly.

“I want to thank, once again, each and every one of our CWU reps, at all levels, and also stress again what an honourable task they perform.”

“This Four Pillars campaign has clearly won the hearts and minds of our members up and down the country – now we go back into the national negotiations with Royal Mail and we have to build on the success.

And if the business still refuses to engage meaningfully – they will know the consequences.”

Joy and relief at Fujitsu’s total rethink

The sword of Damocles has been hanging over the CWU’s entire Fujitsu membership since November last year, and has been dramatically lifted following a company about-turn on plans to outsource its repair operations in Belfast and Birmingham.

The good news, which follows repeated CWU warnings that the union would fight the outsourcing of a highly competitive in-house function every inch of the way, means that the 500 represented grade employees have now been taken out of scope of a massive company reorganisation that has affected almost 1,800 Fujitsu workers across the UK.

From the outset the CWU had argued that plans to outsource the repair function based at the only two Fujitsu sites where the CWU is recognised for collective bargaining purposes – were ill-conceived and nonsensical amid evidence that the highly experienced in-house staff could not be beaten on price.

Assistant secretary John East told The Voice: “Right from the start we made it clear to management that, if Fujitsu proceeded with outsourcing on purely dogmatic grounds, they’d have a fight on their hands. I’m 100 per cent convinced that the solidarity demonstrated by members in Northern Ireland last year in defiance of the company’s move to make compulsory redundancies when their work was moving from Antrim to Belfast has contributed to the positive outcome for CWU members this time around.”

Security for BTMSL transferees

The entire workforce of BT’s Managed Services Ltd (MSL) division, the subsidiary has shifted to BT Plc employer following an unusually rapid TUPE process that concluded on August 1.

Following the announcement to staff at the start of July that all 274 employees would be transferring to BT Group employment status, and a series of presentations to which all employees were invited, the CWU immediately sought and received assurances that no-one will be disadvantaged by the move.

Assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien told The Voice: “While it’s undoubtedly the case that there will be many benefits to staff of becoming BT Group employees, some members were understandably concerned because their terms and conditions are the result of previous TUPEs into BTMSL. The CWU was quick to advise members to carefully review their new contracts, however, that existing Trade Union and Employers Confederations, or TUs and employers’ associations, have shifted to BT Group employment following an unusually rapid TUPE process that concludes on August 1.

As such this TUPE is good news for BTMSL transferees as it brings with it enhanced career and training opportunities for BTMSL employees.

 transferees for BTMSL transferees

The good news, which follows repeated CWU warnings that the union would fight the outsourcing of a highly competitive in-house function every inch of the way, means that the 500 represented grade employees have now been taken out of scope of a massive company reorganisation that has affected almost 1,800 Fujitsu workers across the UK.

From the outset the CWU had argued that plans to outsource the repair function based at the only two Fujitsu sites where the CWU is recognised for collective bargaining purposes – were ill-conceived and nonsensical amid evidence that the highly experienced in-house staff could not be beaten on price.

Assistant secretary John East told The Voice: “Right from the start we made it clear to management that, if Fujitsu proceeded with outsourcing on purely dogmatic grounds, they’d have a fight on their hands. I’m 100 per cent convinced that the solidarity demonstrated by members in Northern Ireland last year in defiance of the company’s move to make compulsory redundancies when their work was moving from Antrim to Belfast has contributed to the positive outcome for CWU members this time around.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/
SPRUCING UP FLEET

Moves are afoot to address run-down working conditions in BT Fleet garages following demands made at CWU Annual Conference for improvements to those workplaces that are “old, dirty and cold.”

Following a positive first meeting with management, which had just taken place as The Voice went to press, assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien commended the company’s constructive response to criticism that the state of some workshops ill-reflects the spectacular state of some workshops ill-reflects the spectacular achievements of ‘access days’ in June and ‘access days’.

The new push augments the CWU’s wider agency campaign below-Living Wage pay rates were imminent with BT’s Wholesale & Ventures and Business divisions – with ConDem expected to follow suit shortly.

“We’ll be pointing out that even though BT doesn’t openly claim to be a Living Wage employer, none of its employees, including cleaners and security guards in the BTFS wholly owned subsidiary, are paid below it,” assistant secretary Sally Bridge told The Voice. “That begs the question as to how it can possibly be right that the Government’s campaign against agency exploitation.

MEMBERSHIP GROWING

Following on from concerns expressed at CWU Annual Conference over an increasingly anti-union stance being taken by some managers at EE, the union’s fightback is gathering strength.

In late May, just weeks after the close of Conference, EE reps from across the country gathered at CWU HQ for a two-day strategic planning meeting at which branch and organiser’s mapped out a new approach to achieve the membership numbers the union needs to seek a formal recognition agreement.

That has been followed by meetings with BT to impress the case for a crackdown on any union-hostile managers in its new subsidiary. Separately, talks have been held with EE’s HR director for call centres at which it was agreed that problems being experienced by the union at some sites will be resolved through closer dialogue about planned CWU access days.

Meanwhile, the latest round of ‘access days’ in June and July – most of which were held in canterbury following CWU protests about being restricted to foyer areas that aren’t conducive to meaningful contact with potential new members – have proved highly successful.

NEW REVIEWS BECKON

Members at BTFS have voted by nearly four to one to accept a CWU-negotiated pay deal that delivers a 2.42 per cent increase for the lowest-paid staff and paves the way for further negotiations on a raft of issues the union has long been seeking to address.

The complex agreement, which covers around 1,750 employees working at the in-house facilities service provider, secures guaranteed basic rate increases across the board, with additional raises to bring lower-paid staff up to the real Living Wage (as opposed to the Government’s significantly lower-rebranded “minimum wage”) and for higher-graded employees a small element of performance related pay.

Crucially, annual leave entitlement rises to 22 days for all BTFS staff, while those already on 21 days will receive an £80 lump-sum cash payout. Assistant secretary Sally Bridge, who led the union’s negotiating team, says: “It’s been a tough round of talks this year – with the CWU determined not just to secure a meaningful pay increase for all members but also a company commitment for serious reviews of the Security pay structure and pay progression arrangements across BTFS. “Real progress has been made on all of these issues and more.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

UNISON LEARN TRIUMPH

Neil Crothall, lead ULR from Great Western branch, has been awarded the prestigious Unison ULR Award for 2017. Receiving the award from TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady during last month’s Unisonlearn Conference at Congress House in central London, Neil has been instrumental in the transformation of the CWU’s Joyce De Freitas learning centre in Bristol, introducing new technology and software.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

BTFS pay deal heralds further key talks

Overcoming hurdles at EE

The latest round of CWU recruitment days in EE have proved highly successful

Confusion Cleared Up

Sustained pressure from the CWU has resulted in a long-standing area of confusion in parts of BT Consumer over how enhanced bank holiday pay rates should be calculated.

Despite the CWU’s longstanding campaign that premium payments – which stand at 2.5 x base pay for normal bank holidays and 3 x base pay for Christmas Day – should be paid in addition to nominal base pay, some parts of Consumer have paid just the premium. That meant that some members were short-changed when working bank holidays.

Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove told The Voice: “This issue blew up following St Patrick’s Day in 2016 and we’ve been disputing it ever since – but, after 15 months of arguing, BT has now conceded that the CWU’s interpretation of the policy was correct all along.

“If anyone believes they’ve been underpaid for working Bank Holidays since 2016, in the first instance this should be brought up with their line manager.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

Opening salvo of new agency drive

Notice has been served on both BT and Manpower that CWU patience has run out with regards to unacceptably low pay rates that continue to be applied to hundreds of agency workers at BT sites across the country.

Even after this year’s pay rises, no fewer than 262 Manpower agency workers are still paying well below the £8.45 per hour that the Living Wage Commission says is the minimum required outside London for a reasonable quality of life.

“The situation is worst of all at Consumer Sales and Service sites in Doncaster, Glasgow, Manchester, South Shields, Truro, Warrington and Carliford where agency staff in some work areas are only paid £7.15 per hour – just 5p more an hour than the national minimum wage – making them some of the lowest paid workers anywhere in BT.

At the time of printing, meetings convened at the CWU’s request to discuss how it can possibly be right that an agency dealing in so-called ‘low-skilled’ work can deliver an annual profit of 21.7%.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

BT Consumer concedes bank holiday pay error

BANKING ON GROWTH

A concerted CWU recruitment drive has been launched at Santander’s ISBAN and Produban subsidiaries, focusing in particular on the UK sites where the union doesn’t currently have a collective bargaining rights.

Assistant secretary John East told The Voice: “In June we had a meeting with the HR directors of both companies to explain our objectives and to explain how we can work together to build on the positive relationship we have with management there, thus further cementing where the CWU already has recognition.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

SWISS POST PAY UP

High-paid members in Swiss Post, who did not benefit from last November’s 2.4 per cent uplift in the real Living Wage, have voted overwhelmingly in favour of a 2.2 per cent pay increase. The CWU-negotiated pay deal, which applies to 63 of the 200 employees on Santander’s Swiss Post contract – most of whom were TUPE’d over from Geobank in 2013 and all of whom work in Bootle, Carlston Park or Bradford – was paid in July’s pay packets, backdated to April 1.

Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/

IN BRIEF

UNIONS IN THE NEWS

- The Charity Sector

- Confessions of a former UEF

- The CWU has formally notified the Manchester United Community Foundation (MUCF) that it will not be represented at future meetings of the MUCF’s board of directors. The MUCF Board, which is also the CWU’s Central Board, is the key owner and promoter of the MUCF, which was formed to deliver the Community Foundation programme in the Manchester United area.

NEWS IN BRIEF

- Overcoming hurdles at EE

- Following on from concerns expressed at CWU Annual Conference over an increasingly anti-union stance being taken by some managers at EE, the union’s fightback is gathering strength.

- In late May, just weeks after the close of Conference, EE reps from across the country gathered at CWU HQ for a two-day strategic planning meeting at which branch and organiser’s mapped out a new approach to achieve the membership numbers the union needs to seek a formal recognition agreement.

- That has been followed by meetings with BT to impress the case for a crackdown on any union-hostile managers in its new subsidiary. Separately, talks have been held with EE’s HR director for call centres at which it was agreed that problems being experienced by the union at some sites will be resolved through closer dialogue about planned CWU access days.

- Meanwhile, the latest round of ‘access days’ in June and July – most of which were held in canterbury following CWU protests about being restricted to foyer areas that aren’t conducive to meaningful contact with potential new members – have proved highly successful.

- Confusion Cleared Up

- Sustained pressure from the CWU has resulted in a long-standing area of confusion in parts of BT Consumer over how enhanced bank holiday pay rates should be calculated.

- Despite the CWU’s longstanding campaign that premium payments – which stand at 2.5 x base pay for normal bank holidays and 3 x base pay for Christmas Day – should be paid in addition to nominal base pay, some parts of Consumer have paid just the premium. That meant that some members were short-changed when working bank holidays.

- Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove told The Voice: “This issue blew up following St Patrick’s Day in 2016 and we’ve been disputing it ever since – but, after 15 months of arguing, BT has now conceded that the CWU’s interpretation of the policy was correct all along.

- “If anyone believes they’ve been underpaid for working Bank Holidays since 2016, in the first instance this should be brought up with their line manager.”

- Full story at www.cwu.org/voice/
Breakthrough on Openreach career progression

DUAL BENEFITS

For Openreach the attraction of providing upskilling opportunities for both longer-serving R2s and TMNE2s 2020 grades is that the enhanced skill-sets of large numbers of field engineers will help the company meet ever increasing demands from Ofcom over service levels. In Service Delivery, this financial year opportunities exist for 1,700 engineers to move to the CSE role and, for those who are currently TMNE2s, that will mean an increase to the higher rate of pay.

“We’re trying to tackle the promotion ‘wastelands’ that currently exist”

The CWU believes that Service Delivery will need to have 85 per cent of the field engineers workforce CSE-skilled to meet Ofcom’s service level requirements. Clearly further multi-skilling in Infrastructure Delivery as well as Business and Corporate Delivery will also be needed to build the network of the future and provide excellent service levels to business customers. Talks are progressing well with regards to the creation of a role in Network Solutions at the higher pay point.

In conjunction with the upskilling opportunities, Openreach is working alongside the CWU to break down barriers that currently make it hard for field engineers to move from one business unit into another - again providing individuals with the opportunity to move their careers in the direction that interests them most.

Meanwhile, a new approach to recruitment will see around 1,500 new joiners coming into Openreach over the next few months on fast-tracked 12-month apprenticeships offering a significantly improved starting salary of £20,000 - and the CWU is currently in discussions with Openreach to ensure that the current (and recently assimilated) apprentice population attains equality of treatment.

Davie concludes: “The new Career Pathways approach is overwhelmingly good news for all our members in Openreach Field. Further details will emerge in the coming weeks, and I’d urge all our Field members to attend special branch meetings, which are occurring in a much smaller number of sites - the creation of a brand new ‘Senior Engineer’ role that is close to being agreed with the company is set to re-open promotion opportunities for individuals that are currently few and far between.

“What we’re trying to do is tackle the promotion ‘wastelands’ that currently exist for R2 field engineers in much of the UK,” stressed Davie Bowman, CWU national officer for Openreach. Davie Bowman.

“A trial of a new ‘Senior Engineer’ role is currently taking place in the North East, but the intention is that around 1,800 such positions will be created nationally, generating opportunities for advancement in localities where such opportunities simply don’t exist at present.”

Crucial test looms for new PM approach

The latest attempt to slay BT’s performance management (PM) demons will face its first major test in just over a month as employees across the company discover how they’ve been rated under the new ‘My Performance’ approach. Simon Alford reports

The CWU went to press, the CWU was waiting with bated breath to see whether the replacement of BT’s five former performance ratings with just three new bandings - ‘Brilliant’, ‘Good Work’ and ‘Work To Do’ - proves part of the hoped-for antidote to previous PM systems which have consistently left large numbers of loyal and hard-working employees feeling demoralised and under threat.

Company and union negotiators are in broad agreement that, in order to shift deep-seated perceptions that PM in BT is an overwhelmingly punitive and negative experience, the number of employees placed in the ‘Work To Do’ category will need to be a tiny fraction of the number hitherto placed in the bottom two former categories that it effectively replaces.

But how things actually turn out in September will depend not just whether or not the three new ratings have achieved the desired aim of addressing the massive over-use of the former ‘Development Needed’ (DN) rating. It will also be the first important indicator as to whether any genuine progress has been made on the overriding aim of effecting significant cultural change in the overall approach to PM by successive tiers of management.

Assistant Secretary Dave Jukes explains: “In the last three years around 19,000 people - a staggering 40 per cent of BT Group's entire workforce - have been rated DN, and even BT concedes that has had a huge demoralising effect on a significant proportion of the workforce.

“We know that forced distribution has taken place, and that DN ratings have sometimes been passed round teams so that managers can meet quotas that have been imposed from above - and that clearly has to stop.

“‘Brilliant’ is currently a target not to be achieved by more than 10 per cent of the workforce, and the CWU is currently in talks with the company about dropping the target to 15 per cent; a more realistic figure that will not result in massive numbers of people automatically being moved into the ‘Work To Do’ - a rating BT concedes that results are based on nothing but hearsay and hearsay - was initially proposed by the CWU to be the maximum number of people to be placed in the ‘Work To Do’ banding.”

The hope is that the three new ratings will make it much harder to force the distribution - not least because it’s being made absolutely clear to managers that they can only rate someone as ‘Work To Do’ if they’ve told that person they are underperforming.

Dave continued: “BT has responded to the CWU’s concerns about the discredited ‘DN’ rating by saying that they recognise that the vast majority of employees do a good job for the company. Indeed, we’ve been assured that they want to see significant numbers of people in the ‘Brilliant’ rating band and most of the rest in ‘Good Work’. Large numbers of people who are already in the formal performance process, or just entering it, will be categorised as ‘Work To Do’.

“As a result the CWU expects very, very few people to be given a ‘Work To Do’ rating - but we’ve refused to talk numbers or percentages because as soon as you start to do that it becomes a ‘target’ - which is precisely what we’re trying to move away from.”

JURY’S OUT...

Dave Jukes concludes: “Given the difficult history of PM in BT there’s understandably considerable scepticism over whether this latest attempt to make PM a fair and positive experience will succeed where previous attempts have failed.

“If it turns out that ‘Work to Do’ has become a rebranded DN, ‘My Performance’ will have demonstrably failed and the CWU will then have to consider how to respond in line with various Conference mandates.

“The hope, however, is that the new approach will turn out to have been an important step in the right direction, take the heat out of the issue and maybe ultimately even lead the company towards the CWU’s view that there’s really no point in PM at all in a supportive and nurturing workplace environment.

“Much will become clear come September - October - so at present it’s really just a case of ‘let’s wait and see’.”

Full story at: www.cwu.org/voice/
June’s General Election result vindicated the CWU’s support for the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn and its positive direction over the past two years, Dave Ward tells The Voice.

He continued, pointing to the 21 per cent opinion poll lead being reported by pollsters YouGov on the day that Theresa May confidently walked from the door of Number 10 to announce her ‘snap’ election to the nation.

But amid the doom and gloom from much of the media – and even from some in the Labour Party – the CWU made its position crystal clear straightaway, our general secretary issuing a fighting statement on the same day, stating that the union “welcomes the opportunity to fight for a new political settlement.”

“Dave emphasises, once again, the significance of the June election and the step forward it represented, by reminding us of how dramatically different everything looked just three months ago.

“Let’s remember that very few people gave Labour a chance when the election was called.”

The advances that Labour made across the Constituency battles mean that, Labour’s recovery from a opinion poll deficit to a huge well done and thank you” to all who participated it represented, by reminding us of how dramatically different everything looked just three months ago.

“Let’s remember that very few people gave Labour a chance when the election was called.”

Dave emphasised that the agenda has changed – the ideas Labour argued for in the campaign have now become the new mainstream political issues,” our general secretary explained.

FOUR REASONS WHY 2017 WAS A SUCCESS
- Labour’s 2017 manifesto received 12,877,869 votes across the nation overall, a long way in excess of the 2015 total of 9,347,304. It was the party’s highest vote total since 1997, 1996, 1987 and 1950.
- Labour’s recovery from a 21 per cent opinion poll deficit to a 2 per cent gap on election day was the biggest opinion poll swing (19 per cent) during a campaign since records began, even beating the dramatic 18 per cent campaign swing achieved by Edward Heath (from 22.5 per cent behind to a 3.5 per cent election day win) way back in 1970.
- Labour’s total of 262 elected MPs accurately reflected the party’s national percentage vote share, both of which were 40 per cent. But the Conservatives’ 42 per cent of total vote share won them 318 MPs, which is 49 per cent of the House of Commons.
- The advances that Labour made across the Constituency battles mean that, next time, just a 1.8 per cent uniform vote swing can bring the 34 gains needed to make Labour the largest party, and 58 more seats, from a 3.5 per cent swing, will bring a Parliamentary Majority.

Consolidate, strengthen... and go again

The union is determined that the big step forward achieved in the June election and the campaign must now be consolidated and built upon.

And the CWU’s national executive met recently and approved a series of action points intended to do just that, with the overall aim being to advance our World of Work agenda further – both politically and industrially.

CWU POLITICAL ACTION POINTS:
1. Increasing our Parliamentary representation – working with our three candidates who came second in tough seats in June to support them in standing again and providing training and other support to CWU members who want to stand in the future.
2. Giving full support to our member Asghar Khan in his bid to be elected onto the Labour Party’s NEC on behalf of BAME Labour. Asghar has been a long-serving CWU rep and activist in our Leeds NEL Branch and is being backed by the CWU, GMB and Unite.
3. Policy development – looking ahead to the next Labour government and with the prospect of another election, the union’s political team is liaising closely with the Shadow Ministerial teams to further develop CWU-specific policies. At this time, we are actively focussing on the Post Bank concept, which we will also be seeking cross-party support for.
4. Labour Conference and TUC Congress – We will be pushing to win wider and deeper support for our World of Work and New Deal programmes at both of these major decision-making events.
5. The union will be hosting a high-profile political event in the autumn – soon after the end of the conference season, which will be an opportunity for members to become involved in taking forward the CWU agenda.
6. And CWU branches will be asked to ensure they are affiliated to their local Labour Party branch and to encourage members to join the Labour Party. Strengthening our union’s presence within Labour’s grassroots will increase our ability to positively influence party policy.
POL PAY TALKS
As The Voice went to press, consultative ballot papers were being sent out to our Post Office members following the company’s shock decision to shut down pay talks and impose a below-inflation deal. The abrupt halt to long-standing negotiating procedures by management last month outraged the members, while the settlement unilaterally forced onto staff has been condemned for pushing employees below the inflation running at 3.5 per cent.

Employees were being sent out to our Post Office members following the abrupt halt to pay talks and impose a below-inflation deal.

"This is the company's attitude and behaviour which have been underhand, disrespectful and insulting," he told The Voice. "And we're urging our members to return the biggest possible rejection of the Post Office's offer of a 2 per cent pay rise, and we're determined to re-open negotiations and reach a fair agreement.

But "it's not great to have a Labour Party leadership that's standing up should to shoulder alongside us," he added.

Our DGSP paid tribute to the history of the Durham Miners Gala and the miners' union which he described as "the strongest union in our history, with a proud legacy." The miners' strike of the 1980s had been the key event which had inspired him as a young trade unionist. Terry continued, and pledged full support for the Durham Justice Campaign.

"Never forget, never forgive and let's get a Labour Government into power," he concluded, to thunderous applause and cheers.

INDUSTRY NEWS
Postal

Wimbledon win SW London football crown

Branch Tournament
Wimbledon Delivery Office won the inaugural South West London CWU five-a-side football tournament as part of a family fun day last month.

Organised by London South West Postal branch secretary Greg Charles, the event attracted around a hundred people – branch members, their partners and children – raised the profile of the union's Four Pillars campaign, and also raised money for the CRW charity.

CWU general secretary Dave Ward was on hand to award the trophy to the winners.

"It was a great family fun day and everyone who came agreed we should try to do this every year," said Greg.

Close to the delivery office, who were worthy winners - but watch out next year, our own office is determined to take your crown!"

"Never forget, never forgive and let's get a Labour Government into power," he concluded, to thunderous applause and cheers.

INDUSTRY NEWS
Postal

"Horrific' dog attack hospitalises Boston postwoman

A Lincolnshire postwoman suffered life-endangering injuries in an horrific attack by two dogs, who mauled her while she was out on her round last month.

Sharon Singer was rushed to hospital for emergency surgery after the ordeal, in which she was set upon by two large Dobermans while delivering to an address in Wrangle, near Boston.

In a four-hour operation, surgeons at Boston Pilgrim Hospital had to reattach Sharon's muscles and tendons while performing emergency skin grafts.

"This was part of the Delivering with Pride initiative run jointly with Royal Mail and our LGBT Committee," reports Midland 7 Branch union learning rep Sammi Craig.

"And all these events and many others helped to raise over £1000 for the Stokie Pride Charity," she added. Amid all the fun, the serious side of Pride Month was not overlooked, and the opportunity was taken to share with members the history behind Pride Month as well as the origin of the iconic Rainbow Pride flag.

"Staff from the unit were among those who volunteered to help run the LGBT & Friends stall at the city's Stokie Pride event itself, which was live streamed and proved popular with many.

"Pride Month in all has been great and has given everyone another opportunity to celebrate the wonderful diversity and equality of our workplaces," said Sammi, who added "a huge thank you" to everyone involved.

Celebrating Pride in the workplace

DELIVERING WITH PRIDE
Royal Mail customer service workers at the Stokie CE unit organised several initiatives to celebrate Pride Month in June.

As well as painting the on-site post box in bright Pride Rainbow, and holding a five-a-side football event, members also enjoyed a rainbow sponge-splatter day, during which they were able to throw sponges at managers – for a charitable donation.

"This is part of the Delivering with Pride initiative run jointly with Royal Mail and our LGBT Committee," reports Midland 7 Branch union learning rep Sammi Craig.

"And all these events and many others helped to raise over £1000 for the Stokie Pride Charity," she added. Amid all the fun, the serious side of Pride Month was not overlooked, and the opportunity was taken to share with members the history behind Pride Month as well as the origin of the iconic Rainbow Pride flag.

"Staff from the unit were among those who volunteered to help run the LGBT & Friends stall at the city’s Stokie Pride event itself, which was live streamed and proved popular with many.

"Pride Month in all has been great and has given everyone another opportunity to celebrate the wonderful diversity and equality of our workplaces," said Sammi, who added "a huge thank you" to everyone involved.

"Never forget, never forgive and let’s get a Labour Government into power," he concluded, to thunderous applause and cheers.

CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young) was established in 1995 and works to reduce the frequency of young sudden cardiac deaths through the promotion and development of heart screening programmes, funding medical research, and providing bereavement support to families. For further information, see www.cry.org.uk/about-us/
June 14 have been praised for the professionalism and humanity with which they dealt with calls from individuals in the most desperate of circumstances. As the inferno spread, mostly up the 24-storey building, BT Ventures Voice Services operators on night-duty in centres across the country received a large number of heart-breaking calls from desperate individuals and families trapped in their homes. In the aftermath of the disaster, Fire Brigades Union station rep Jon Wharmby - himself one of the heroic fire-fighters who fought their way into the blazing building to rescue all those they could - went out of his way to praise the “brilliant” call handlers whose contribution, he said, was “so often forgotten” amid the chaos.

Ventures Voice Services has itself heaped praise on employees who, it said, “were left in the very difficult situation of talking to people trapped in their homes, unable to transfer them” to the London Fire Brigade on account of an exceptional emergency call volumes. In response to an enquiry from Portadown CWU H&S rep Erin Massey as to what support was being provided for traumatised staff, who’d been left in a state of “emotional distress after listening to these cases and their cries for help,” the company confirmed that counselling services had been offered to all affected employees.

Assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien concludes: “I’m pleased that Ventures Voice Services has recognised the stress that employees were put under that dreadful night and that a process was swiftly put in place to support them.”

WM CUU national health & safety officer Dave Joyce has written to the Prime Minister following the Grenfell tragedy pointing out that for many years Ministers have called for HMSI regulations to be axed “as a matter of principle” - something he insisted should be urgently reconsidered “at this time of national reflection and sorrow”.

FEARS FOR EQUALITIES AGENDA POST-DUP DEAL

Concerns are mounting that the Tories’ pact with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) could pose serious threats to hard won rights for women seeking abortions and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

The CWU has finally granted women in NI the right to access to terminations on the most extreme of cases when their health is in serious danger, is to travel abroad or take the risk of relying on pills bought illegally. And despite June’s unexpected UK Government response to a threatened Tory revolt on the Queen’s Speech, which has finally granted women in NI the right to access to terminations on the NHS elsewhere in the UK, CWU national equality officer Linda Roy is concerned at the influence the DUP could have on the future direction of equalities legislation.

Other concerns cover the strong threads of climate change denial and “creationism” (a religiously-based rejection of scientifically-based theories of evolution) that run through its utterances - as well as fears that the party’s undue influence in Westminster could threaten the NI peace process.

Already the price the DUP has extracted from the Tories stands at £1.5bn in extra funding for NL,” Linda points out. “If the Government is that desperate for DUP support, who knows what they will agree to next? Just think what else could have been done with that money,” continues the union’s national equality officer.

It could have paid for 10,000 new police officers, the increasing of benefits for the under 25s, the abolition of tribunal fees, renationalisation of Royal Mail, and that’s just some of the possibilities. “We’re constantly being told that there’s no money-tree,” yet the Tories have suddenly found that money simply to keep themselves in government.”

Linda concludes: “I’d urge every CWU member with a Tory MP to write to them asking whether they support this deal - specifically raising the DUP’s atrocity track record on women’s and LGBT rights. “It could be used to help address chronic underfunding of the NHS and social care, extended nursery access to all children or funded the re-nationalisation of Royal Mail, and that’s just some of the possibilities.”

“Tory MPs need to be held account for Theresa May’s dreadful decision to link no viler act, apart from homosexuality and transsexualism, than sexually abusing innocent children. I cannot think of anything more sickening than a child being abused. It is not just about the act of homosexuality. I think they are all comparable. I feel totally repulsed by both.”

ABORTION

On the abortion issue, the DUP’s views are similarly controversial. Just last year DUP leader Arlene Foster vowed to retain NI’s ban on terminations except when a woman’s life is danger, her only concession being to carefully consider cases when a pregnancy arises as a result of rape.

Last year she told The Guardian: “I would not want abortion to be as freely available here as it is in England and don’t support the extension of the 1967 Act.”

At present the only way women in NI can secure access to an abortion, except in the most extreme of cases when their health is in serious danger, is to travel abroad or take the risk of relying on pills bought illegally. And despite June’s unexpected UK Government response to a threatened Tory revolt on the Queen’s Speech, which has finally granted women in NI the right to access to terminations on the NHS elsewhere in the UK, CWU national equality officer Linda Roy is concerned at the influence the DUP could have on the future direction of equalities legislation.

Other concerns cover the strong threads of climate change denial and “creationism” (a religiously-based rejection of scientifically-based theories of evolution) that run through its utterances - as well as fears that the party’s undue influence in Westminster could threaten the NI peace process.

Already the price the DUP has extracted from the Tories stands at £1.5bn in extra funding for NL,” Linda points out. “If the Government is that desperate for DUP support, who knows what they will agree to next? Just think what else could have been done with that money,” continues the union’s national equality officer.

It could have paid for 10,000 new police officers, the increasing of benefits for the under 25s, the abolition of tribunal fees, renationalisation of Royal Mail, and that’s just some of the possibilities. “We’re constantly being told that there’s no money-tree,” yet the Tories have suddenly found that money simply to keep themselves in government.”

Linda concludes: “I’d urge every CWU member with a Tory MP to write to them asking whether they support this deal - specifically raising the DUP’s atrocity track record on women’s and LGBT rights. “It could be used to help address chronic underfunding of the NHS and social care, extended nursery access to all children or funded the re-nationalisation of Royal Mail, and that’s just some of the possibilities.”

“Tory MPs need to be held account for Theresa May’s dreadful decision to link
Get snapping – it’s competition time!

PHOTO CONTEST DEADLINE NEARS

Calling all budding photographers! The CWU’s education & training department is once again running a digital photography competition with a top prize of £200 for the overall winner.

The competition has consistently attracted a high standard of entries, with two-times winner – postman David Gibbon from Durham – going on to reach the finals of the National History Museum’s wildlife photography competition. This year David’s surpassed even that, becoming the first Briton ever to spend a whole week photographing Arctic Fox in their harsh winter environment on a remote Arctic Circle island – with one of his resulting images appearing in the current issue of the BBC Wildlife magazine.

Last year’s winner was Paul Fine of Plymouth Mail Centre, whose captivating image of a snarling tiger was singled out for first prize by a national poll of members visiting an online gallery of the shortlisted entries. This year the same mass-voting mechanism will be used to select the overall winner of the 2017 competition. The deadline for entries is October 1. For full competition details visit https://goo.gl/ppjP5m.

Previous competition winning image

SPIRIT OF STRUGGLE CELEBRATED

The CWU was well represented, as ever, at the Tolpuddle Festival – the annual tribute to some of our movement’s earliest pioneers. In 1834 the brave group of agricultural workers were arrested, tried and sentenced to seven years penal servitude in Australia for forming one of the UK’s first trade unions in response to their employer cutting their pay.

Following huge protests across the country they were eventually released from exile and their legacy ever since has been to inspire successive generations about the power of collective action.

At this year’s celebration of their achievement, CWU general secretary Dave Ward spoke at a fringe meeting and the union’s banners took pride of place in the annual march through the Dorset village where the spirit of struggle first took hold.

‘Our Parliament needs more working-class people’

After a barnstorming maiden speech, followed by a series of crucial votes and amendments on the Queen’s Speech, long-serving CWU Parcelforce rep and Labour MP Hugh Gaffney tells The Voice ‘I’m really getting my teeth into my new role.’

Entering the Houses of Parliament for the first time just the day after his sensational election victory, the newly-elected Member of Parliament for Coatbridge, Chryston & Bellshill said: ‘I’m here for justice for workers’ when the on-duty security guard challenged him at the doorway.

‘I was in my Parcelforce uniform,’ Hugh (pictured right) explains, ‘so he probably thought I was delivering something – but when I showed him my ID, he gave me a huge grin and said “Well done mate”.

‘It was fantastic,’ Hugh told us, adding ‘I had been feeling increasingly optimistic as the campaign went on, and there was a growing Corbyn effect that was bringing voters our way as well.’

The Voice spoke to Hugh at the start of the campaign; he noted a growing disillusionment with the nationalists on the doorstep and said at the time: ‘I get the feeling local people may be turning against them.

‘I’m getting a good response and I really do believe chances are improving,’ was his forecast back in early May, which turned out to be remarkably prescient. Reflecting on his victory, Hugh said ‘My catchphrase on the doorstep was: “Send a working-class MP to Parliament and people responded really positively to it, because Parliament needs more working-class people.”

In his first speech in Westminster, he also set down a marker that he would be taking the fight to the Government for the union saying ‘Royal Mail was not for sale, it was stolen and I am going to return this great public service to rightful owners – the residents of the UK.”

As a veteran CWU rep, Hugh is urging all our union’s reps and activists to follow his example and stand for election.

‘It doesn’t matter who you are or where you come from – stand for your local council and if you get the chance stand for Parliament. The CWU gave me incredible support and the union will give full support to you too.

‘You can make a difference’

Just a few miles away from Hugh, our own Matt Kerr achieved another monster swing from the nationalists to Labour, but the 12 per cent swing in Glasgow South West left him just 60 agitating votes short of the winning post.

‘I’m delighted for Hugh and he’s made a great splash already,’ Matt told us, but added that he had been “gutted” not to be able to join his fellow CWU member in Parliament.

‘I just can’t leave it at that and I really want to stand for Glasgow South West again and hopefully win it next time,” he vowed.

Bury North provided a second Labour victory for the CWU, with James Frith snatching this marginal seat from the Conservative incumbent David Nuttall. UKIP and Green Party withdrawals, plus an increased turnout saw both major parties put on extra votes here, but Mr Nuttall’s additional 2,398 was dwarfed by our man’s 7,071 pile-on, giving him a 4,375 winning margin.

Our other two CWU candidates, Chris Webb and Julie Gibson, also recorded significantly increased vote totals compared to 2015 – Chris polled an extra 4,927 on last time, while Julie’s total rose by 3,191 – but not quite enough to snatch either Blackpool North & Cleveleys or South Ribble.

CWU general secretary Dave Ward sent his “warmest congratulations” to Hugh and James on their election and added “Our deepest thanks to our other CWU election candidates as well.

“Well done to all of them, and let’s hope they get the chance to have another go sooner rather than later.

“Hugh is absolutely right that we need more working-class people in Parliament – so please contact your local office if you want to be part of this change.”

@CWUNews

OUR CANDIDATES

- Coatbridge, Chryston & Bellshill
  Hugh Gaffney (Labour) 19,183 (+1,998)
  Philip Boswell (SNP) 17,607 (-1,089)
  Other candidates: Conservative +4,109
  LibDem +737

- Bury North
  James Frith (Labour) 25,683 (+7,091)
  David Nuttall (Conservative) 21,308 (-4,388)
  UKIP -4,431
  LibDem +225

- Glasgow South West
  Chris Stephens (SNP) 14,386 (-9,002)
  Matt Kerr (Labour) 14,326 (+9,002)
  Other candidates: Conservative -3,488
  LibDem +275
  UKIP -623

- South Ribble
  Seema Kennedy (Labour) 18,991 (+4,067)
  Other candidates: Conservative -3,643
  LibDem -194
  Green -508

- Blackpool North & Cleveleys
  Paul Maynard (Conservative) 20,258 (+2,747)
  Chris Webb (Labour) 18,232 (+4,067)
  Other candidates: UKIP -4,431
  LibDem +737
  Green -508

- South Ribble
  Seema Kennedy (Conservative) 28,980 (+4,667)
  Julie Gibson (Labour) 21,559 (+3,191)
  Other candidates: UKIP -3,980
  LibDem -275
Young Workers attend UNI Europa ICTS Conference

Last month saw the UNI Europa ICTS Conference take place in Zagreb, Croatia. Depute general secretary (TBFS) Andy Kerr led the union’s delegation and was accompanied by CWU Young Workers’ representatives Adam Gibbins and Fiona Curtis.

The quadrennial conference was this year entitled Smart World, taking part in workshops, and Q&A sessions on recruitment and organising and highlighted the initiatives Tomorrow Together of the then recently derecognition of their union by their employer having been there 10 years. The dispute lasted 28 months, after you’ve gone from Wales.”

The then CWU general secretary, Derek Hodgson, bemoaned the plant “a weeping scar on the landscape of South Wales.”

The 31 CWU-represented men and women at the Critchley Labels factory in Crosspenmaen had almost 471 when 10 people were made for nine years.

The 31 CWU-represented men and women at the Critchley Labels factory in Crosspenmaen had almost 471 when 10 people were made for nine years. The dispute lasted 28 months, after you’ve gone from Wales.”

The then CWU general secretary, Derek Hodgson, bemoaned the plant “a weeping scar on the landscape of South Wales.”

Standing strong, the 31 union members embarked on a week-long strike at the end of February 1997 that resulted in dismissal for all participants. A union worked for BT for many years before Critchley took over that arm of the business four years previously. The company, which made specialist labels for electronics products, had assured BT at the time of the factory’s sale that TS&Cs and union recognition would remain in place. This, however, proved to be false.

One year into the strike, with traditional picket lines failing to have the desired effect of reinstatement, the union tried an innovative new approach to capture the attention of the business. Workers, supported by the CWU, called for a 24-hour ‘electronic picket’ to mark the 20th anniversary of the workers’ right to withdraw their labour. One year into the strike, with traditional picket lines failing to have the desired effect of reinstatement, the union tried an innovative new approach to capture the attention of the business. Workers, supported by the CWU, called for a 24-hour ‘electronic picket’ to mark the 20th anniversary of the workers’ right to withdraw their labour.

The 31 CWU-represented men and women at the Critchley Labels factory in Crosspenmaen had almost 471 when 10 people were made for nine years. The dispute lasted 28 months, after you’ve gone from Wales.”

Standing strong, the 31 union members embarked on a week-long strike at the end of February 1997 that resulted in dismissal for all participants. A union worked for BT for many years before Critchley took over that arm of the business four years previously. The company, which made specialist labels for electronics products, had assured BT at the time of the factory’s sale that TS&Cs and union recognition would remain in place. This, however, proved to be false.

One year into the strike, with traditional picket lines failing to have the desired effect of reinstatement, the union tried an innovative new approach to capture the attention of the business. Workers, supported by the CWU, called for a 24-hour ‘electronic picket’ to mark the 20th anniversary of the workers’ right to withdraw their labour. One year into the strike, with traditional picket lines failing to have the desired effect of reinstatement, the union tried an innovative new approach to capture the attention of the business. Workers, supported by the CWU, called for a 24-hour ‘electronic picket’ to mark the 20th anniversary of the workers’ right to withdraw their labour.
RISING TO THE CHALLENGE OF THE ‘FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION’

With technological advance now accelerating at such a pace that serious commentators are predicting that millions of jobs could be wiped out over the coming decades, the trade union movement needs to get ahead of the game to ensure we don’t all sleep-walk into a science fiction nightmare. Simon Alford reports...

July/August 2017

GLOBAL RESPONSE NEEDED

CWU Conference delegates unanimously resolved that the potential threats posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution necessitate “the urgent development of a TU strategy both nationally and internationally.”

Proposing the motion on behalf of London Postal Engineering, John Humphries characterised the looming explosion in robotics and AI as “the greatest threat to working people in decades”, and one that should be viewed in the context of previous broken promises that increased automation would lead to a better life and more leisure time for everyone.

“FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

It may sound like the stuff of a B-movie plotline - but when someone as influential as the digital sphere as Bill Gates is calling for robots to be tried to make up the economic loss of human workers’ earnings as artificial intelligence takes over, we’re clearly on the brink of radical change in the world of work.

With leading global management consulting firm McKinsey predicting that even “currently demonstrated technologies could ultimately automate 45 per cent of the activities people are paid to do,” the spectre of further developments in robotics and the creation of truly ‘thinking’ machines is, according to UNI Global Union - to which the CWU is affiliated - something the trade union movement ignores at its peril.

Speaking at CWU Annual Conference in April - appropriately directly after delegates committed the union to develop a strategy as to how it should respond to the introduction of driverless vehicles in any CWU-represented workplaces - UNI general secretary Philip Jennings set the challenge in the context of “a global economy which is now more unequal than it has been at any time since the 1920s.”

“Laid on top of that you have the digital revolution, to which some speakers referred in the last debate,” he continued. “You’ve all seen the headlines, and now we’re beginning to see the creeping reality of what this is all about - the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the second machine age... the age of the robot - all driven by the rapid increase in computer capacity, by big data and artificial intelligence. The TU movement is always accused of scaremongering - but this time there have been plenty of warnings of job losses and even the end of humanity as we know it.”

Citing predictions by the Royal Astronomer, Sir Martin Rees, of a “robot uprising that will be complete in just a few generations... with machine life eventually replacing humanity,” Philip Jennings went on to quote Professor Stephen Hawking’s warning that the creation of powerful artificial intelligence will be “either the best or the worst thing ever to happen to humanity”... and that the outcome “isn’t necessarily to be feared.”

Pointing out that already only a tiny fraction of the world’s 3.2 billion workers have anything resembling a “decent contract” - with one in three struggling to survive on less than $2 a day - the UNI leader insisted that the possible job losses associated with the mass-automation potentially unleashed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution could prove devastating to billions worldwide. “The World Economic Forum is already talking about millions of job losses and the OECD puts the figure at one in 10 - so we’ve got to put jobs at the heart of the future political agenda,” he insisted.

Stressing that the technology behind developments in artificial intelligence (AI) is concentrated in the hands of just six mega-corporations worldwide, Philip Jennings concluded: “Money will be made - wealth will be created - but is it going to be concentrated in the hands of just six companies? This is no fantasy, when already eight individuals have more wealth than 50 per cent of the planet. We urgently need a convention on AI ethics - and that’s something that UNI is working on.”

CWU general secretary Dave Ward agrees: “This is yet another reason why our campaign for a New Deal for workers is so important,” he insists.

DRIVERLESS VEHICLES

One of the first areas in which AI will have a profound impact on the world of work stems from the rapid progress being made in the development of driverless vehicles.

As well as considering the impact their introduction will ultimately have on the jobs of those who drive for a living, CWU Annual Conference focussed on the obvious health and safety implications - committing the union to develop a strategy to protect members in advance of moves to introduce such vehicles by any of the employers in which the CWU has recognition.

Proposing the motion on behalf of the London Regional H&ES Forum, Stephen Howlett of London Postal Engineering cited the Department of Transport’s recent ‘Pathway to Driverless Cars’ report, stressing: “The Government is obviously pushing to introduce driverless technology and it’s very possible that our businesses will look to introduce it.”

Pointing out that, although the technology had ostensibly been proven by the successful completion of a 120-mile pilot delivery by a fully autonomous juggling train in rural Colorado last October, one delegate cited a separate trial that ended in a full-speed fatal accident when a sensor on a driverless car couldn’t cope with bright sunlight.

Another speaker warned that, given prior to full driverless technology, the increasing introduction of automated safety features was likely to result in the haulage industry seeking the relaxation of regulations governing the number of hours drivers can spend behind the wheel.

Executive speaker Tony Bouch stressed that “getting ahead of the technology is the right thing to do,” adding that recent trials of a driverless-shuttle bus in Greenwich and demonstrations of a fully automated car in Milton Keynes show just how fast things are moving.

“Nissan and Ford have said they’ll be able to make driverless cars by 2020,” he added. “While the motion seeks to put in place a strategy to deal with the safety implications, the NEC knows that the consequences of the introduction of driverless vehicles goes far beyond that.

“Imagine what this could do for jobs.”

he stressed. “In previous industrial revolutions people moved from one type of work to another - jobs in industry and manufacturing have been replaced by jobs in the service and financial sectors - but this threatens to be different.

“There’s already a company in San Francisco called Momentum Machines which makes a device that creates hamburgers from start to finish, and its quote is "Our device is not designed to make employees more efficient, it is meant to completely obviate them”

John warned of a looming “social and economic disaster” unless genuine safeguards are implemented to ensure the Fourth Industrial Revolution “benefits all humankind.”

Mark Elwen of West Yorkshire branch agreed. Citing huge recent developments in driverless vehicles, drones and 3D printing, Mark highlighted predictions that 35 per cent of jobs in the UK - £10 million in total - could be lost in the next 20 years. “In the 18th Century people moved from the land to the factories, and in the 20th Century people moved from manufacturing to the service industries, but in the 21st Century there’s a real danger that we could move to absolutely nothing,” he stressed. “Henry Ford famously paid his employees enough to buy his cars... but the problem is that a worker is a consumer and a machine is not - and there’s therefore a real danger of the Fourth Industrial Revolution widening the gap between the haves and the have nots.

We need to explore radical new ideas, including a basic income guarantee - a set amount that everyone receives whether they work or not.”

Pledging Executive support for the terms of the motion, deputy general secretary Andy Kerr concluded: “This is an absolutely massive and truly global issue.”

July/August 2017 THE VOICE 25

@CWUNews

Uncertain future FEATURE
interested. Will anything change now that you come back to more work than you return date as there’s not enough staff not interested in your wellbeing - only a competent managers and some not up to Solutions. Over the years we’ve had some in-house as Royal Mail Property & Facilities outsourced joint venture, we’re now back I’ve been a cleaner for 19 years working always worked hard to defend members’ Thanks for your letter, Alan. The union has

Matthew Kiveal-Duffy, Liverpool

Assistant secretary, Sally Bridge responds: As the CWU officer with responsibility

As an employee of Telefónica I cannot’ in-house’.

to help and support our cleaning grades workplace reps, of which there are already number of members. We always did try to use that collective strength during the joint venture years and, overall, we had a measure of success. We do believe, however, the move into RMSG will increase our ability to protect our cleaning members from the type of behaviour that you describe. Our workplace reps, of which there already a greater number, will be better placed to help and support our cleaning grades than was the case before the move back ‘in-house’.

TELEFÓNICA DISPARITIES As an employee of Telefónica I cannot help but think that, for the unpleasent

contractual entitlements: these include pay and pension protection whereby, if you are displaced in your current role and have to take up an alternative at a lower salary, your pay is protected. This is not the case for O, contract holders who only get six months protection. Also progression arrangements are different, as most of those on NewGRID contracts can progress to the maximum of the pay band within a 4-year period. This is not the case for an O, contract. Furthermore, the amount of bonus is not guaranteed, nor does it form part of your consolidated pay. It is not the current policy of the CWU to move to performance related pay or a performance related bonus arrangement. The CWU National Team continues to do the best it can for members, in Telefónica, whether they are on NewGRID or O, contracts

PENSION TRUSTEE REPRESENTATIVE? I recently received my annual magazine from the BT Pension Trustees. In the magazine there was a focus on the issue of pensions who we are, told, manage all the affairs of the scheme and the billions in the trust. I read all the resumes and, on the face of it, they look a very worthy lot. What jumped out, however, was the complete lack of BT pensioners within the band of trustees – even though we are those people on whose behalf they are making massive decisions. In consequence, I wrote to them asking why we BT pensioners are not represented on our own Trustee Committee. Perhaps, I suggested, we are view as disengaged 20-30 years before our pensions kick in and falling asleep all the time!

They replied by answering a lot of questions did I not ask and none of what I did ask. The letter was never signed by the author. That may not seem rude to them, but it certainly does to me.

I’ve since contacted my local branch in Liverpool, who completely agreed with my view. I’d urge other pensioners to write to the BT Pension Trustees, again asking why we pensioners are not represented on the board of trustees.

Tony Gaskell, West Kirby, Wirral

Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgreave responds: The BTPS Board of Trustees includes four Member Nominated Trustees. These are selected using a process involving three organisations: CWU, Prospect and The National Federation of Occupational Pensioners. Whilst there may not currently be a BTPS pensioner among those who sit on the Board, the selection process allows for their inclusion, and the Trustees have a legal duty to look after all members of the scheme and active, deferred or pensioners. Donald McDonald, who has recently stepped down after many years as a member of the Trustee Board, is a BTPS pensioner. The current Member Nominated Trustees are made up of three former trade union officers who have represented BT members and pensioners for many years and the other is a current employee of BT and an active member of the BTFS. All four are also members of the National Federation of Occupational Pensioners.

THANK YOU CWU Throughout my 39 years of membership of the union, firstly the NCU and now the CWU, I’ve received tremendous support and would like to send a huge ‘thank you’ to all involved. I’m extremely grateful to recently retired Simon Sagar for his support with the RSI test case against BT in London’s Royal Courts of Justice in 1991. I’d also like to express my sincere thanks to Eugene Caparosa, CWU South Wales branch secretary. Eugene has been a tower of strength, knowledge and support to me, during the last eight to nine months. I could not have managed or coped without his help. My heartfelt thanks to you, Eugene, and the whole CWU.

Diane Davies, former Openreach Disc Team member, Cardiff

n...
The Paris Climate Agreement was struck back in 2015 when major world leaders, meeting in the French capital, signed up to a series of measures to limit and stabilise greenhouse gas emissions.

And the unprecedented accord was heralded by the UN’s Framework Convention on Climate Change as “charting a new course in the global climate effort.”

Tony Kearns told The Voice: “At last, all the major nations of the world agreed to tackle the issue, with even the United States Congress saying that the prospect of catastrophic climate change was now such that they considered it to be a ‘security threat’.

“But then along came President Trump, who, on Thursday June 1, announced that the US would withdraw from the Paris Agreement – in one reckless act, endangering the consensus built up with irrefutable evidence of years of intergovernmental work and in so doing endangering the future of life on the planet,” Tony added.

INTERNATIONAL OUTRAGE

World opinion was highly critical, but when the UK Prime Minister Theresa May met with Donald Trump at last week’s G20 gathering, she failed to raise the matter with him – despite the UK being one of the major nations signed up to the Paris Agreement.

By contrast, the Leader of the Opposition Jeremy Corbyn insisted that, had he been at the G20, he would have “taken Mr Trump to task” and accused Mrs May of having let the US president “off the hook.”

In a statement on the issue, Mr Corbyn said that the Paris Accord was “crucial for the future of all of us and I hope Mr Trump will understand that unless all the nations of the world get together to reduce emissions and try to preserve and protect our planet then the next generation are going to have more climate disasters, more extreme weather conditions and there’s going to be more environmental refugees around the world.”

Tony tells The Voice that “Jeremy Corbyn was right – this issue is far too important to be left to the whim of a US President in hock to the fossil fuel industry.”

The scenario previously accepted by the US and amplified by Jeremy Corbyn also means, Tony pointed out: “Climate change is a trade union issue. “More climate disaster, more extreme weather and huge numbers of environmental refugees will have a direct impact upon how our lives are structured.”

The supply of energy, oil and gas etc is fundamental to the way we live our lives and it is fully in the control of global corporations getting ever richer on the back of it whilst accelerating damage to the planet, he warns.

WORKERS’ VOICE MUST BE HEARD

Going forward, the trade union movement “has to be part of a movement that argues for a different approach, for an economy no longer reliant on growth that damages the planet,” he explains, adding: “The voice of workers everywhere has to be heard.

“As industry and jobs change, we need to lead the fight to ensure that this transition takes place in the interests of the working class and not something we simply let happen.

“The message we need to take to Trump and May is: ‘This is our future you’re gambling with – there are no jobs on a dead planet,” Tony concludes.

The CWU has supported calls for a just transition at the TUC and is an affiliate of the Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union Group. If you want to become involved in shaping the trade union movement’s environmental agenda, please contact www.campaigncc.org/unions