IT’S A YES - THANK YOU
ContactUs

CWU HQ – all enquiries 130 The Broadway, Wimborne, London SW19 1RX 020 8971 7200
In most cases your branch should be your first point of contact. Details are on your membership card.

Harassment Helpline 0800 090 2303
Have you changed your address? Please inform CWU about any changes to your membership details. There are three different ways to update your membership details:
- Option 1 – Log into the members’ only section of the CWU website (www.unionline.co.uk), using the username and password that you have previously been sent, and change your own details.
- Option 2 – Contact your branch secretary with your new details.
- Option 3 – Contact CWU HQ on 020 8971 7447 or email your new details to membership@cwu.org and we will make the necessary changes.
Please help us help you – keep your details up to date.

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. Detail up to date.
- Employment law advice. More information at www.unionline.co.uk
- Free will writing service.
- Free legal advice helplines.
- Free will setting service.
- Tax advice.
- The motor claims service.
- To register a claim or for any legal advice call UNIONLINE on 0300 333 0303.

Publications Editor Simon Alford
Jouralist, The Voice Karl Street
Stories for The Voice and Communications department 020 8971 7487
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Advertising enquiries
Felipa Delfiner
020 737 730 192
felipa@centurysonpublishing.co.uk

Creative design and production
Heather Davis
020 8971 7487

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golet's get this straight: Royal Mail makes a 56% per cent mark up on sale of land for luxury flats and then plucks poverty from the people when it comes to the pensions of our postal workers!

The privatised postal giant is flouting 6.25 acres of its Mount Pleasant sorting office in North London to Taylor Wimpey for a whopping £395 million.
The land had a net book value of just £29 million and this isn’t the first big money land sale by Royal Mail. It means the firm will have made about £400 million from three central London land sales - yet they now want to slash the pension entitlements of 90,000 postal workers on the grounds of, GET THIS, affordability!

snouts in the trough
In those and a half years Royal Mail has paid out almost £600 million in dividends to private shareholders (lucky shareholders!) and by April next year that figure will likely exceed one billion!

In those circumstances is it seriously too much to ask for some dignity in retirement for the workers that break their backs every day to provide the service that yields the profits that make the shareholders rich? That, after all, is what the CWU is fighting for!

It is really too much to ask when hundreds of millions of pounds is paid out every year to hedge funds whilst the workers can’t even get a pay rise?

They’ve seen their pay freeze as living costs rise, effectively giving them and their families an annual pay cut!

Isn’t it time Royal Mail started sharing some of its good fortune with its workers?

A company whose business model is based on asset stripping, cost cutting and slashing 3,000 full-time jobs every year – jobs that belong to real people just like you and me, men and women with families and children to support, struggling every day to make ends meet – is not a company operating a strategy of innovation and growth. It’s a company using a Dickensian model of simply screwing over hard-working men and women.

When a union like the CWU stands up against injustice for its members we all need to get behind them – because, ultimately, they are fighting for justice for each and every one of us. They are holding that line which says; ‘we’re not allowing workers to have their rights trodden on, we aren’t allowing workers to be robbed of their dignity, to be disrespected, undervalued and exploited.’

Royal Mail wants to slash the pensions of our postal workers by 30 per cent but, by some remarkable piece of good fortune, the CWU, a year paid into the pension of its chief executive Moya Greene won’t be affected because her pension isn’t part of the scheme that’s being closed down!

You just couldn’t make this up! With double standards like this at play, no wonder the CWU’s ballot its members on strike action. And that’s not the half of it. Postal workers are under relentless pressure to work faster, harder and cheaper and live each day feeling undervalued and fearful for their terms and conditions. This just isn’t right; you know it, I know it and Royal Mail knows it!

In those circumstances I know it and Royal Mail knows it!

Over the coming weeks I’ll be asking everyone I know to support our postal workers because it’s the right and just thing to do. We’ve reached a tipping point in this country where, if we don’t fight to defend the rights of each other, if we don’t stand together against injustice, if we don’t face what’s coming head on as one, we shall all lose out - and so will our kids and our grandchildren. What we’re willing to do today will determine their tomorrow.

A fight for all our futures: Royal Mail’s got it badly wrong

Lawyer, journalist and political campaigner Peter Stefanovic argues that Royal Mail’s double standards have to be challenged

We’ve reached a tipping point in this country where if we don’t fight to defend our rights we shall all lose out

Peter Stefanovic
GUEST COLUMNIST

Peter Stefanovic often appears on TV and radio and has a social media following of more than 100,000

GS Column

General Secretary’s column

Peter Stefanovic

All disputes have their own dynamics and the objective is always to secure an agreement that addresses our members’ grievances. Strikes are a legitimate part of any dispute and I know our members will support a call to action from this union.

Our members in BT also now face a potential dispute over their pension contributions and the DCSET and the T&FS Executive are fully focused on this. If we reach a point where an industrial action ballot is necessary, make no mistake, the full resources of the union will be used to support our BT members.

The CWU is a strong union. Politically, we have significantly grown our influence within the Labour Party.

Within the TUC we are seen as one of the most progressive unions in the country. We are setting the agenda and Congress agreed a CWU motion that calls for trade unions to come together – with a proper campaign and deliverable action – to tackle insecure employment, in-work poverty and deliver a new deal for all UK workers.

Our recent ballot result will give confidence to the rest of the labour movement. This was the first national ballot under the Government’s new anti-trade union laws. Through strong workplace representation and new ways of campaigning online and through social media, the CWU has shown how unions can overcome the new thresholds the Government has imposed.

It’s time to shift the balance of forces in the interests of workers everywhere.

The CWU is fighting for this in our own industries and playing a leading role in bringing the whole of the movement together to deliver a new deal for working people.

General Secretary

Dave Ward
Crunch time is approaching with regards to our on-going talks with BT over pensions and an agreement is essential because without one there’s a real risk of the BTPS being unilaterally closed to future service accrual by the company – something that the CWU will never accept.

We didn’t seek this review and, as ever with pensions, even if a deal can be reached, the outcome will be a bitter pill to swallow for many. The alternative, however, would be infinitely worse. With negotiations now entering a critical phase, members can rest assured that the CWU is continuing to ensure that their best interests remain paramount.

Against this backdrop we’re revating our long-standing campaign to end the injustice faced by thousands of Manpower agency workers conducting work for BT on so-called ‘Pay Between Assignment’ (PBA) contracts. The eradication of these contracts, that deviously circumvent the equal treatment aims of EU legislation that the CWU helped secure, remains a key plank of our new Close the Gap campaign – but, given the negligible prospect of the Tories legislating to protect vulnerable workers, we’ve broadened out our objectives. (See pages 12 & 13)

Andy Kerr
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (T&FS)

Meanwhile at EE we continue to pursue our aim to grow membership with the ultimate goal of securing the right to negotiate better pay, terms and conditions with the employer. The excellent progress made to date is reported on page 19. Busy times indeed - but the CWU is up to the challenge.

STANDING FIRM ON BT PENSIONS

CWU warnings that any unilateral attempt to close the BT Pension Scheme would trigger an immediate ballot for industrial action are being forcefully reiterated in ongoing talks. BT’s unwelcome but widely anticipated announcement that deviously circumvent the ‘equal treatment’ aims of EU legislation that the CWU helped secure, remains a key plank of our new Close the Gap campaign – but, given the negligible prospect of the Tories legislating to protect vulnerable workers, we’ve broadened out our objectives.

The Voice
Kerr told delegates at April’s CWU forum was held in central London to brief branches on various proposals that have been set on the table by the company, and to outline the union’s counter-proposals.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told The Voice “Once again the strength of feeling amongst branches on this issue was palpable. That solidarity of purpose, reflecting unanimous support for our policy position at CWU Annual Conference, can only help bolster the union’s position in the talks going forward.”

“This review is clearly unsettling for members of the BTPS, they can rest assured that the union has no intention of allowing a situation to develop where one scheme is improved to the detriment of the other. ‘Robbing Peter to pay Paul’ has no part whatsoever in our negotiating strategy - and never will do. “This imposed review has, however, allowed us the opportunity to shine the spotlight once again on the improvements that are needed to ensure that BTRSS members receive a decent pension in retirement - something we’ve long argued BT should be doing anyway. “Pension reviews of this nature are never easy or straightforward, but ultimately the union’s paramount objective has to be the long-term sustainability of members’ pensions while simultaneously ensuring that the best possible settlement is secured for members in both schemes.

“Encouragingly, BT has stressed from the outset that it wants to secure an agreed way forward - no doubt in part because it’s under no illusion that the alternative would be a serious industrial relations breakdown.”

Andy Kerr
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (T&FS)

STRENGTH OF FEELING

On October 3 a major BT branch forum was held in central London to brief branches on various proposals that have been set on the table by the company, and to outline the union’s counter-proposals.

DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY

The Voice

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

INSPIRATIONAL SOLIDARITY

If the momentum of this activity continues, we will inspire the next generation of activists and maintain the membership solidarity that was clearly demonstrated in the recent ballot result. Despite restrictive trade union legislation and Royal Mail management’s misleading propaganda, CWU members have clearly rejected the company’s divisive and damaging attempts to privatise and registered a massive, positive vote to defend their future employment, income and retirement security.

In light of the ballot result, we are calling on Royal Mail management to think again, listen to the views of our members – as employees and shareholders – and negotiate seriously with the CWU on the critical issues of pensions, pay and future working conditions.

Every CWU branch officer of the union at all levels must continue to engage with members at every available opportunity to secure their continued support for our ongoing campaign.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

Mark Baulch
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

Davie Robertson
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

Stay strong - keep up the fight

Following this week’s dramatic strike ballot result, The Voice asked our outdoor and indoor secretaries Mark Baulch and Davie Robertson for their initial reactions and their key messages to our frontline members.

Both Davie and Mark say that they were not surprised by either the size of the majority or the large turnout, pointing to the strength and effectiveness of the Four Pillars campaign and the daily reality of the workplace as the key reasons for the result.

“The union’s message has really hit home with members and this is testament to the phenomenal work done by everyone,” says Davie, adding, “Our members understand the issues and that this is a fight for the very future of Royal Mail Group.

“The efforts of our reps and members in ‘Rising Up’ in support of their union and the levels and innovative methods of engagement across every mail centre, V&C, and Parcelforce site have set a standard not just for the CWU but for every trade union to follow. “We asked our members to pick a side – they overwhelmingly picked the CWU.” In Mark’s opinion, members voted ‘Yes’ because they are “fed up with the attitude and greed of senior management and with managers in their delivery offices forcing unacceptable levels of workload and unmanageable lapsing and absorption whilst not staffing up to the agreed and necessary levels in order to cut costs.

“Delivery offices are at breaking point and Royal Mail are simply ignoring this fact,” he adds.

As well as praising the campaigning by our frontline reps and activists, both Mark and Davie told The Voice that they have been extremely impressed with the work of the union’s communications team.

By contrast, Mark said that “clearly Royal Mail have lost the dressing room on this issue – our members are the most important players in this and they are not listening to the message from the top of the company – not only because of the brilliant CWU campaign, but because the RMS Board is choosing the wrong direction to travel in to make this company the best, and to keep it there.” He added: “When over 70,000 people tell you that you are wrong, you’d seriously think that they would listen. Instead they’re in abject denial.”

Staying true to the tasks ahead, Davie said: “To our Processing, Logistics and Parcelforce members, I want to say: ‘Thank you – your officers and PEC are working hard in your support and are determined to deliver for you.’

Now we need to keep the pressure on. Keep the engagement going, keep the discussion going, maintain the shared sense of purpose and camaraderie and together we can and will deliver the right result.”

And Mark’s message to our delivery members is: ‘Stay strong for the struggle that lies ahead and stay united. Also be proud that you stood up to defend your terms and conditions and proud that you will not kowtow to the employer’. “We are proud to lead you and proud to fight our cause. Togethe, united, we will overcome and we will succeed.”

WELCOME
Telecoms & Financial Services News

Postal News
Postal workers have spoken

National news broadcasters and newspaper correspondents sat alongside local branch activists at the Mechanics Institute in Manchester earlier this week to hear the result of our national strike ballot.

R oyal Mail’s senior leadership were urged: “Shift your position significantly and very quickly” after the union revealed a huge 99 per cent majority for action in the ballot.

With such a large majority, from a 73 per cent turnout, the poll easily surpassed the national strike ballot.

“Mixed the best of our traditional colours,” he continued and praised the campaign videos. “As the first union to test the Trade Union Act, we have passed with flying colours,” he explained, saying: “Well here we are, three years on – they’ve been selling off our buildings and flogging the assets – action inspires.”

Speaking through the applause, Terry added: “You are going to be joined by 110,000 postal workers that are now being balloted in this country to take industrial action in defence of our jobs and this much-loved public service.”

TUC unanimously backs CWU

Unions representing the UK’s six million organised workers stand pledged to offer their full support and solidarity to the CWU, as our Royal Mail members prepare to move into action to win the Four Pillars of Security.

Postal workers have spoken

“Say this to Royal Mail: ‘Unless you shift your position significantly and very quickly, then industrial action will be inevitable’.” Dave Ward

She then set out the details of the ballot result and, after the applause and cheers from the CWU people in the room which greeted the news, Elli declared: “Postal workers have spoken.”

ARE YOU PREPARED TO TAKE PART IN STRIKE ACTION?

Yes: 72,877 (89.1%)
No: 8,954 (10.9%)
Turnout: 73.7%

Number of individuals entitled to take part in the ballot: 110,082
Number of voting papers returned: 81,886
Number of spoilt or otherwise invalid papers returned: 88

Terry told the room that he “couldn’t be more proud” of his members, who had “proven what I’ve always known - that they’ve got so much dignity and self-respect that they’re not prepared to put up with what’s been happening in Royal Mail.”

“Dispute is about broken promises, and broken agreements,” he pointed out, explaining that the union and its members are “not just fighting for themselves, they’re fighting for this great public service.”

“We will stand up and defend ourselves and defend this public service - have no doubt.”

Dave Ward said that the result was a “fantastic” one for the CWU and for the wider trade union movement.

“As the first union to test the Trade Union Act, we have passed with flying colours,” he continued and praised the Four Pillars campaign, which had “tapped into a mood amongst workers across the UK.”

“Our members are prepared to stand up and fight to protect their terms and conditions and we will do everything within our means to defend them.”

ARE YOU PREPARED TO TAKE PART IN STRIKE ACTION?

No employee gives you these things – workers fought for it. And we now have got to do our bit to fight for the next generation.”

After summarising the union’s pensions proposals, Terry ended with a heartfelt appeal for support, in which he quoted the CWU’s own Four Pillars campaign slogan:

“We’re asking you to pick sides – please support us.

“And I promise you, we will ensure that there is still a public service worthy of renationalisation when Labour come into government,” Terry concluded.

Terry Pullinger, who brought delegates to their feet with his determined message.

He began by sending the CWU’s “solidarity to our colleagues in the RMT, solidarity to the Birmingham refuse workers, and especially solidarity to those incredibly brave young workers taking action in McDonald’s.”

Speaking through the applause, Terry added: “You are going to be joined by 110,000 postal workers that are now being balloted in this country to take industrial action in defence of our jobs and this much-loved public service.”

Royal Mail was flogged off.”

In order to keep on “feeding the shareholders,” Royal Mail bosses are now “turning their sights on our members and on this great public service,” Terry continued, adding: “They’re attacking our members’ terms and conditions and they’re attacking our members’ security of work.”

FIGHT FOR ALL GENERATIONS

The company’s future plans to enter a race to the bottom on pay and conditions will be fiercely resisted, pledged our DGSP, who received a second bout of enthusiastic applause when he vowed: “We will not pull up the ladder on the next generation. “Generations of postal workers have fought for the conditions and security that our members have today.

“Royal Mail is a billion-pound that’s gone to shareholders since
**Geoban boost mirrors breakthrough at Bank**

**MINIMUM SALARIES UP**

An interim agreement has been reached with Santander subsidiary Geoban that secures an immediate improvement to minimum salary levels for all existing and new G1 grade employees.

Mirroring elements of a deal that was secured just weeks earlier for some of the CWU’s lowest paid members within Santander itself (see report on facing page) the CWU has welcomed a major reorganisation in January.

Employees at all three subsidiaries will be incorporated into two new subsidiary companies - Santander Technology and Santander Operations - both of which will be directly accountable to the UK bank, rather than Madrid, as part of Santander UK’s drive to become a fully digitally enabled bank that is more aligned and responsive to the needs of UK customers than ever before.

Assurances have been sought and received by the CWU that there will be no adverse effect on terms and conditions as part of the reorganisation and that no job losses will stem from the move - which will see the Isban, Produban and Geoban names cease to exist in the UK by January 1.

For members in Geoban UK and Isban UK the immediate practical effect of the change in legal ownership will be little more than a name change. For members in Produban, however, the reorganisation will initially require a TUPE transfer into Isban - and the CWU is poised for negotiations to commence on that within days.

Assistant secretary John East explains: “We’ve already secured a commitment that no jobs are at risk.

“Indeed, the CWU is optimistic that the longer-term effect of the absorption of Produban into Isban and the legal transfer of ownership of the combined technology provider to Santander UK will be extremely positive for the UK workforce.

“For some time we’ve been talking to both Isban and Produban about ensuring their directly employed headcount on account of their heavy reliance on contractors. While progress on that has been held up by what’s been going on in the background, Santander has told us that objective remains unchanged.

“We’ve also received assurances that both Bootle and Carlton Park are regarded as key long-term sites for the work currently conducted by Isban and Produban, which is welcome news given the CWU’s concerns that both were being run down under the Spanish chain of command.”

John concludes: “With Santander UK now taking on full responsibility for developing its own systems, rather than adapting systems that have fundamentally been developed in Spain, there’s clearly going to be a lot more systems development work conducted in the UK, and that can only be good news for our members in the new UK-led Santander Technology subsidiary.

“There are strong grounds for optimism that the cumulative effect of all these changes will mean more fulfilling work, added long-term job security and hopefully new jobs in Bootle and Carlton Park as well.”

**UNSUSTAINABLE CHURN**

Amid concerns that the number of employees leaving the bank was not just unsustainable from a customer service perspective - but also placing unacceptable pressure on local longer-serving staff - the talks were given added impetus by CWU Assistant secretary John East explaining: “We’ve already secured a commitment that no jobs are at risk.

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**SHIFT PATTERNS NOW THE FOCUS**

“We’ve consistently told the company that low pay was a major contributory factor to attrition levels - and Santander’s constructive engagement with the union to address this issue certainly represents a big step in the right direction.

“We now look forward to the commencement of negotiations on the development of new shift pattern options that are far more attractive than those that exist at present, in line with the company’s firm belief that the onerous and anti-social nature of the current roster patterns have been the other big contributory factor to high attrition levels - and that, of course, has not yet been solved.

“There’s no doubt, however, that we’re heading in the right direction - and now the company has accepted what needs to be done I’m confident we’ll get to where we need to be soon.”

Simon Alford
'There's never been a better time for Post Bank...'

POST OFFICE

Our fight to defend Post Office jobs and promote the network is stepping up this autumn, with a determined push to drive the Post Bank concept to the top of the political agenda.

As reported in this edition’s TUC and Labour Conference round-ups (Pages 40/41 and 225), Post Bank was also flagged up to delegates at both events, forming part of a passionate speech by CWU general secretary Dave Ward at the political gathering and was also the subject of a contribution from our president Jane Lotfus in the trade union debate on Rebuilding Our Finance Sector.

SOCIAL BOOST

Both Dave and Jane explained our union’s case that, as well as being crucial in the fight for jobs and the service, Post Bank can also be a powerful weapon in the fight to end financial exclusion in society and boost local economies.

Speaking to The Voice, CWU assistant secretary Andy Fearney said: “It was great to see how Dave and Jane’s speeches were received and it’s vitally important we emphasise that aspect of the campaign, particularly in our political and public activities. “While our primary purpose, as a union, is the defence of our members’ jobs and livelihoods, the work we do – particularly a public-service union like ours – is an important contribution to society as a whole as well. Post Bank has the potential to make a huge positive difference in our towns and communities.”

In order to turn a good idea into a solid, practical plan, the union commissioned the Centre for Banking Research at Cass Business School, City, University of London to produce a detailed piece of work setting out how Post Bank could be created and run.

The report – Making the Case for a Post Bank – was published last month and sets out a series of key recommendations in the form of practical steps that can be taken to make the concept a reality.

Written by Professor Barbara Cuau Lupac, Dr Angela Gallo and Dr Francaisc Rodriguez Tous, its primary conclusions are that Post Bank is a viable proposition, which can generate significant revenues, and assist local businesses and local communities.

“Despite all the cutbacks the Post Office still has a larger branch network than all of the banks combined…

Despite all the cutbacks the Post Office still has a larger branch network than all of the banks combined…”

Whether or not the new ‘Work To Do’ rating will determine whether or not the CWU’s latest attempt to save BT’s notoriously resilient performance management (PM) demotions is successful – and the crucial vote is coming next month.

As The Voice went to press, members across BT Group were in the process of receiving their latest performance ratings. Within days that exercise will be complete, and every staff member will have been labelled ‘Brilliant’, ‘Good’ or ‘Work To Do’ under a new scoring system that has replaced the five former bandings – most notably the discredited Development Needed (DN) category.

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 into a solid, practical plan, set out a series of key recommendations in the form of practical steps that can be taken to make the concept a reality.

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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 new ‘Work To Do’ rating will need to be a tiny fraction of the number hitherto placed in the bottom two former bandings that it effectively replaces.

Whether that happens in practice will determine not just whether or not the three new ratings have achieved the desired aim of addressing the massive over-use of the former DN category. It will also be the first important indicator as to whether any genuine progress has been made on the overriding aim of affecting significant cultural change in the overall approach to PM by successive tiers of management.

Last month reps attending a special forum at CWU HQ in Wilmslow delivered a healthy dose of scepticism to company negotiators – pointing out areas where the dominant ideas of the day are being undermined. We do not have long to wait, however – and already have a meeting scheduled with management on October 25 to discuss the outcome.”

Could a better future beckon?

INWARD TUPE HERALS NEW OPPORTUNITIES

BT Fleet’s move into the mobile vehicle maintenance and servicing market has been warmly welcomed by the CWU amid hopes that the move will create new job opportunities for existing and further potential for CWU membership growth.

Following on from Fleet’s purchase of SEV Automotive earlier this year, 39 mobile technicians and their three managers were formerly TUPE’d into Fleet on August 1.

Phase two of the integration will see more SEV employees based at its Sheffield and Washington offices formally transfer to Fleet in the coming months – with further plans to relocate the Washington office to BT premises at Harton Quays in South Shields later in the year.

Fleet’s plans to provide a complete service, maintenance and repair (SMR) offering to both new and existing customers will also see the recruitment of 21 new mobile technicians this year alone – on top of the headcount expansion stemming from the 60 TUPE transfers.

CWU assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien told The Voice: “The CWU views this latest move by BT Fleet into a new business area as an overwhelmingly positive development that demonstrates the company’s determination to go for growth and expand its award-winning fleet management services.

“That can only be good news for existing CWU members at Fleet’s established network of 64 garages, as well as the transferring former SEV employees and the new mobile technicians who will be joining the company.

“The key message for our members is to make all the new people coming into Fleet welcome and, of course, to encourage them to join the CWU.”
NEW AGENCY CAMPAIGN FEATURE

TIMELINE OF A BETRAYAL

Early signs of the mass betrayal of UK agency workers first appeared when the ink was barely dry on the so-called ‘Tripartite Agreement’ between ministers, the CBI and trade union movement in the final months of the last Labour Government.

By the time talks led by the successor ConDem Coalition Government were getting underway on the details of how the UK’s Agency Regulations would operate in practice, a number of agency employers, including Manpower, suddenly began introducing a new type of contract that had previously been virtually unheard of in Britain.

“Pay Between Assignment” (PBA) contracts had hitherto been widespread in Scandinavia, used by agencies as an enticement to keep highly sought after freelance specialists on their books by offering them super generous pay rates even when no work was available.

Keen to protect the interests of these top end agency staff, the worker-friendly Swedish Government sought, and secured, a special exemption to the Agency Directive - yet when the UK Agency regulations finally came to be published in 2010 it emerged that, in a UK context, the same exemption had been applied to ordinary agency workers on the basis of minimal and time-limited pay between assignments which have hardly ever been applied to Manpower employees on the BT account in practice.

“From the moment we heard about the so-called ‘Swedish Denograting’ the CWU recognised the danger of it being used to circumvent the Directive’s ‘equal treatment’ aims - and we vociferously made clear the basis as the UK Agency Regs were being finalised,” stresses CWU assistant secretary Sally Bridge.

Sadly our concerns were ignored - and that’s why, in 2012, we launched the ‘Closing the Loopholes’ campaign for a change in the law to protect a new generation of agency workers.

“The eradication of PBA contracts on the BT account remains a key aim of the successor Close the Gap campaign - but given the negligible prospect of the current Tory Government legislating to protect vulnerable workers, we’ve broadened out the campaign to deal with the immediate realities of an injustice that has now become intolerable.”

CLOSE THE GAP OBJECTIVES

1. To secure, at the very minimum, the Real Living Wage for Manpower members working on the BT account

2. To eradicate the use of PBA contracts on the BT account

3. To expose the issue of low pay and to seek amendments to the UK Agency Regulations to close the current loopholes that allow exploitation

4. To pressure BT and Manpower on the issue of low pay and the use of PBA contracts

5. For branches to engage and campaign at both a local and national level and to encourage our agency members to become fully involved.

HUMAN FACE OF EXPLOITATION

The stark reality of struggling to survive on PBA contract pay rates that, at best, fall short of the legal minimum wage - was laid bare by a survey conducted at a special branch forum that immediately preceded the launch of the Close the Gap campaign.

All respondents told of a never-ending struggle to pay bills and the difficult decisions that are necessary when pay packets simply don’t cover the cost of living.

“I live on my overdraft, go without new clothes and holidays and recently moved back with family to reduce my bills,” wrote one young member from the North East - adding that, above everything else she yearned to be able to “feel more valued and equal” in the workplace.

Another member spoke of her despair at the widening gap between her lifestyle and that of BT contract colleagues in an era of rising prices.

“The minimum wage is barely enough for the basic necessities,” she stressed, adding there was “no room for the niceties of life” whatsoever.

Highlighting the curse of in-work poverty, another member added: “I’ve had to reduce my hours to part-time in order to reduce my childcare costs as that is where a significant part of my wage had gone.”

Reflecting the high level of empathy that has consistently been shown to PBA contract members by their better-paid colleagues, one respondent concluded: “I’m on equal pay myself, but my colleagues doing exactly the same work are on 35p per hour less - so it’s a very big gap for them, especially with the cost of living, food and housing on the increase.”

NEXT STEPS

The first phase of CWU campaigning on the issue has now begun in earnest with the launch of an online and paper petition that both Manpower and BT members are being asked to sign.

This petition will be delivered to both companies by the end of the year, and plans are already being drawn up for a series of local events where members can demonstrate their support for the campaign and generate local media attention.

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge concludes: “As the campaign gains momentum it will be our aim to politicise our objectives and involve MHS, the Labour Party and other interested parties - but at this point in time the priority is to raise the profile of the issue amongst members and get them fully involved.

“With that in mind, I’d urge Manpower members who feel strongly on this issue to contact us - on agencycampaign@cwu.org - and for all interested parties - but at this point in time the priority is to raise the profile of the issue amongst members and get them fully involved.”

Use #CloseTheGap, @CWUNews, Facebook: The Communications Union

IT’S TIME TO CLOSE THE GAP

Justice for Agency Workers

A major new national campaign aimed at winning justice for agency workers was launched by the CWU last month amid mounting anger at the ‘second class’ treatment of around 2,000 Manpower employees working on the BT account. Simon Alford reports on why the union has decided to launch a four agency campaign in less than a decade is now essential.

Not only are the majority of agency workers in BT once again paid up to a quarter less than directly employed colleagues doing exactly the same job - but even after this year’s pay rises, no fewer than 28 Manpower work areas are paying well below the £8.45 per hour that the Living Wage Foundation says is the minimum required outside London for a decent quality of life.

The situation is worst of all at Consumer Services and Sales sites in Doncaster, Glasgow, Lancaster, South Shields, Truro, Warrington and Cardiff where agency staff in some work areas are only paid £7.50 per hour - the legal minimum wage - making them the lowest paid workers anywhere in BT.

Agency workers in other work streams and for thin Customer Service are only marginally better off, with an hourly rate of £8.38, and even most of the better-paid PBA contract agency workers in Consumer Services, Consumer Service and Venture Voice Services (barring those on short-term contracts) are only paid £8 per hour - still 45p per hour shy of the Real Living Wage.

Even though BT doesn’t claim to be a Living Wage employer, none of its directly employed staff, including cleaners and security guards in the BTFS wholly-owned subsidiary, are paid below it - highlighting the chasm between those on BT contracts and agency employees.

Launching the Close the Gap campaign, CWU assistant secretary Sally Bridge told The Voice: “It simply cannot be right that a blue chip company like BT - which rightly prides itself on the good terms and conditions it offers employees - has hundreds of agency staff doing exactly the same work as workers in a number of agency employers, including Manpower, suddenly began introducing a new type of contract that had previously been virtually unheard of in Britain.

‘Pay Between Assignment’ (PBA) contracts had hitherto only been widespread in Scandinavia, used by agencies as an enticement to keep highly sought after freelance specialists on their books by offering them super generous pay rates even when no work was available.

KEEN TO PROTECT THE INTERESTS OF THOSE
Speaking to The Voice, general secretary Dave Ward said: “It’s always great to meet our sisters and brothers representing workers in every industry and sector in the UK – and it’s always striking how so many of our struggles, issues and campaigns centre on many similar core issues. “Of particular importance this year was the collective solidarity expressed not only to our members in Royal Mail, but to our comrades in the RMT fighting with several train operating companies to keep guards on our trains, to the refuse workers in Birmingham in their struggle to protect jobs and services and the McDonald’s workers taking action for the first time. “The mood seems to be shifting in the country and increasingly insecure employment, and the pressure workers are under, is recognised as a major issue. I think we’ll see more unions starting to take action, and politically we have been promoting our call for a New Deal for Workers as the central issue the labour movement needs to unite around.” Dave continued. “Our motion on a New Deal for Workers was composited into a wider and broader proposition, which encompassed demands from other unions under the overall title of Great Jobs. Speaking in support of this, our general secretary set out the union’s specific four-point plan to: 1. Develop a common bargaining agenda to tackle job insecurity. 2. Publish a trade union manifesto on what constitutes a new deal for workers. 3. Mobilise for a national demonstration for a new deal for workers to be held no later than the first half of 2019. 4. Build a consensus on unions working together on deliverable forms of action, including protests or industrial action. “We could get a million people out on the streets,” enthused Dave, adding that he regularly speaks at large demonstrations, but that the trade union movement needs to take the lead on a campaign to end insecure employment and deliver a bold new set of rights in the workplace. Issues of insecure work and low pay “need to be pulled together and we need to find a way, a single plan, a serious strategy to win a New Deal for Workers,” he urged. Our other strategic motion, for a New Model of Trade Unionism, was adopted unanimously by Congress. Also moved by Dave Ward, the proposition called on the TUC and affiliated unions to “lead a major transformative project to create a new model of UK trade unionism.” Corbyn has delivered a new kind of politics – what are we going to do about it as a trade union movement?” he asked the packed hall. TIME FOR CHANGE “Under Corbyn’s leadership, the Labour Party has definitely broken through with younger people and surely there must be an opportunity for us to say to some of those young people: ‘Yes you can change society politically, you can also change it through industrial work and belonging to trade unions’.” “Make this conference the one where we delivered a New Model of Trade Unionism,” Dave urged. Our senior national industrial officers – deputy general secretaries Andy Kerr and Terry Pullinger – each spoke on the major issues facing our members in the UK telecoms and postal industries respectively. Speaking just a few days after the postal executive authorised a national strike ballot of Royal Mail Group members, Terry won enthusiastic applause with his robust speech, in which he pulled no punches as he set out the union’s determination to fight for the Four Pillars of Security. (See full report of Terry’s TLC speech on Page 36.) Interventioning in a wide-ranging debate on ‘A Strong Economy That Works For All’, Andy restated the crucial importance of ensuring that every location in the UK is served by high-quality broadband connectivity at a minimum of 10Mbps. In order for this target to be met, there must be serious public investment, he argued, pointing out that such a critical national infrastructure project cannot be left to the vagaries of the market. (See full report of Andy’s speech on Page 19) And our president, Jane Loftus, took the opportunity during the Congress debate on Refunding Our Finance Sector to make a powerful case for Post Bank as a key component of the campaign to end financial exclusion in society and boost local economies, as well as a crucial measure in the fight to defend Post Office jobs and protect the network. With some 1.7 million people in the UK without any form of bank account, an ongoing decline in high street bank branches and small and medium-sized businesses in need of access to capital funds, a publicly owned Post Bank – a true People’s Bank – is the right idea for the time, she explained. “We, as a union, have been campaigning for a Post Bank, because we believe it can bring community cohesion and other services relevant to people today. “But the union hasn’t just sat on slogans, we’ve worked with Cass Business School, City University of London to put meat on the bones, with a detailed report making the business case for Post Bank and how it can work,” explained Jane, calling on delegates to back the ongoing campaign. (Read the latest update on the CWU’s Post Bank initiative on Page 17) CLIMATE CHANGE Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns seconded a successful Climate Change composite motion, which had been moved by the bakers’ union BFAWU. “Industry has got to change because one-third of all carbon emissions in this country come from industry,” he explained, adding that this is necessary in order for us to meet our international carbon emissions reduction obligations. “Companies are going to change with or without us,” he continued, explaining that the trade union movement needed to get in front of this debate in order to ensure that the changes made do not impact detrimentally on our members. “We want to engage with every trade union and develop an industrial strategy and a just transition that makes sure that when climate change happens, this trade union movement in this country takes over this issue.” As well as our senior national officers, several of our branch delegates to Congress also spoke, including Maria Exall (Greater London Combined), Amarjite Singh (South East Wake Amal) and Kate Dunnings (West London Postal). Maria Exall spoke in opposition to a motion on worker representation on company boards, which was moved by the FDA, arguing that it could risk undermining trade union representation. “We should not give a blank cheque for any form of worker representation,” she insisted, reminding Congress that, when our Prime Minister initially talked about workers on company boards, she had not mentioned trade unions. There’s no shortcut to a workers’ voice – it’s about trade unions and what we want are positive rights for workers that underpin trade union representation.” Amarjite Singh also spoke during the session of international affairs to highlight the deepening humanitarian crisis in Burma-Myanmar, a nation in Southeast Asia bordering India and Bangladesh. ROHINGYA GENOCIDE Government troops stand accused of committing acts of genocide against people from the minority Rohingya community in the country’s troubled north-west Rakhine region, from which an estimated 380,000 Rohingya people are said to have fled since August. Intervening in a wide-ranging debate on The Safety Risks of Light-touch Regulation, which had been moved by pilots union BALPA, she insisted Kate. “We should not give a blank cheque for companies to do what they want are positive rights for workers that underpin trade union representation.” Kate explained. “Light-touch regulation is little more than a smoke screen, with the Government skewing policy. “This so-called light-touch regulation ensures that the food we eat and the drinks we drink don’t kill us and that our workplaces are kept as safe as workplaces can be,” insisted Kate. “Putting profit before people is not only unethical but well and light-touch regulation is little more than no regulation.”
Criticism of 'shocking' management

The worrying story of the response a member received from his line manager after requesting assistance when falling ill while on delivery

Martin Teece was awaiting an occupational health assessment to enable him to return to work after suffering a stroke earlier this year.

Back in January, Martin was on delivery in Wen, Shrewsbury, when he started to feel a headache coming on.

He was taken to Royal Stoke Hospital, where surgeons operated to remove a blood clot and implant a coil in his brain.

Martin, 50, has been unable to drive since then, and he still suffers from a loss of left-side peripheral vision (visionary fields) but, following his discharge from hospital and some time spent recuperating, he has been keen to get back to his job at Shrewsbury Delivery Office.

FIGHTING TO GET BACK TO WORK

“I’ve always enjoyed the job, and I asked my GP and consultant about when I could return to work, and they said I needed a properly medically supervised phased and gradual return,” he told us.

But local Royal Mail management initially seemed reluctant to authorise Martin’s referral for a full occupational health assessment, which, Martin told us, was not actioned until last week.

The CWU has worked hard to ensure that the proper procedures are followed in the best interests of Martin, who says that his branch secretary James Braidwood “has been very, very good and a big help.”

James, secretary of the union’s Shropshire & Mid-Wales Branch, told The Voice that he took up Martin’s request with the Royal Mail SHE team and HR department and that both of them recommended an occupational health referral.

“But we still had to wait months for the manager here to make that decision,” he told us, and also sharply criticised the initial response of Martin’s line manager on the day he suffered his illness.

“For a line manager to have that kind of attitude in a situation where someone is literally collapsing, is very worrying,” he said.

CWU assistant secretary Ray Ellis told us that the reported response of Martin’s line manager to his request for assistance had been “absolutely shocking”.

“There is a duty of care under the law and to apparently blithely ignore someone when they are just minutes away from suffering a stroke is quite astonishing,” he said.

As well as appearing to have zero concern for the welfare of Mr Teece, there also seems to have been no consideration given by the manager to the fact that Mr Teece was also in control of a vehicle.

“Thankfully, the member had the presence of mind to park, and secure his vehicle safely as soon as he started to feel his condition worsening.”

Ray praised the actions of Martin’s branch secretary and said that an occupational health referral was “100 per cent appropriate” in this instance.

Can new electric vehicles deliver?

Three electric-powered vehicles are being rigorously tested at one of Royal Mail’s largest operational sites – do they meet our needs?

Zero emissions, touchscreen controls, so quiet that noise is being said for safety reasons, and Made in Britain as well. The Voice went along to Mount Pleasant to take a look at the electric Royal Mail vehicles currently being tested.

“We’ve got three electric vehicles equivalent in size to our 7.5 ton trucks and another three ‘3-ton’-sized, and we’re getting three smaller, transit-type vans as well,” explains CWU executive member Alan Tate, who has been leading the union on this project.

Royal Mail has been given them free for six months by a company called Arrival, which designs and manufactures a range of electric cars, vans and trucks at its factory in Banbury, Oxfordshire.

The Government’s recent announcement that the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles will be banned from 2040 and the emissions measures being introduced by local authorities have sparked an increased interest in electric vehicles.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Companies with large fleets – such as Royal Mail, who run some 49,000 vehicles across the country – need to plan for this emissions-free future and the Mount Pleasant pilot being run jointly with the CWU is part of this sector’s first step in that direction.

Prototype engineer Andy Houston is leading on this project for the Arrival company and he is on site here to look after the vehicles, monitor the feedback from drivers and take back the appropriate adjustments that need to be made.

“For example, we’ve dampened the acceleration, which drivers reported as being quite ‘lively’, and we’re also planning to introduce an engine noise – due to concerns that pedestrians or other road users might not hear the vehicles,” Andy tells The Voice.

He explains that the largest of the trucks are powered by two direct-current 344 volt motors, which are placed on top of the middle of the two axles, and says that the torque ratio is greater than that of its diesel equivalent.

Mount Pleasant distribution manager Chris Head says that the vehicles take two hours to ‘fast-charge’ and eight hours to fully power up on ‘slow-charging’, which then gives the trucks a 50-mile range.

“Our plan is to use them for hub runs and taking mail to delivery units in London – so the longest route that we’re trialling is 12 miles,” he points out, explaining that the maximum 50-mile range will be quite sufficient for this purpose.

FINE TWEAKS STILL NEEDED

While the feedback from drivers has been positive overall, and solutions have quickly been found for most of the problems raised so far, the issue of load weights is something that the company, the union and the manufacturer were still working on when The Voice visited the site.

“At this time, the maximum payload on the largest of the electric vehicles is around half of what can be carried in the equivalent diesel engine trucks,” says Alan, and Chris explains that if he can only send out what is essentially a half-load, then he would have to double the number of vehicles used, which would make no sense from an operational perspective.

He has told the Arrival company that he needs the load capacity to be equal, and a potential solution currently being worked on is reducing the size and weight of the tail-lift mechanism to increase the payload capacity.

“Basically, it’s a case of striking the right balance between reducing the weight of the tail-lift so that the trucks meet operational needs, without compromising operational safety,” says Alan, who adds that Arrival have undertaken to supply a lighter and also sharper criticised the
Fujitsu pay up with more likely to follow from most

On a roll at EE as sights set on recognition

Fujitsu membership - with immediate effect. “Given that the official pay date in Fujitsu is August 1, however, the company has effectively agreed to pay 1.75 per cent three months early – with the bulk of the company’s employees receiving a top up to their existing Living Wage, it has acutely conscious they’ve previously lost out where the Living Wage increase has taken over. The pay deal effectively an eight-month top up to any 1.75 per cent for all employees this year, the CWU has previously expressed how independent unions provide protections for workers that employee forums simply don’t offer.

The key message, of course, is that the latter are first and foremost a mechanism for management to engage with staff on its entire terms – and not a body that actively negotiates on behalf of employees. Early indications suggest that the merger is really starting to get through.”

Over the coming weeks and months all those who have signed up to the CWU’s mailing list of EE employees will receive regular updates on the CWU’s drive to reach a membership level that merits the lobbying of a formal demand for trade union recognition. John concludes: “Ultimately everything depends on whether employees in EE work to negotiate on their behalf in the same way as we do, extremely effectively, for our members in BT. “If the answer is ‘yes’ it’s vital those people don’t just join the CWU but that they also convince their colleagues to do the same.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/a-roll-at-ee/

PAY TALKS BECKON

Growing in Capita amid changes at the top

The CWU’s annual month-long October focus on organising and recruitment across the telecoms and financial services (TBFS) sector was swinging into gear as The Voice went to press, with branches across the country pulling out the stops to contribute to this year’s hive of activity. A special focus on the outcome will appear in the next issue of The Voice. In the meantime, watch out for updates at www.cwu.org

A time for ACTION

The Voice’s October issue features a breadth of content dedicated to the positive outcomes of the CWU’s efforts to organise across the telecoms and financial services (TBFS) sector.

In this edition, we look back at the progress made in the telecoms and financial services (TBFS) sector, including the significant gains made in Capita and EE, and the ongoing efforts to organise across the entire industry.

Key highlights include:

- **Fujitsu Pay Rise**: Fujitsu has paid up with more likely to follow from most.
- **EE Strong Growth**: EE’s strong membership growth is being recorded in the CWU represented Capita sites at Leeds, Preston Brook and Bury with recent engagement days at all three sites drawing in impressive numbers of new joiners.
- **Pay Talks Beckon**: As The Voice went to press the CWU has been geared up for pay negotiations with both the Capita/O and Tesco Mobile accounts, with dates already confirmed for the commencement of formal discussions in advance of the January 1 due date.
- **Big Organising Push**: Hundreds of new members have been signed up to the CWU as a result of the latest round of ‘Access Days’ that took place last month (September) – an initiative that doubled up as the biggest data gathering exercise yet mounted by the union in EE.

The Voice’s October issue also features a special focus on the outcome of the CWU’s efforts to organise in the telecoms and financial services sector, with updates available at www.cwu.org.
Plunging 13,000ft for charity

**FUNDRAISING PARACHUTE JUMP**

"Amazing, scary, dizzy, awesome" were the first words Lisa McLernon used to describe her 13,000 foot parachute jump in Nottinghamshire last month to raise money for several charities.

Having had her training and safety briefing at the Langar Airfield in mid-September, Lisa was disappointed to be told her parachute jump was called off due to the bad weather.

"I wasANTED," she tells us. "I was all kitted up and I’d had the training but it was too cloudy."

"It was postponed until the following Sunday, which meant another week of nervousness for me."

But fortunately, there were no problems the second time and Lisa joined her fellow jumpers on board the Cesna Grand Carvan.

"If I could ask to take my union poster up with me to publicise our ‘Vote Yes’ campaign from the air," recounts our intrepid CWU Para.

"But I was told no. No cameras or anything, because your hands and legs have to be in a certain position at all times — so I got a photo of me with the poster on the ground."

Lisa’s instructor, Linley, went through the safety instructions with her again as the plane climbed the skies above the former RAF base, while also pointing out landmarks and telling jokes to calm her nerves.

"When they got up to 13,000 feet, the Cessna’s jump door was swung open and it was time for action."

"As a first-timer, I was jumping tandem with Linley and we were strapped together; so I jumped when he jumped," continues Lisa.

With the canopy safely opened, she was given the chance to "guide the parachute and twirl around."

"It was an amazing experience — made me feel a bit sick, though, but Linley kept telling me I was doing really well and to take deep breaths until we landed."

"Back at work the next day, her night-shift colleagues at Nottingham Mail Centre were really supportive and congratulated me."

"Many thanks to my workmates, friends and family who have given generously to my four nominated charities and if any readers of The Voice want to donate, please visit my ‘sponsor me’ page,” she concluded.

**Support grassroots football**

Warrington Mail Centre Branch is urging all readers, their families and friends to sign the new e-petition calling on the Premier League to support grassroots football.

The Grassroots Football Campaign fights for better facilities at amateur club level, where the lack of pitches to play on, the poor pitch of the pitches that do exist, the lack of changing facilities and ever-increasing costs are making amateur football more and more difficult to participate in.

By contrast, English football is one of the most wealthy, with enormous sums being generated in TV revenues, gate receipts and sponsorship — and the gap is growing.

"Many thanks to my workmates, friends and family who have given generously to my four nominated charities and if any readers of The Voice want to donate, please visit my ‘sponsor me’ page,” she concluded.

**CHARITY CLIMB**

Two intrepid CWU hikers scaled the peak of the UK’s highest mountain last month to raise awareness of Alzheimer’s and the need for research into the cruel and indiscriminate disease.

Pete Metcalfe and Linda McNamara who work for the CWU’s mobility department, decided to take on the challenge of Ben Nevis after being encouraged by the success of the previous year’s challenge.

Linda’s father was diagnosed with the condition. “I know first hand the pain it causes to the individual and those around them,” explains Linda. “That’s why we wanted to do something to hasten the day when there will be a cure and a world without Alzheimer’s.”

Donations can be made by bank transfer to CWU General Fund, 33019822, sort code 60-83-01, quoting reference ‘Ben Nevis’.

**Save money with your union’s credit card**

The CWU’s credit card will save you money on your weekly shopping.

**E-PETITION LAUNCHED**

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TIME TO BUILD A BETTER BRITAIN

Delegates from the CWU participated enthusiastically in this year’s Labour Party Conference, taking our own agenda to a wider audience.

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn stated in his speech to conference that such changes would be done on a “just transition” basis. “Now that we have the full support of both the TUC and the Labour Party, we need to push ahead with developing this programme,” Tony added.

ON THE FRINGE…

Activist organisation The World Transformed ran a series of sessions on trade unions, which gave hundreds of young activists the opportunity of some training in workplace organising, and also the chance to hear from seasoned trade union activists. Our own Midlands Region secretary Kate Hudson spoke at one of the World Transformed sessions, on a panel with Rebecca Long Bailey, Labour’s Shadow Business Secretary, discussing industrial strategy.

Kate talked of her working life in the postal industry, made the case for renationalisation of Royal Mail and also outlined the issues in the Four Pillars campaign.

And Maria Exall, from our Greater London Combined branch, addressed a fringe event hosted by TULO, the organisation for Labour seasoned trade union activists. Secretary Frances O’Grady tobrand tribunal fees “a huge victory for Britain’s worst bosses.” With that view now implicitly echoed by the Supreme Court ruling – which highlighted contraventions of the Equalities Act – CWU head of legal services Tony Rupa told The Voice: “This is a very rare and extremely welcome judgement in favour of working people.”

VINDICATION

“It totally vindicates the CWU’s decision and all the tribunal cases taken by members during a period that has now been acknowledged to have been a travesty, and demonstrates the importance of trade union membership, as without trade union membership we would not have been righted,” Tony added. “The prospect of the £880,000 we paid out to ensure our members weren’t denied access to ETs being refunded is, of course, welcome – but for us the main thing is that a fundamental injustice has been corrected.”

MONEY BACK

The judgement overturned earlier High Court and Court of Appeal rulings which had resolved UNISON’s case against the then Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Liz Truss. Responding to its Supreme Court defeat, the Ministry of Justice immediately declared it would take “immediate steps to stop charging fees in employment tribunals and put in place arrangements to refund those who have paid”. It is estimated that in total around £30 million in fees will now have to be refunded – with the CWU alone seeking to recoup around £388,000 that it has paid out over the last four years to prevent members from being deprived of seeking employment justice on financial grounds.

Although much of the trade union movement took similar steps to the CWU in attempting to mitigate the effect of the charges on members seeking employment justice, those not in union membership were not so fortunate.

The Supreme Court noted that, following the introduction of fees by the then Lord Chancellor, Chris Grayling, there had been an astonishing 70 per cent decline in the overall number of cases being taken – a figure that closely corresponds with the percentage of workers who are not in trade union membership.

Detailed TUC research comparing Ministry of Justice statistics for a three month period shortly before the introduction of tribunal fees and the corresponding period a year later highlighted that women were amongst the biggest losers, with sex discrimination claims plummeting by 80 per cent and pregnancy discrimination claims falling by over a quarter. During the same period the number of race discrimination and sexual orientation claims both fell by 40 per cent, the number of disability discrimination claims virtually halved and 70 per cent fewer workers lodged claims for non-payment of the national living wage – prompting TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady to brand tribunal fees “a huge victory for Britain’s worst bosses.”

UNION TRIUMPH SEES TRIBUNAL FEES SCRAPPED

The Government has been forced into a humiliating U-turn on employment tribunal fees after a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court that the charges were inconsistent with access to justice and, consequently, illegal.

Of workers who are not in trade union membership.

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With the number of new tribunal applications already doubled since the abolition of fees the CWU is watching with interest as to whether a system that has been savaged by government cuts in recent years can cope with workloads that look likely to rise to pre-fee levels.

“If we start to see backlogs developing the union will be lobbying hard to ensure they are swiftly addressed,” concludes Tony.
Further proposed increases to the state pension age have once again highlighted the disproportionate effect of austerity on women. Since 2010 the state pension age (SPA) for women has been steadily increasing – reaching 63 and nine months in April this year. It is on course to rise to 64 and six months by April next year, and parity with the current male SPA (65) just seven months later, in November 2018. The pace of the increase in women’s state pension age, originally set out in the Pensions Act of 1995, has already been accelerated by the subsequent Pensions Act of 2011 – which additionally set in train a timetable for a phased increase in the unified male and female SPA to 66 by 2020.

Under the Pensions Act of 2014 a further increase in the unified SPA was brought forward by eight years – meaning that the current male SPA (65) just seven months by April next year, and parity with women has been steadily increasing – further proposed increases to the state pension age will rise to 65 in 2028 and 66 in 2036. Even as of the end of last year, 1.1 million women were worse off, on average, by £32 a week – representing an average household income drop of 12 per cent for women aged 60 to 62 who would previously have been drawing a pension.

While employment rates in this female age group have gone up significantly – with more women forced to work for longer to make ends meet – the net effect has still been to reduce the average income of low income households by a staggering 21 per cent (compared to just 4 per cent for higher income households).

CWU national equalities officer Linda Roy told The Voice: “The 6.4 percentage point increase in absolute income poverty levels amongst women aged 60-62 that the IFS has identified since the SPA reforms began is proof once again of the extent to which women are being disproportionately affected by Government austerity measures.

“While it’s true to say that, after 2018, both genders will be equally disadvantaged by relatively swift increases to the unified SPA the particular concern at present is that hundreds of thousands of women in the later stages of their careers have been given inadequate time to prepare for fundamentally changed state pension provision.

“That’s why this year’s CWU Annual Conference unanimously committed the union to lobby the Government on behalf of a generation of women who’ve been seriously disadvantaged by the SPA changes we’ve already seen – and why the Women’s Advisory Committee is already working in conjunction with the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign which is demanding compensation for those who were not properly notified and are suffering financial hardships as a result.”

Austerity Gender Gap

For some time a raft of commentators have been warning that the UK is witnessing widening gender inequality as a result of austerity policies that fall hardest on women.

Analysis by the Women’s Budget Group independent think-tank shows that tax and benefit changes since 2010 will have hit women’s incomes twice as hard as men by 2020 – with women set to be £3,003 a year worse off on average by then, compared to £355 for men.

“Time and time again it’s women who are bearing the brunt of austerity,” CWU national equalities officer Linda Roy told The Voice: “Childcare is just one example, with many of the Surestart nurseries already closed. As well as cuts to social security, the freezing of child benefits and tax credits and the household cap on benefits, cuts to legal aid have seriously affected women in situations of domestic violence.”

Pointing out that last year Britain fell to 25th place on the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index – lower than almost all of our European neighbours – CWU national Women’s Advisory Committee member Jean Sharrocks cites the huge increase in foodbank usage that has been recorded across the country as the direct correlation of seven years of UK Government austerity.

The North East Region equalities officer – who is also a Middleborough Councillor – is closely involved in a local Labour Party initiative to collect and distribute women’s sanitary products to foodbanks amid disturbing evidence that increasing poverty levels are making such products unaffordable for some cash-strapped families.

“We know that in West Yorkshire there have been instances of young girls missing school during their periods – something which is an appalling indictment of the situation we’re in,” Jean told The Voice.

A campaign is fast gathering pace around this issue and as this magazine went to press almost 100,000 people had signed an online petition calling on the Education Minister, Justine Greening, to commit to the funding required to ensure that sanitary products are provided free in schools across the UK. A Bill is already before the Scottish Parliament to make it a requirement for Scottish schools to provide free pads and tampons – and last month the Labour Party announced that an incoming Labour government would do likewise for the rest of the UK.

DOUBLE WHAMMY FOR WOMEN ON PENSIONS AND AUSTERITY

Jean Sharrocks [left] Linda Roy [right]
UNITED WE STAND

As a longstanding retiree, a member of the CWU and a former employee of BT, I feel I need to put in my two pennies worth on what I see as a really serious and growing problem for every British worker.

In particular I’d like to comment on the treatment currently being dished out to postal workers within Royal Mail and the proposals of the changes to their working practices and pensions.

I have, on occasion, spoken to my local postie, who I can tell is a hard-working dedicated individual, and from what I can gather the postmen and women of the UK are under ever increasing pressure, in some ways reminiscent of BT performance management.

On top of that they now face the threat of forced changes to their jobs such as paying their own sick leave, the threat of forced changes to their jobs in every possible way – which leads on to the article about dangerous dogs on page 16 of the last issue of The Voice.

The photos of the injuries the Lincolnshire postwoman suffered were horrific and they highlight just how dangerous the postie’s job can be. She could so easily have been fatally wounded - and I’d like to express my sympathy to her and wish her a speedy recovery. These gals and guys deserve our respect.

If the CWU’s dealings with Royal Mail management turn nasty maybe the union could use these pictures, with the public’s permission of course, to help get the public on side. I genuinely feel that a groundswell of public support will aid your coming fight.

I do not wish to get anyone in trouble so I would ask that you do not publish my name and address – as that could identify my local postman - but I would very much like to know what the union is doing about this.

Name and address supplied

The Voice responds:

At a time when our members in Royal Mail are up against the greatest challenge to trade unions to recruit new members, got me very excited.

Perhaps there is a correlation with increased numbers attending our universities and the decreasing number of students who would have been free to let the wider world know what Royal Mail is trying to do – most recently at the Labour Party Conference and at TUC Congress, where a motion condemning Royal Mail for the situation it is placing its members in was unanimously carried.

We know from feedback we’ve already received from our messages going through – but it’s still great to receive a letter such as this, eloquently expressing a deep sense of outrage at what our members in Royal Mail are up against.

Thank you once again for sending it in.

ACTION NEEDED – NOT WORDS

Having read the report on the Taylor review and how it fell short of the real issue of The Voice, and the separate piece on Grenfell Tower, my greatest concern is the Tower inquest will go the same way as the Tower inquest will go the same way as the Taylor report.

I, along with many others, made a submission to the parliamentary consultation concerning Royal Mail privatization, we all lobbied our MPs and petitioned the then ConDem government, but Vince Cable pushed it through anyway - even though opinion polls were showing 85 per cent against privatisation.

While local MPs joystick in politics, the question, slightly amending the famous Monty Python saying, is “what have parliamentary reports ever done for us?” Very little, it seems, except to allow governments to give the impression that they are doing something.

John Thwaites, retired member, Milton Keynes

WORKERS IN WESTMINSTER

I completely agree with the article in the June/July issue regarding poor worker representation in Parliament. My local Tory MP has not had to face the real world, but neither have many of his opponents.

We need people in parliament who’ve had to budget and know the worry and the difficult choices between food, council tax and fuel that have to be made when expenditure exceeds income. Some of my friends have had bailiffs call on them, and that’s the real world – not the coddled life of practically every MP.

As a Labour Party member, besides paying my union dues, I thoroughly look forward to Jeremy Corbyn reaching Number 10 in the near future because we need a Prime Minister who understands.

MP P Bedford, Southampon

REMEMBER LABOUR’S TU ROOTS

Dave Ward’s contribution in the July/August edition of The Voice expressing that for many years there has been a noticeable reluctance amongst many Labour MPs to join a trade union, despite repeated contact from more active members, got me very excited.

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

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From 200,000 at the beginning of 2015, Labour Party membership rose to over 380,000 during 2016, passed the 550,000 mark this year and is still heading upwards – with the majority of new activists coming from the under-30 age group.

But just a few years ago, political party membership was in a pattern of long-term decline, particularly among younger people, with election turnout lowest among this age group as well.

Against this backdrop, when Jeremy Corbyn stood for the Labour Party leadership in 2015, few at first expected him to generate such interest.

But his leadership campaign enthused hundreds of thousands of young people to become involved in the party – as members and registered supporters – and a new activist organisation emerged, which named itself Momentum.

“It was Corbyn’s focus on real issues of material interest to younger people that was at the core of this surge in support,” says our SDGS, who lists the housing crisis, university tuition fees and austerity as the key subjects which have been affecting younger people in particular. “After so many years in which all our politicians told us that there was no alternative, here was somebody telling us all about the alternatives and about how people can make a difference.”

And in this year’s general election, it was among the youngest age group that participation rose the most – increasing by some 10 per cent this year compared to 2015 – and according to exit polls, some three-quarters of these younger voters chose Labour.

LESSONS TO LEARN

“We in the trade union movement need to learn lessons from this – that a serious focus on the important issues affecting younger people is the key to engaging their interest and winning their support,” Tony points out.

The CWU’s demands for a New Model of Trade Unionism and for a New Deal for Workers are not only aimed at protecting and defending the longstanding rights of our members, but also show a strategic turn towards the growing numbers of workers affected by insecure employment, low pay and a lack of workplace rights.

“And these are overwhelmingly younger workers – people entering the workforce for the first time,” says Tony. “And as we organise and recruit across our sectors, reviewing our membership package and the rates we charge for different groups of membership is something we’ll have to address to ensure we attract more workers, especially younger workers,” Tony suggests.

If hundreds of thousands of younger people can be inspired by the Labour Party, why can’t the trade union movement recruit more young workers? The Voice asked Tony Kearns what our movement can do to emulate the success of ‘Corbynism’…