One union, one magazine, one voice

CWU members across the UK
#TellBTNo

‘We deserve better’
BT told as pension anger mounts. See pages 5, 6 & 7

December 2017

FOUR PILLARS PROGRESS
Significant progress on the big issue of pensions; positive news on pay and the working week

WORKING-CLASS POLITICS
Looking back at the CWU’s year in politics and making our plans for the next 12 months

CLOSE THE GAP ON PAY
Unequal treatment of agency employees becomes impossible to ignore as politicians pile in
A s we come to the end of 2017 and take stock of where we are, I think we’re justified in saying the CWU is in a good place. 2017 has shown that we are trying new and very different things to significantly improve engagement with members, acting as one union by harnessing all our strengths and resources in the interests of all our members – wherever you work.

The Four Pillars campaign in Royal Mail delivered a huge Yes vote that sent a clear message – not only to Royal Mail but more widely – that the CWU will stand up for our members and is leading the way in the union movement on campaigning.

Make no mistake, an 89.1 per cent vote for strike action means the pressure is squarely on Royal Mail to listen to CWU members. As negotiations continue (at the time of writing) the company has made significant concessions and our ballot remains intact.

More recently, in BT over pensions and with our Manpower agency workers, we have been engaging our members around the country in a way that few other unions in the UK are able to do. On both issues, it is clear that our members deserve better from a company that is making billions of pounds in profits each year.

Because of this, I am clear that in 2018 we have to secure the future of the CWU, and continue to drive forward positive changes in the way we stand up for members, through the Re-design project.

Significant steps have been taken in 2017 to take out cost at our headquarters and improve key areas of our work nationally and we will be launching a number of initiatives to move this forward across the union’s structures over the next 12 months.

The positive work this union has done over the past year could not have been achieved without the hard work and support of our reps and members. In 2018 the struggle continues (this is what we exist for). Enjoy the break and have a happy Christmas and New Year – you deserve it.

Dave Ward

GENERAL SECRETARY

ContactUs

CWU HQ – all enquiries
150 The Broadway, Winslow, London
SW19 1RX
Tel: 020 8971 2700
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 of 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.cwu.org), using the username and password 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 2447 or email your new details to membership@cwu.org.uk and we will make the necessary changes.
Please help us help you – keep your details up to date.

Info

CWU Legal Services: UNIONLINE
0800 333 0303
To register a claim or for any legal advice.

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December 2017

THE VOICE 03

This is a guest piece from Ben Chacko, the Labour MP for Mitcham and Morden.

Ben Chacko

A similar approach was taken by the ATL and NUT (now National Education Union) when they launched the School Cuts campaign, built around an interactive website which allows parents to enter their postcode and immediately see the impact of projected government cuts at their local schools. This approach enabled activists to quickly build community support and, before long, thousands of teachers and parents had delivered over a million leaflets in their local communities, pressuring politicians to oppose the Government cuts. A Survation poll shortly after the 2017 election showed that several hundred thousand people had switched their votes to Labour as a result of the campaign.

Finally, the CWU’s own pensions dispute at Royal Mail, which used social media to enhance workplace mobilisation, shows that the trade union anti-thresholds can be beaten when union members are determined to protect their livelihoods.

All this points towards a movement with its eye on changing the world, not just terms and conditions. Alongside a Labour Party now ready to stand with workers rather than disown them, the potential for our movement to become a powerful force in shaping this country’s future is clearer than ever.
In pursuing these objectives, our collective determination and continued solidarity will be absolutely critical. Our strength in the national tasks and our ability to secure a decent agreement will ultimately depend on our well-organized representative structure and the support of our members in workplaces right across the country. The talks are precariously positioned and whilst progress has been made they could go either way at any moment in time. What is emerging are the major differences between us which we will have to resolve early in the New Year if a dispute is to be avoided.

Finally, I would like to thank all members and representatives for the support they have shown to date and to wish all members and their families a Merry Christmas and a happy and peaceful New Year.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

Tell BT No: Battle lines drawn on pensions

BT’s proposals to radically change pension provision across the company have been branded a ‘slap in the face to loyal employees’ by the CWU, which is urging members to deliver an outright rejection of the plans in a formal 60-day consultation that is presently at its midpoint.

With both BT Pension Scheme (BTPS) and BT Retirement Saving Scheme (BTRSS) members affected by different proposals which the union believes totally fail to grasp the importance hard-working employees place on decent pension provision in retirement, members are being urged to say ‘no’ to all of BT’s proposals for both the defined benefit BTPS and the defined contribution BTRSS that has been in place since 2001.

Andy Kerr, deputy general secretary for the CWU said: “With senior management proposing new schemes that represent a significant step backwards for members, our determination and continued solidarity will be absolutely critical. Our strength in the national tasks will allow us to deliver an outright rejection of the plans in a formal 60-day consultation that is presently at its midpoint and urge them to withdraw these proposals.

As BT plans to remove the guaranteed value of their pensions, we will ensure our members are aware of the impact this will have on their future security and retirement planning.

BT’s current proposals for both the BTPS and BTRSS are nothing less than a slap in the face for loyal employees and must be challenged with a totally united front.

‘BT talks about ‘fairness’; but some senior management get a contribution to their pensions of up to 30 per cent of salary – far in excess of any CWU member. Further highlighting the total inadequacy of its pay offer to BTRSS members and the unacceptable of the massive changes suggested for BTPS members.

Andy concludes: ‘These proposals represent the short-changing of all of our members and it’s vital that senior management emerges from this consultation under no illusion as to the level of anger we know is out there, because that will present the company with a very stark choice between listening sensibly to what its workforce is saying and reopening meaningful discussions with the union – or riding roughshod over loyal employees with all the risks that carries.’

See also pages 6 & 7

The union’s detailed response to the BT Pension Review can be viewed at www.cwu.org/campaign/bt-pensions/

You can also find us on Facebook and Twitter or email us on bt pensions@cwu.org

Reject all BT’s proposals – #TellBTNo
BT pensions review

‘WE DESERVE BETTER’ BY HOLDING AS PENSION ANGER MOUNTS

Thousands of CWU members across BT have already vented their fury at company plans to change pension arrangements. With a fortnight to run before an imposed consultation period on unagreed proposals affecting the entire workforce draws to a close, the union is urging those who have not already responded to ‘Tell BT No’ without delay. Simon Alford reports

A thing stands BT is persisting with two alternative proposals for the BTPS, which have already been categorically rejected by the CWU. Option 1 involves the closure of the BTPS for future service accrual from April next year – something the union has consistently warned would automatically trigger an automatic industrial action ballot. Option 2, which has been tabled by the company in response to the CWU’s absolute rejection of the BTPS closure – involves a raft of negative changes to the scheme that are so profound that they would make the BTPS virtually unrecognisable.

Member contributions are proposed to increase by up to 3 per cent of salary and the removal of the current National Insurance rebate would cost members another 1 per cent of salary – while BT’s contributions would remain almost the same. Taken in conjunction with a triple whammy of significantly reduced caps on both pensionable pay increases and future increases for pensions in payment, Option 2 would mean in practice that BTPS members would have to pay much more for considerably less. BT’s costs for future service would only marginally increase.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told The Voice: ‘BT is gambling that, faced with the option of total BTPS closure, members will accept not just significant cuts to their future pension but big increases to their contribution levels as well. The CWU remains absolutely committed to reaching a negotiated settlement that addresses the BTPS’s long-term sustainability and this issue could easily be resolved with just 1 per cent of BT’s profits. Any settlement must be fair to members, however, and the company’s current position simply isn’t.’

BTRSS LET-DOWN

The CWU has always believed that BT should pay more into the BTRSS. While BT’s current proposals offer a 1 per cent increase in company pension levels, the CWU is adamant this falls well short of what is required, representing only around a 64 per cent increase in company contributions for those joining BT. Similarly, while the company has finally accepted longstanding CWU arguments that London Weighting should count towards BTPS pension other allowances, notably shift pay and unsociable hours payments, which have always been pensionable in the BTPS, are still excluded – which the union believes is simply not fair.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr explains: ‘The pretty marginal improvements BT is proposing to make to the BTRSS simply don’t go far enough to provide for a decent retirement at 60 or 65, and I’d urge all BTTRSS members to see through BT’s positive spin and stand firm for what they deserve.

‘We’ll never get a better opportunity to secure the sort of changes to the BTRSS that are needed.’ Andy concluded. ‘The reasonableness of the CWU’s claim for a BTRSS that genuinely delivers for members is reflected in the fact that our claim for company contribution levels to be pitched at twice those of employees would only cost the company about 0.2 per cent of BT profit.’

UNITED FRONT

The scale of the anger at BT’s pension proposals amongst both BTPS and BTRSS members has already been reflected by large turnouts at a series of special CWU members’ meetings across the country. The vehemence of opposition to BT’s pension proposals was, however, perhaps most graphically demonstrated at a special branch forum just days before the formal consultation was launched at which the company’s lead negotiator attempted in vain to justify the proposed changes to disgruntled branch reps.

Bill Dixon of South London, Surrey & North Hampshire branch branded the changes proposed for the BTPS ‘cataclysmic’, adding that the company underestimated workforces anger at its perils. “My members are talking about broken promises and about retiring in poverty and they are not going to sit by and let this happen,” he warned.

Directly asking management whether or not the consultation was ‘a sham’, Graham Colk of South Wales branch stressed his own members’ perception that “you’ve already made your mind up…you’ve invested in the glossy booklet, you’ve done your calculations, and this is BT’s version of austerity.

“Then they’ll look at people in the BTRSS and see you are offering a pittance for those individuals,” he added – predicting that members of both schemes would respond to BT’s consultation by “wanting the CWU to consult with them about how we fight this.”

Jeffrey Till of Greater London Combined agreed, stressing the company was “making the minimum improvement to the BTRSS that it thinks it can get away with.”

“So what’s the consultation for?” he asked. “The union’s already telling you this isn’t enough, so you already know our position!”

Turning to the BTPS, Jeff stressed members would have to ‘fight tooth and nail’ to protect hard earned “deferred pay”. Onewatch engineer Ian Harrington, a lay member of South London, Surrey & North Hampshire branch, predicted that once BTPS members had digested the scale of the attack on their pensions BT would have “lit the touch paper all by itself.”

Meanwhile, Chris Johns of Mid Wales, the Marches & North Staffs branch insisted the marginal improvements being proposed to the BTRSS would be totally inadequate to make any real difference to his own retirement prospects. ‘I’ve worked for the company for 17 years, and I’ll recall they’ll be increasing the BTRSS by one per cent, I’ve done the maths and I really don’t know how I will survive when I retire on £7,200 a year without going to foodbanks,” he stressed. “If anyone asks what I think about what’s being proposed my answer will be to just reject it. It’s an absolute insult.”

Angela Teeling of Greater Merseyside & SW Lancs Amalgamated had an equally blunt message for management: ‘People just aren’t going to accept this and one of the reasons is that they work really hard…we don’t see the shareholder dividends going down, yet you want us to lose ours,” she said.

“You say you have a responsibility to make sure pensions are fit for the future; well, if we can’t afford to live in the future you are failing in your responsibilities – and, if our members did that, you’d sack them!”

UNITED ACROSS THE UNION

With the fight for decent pensions now entering a critical phase in BT, CWU general secretary Dave Ward has pledged that the entire resources of the union will be made available for the forthcoming campaign if the present impasse with BT develops into a fully-fledged dispute.

Addressing last month’s special BT branch forum in Euston, Dave stressed that members in BT had the full support of the whole union, noting that the postal department is presently in tough negotiations with Royal Mail over future pension provision. (See pages 4, 6 & 9)

“I’m here to show the whole of BT’s union at what is clearly a hugely difficult moment for our members.”

Dave pointed out that BT was not alone in using statistics and financial projections to “paint an air of desponsibility, inevitability, doom and gloom” on pensions – and insisted the real debate had to be shifted towards genuine affordability.

“When you hear the numbers – the £7bn profit and the £1bn paid to shareholders…yet that the company isn’t prepared to go higher than paying 10 per cent towards BTPS members’ future pensions when the industry average is around 15 per cent…that clearly isn’t acceptable,” he concluded.

More on Dave’s contribution at www.cwu.org/news/united-across-union-bt-pensions/
The company had initially told employees that the Royal Mail Pension Plan was to close to future accrual and that all members would transfer to the inferior defined contribution scheme.

CWU put forward its Wage in Retirement (WinRS) proposal, under which all employees would be in the same pension scheme, providing a pension solution fair for all.

But the business responded by turning down the plan, arguing that it would be unaffordable and too risky in their view, they did not see it as the right way forward.

Following the 99.8 per cent strike ballot result, and the High Court decision to order external mediation, Royal Mail has gradually moved its position during these negotiations.

By December, the company has now committed to work with the union (with the support of both sides’ respective pension advisors) and develop a single pension scheme for all employees which offers a genuine Wage in Retirement.

The company is now prepared to introduce the new scheme as quickly as possible (subject to the statutory regulations being put in place and to discuss transitional arrangements if such arrangements are required) from April 2018.

In further talks, there has also been agreement as to the contribution rates for pensionable pay which will cover all basic pay and allowances with no lower earnings deductions.

Terry Pullinger tells The Voice: “This represents huge progress on what, from the feedback from members, is the most important of the Four Pillars.

“We have still not agreed either the transitional arrangements – should they be required – or the contribution rates of the employer in any final new scheme which we believe is fundamental to the targeted benefit outcomes.

“But to have moved from a straight ‘No’ to where we are at this time is extremely encouraging.”

Back in March, Royal Mail unveiled a range of attacks on our members’ pay, including the introduction of a lower starting rate for new recruits, the removal of many long-standing allowances, cuts in sick pay and other detrimental changes.

The business initially offered a consolidation-delayed lump-sum (prp) for 2017/18, a 1.2 per cent base rate increase from April 2018, and a further productivity and performance-linked award, which was also linked to agreement on the above proposals.

These proposals were rejected by the union and, as our Four Pillars campaign gathered momentum, the business withdrew their initial plans.

In the course of the mediation process, they tabled a revised offer of a £550 lump sum payment (prp) for 2017/18 (consolidated in April 2018) a 2 per cent base rate increase from April 2018, and a one-hour reduction in the working week from October 2018 subject to a number of conditions.

In his letter, the mediator included her pay recommendation for a consolidated 2.6 per cent pay increase for 2017/18, followed by a 2 per cent base rate increase from April 2018.

“The employer’s position on pay has moved both in design and reward since their original proposals,” says Terry, but he adds that the union’s offer has not reflect current rises in the cost of living,” he explains, adding that the union has not accepted the employer’s revised offer or the mediator’s recommendation and that “more progress needs to be made on pay.”

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The legal protections that were achieved in the 2013 Agenda for Growth agreement provide security in the way the company is structured, including the IR representative framework, and prevent outsourcing of functions and operations, which would break up Royal Mail Group.

Extending these protections for a minimum further five years from 2018 until 2023 has been the union’s position, and is considered essential for the job security of postal workers today and in the future.

“This is an area where we have not made significant progress at this time,” reports Terry. “The mediator recommended an extension until 2019, but our view is that this is nowhere near long enough and negotiations on this are continuing.”

This strand of the negotiations also includes issues around the introduction of new products and services and one of the ideas currently being discussed is the creation of a new joint growth forum with additional investment funding from the company to support developing and trialling of new products and services.

“This still remains a long way from the union’s own agenda for growth, and we’ve urged the company to keep this key strand of our legal protections and to give this union the confidence to work with them on a genuine mutual interest culture which affords employees, with employment, standard of living and retirement security,” adds Terry.

The mediators’ pipeline recommendations are for negotiations to continue on the company’s proposals to move the last letter time (LLT) back on delivery from the current specification of 5pm in urban areas and 4pm rural to 3.30pm/4.30pm, in order to better understand the impact on this for members.

Royal Mail has also linked the trial of automated hours data capture (AHDC) and trials of new indoor preparation methods in delivery offices to a one-hour reduction in the working week, from October 2018.

Outdoor secretary Mark Baulch explains that the current LLT position is an improvement on Royal Mail’s original proposal, adding that initially Royal Mail had wanted to shift LLT to 5pm.

“Our position throughout these talks has been to better understand what changes are necessary in the network in order for the business to gain new parcel opportunity and what aspect of the current proposals are simply about cost reduction,” Mark explains.

“We have argued strongly that we want to keep our members’ current working days and shift patterns, and that the current proposals do accept that there will be a range of work arrival times into delivery units and a range of LLTs across the UK as is currently the case within existing agreements, with most deliveries planned to finish earlier than the LLT.

“We need to work through the detail of this proposal and nothing is agreed at this stage.”

On AHDC, indoor secretary Davie Robertson tells The Voice that “initially, what the mediator had proposed was the usual protections and conditions that we require and have always applied in the past with monitoring technology such as this.

“But in the end, the mediator recommended that the business should offer the required safeguards in future trials and this has now been

“Keep your eyes on the prize, stand strong behind your union and we will win’

(Continued on page 10)
Presents for refuge kids from women’s generosity

**FUNDRISING**

Remote-control cars, toy motorbikes, pop-up houses and dinosaurs are among the festive presents being unwrapped by children at York Women’s Refuge thanks to the CWU’s North East women’s committee.

Jean Sharrocks, the union’s Women’s Advisory Committee chair, played Mother Christmas when she delivered dozens of gifts to mums and their children staying at York Women’s Refuge over the festive period.

“The union’s North East Region women’s committee voted to donate £300 to the refuge – what better way to use the money the union members have all been through than to get gifts for everyone there?” She said.

The centre is run by the Independent Domestic Abuse Services (IDAS) charity, which began life as York Women’s Aid run by volunteers in a two-bedroom flat in the city over 40 years ago.

As well as refuges, IDAS also offers a range of services – including a 24-hour helpline and Live Chat – across Yorkshire and for the past 10 years, this has also included providing help to male victims of abuse.

As she set out on her special delivery, Jean told The Voice: “The women and children here have all been through traumatic experiences and this time of year must be particularly difficult for the children, so we hope these presents will at least bring a few smiles.”

“We’re proud to support this charity and the fantastic work that they do for people in truly desperate situations. But as well as raising donations, we also need to be campaigning for better and more adequate public funding from local and central government for these essential services.”

**PIPELINE**

(Continued from page 9)

conceded by the business,” he explains, adding that the company wants to start the trials at PRDC and Greenford, as well as at two delivery offices.

Detailed discussions are continuing and agreement has not yet been reached on these two potential trials, but as has been the case elsewhere, progress has been made.

Both Mark and Davie have been pressing the company on latest acceptance times (LATs), which the union argues is essential for Royal Mail to capture some of the expanding, and revenue-generating, parcels market.

“Currently, our LAT is 6pm, while competitor companies offer 10pm and even midnight,” Davie points out “so we’re working with the business on a new LAT product offering which can support our growth agenda.”

Mark agrees that “the real issue is LAT, because the parcels market is driving later and later.”

“Letters and parcels are about 50/50 in terms of Royal Mail revenue generation at this time, but the trend has been and is set to continue moving in the direction of parcels and so that’s where we need the operational pipeline to be focused towards going forward but not to the detriment of the service Royal Mail currently provides.”

Other key issues being raised in this part of the negotiations include resourcing – where Mark feels that the business has been “in denial” about the problems, particularly in delivery – and future RDC/mail centre strategy, both in terms of catchment areas and also the rationalisation that has taken place over recent years. Davie reports that we are looking to secure commitments that there will be no further rationalisation plans from the business for the coming period.

Verdict unclear on BT’s new PM approach

The question as to whether or not BT’s new approach to performance has succeeded in staying, or at least remaining, in the company’s notoriously resilient performance management demons remains unanswered, despite CWU hopes that the jointly agreed rollout of a new BT-wide ratings system would provide a definitive moment of truth.

In October every member of staff in BT was 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’ category.

Prior to the exercise both company and union negotiators were in broad agreement that, in order to shift deep-seated perceptions that PM in BT is fundamentally unfair, the number of employees placed in the new ‘Work To Do’ rating, needed to be a tiny fraction of the number hitherto placed in the bottom two former categories that it effectively replaces.

The result, however, has been mixed. While in many of BT Group’s smaller divisions the number of individuals in the bottom ratings category has indeed shrunk significantly – to well under 5 per cent in most cases – in the largest two lines of business, Openreach and Consumer, the number has remained stubbornly high, albeit down from previous excesses which have twice brought the company to the brink of an industrial action ballot.

Assistant secretary Dave Jukes told The Voice: “Given we know there has been a forced distribution of ratings in the past, we have to view these figures with some concern. “That said, even in those lines of business, the higher than expected numbers of ‘Work To Do’ ratings doesn’t seem to be translating into formal warnings. You could view that as some kind of success, but, given the troublesome history of PM in BT, you can’t help but feel that there might be something just round the corner that puts a very different complexion on things.”

Dave stressed the BT negotiators with whom the CWU’s been dealing on the PM issue are similarly perplexed by the figures and that both sides had agreed further investigation was required, the outcome of which will be discussed at the next scheduled meeting in January.

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/verdict
Government pressed on Post Office funding

POST OFFICE FINANCES
A strongly worded reminder has been sent to Government Minister Margot James urging her to secure sufficient future funding for the Post Office network, after last month’s Budget failed to address the issue.

“We were surprised and disappointed that Chancellor Philip Hammond failed to mention the Post Office funding settlement either in his keynote presentation to the House or in his projected economic programme,” said CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey.

“Keeping the Post Office in public ownership was something that was promised to the nation at the time of Royal Mail privatisation and it was further enshrined in legislation,” he explained.

“Therefore, it’s incumbent on the Government, as the custodian of this vital service, to ensure that it is sufficiently funded across the UK.”

Current arrangements, which were set in place in 2013, are due to expire at the end of March 2018 and the union is determined to secure Government funding beyond that date.

“I’ve written to the Post Office chief executive Paula Vennells and our general secretary Dave Ward has also written to Margot James, the Government Minister with responsibility for the Post Office, insisting that this is resolved with the greatest urgency,” Andy continued.

Dave Ward told The Voice that, as well as calling for the financial settlement to be dealt with, he had also raised with Ms James the growing need for a Post Bank to be set up throughout the Post Office network.

“ar, the Government must take its responsibilities seriously here,” said Andy.

“It’s our Prime Minister means what she tells us about wanting to create a ‘country that works for everyone’. And then she must settle the Post Office’s budget arrangements without delay and also take the opportunity to make a real difference in the fight against financial exclusion by setting up the publicly-owned Post Bank that the people of the UK need.”

“And with a nationwide branch network bigger than any other bank combined, the Post Office is the ideal vehicle for this and we need the Government to take this on board and move from words to action,” he insisted.

Compensation win for injured member

INDUSTRIAL INJURY

“I would never have got justice if it hadn’t been for the CWU,” says Michael Tatterton, a Parcelforce worker, who was injured on duty at York LD.

While at work, Michael, a Parcelforce worker, was injured on duty at York LD.

“Parcelforce’s lack of action against domestic and sexual abuse and violence against women is still all too common in our society. We need to take a stand for victims of domestic and sexual abuse and it is imperative we also encourage others to do the same.”

Michael took up his case with the help of the CWU and secured a financial settlement to compensate for his injury and the support of Unionline, the CWU’s own workplace advice service.

£22,800

THE SETTLEMENT AWARDED TO MR TATTERTON

“I would never have got justice if it hadn’t been for the CWU,” says Michael Tatterton, a Parcelforce worker, who was injured on duty at York LD.

“Parcelforce in 2016, when a rotating conveyor belt trapped and crushed his hand and also caused serious friction burns. A Health & Safety Executive investigation, a copy of which he received through a Freedom of Information Act request, cleared him of blame and criticised the company for ineffective guarding.

However, on his return to work, Michael was given attendance and conduct warnings by Parcelforce.

“Dave’s findings were that a serious miscarriage of justice had taken place, and he spoke on my behalf to senior management,” continues Michael, adding that, thanks to the intervention of the CWU and the support of Unionline, his warning was reduced by half and he also won a £22,800 financial settlement to compensate for his injury and associated issues.

“I certainly would not have achieved any of this without the union,” Michael concludes.

Backing for anti-violence charity

AWARENESS EVENT

Members at Stoke Customer Services Centre marked White Ribbon Day 2017 by putting up leaflets and posters around the workplace, and fundraising for women’s charities, reports Sammi Craig, the lead union learning rep for Midland No7 Branch.

“The White Ribbon Campaign UK is part of a global movement to put a stop to violence against women and girls,” she explains, adding that the materials that were put up in the office aimed to highlight the signs of domestic violence to be aware of and the importance of talking about this difficult and sensitive issue.

“We also provided information about local domestic violence helplines, charities and support organisations and contact details.” Sammi added, and praised the work of the branch women’s officer Stephanie Johnsons and on-site IR rep Janice Yates in supporting and promoting White Ribbon Day.

£158

RAISED BY WORKPLACE RAFFLE FOR LOCAL WOMEN’S AID CENTRE

Explaining why the campaign is so important to her, Janice said: “Violence against women is still all too common in our society. We need to take a stand for victims of domestic and sexual abuse and it is imperative we also encourage others to do the same.”

Janice and Stephanie organised a raffle on the day, which raised £158 for the Staffordshire Women’s Aid Centre and secured a £50 branch donation to the campaign.

Healthy Minds Matter

Mental health pocket z-cards setting out key practical steps that workers can take to seek early help for themselves or colleagues have been sent out to all CWU members across the country in an initiative supported by the business and the union.

CWU national health, safety and environment officer Dave Joyce says: “Preventative action is the most effective ways to support mental health and the z-card reminds us all to ACT.”

Communicate – Speak to someone or encourage your colleague to talk

Take Action – Find out about the support that’s available or encourage your colleague to do so.

For further information, contact your CWU unit or area safety rep.

IR framework proposals spark serious concerns

UNION REPRESENTATION

An unprecedented attack on CWU recognition within the Post Office is being resisted by the union, following a prompt escalation to arbitration service ACAS.

The company had shocked the workforce by unveiling plans to cut the number of CWU reps in the business to just three for the whole of the UK – in an alarming step that the union described as a ‘precursor to derecognition’. Post Office bosses unilaterally served notice on the agreed Collective Engagement and Industrial Relations Framework Agreement (CEIRF), under which there have been 19 representatives looking after the interests of CWU members across the network.

“When CEIRF was introduced in 2013, this reduced the rep structure from 28 to 18 and now the Post Office is mounting a further attack on our members’ right to be represented,” explains assistant secretary Andy Furey.

While the union recognises that total numbers of CWU-grade staff have reduced, cutting rep numbers down to just three is extremely disproportionate and is “designed to destabilise the union as a precursor to derecognition,” he adds.

The union accepts the need for change in the circumstances – but insists that it must be both agreed and proportionate.

“There are still over 3,000 CWU-grade Post Office employees and it’s vitally important that members are able to access CWU representation as and when they need it,” Andy explained.

The issue was reported to the CWU Postal Executive and to a national briefing of reps and branch secretaries, the collective dispute resolution procedure was invoked and the matter was reported to ACAS.

The growing opposition forced the company to concede a two-month moratorium on any changes, pending the outcome of further ACAS-supervised talks early in the New Year.

For further information, contact your CWU unit or area safety rep.
WE'RE SHIFTING POLITICS TO A WORKING-CLASS AGENDA

Brexit dominated politics in 2017, but 2018 must be the year of a New Deal for Workers, insisted our general secretary Dave Ward after the CWU's national political event in Birmingham. Regional secretaries, branch secretaries and political officers gathered at the nation's second city to hear reports of this year's political work and discuss and debate how we are going to take this forward over the next 12 months, against the background of a rapidly shifting political environment.

"In the two years since I was elected as general secretary, we've had two general elections, a referendum and two Labour leadership elections," Dave began as he opened proceedings. "In 2015, it was clear that we needed fundamental change in the Labour Party – the party had lost its way, had moved away from representing working-class people and had become like a machine."

The CWU's decision to be the first union with a seat on its national committee which we have accepted was exactly what was needed to make Labour a campaigning party and a mass movement once again.

CORBYN THE 'ANTIDOTE'

When he announced the CWU executive's decision to formally endorse Jeremy Corbyn as leader, our general secretary memorably said we needed an antidote to the ideology dominating the party at that time.

The union's wider political strategy has been based on connecting our political and industrial agendas, Dave continued, explaining that, as well as winning key election manifestos commitments on specific postal and telecom industry issues – which had proved very popular with the voting population – the union's focused political work had also brought to the fore the whole subject of the world of work.

"This has all been driven by a new approach to our political work and we are looking to drive forward engagement of our membership at all levels of the CWU," he said and cited the success of our union's New Deal for Workers proposals, along with the “four-point plan for action,” which won the support of both the TUC and Labour Party Conferences and will be the theme for a major national demonstration that the TUC is organising in May.

During the 18 months since the EU referendum, much of UK political debate has also been overshadowed by the ongoing Brexit issue, but Dave made the point that this must not be allowed to crowd out all of the vitally important domestic issues that the Labour Party and trade union movement must focus on in the coming period.

"We need to make 2018 the year that we engage seriously in the fight for a New Deal for Workers," he insisted.

"The balance of forces has changed, but we still have a lot of work to do," Dave told the audience, urging: "We need to be more assertive – let's work together to make our political link part of our everyday work all the year round."

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns spoke about the CWU’s affiliation to the Labour Party’s activist organisation Momentum, which played a major role in turning out the vote during the June election campaign.

With hundreds of thousands of new Labour Party members around the country, of whom tens of thousands have also joined Momentum, there is a range of views and experiences within this vibrant network.

During the debate in Birmingham, several CWU branch representatives spoke about some different experiences with Momentum locally. Tony Kearns made the point that our union’s formal affiliation to this organisation is an important part of our wider agenda for Labour and gives us a seat on its national committee which we are able to use to influence its direction.

EXCITING TIME IN UK POLITICS

"This is the most exciting time in politics that I have known," he said. "The Labour party is the largest and fastest-growing political party in Western Europe and it's right that we, as a union, are closely involved with the most vibrant part of the party, supporting its activities and helping to give it direction."

Andy Kerr, our deputy general secretary for the union’s T&F&S constituency, spoke about his role on the Labour Party’s national executive committee (NEC), of which he is currently the vice-chair.

Andy has also been tasked with a major review of the party’s democracy review, which is, he explained, aimed at moving the party further in the direction of being a “bottom-up” organisation and away from its previous “top-down” approach to policy development, decision-making and campaigning.

"It's all about bringing the party back to its members and it was a brave move by Jeremy Corbyn to set this up," he added, adding that the NEC would also encourage all local constituency parties to urge all new Labour Party members to join the union, stressing: "We need to organise these people, just as we also need to encourage more trade union members to join the Labour Party."

WORKING TOGETHER IN TULO

The final speaker of the day was Maria Exall, an officer of our union’s Greater London Mail Branch and also the CWU’s representative on the Labour Party Trade Union Liaison Organisation (TULO).

"The political centre of gravity has shifted and we're getting our act together as TULO," she began, and explained that, in this changed political environment it is essential that the Labour Party-affiliated trade unions ensure that the positive policy commitments are fully carried through when the party takes office.

"It will be up to us to make sure our friends in the party carry out these policy commitments, because there will be strong countervailing pressures on them," Maria pointed out, going on to make some wider points about the work of TULO, its activities around the regions and localities and the growing alignment between the party’s political and industrial wings.

Plenty of time was set aside for debate from the floor to discuss our political work, and the audience heard contributions from the many Labour MPs in the party’s traditional North West and North East heartlands.

LIVELY DISCUSSION FROM FLOOR

Gary Watkins highlighted the positive achievements of the party, leading the devolved administration in Wales and the host regional secretary, Kate Hudson, spoke in more general terms about the need to involve more and more of our members in political activity, saying: “You don't need to be a political officer to be interested in politics. Politics is in every day at the workplace.”

After the speeches and the audience discussion, delegates participated enthusiastically in a live facebook Q&A session, which has now had nearly 9,000 views and indicated the high level of interest in the union’s political work, and the forthcoming events planned for 2018.

And in his closing comments, Dave Ward thanked everyone for attending, and urged everyone to focus on the New Deal for Workers campaign, particularly the national TUC demonstration planned for May 12th.

"The CWU’s in a good place, although there’s a lot of work to do – we all know that," he said.

“And through our campaigning in the coming year on the world of work, we can build a platform for real political change across our movement and across workplaces.”
Three weeks of ‘on-the-road’ CWU campaigning to highlight the second class treatment of Manpower employees working in BT call centres has delivered the strongest possible message that it isn’t just agency staff who are appalled at the travesty of unequal pay for identical work – Simon Alford reports on a groundswell of anger that will be hard to ignore.

I f BT or Manpower ever doubted the strength of feeling about unequal pay levels stemming from the use of so-called ‘Pay Between Assignment’ (PBA) agency contracts on the BT account, they aren’t under any illusion now!

Just three months after the CWU launched its fourth agency campaign in less than a decade – a clear message has been delivered to both companies that the long-running travesty of unequal treatment across the country – a clear message has been delivered to both companies that the long-running travesty of unequal treatment simply HAS to end.

Seven years after the union’s iconic Euro-trashed campaign briefly appeared to have secured the ‘holy grail’ of equal treatment on pay for agency workers, frustration has long been building at the relentless whittling away of a historic victory that has been comprehensively eroded over time.

Today less than 70 Manpower employees working for BT still benefit from the equal pay for agency workers that was briefly almost universal before the recruitment industry seized upon legal loopholes in the Coalition Government’s cynical interpretation of the EU’s Temporary Agency Workers Directive – using the so-called Swedish Deregulation (exemption) to reinvent the very injustice EU laws sought to prevent.

Since then anger has been steadily mounting amongst the ever-increasing number of PBA contract Manpower employees in BT call centres who simply can’t understand why they are paid far less than their BT contract counterparts for doing exactly the same work.

Yet even organisers of the union’s Close the Gap tour – which kicked off in Doncaster on November 7 – visiting no fewer than 16 sites before reaching its crescendo at Portadown and Liverpool on November 23 – have been surprised at the speed with which the union’s latest agency campaign has caught the imagination of not just members but also a wider audience – in part because of an explicit appeal for support on social media.

Day one provided the first hint of what was to follow. Coming just 24 hours after the Living Wage Foundation upwards revised the hourly rate it believes is the minimum required outside London for a decent quality of life to £8.75, the poignant and widely tweeted video from a protest which was supported by local Labour councillors and the local trades council and a delegation from the Fire Brigades Union.

Combined with a simultaneous CWU protest at the opposite end of the country in Truro, a social media buzz was taking hold – fed by the posting of videos from each event on all the union’s social media channels. By the time this magazine went to press those videos had collectively received more than 40,000 ‘start to end’ views – and that number is still growing. (The videos are still playing at www.cwu.org/campaign/close-the-gap/)

By day three of the Close the Gap tour, national politicians were starting to get involved, with Kate颔kmem PBA joining the CWU outside BT’s Blackburn call centre.

The Blackburn MP, who pledged to write to BT to express her outrage at unequal pay, was quickly followed by the new Scottish Labour leader, Richard Leonard, who joined the Glasgow protest alongside CWU member and Glasgow Labour Councillor Matt Kerr who all but eradicated a 5000 SNP majority in the Glasgow South West parliamentary constituency in May’s General Election.

Speaking outside BT’s Alexander Bain House site just days before his leadership election victory was confirmed, Richard told reporters: “It is simply unacceptable that people who are working for a company, but are not employed by a company, can be paid less. It’s inequality and it’s discriminatory.”

Matt Kerr added: “A company like BT is perfectly capable of coming up with the money to pay a decent living wage.”

Footage and photos of Richard Leonard at the CWU protest got an even wider airing when his leadership victory was announced on November 18, with a number of newspapers picturing him signing the CWU’s Close the Gap petition.

Just hours earlier Lincoln MP Karen Lee delivered an equally blunt message outside BT’s Lincoln call centre telling reporters: “It’s absolutely wrong that people are doing the same job and getting a different rate of pay.”

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge told The Voice: “Politicians are literally queuing up to get involved – clearly moved to do so by the blatant injustice, unfairness and immorality of the situation our Manpower members find themselves in.

Apart from the MPs who turned up at our protests, completely unprompted by CWU headquarters, we’ve received messages of support from prominent front benchers including Angela Rayner and Tom Watson as well as Dennis Skinner and now Jessy Conolly herself.

‘MPs see this as a real-life story they want to get involved in – and the political phase of our campaign will now develop quickly’:

Speaking just after the Close the Gap campaign tour reached its crescendo in Liverpool and Portadown – where NI Manpower members conducting vital 999 work are paid well under the Real Living Wage – Sally concluded: ‘We’ve travelled the length and breadth of the country, and the cross-party membership face-to-face but also through social media, and the extent to which both our Manpower and BT members wholeheartedly support the key aims of the Close the Gap campaign could not have been clearer.

‘Both groups of members are appalled that agency members on the BT account are being paid less than the Real Living Wage – but they also passionately believe there should be no room for exploitative PBA contracts and the unequal pay rates that stem from them in the 21st Century.

‘With the Labour Party already on board, and even two Government select committees now apparently reaching the conclusion that the Swedish Deregulation is a travesty, BT and Manpower need to do the right thing before they are forced to do so’.

Close the Gap tours the nation

Outpouring of emotion

During the Close the Gap tour thousands of Manpower and BT employees signed a CWU petition demanding action to tackle unequal pay at the 16 sites visited – and now the petition is being extended to a wider audience for the political phase of the campaign. Those who have not yet backed the CWU can do so immediately at www.cwu.org/CTGpetition/. Throughout the tour dozens of members delivered their own poignant verdicts on the unfairness of unequal pay in video interviews – all of which can be viewed in a round-up at www.cwu.org/campaign/close-the-gap/.

Here, however, is a taster of what they had to say:

Connor Williamson, South Shields

“It makes you feel underprivileged. If I was on a BT contract I could afford rent. I’d be able to live comfortably – and that’s just because I do exactly the same job.”

Matthew Brown, Truro

“It’s incredibly unfair that some of my colleagues are paid up to £7000 a year less for the same job. When I was agency I was earning around £13,000 but now I’m BT it’s closer to £10,000 – that’s the difference between existing and living.”

Lee Azzopardi, Gosforth

“My message to BT and Manpower is that they should sort this out now. I was on the lesser rate of pay for three years and I can remember living from day to day, constantly struggling with living costs.”

Iain Watt, Gosforth

“It’s downgrading people that you wouldn’t normally have to do this for. When you know someone sitting next to you doing an identical job, it is getting nearly double the pay.”

Danielle Culshaw, Warrington

“It’s very hard even gaining a ‘phone’ to get a job into work. A weekly bus ticket is around £34 and that’s a lot when I can’t even earn £750 per hour. It’s really hard to get by even to survive.”

SeanMcCann, Lancaster

“I’ve got a small daughter and my partner doesn’t work with my daughter and does work. I never thought an employee of Manpower is powerful. We can’t afford to do any of the normal things a family should be able to do.”

CLOSE THE GAP TOUR VIDEO ROUND-UP: MEMBERS EXPLAIN WHAT UNEQUAL TREATMENT MEANS TO THEM

December 2017 THE VOICE

www.cwu.org

December 2017 THE VOICE

www.cwu.org
Fears grow that the law is going soft on dog attacks

bitten through the letter box while delivering mail in February, as did Gavin Murrell, in Ipswich a couple of months later.

Cornwall postwoman Claire Stayner was seriously injured in Newquay, and Shannon Singer was mauled by two dogs, while on duty in Boston, Lincolnshire in July.

“But in each of these cases, the dogs remained with the owners and either a lenient sentence or no sentence at all was passed,” Dave tells The Voice, adding: “In none of those cases was there any sanction as to future dog ownership.”

In the case of Mr Kelly, the prosecution collapsed altogether when the judge directed the jury to “not guilty” verdict – a decision described by the national officer as “both ‘bizarre’ and ‘most unsatisfactory’” – while Suffolk Police decided not to bring to court the owner of the dog that attacked Mr Murrell and closed the matter with a ‘community resolution’.

Complaints about what was widely perceived as a “too lenient” sentence in the Ms Singer case were reported in our last edition and an appeal to the Crown Prosecution Service is being pursued in response to that verdict. An appeal is also under consideration with regard to Ms Stayner’s ordeal.

“The cases may go to a judicial review if the courts refuse to review the unduly lenient sentences which fail to meet mandatory sentencing guidelines,” said Dave.

“This is now starting to look like a developing trend – and it makes me wonder if the law is going soft on dog attacks.”

“It is good to win compensation payments for our members and it’s also good that we now have the law on our side in regard to attacks that take place on private property – but if lenient sentencing becomes the norm, this might make police forces reluctant to institute proceedings.”

“That’s why we’re determined to pursue case reviews and to keep the pressure on the relevant authorities to reconsider lenient sentences – there must be a clear deterrent for this small minority of irresponsible owners,” he concluded.

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/serious

Snapping success

Gloucestershire postman Tim El-Shawk has scooped top prize in the CWU education & training department’s annual digital photography competition with a stunning image of a waterfall in full flow.

One of 31 finalists selected from scores of entrants, Tim emerged triumphant after his photo was singled out in a national pol of members visiting an online gallery of the shortlisted entries.

The Gloucestershire Amal branch member, who wins £200 for his achievement – as well as the kudos of knowing his photographic skills were pitied against previous competition winners, including Durham postman Dave Gibbon whose highly acclaimed work has recently appeared in the BBC Wildlife Magazine – told The Voice: “I’m very humble to have won this – it’s a great competition – there are always some fantastic images submitted, which made it especially surprising that I actually won!”

Education and training department national project manager Paul Dovedy concludes: “Tim has been a regular participant in the competition over the years and has shared some lovely images with us over that time. His entry this year immediately caught the eye of the competition shortlisters with its wonderful composition and sense of movement.

There were some fantastic images submitted this year and the fact the winner was selected by public vote was a relief as it saved the team from having to make an exceptionally difficult decision!”

Remembering Alan Tuffin

TrIBUTES TO FORMER GS secretary Alan Tuffin who passed away on Friday November 10 at the age of 85.

Alan first joined the Post Office as a telegraph messenger boy in London in 1955 and worked as a postal and telegraph officer on Post Office Counters after a short time as a postman. Apart from National Service in the Royal Airforce he spent his whole working life in the Post Office and with the union.

Alan was elected to the Executive Council of the UPW (as it then was) in 1966 and became a full-time officer of the union in 1969. He was elected as deputy general secretary in 1979 and then as general secretary of the UCW in 1982.

“Alan retired in 1993 having made a huge contribution over many years to the UCW, its predecessor unions and to the wider trade union movement,” recalls CWU general secretary Dave Ward.

“His was a highly respected trade unionist of conviction and I know that he will be greatly missed by his friends and colleagues in the union and wider labour movement.”

“We are all very conscious of course of Alan’s wife Jean and their family.”

CWU Death Benefit

In accordance with CWU Rule 4.11, the CWU Death Benefit payment increased to £750 from October 1, 2017.

Any enquiries should be addressed to the senior deputy general secretary’s department on telephone number 020 8971 7237, or emailed to sdgs@cwu.org.
Bread and Roses - the art of struggle!

NEW AWARD LAUNCHED

The CWU has linked up with ‘Culture Matters’ – a collective of writers and activists who believe that culture is a vital part of the struggle for a better society – to launch a new national songwriting and spoken word award.

The new ‘Bread and Roses’ award aims to encourage artistic expression and the creation of material that is meaningful and relevant to working class people and communities – and, in turn, to encourage those communities to engage more with songwriting and the spoken word.

Five cash prizes of £100 are up for grabs for those submitting material which deals with any aspect of working class life and shows commitment to common people and the common good.

Thanks to sponsorship from the CWU’s North West Regional Learning Committee, the first 100 entries from CWU members will be exempted from the normal £5 entry fee.

CWU general secretary Dave Ward – who has always been interested in the power of songwriting to get a poignant message across, as well as the importance of promoting working class culture more widely – will be part of the panel judging entries, which need to have been submitted by February 2, 2018.

Launching the union’s new partnership with Culture Matters, Dave explains: “The arts and culture generally are vital to the labour movement, and working class communities across the country.

“Good access to the arts, sports and other cultural activities are part of the social wage. State support needs to be rebalanced so that working people everywhere can enjoy cheap, accessible and good quality provision.

“We’re sponsoring this Award because we want to encourage our members in the CWU and working people everywhere to express themselves creatively on themes that matter to them as workers.

“So get writing and get performing, and send your entries in!”

Reach for the stars and get your entries in by February 2, 2018.

To find out more visit: www.cwu.org/news/bread-roses-songwriting-spoken-word-award/

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Targeting 100% after Action Month

GOING FOR GROWTH

The CWU’s annual month-long focus on organising and recruitment across the telecoms and financial services (TFSB) sector netted more than 300 new members during October thanks to a hive of activity by branches across the country.

Now the on-going drive to maximise membership levels across the TFSB sector shifted to a new constituency-wide ‘Target 100’ campaign that will launch in earnest in January.

The aim is to identify, approach and sign up any CWU-registered grade employees who are not already in membership for whatever reason – the special focus on recognised workplaces being driven by the fact that all employees in those companies benefit from the union’s collective bargaining successes.

Those successes, after all, are directly related to the union’s negotiating strength that is, in turn, largely determined by membership strength.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr explains: “The simple truth is that the more members we have in any given business the more we can deliver for everyone – so the recruitment of the ‘missing members’ that undoubtedly exist in every single company in which we have recognition is vitally important.”

Andy stressed he hoped the initiative would build on the success of October’s Action Month activities which, while netting fewer than the 500-plus new members who joined as a direct result of Action Month last year, demonstrated a growing awareness on the part of branches of the importance of keeping on top of the on-going recruitment challenge on a year-round basis.

Andy Kerr

February 2, 2018

One of the US workers at the meeting had been sacked as a direct result of her Communication Workers of America (CWA) union activities, and the others told of a climate of fear that is being systematically orchestrated by management in a bid to deter employees from seeking trade union representation.

Speaking after the meeting deputy general secretary Andy Kerr pledged the CWU’s total support for CWA’s attempts to organise on behalf of Santander’s US workforce.

That support will take the form of an on-going dialogue between CWA activists and their CWU counterparts – the intention being to showcase the positive approach shown to unions by Santander in the UK, and across much of the rest of the world, to workers in America so they can fully appreciate how out-of-sync Santander USA’s management is with prevailing management practices elsewhere.

Full story and video at www.cwu.org/news/solidarity-santander

SOLIDARITY WITH SANTANDER WORKERS IN AMERICA

UNION BUSTING SCANDAL

The CWU has delivered an unequivocal message of solidarity to trade unionists in America.

A group of members who are battling for basic union rights in the face of blatant union-busting activity by the American bosses.

Last month CWU representatives from Bootle, Lancaster and Bradford heard harrowing first-hand accounts of the depths to which the company’s US division has plunged to keep unions out of North America’s entirely un-unionised banking sector.

As a Post Office or Royal Mail employee, it’s perfectly normal for you to hold a Post Office Insurance Society (POIS) savings plan with us. Maybe you’ve forgotten all about it, or maybe you haven’t checked it for a while, perhaps you believe it’s too small to be of any use.

Whatever the reason, it’s worth getting in touch. We’ll tell you what you’re holding and how much it’s worth, and ensure all your details are up to date. We can even remind you of all the Member Benefits you’re entitled to.

Are we holding something precious for you?

As a Post Office or Royal Mail employee, it’s perfectly normal for you to hold a Post Office Insurance Society (POIS) savings plan with us. Maybe you’ve forgotten all about it, or maybe you haven’t checked it for a while, perhaps you believe it’s too small to be of any use.

Whatever the reason, it’s worth getting in touch. We’ll tell you what you’re holding and how much it’s worth, and ensure all your details are up to date. We can even remind you of all the Member Benefits you’re entitled to.

For more information call:

0800 101 8311 or visit www.pois.co.uk

A police blitz has come as a direct result of CWA’s successful efforts to organise and negotiate at the company’s UK and Irish branches.

SPEAKING OUT AGAINST SANTANDER USA’S UNION-BUSTING

See report on developments at Santander’s branch and Swiss branches at www.cwu.org/news/santander

FULL STORY AT www.cwu.org/news/bread-roses-songwriting-spoken-word-award/

 Reach for the stars and get your entries in by February 2, 2018.
General secretary Dave Ward gave detailed speeches to each event, emphasising that increasing the union’s commitment to equality on all fronts is a key objective of the re-design project, which is gathering pace throughout the CWU.

“I’ve enjoyed visiting this year’s forums, meeting some fantastic activists and I’ve come away extremely impressed by the work they do across each of our businesses and functions,” he told The Voice.

“The debates and guest speakers were thought-provoking, and the individual accounts from delegates of how equality challenges in the workplace are being recognised, tackled and overcome were inspiring.

“And we’re now well into the big debate about how we, together, are going to improve equality right across this union and make sure it’s central to everything we do,” Dave added.

“As I stated at each of the events, trade unions are the organisations to bridge all of the divides in society and a union that fully reflects its gender and diversity is a stronger union for all.”

In her speeches, CWU national equality officer Linda also stressed the need for the union to ensure that the re-design process advanced the cause of equality.

Women’s Conference

Women’s Conference experienced its first-ever card vote and attracted a record number of delegates, with first-time conference speaker Holly Kate making history, when the vote on the motion she moved – calling for branch equality audits – was so close that the procedure was invoked.

Holly explained that the intention was to assist branch women’s officers – and other equality officers – “to secure the financial resources to visit branches, start campaigns, or visit members across their branch area” and an annual “equality audit would show the amount of equality activity within a branch and give clear data to address any non-engagement.”

Delegates approved the motion and also selected it for submission to CWU General Conference next April.

Dignity for women at work was the key issue behind the top two industrial motions – each of which demanded appropriate female facilities for Royal Mail and BT workers respectively.

Sue Winstone, from Gloucestershire Amal Branch, moved the first motion, which described as “appalling” the lack of accredited/toilet facilities for Royal Mail and BT workers respectively.

And “justice not charity” was the key theme of guest speaker Paula Peters, from the Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) movement, who explained the organisation’s fighting philosophy and the direct-action activities it carries out, including occupying public spaces and forcing politicians to listen.

“We are not weak – we are warriors and fighters, with fire in our bottles and strength in our hearts,” she insisted, and, after pledging DPAC’s support for our union’s Royal Mail members in their current dispute, she said: “It’s time for everyone to rise up together.”

A resolution committing the union to giving its full support to DPAC will be sent to next year’s CWU General Conference, after it was chosen from among the eight resolutions adopted.

And the need to work with and support education unions in tackling the growing problem of mental health issues among school-age children is the subject of the other motion to be submitted to the union’s highest decision-making body.

Disability Conference

In his opening speech to the Disability Conference, advisory committee chair Tony Sneddon told the fascinating story of a 1912 strike in Bristol organised by the National League of the Blind – “the first organisation of disabled workers, whose principle was ‘justice not charity’.”

Tony told Conference that in today’s society, it was vital for workers with disabilities to fight to protect the rights that these early pioneers of the struggle fought for and won.

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“We are not weak – we are warriors and fighters, with fire in our bottles and strength in our hearts,” she insisted, and, after pledging DPAC’s support for our union’s Royal Mail members in their current dispute, she said: “It’s time for everyone to rise up together.”

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LGBT Conference

Winning equal rights for Northern Ireland’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans community was top of the agenda at LGBT Conference.

First motion of the day, moved by Cathy Chilcott of Bristol & District Amal Branch, noted that “Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK and Ireland where same-sex marriage is still banned.”

The CWU must “continue to defend existing equality legislation across the UK and support campaigns to achieve same-sex marriage legislation in Northern Ireland,” Cathy urged. Greater Manchester Combined Branch delegate Tara Morgan introduced the next proposition, which described attempts to exclude trans women from women’s spaces as “discrimination.”

The motion called on the union to “campaign to ensure that trans women are not discriminated against, both in their daily lives and political activity.”

Tara talked further about the difficulties faced by trans people in society and commented: “This hasn’t been a good year for trans women. There’s a hell of a long way to go – trans women are at the bottom of the barrel.”

Maria Exall, from Greater London Combined Branch, told Conference: “It’s vitally important that we stand together as L, G, B and T in defence of our rights and with our straight brothers and sisters, changing our workplaces and our society, as she moved another motion aimed at fighting discrimination against trans people, which set out four key points of principle for a CWU submission to the Government’s Review of the Gender Recognition Act.

Other resolutions dealt with the issue of equality training for reps and the issue of equality in the union’s own publications, while the Show Racism the Red Card campaign won full support and there was a poignant appeal from veteran London Postal Engineering Branch activist Cyril Omiyekoo in support of a motion to raise awareness of the higher risk that groups of BAME men face from prostate cancer.

Black Workers Conference

The first resolution agreed by the Black Workers Conference called on the union’s postal executive to establish a programme of industrial relations (IR) training for branch black and minority ethnic (BAME) reps.

Moving the motion, Saff Khan of North West Not Branch explained the intentions behind it and insisted: “It’s not about race, it’s about education,” while Dori Bibbons, supporting the motion on behalf of Nottingham Amal Branch suggested that IR reps could be asked to help with training by inviting BAME reps to “shadow” some of their activities.

And the next proposition on the agenda – moved by Josh Williams of Greater London Combined Branch – called for the ethnicity of members being put through performance management processes to be recorded in order to establish whether BAME workers are being discriminated against, saying that discrimination “has a negative impact on life.”

Other resolutions dealt with the issue of equality training for reps and the issue of equality in the union’s own publications, while the Show Racism the Red Card campaign won full support and there was a poignant appeal from veteran London Postal Engineering Branch activist Cyril Omiyekoo in support of a motion to raise awareness of the higher risk that groups of BAME men face from prostate cancer.
W ith the Mersey being the perfect backdrop, 78 young trade unionists descended on Liverpool in October for the CWU National Young Workers Education Event. It was a full house and, apart from a welcome increase in the number of women present, for the first time the delegation was split 50/50 between the Postal and Telecoms & Financial Services constituencies.

The weekend got off to a poigniant start with the North West Regional Young Workers Committee taking part in a HOPEWalk to raise awareness of Papryus UK – the charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide that the young workers’ section is supporting as part of its Charity Promise. The HOPEWalk, took them around Liverpool in glorious sunshine on Friday October 13, sporting Papyrus t-shirts and handing out flyers.

STATE OF THE UNION

Proceedings started for real, however, on the evening of Friday October 13 – and a warm welcome was extended by CWU president, Jane Loftus, and senior deputy general secretary, Tony Kearns, who spoke about the need for young people to get more involved in the union. His ‘state of union’ speech brought home the stark reality of declining membership, but he stressed the enthusiastic response which he had received from young members to grow in confidence, brighter future.

His ‘state of union’ speech needed no more to be done to open up a wider debate and ensure easier access to mental health services for all.

Workshops were hosted by Papyrus UK, Care Solidarity Campaign, Andrew Towers (Head of Political Strategy) and the Ron Todd Foundation. The Ron Todd Foundation workshop participants quickly put their words into action with a trip onto the streets to hand out donated food and drink to the homeless.

CWU general secretary Dave Ward used his time slot to speak openly to the delegates about the ongoing CWU Re-design project and its role within it. Like Tony, Dave urged the younger members to participate fully in the debate to shape the union for the future and ensure it is tailored to meet not just industrial challenges directly affecting members in the workplace but also wider world challenges such as the ‘New Deal for Workers’ that the CWU’s death benefit drew plenty of debate but was eventually rejected.

Thanking attendees for their enthusiastic participation throughout an ‘inspiring weekend’, National Young Workers Committee chair Jake Fear told The Voice: “It was amazing to see so many of the younger members getting involved, speaking up and in some cases standing their ground; you could see they felt comfortable enough in the environment to do so. It was a truly great event.”

- A full report can be viewed at https://www. cwu.org/event/national-young-workers- education-event-2017

- Following the Liverpool HOPEWalk the CWU has backed the newly launched Zero Suicide Alliance which offers free training to help practitioners recognize the early warning signs that someone could be contemplating suicide. See www.cwu.org/briefing/zero

- The CWU has an online course on CWU Leadership for those who want to find out more about Grunwick. As well as details of the origins of the dispute and how the CWU came to be right at the heart of an iconic moment in British history and original video footage including a round table discussion of those involved 40 years ago. It also pulls together lots of different periods of time and a wide range of sources. Just go to www.cwu.org/leadership and look in the View From The Floor section.

With the Mersey being the perfect backdrop, 78 young trade unionists descended on Liverpool in October for the CWU National Young Workers Education Event. It was a full house and, apart from a welcome increase in the number of women present, for the first time the delegation was split 50/50 between the Postal and Telecoms & Financial Services constituencies.

The weekend got off to a poigniant start with the North West Regional Young Workers Committee taking part in a HOPEWalk to raise awareness of Papryus UK – the charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide that the young workers’ section is supporting as part of its Charity Promise. The HOPEWalk, took them around Liverpool in glorious sunshine on Friday October 13, sporting Papyrus t-shirts and handing out flyers.

STATE OF THE UNION

Proceedings started for real, however, on the evening of Friday October 13 – and a warm welcome was extended by CWU president, Jane Loftus, and senior deputy general secretary, Tony Kearns, who spoke about the need for young people to get more involved in the union. His ‘state of union’ speech brought home the stark reality of declining membership, but he stressed the enthusiastic response which he had received from young members to grow in confidence, brighter future.
POSTAL ‘CATACOMBS’ OPENED TO THE PUBLIC

A new museum celebrating the history of the British Post Office from its earliest origins has opened in central London. Part of the story it tells sheds light on the forgotten subterranean world of Mail Rail – a marvel of early 20th Century engineering that once moved four million items a day deep beneath the congested streets of the capital. Simon Alford reports.

What we regard as modern problems have often been around for generations. Take congestion in central London and Victorian predictions that “in 50 years every street in London will be buried under nine feet of manure” on account of the number of horses on the roads. (The problem is not at all new – in 1854 – just as the internal combustion engine was starting to change the nature of the emissions problem – construction began on an ingenius solution to the problem of moving mail across the city-province capital. Hacked out by hand, a perfect miniature underground rail system was completed. It linked the main London sorting offices with the mainline rail terminals where mail to and from the regions was disgorged or picked up by the iconic Travelling Post Office (TPO), another remarkable innovation that was immortalised in WH Auden’s poem Night Mail.

The timing of the tunnels’ completion, however, could not have been worse. With WWI then reaching its tragic height, the focus on the war meant that operating equipment for the 6.5-mile network couldn’t be ordered – so for the first years of its life the excavations served as a clandestine store for priceless artefacts from museums and art galleries, including the Rosetta Stone.

It wasn’t until just before Christmas 1927 that Mail Rail finally opened, immediately cutting the journey time for mail transportations across London from a few hours to just 30 minutes.

Little known about by the public at large – and hidden from the view of everyone except the 220 postal workers who worked in its bowels – the system ran almost non-stop, day and night, for over 75 years.

SAD END...

All that ended, however, on May 30, 2003, when – despite a hard fought CWU campaign – the last postal train completed its final delivery, and the entire operation was decommissioned and mothballed.

Despite the union’s compelling arguments that the very congestion-bearing reasons for which Mail Rail had been built were just as relevant in the new Millennium as they had been when the idea was first conceived, it was changes in the way Royal Mail operated its sorting activities in London, the merging of a number of offices and the gradual decommissioning of the TPO network that were the final nails in Mail Rail’s coffin.

In 2003 there were only three places left on the line, and the sorting for mail going on to trains was taking place at Willesden in West London, and this railway didn’t go there,” explains the Postal Museum’s head of collections Chris Taft.

“The railway simply no longer went to where it needed to go, and the volume of mail being moved between those three locations wasn’t enough to justify a dedicated railway.”

Former UCW deputy general secretary and Labour peer, Tony Clarke – who, prior to September’s opening of a one kilometre section of the railway to Postal Museum visitors, was one of a comparatively select group ever to have travelled on a railway that was never intended for human cargo – still believes the decision to close Mail Rail was a mistake, however.

Recalling how he was once offered a clandestine ride to the next stop when visiting Mount Pleasant as an inquisitive 14-year-old telegraph boy in 1946, Lord Clarke pointed to the CWU’s suggestions that the railway could have been adapted to make deliveries to shops in Oxford Street.

“I felt then, and still do, that we should be trying to keep anything we can off the roads,” he told The Voice.

Other less practical ideas from different quarters included using the tunnels as a giant mushroom farm or as a subterranean cycle super-highway, but these too came to nothing, and until the Postal Heritage Trust charity’s plans for a new Postal Museum crystallised in 2011, it seemed the tunnels could remain forever silent.

NEW BEGINNING

Six years and £26 million later, thanks in part to a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, Mail Rail is now poised to become a popular fixture on London’s tourist map.

The journey on the specially made pint-sized passenger train that rumbles for 15 minutes along a narrow-gauge track and through original platforms is fascinating. Audio-visual technology and projections on the curving walls recreate the frantic activity of yesteryear, displaying a vivid, almost ghostly, picture of a lost era when Mail Rail could justifiably be viewed as the ‘beating heart’ of the postal service.

As with the main galleries of the Postal Museum that stands on the opposite side of Phoenix Place – just adjacent to the huge Mount Pleasant Mail Centre – the story of Mail Rail is told in an imaginative and thought-provoking way that centres on the importance of communication in our collective social history.

Hidden from view, the Mail Rail system ran almost non-stop, day and night, for over 75 years...

“The story we tell is really the story of the first social network – the first organised system for people to keep in touch,” stresses Chris Taft.

“Think of social media today and how much people rely on it. In the days before the railways and the TPO system, people were trying to keep in touch in their own unique way – by placing the right mail in the right slots.”

Taft noted the significance of Mail Rail as the UK’s most significant example of early industrial design. “In terms of what was achieved – and the importance of that achievement – Mail Rail is on par with all the great engineering projects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries,” he said.

The TPO system was essentially a tractor – it had to be driven by a person – but Mail Rail was an ingenious solution to the problem of moving mail across the jam-prone capital.

Turn of a century ago it was, perhaps, the most advanced system in the world. Mail Rail is a monument to the vital social contribution the postal service made to our society at a time when the only way most ordinary people could keep in touch was by letter. That’s why the mail system has been so important from a social history point of view, and why the service has been vital for morale in times of war.”

Both parts of the museum are highly interactive, with special attention paid to activities that help participants understand the intricacies of how different elements of the system worked. One particular favourite for young and old alike is a re-creation in the Mail Rail exhibition area that aims to show what it was like to sort mail at speed on a fast-moving TPO train, with two participants encouraged to compete against each other by placing the right mail in the right slots. Frames at speed while being rocked from side to side.

Over the road, the broader Postal Museum tells the history of the service in a series of zones describing the beginnings, popularity, and social and artistic contribution of Royal Mail, as well as the challenges it faced along the way and the way it innovated to overcome them. This is not an exhibition targeted at philatelists (though a complete page of mint-condition Penny Blacks is included) – nor primarily a business history – but instead an exploration of a communications revolution and people’s need and desire to stay in touch over time and distance.

With regards to Mail Rail, some may regard the transformation of a place that once employed hundreds into a tourist attraction as rather sad – but at least it is now preserved for the future as a monument to the vital social contribution made by all those who worked there.

The Postal Museum is at Phoenix Place, Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0DA. For visitor information and ticket prices visit www.postalmuseum.org

At current Royal Mail employees are entitled to unlimited free access to The Postal Museum (subject to restrictions on production of their staff ID from now until 30 September 2013 – and one free ride on Mail Rail, which normally costs £7.50). Further details at www.cwu.org/special
In October, millions of confidential documents relating to offshore investments were leaked to the German newspaper Suddeutsche Zeitung, the same newspaper that first obtained the similarly revealing ‘Panama Papers’ in 2016. Such was the volume of information that the newspaper contacted the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists to probe further and, perhaps appropriately, the 2017 documents were made public on November 5th – quickly being dubbed the ‘Paradise Papers’, reflecting the tax havens used by some 120,000 individuals and companies.

Among those named in the documents are Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton, who used loopholes in the system to avoid tax on his private jet – one of 957 ‘imported’ into the Isle of Man according to the Paradise Papers; reflecting the tax havens used by some 120,000 individuals and companies.

Musicians Bono and Shakira also feature, the U2 front man being listed as an investor in a Lithuanian shopping centre via a Malta-based company and the Colombian singer, who lives in Barcelona, is reportedly formally registered as a resident of the Bahamas.

“Yes, there are a large number of high-profile individuals about whom serious questions clearly need to be asked,” says Tony, “but even their huge wealth pales in comparison to the likes of Facebook, Twitter, Apple, Disney, Uber, Nike, Walmart, Allianz, Siemens, McDonald’s and Yahoo! – some of the biggest corporations on the planet and which are all named in these papers as owning offshore companies.

“It’s the difference between millions and billions,” he explained, adding: “The enormous fortunes that these enormous companies generate are of a magnitude that actually makes a real difference to the economies of countries like ours.

“And most shocking of all is the fact that these tax avoidance practices – the offshoring, the ‘shell’ companies which exist purely for tax reasons – are all legal and there’s even government assistance for it.”

A change in the law to oblige all companies to pay tax on all revenues generated in the UK at UK tax rates would bring billions in revenues to the public purse, he argues, particularly at a time when our NHS is under pressure, our housing need is at an all-time high, and our other public services are being squeezed in the name of ‘balancing the books’.

As an example, Tony cites an estimate from the HMRC (Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs) that they lose over £4 billion per year as a result of tax avoidance.

“And to give that figure some perspective, that’s the equivalent of over 80,000 primary school teachers or over 400,000 hip operations in the NHS,” he explains.

“Failing to pay this tax means that either ordinary people carry the cost of these services or they are not funded and under so-called ‘austerity measures’, we know it’s the latter – so tax dodging for the rich is paid for by austerity for the rest of us.

“Ordinary workers have no means of not paying their tax – it’s taken out at source, whether they like it or not,” Tony continues, pointing out that, if wealthy individuals and companies are not paying their fair share, then this “increases the burden on the rest of the population who are not able to use these loopholes.

“Ordinary workers are legally able to avoid tax while the rest of us pay far more, proportionally, from our respective incomes.

“It proves that there is one law for the rich and one for the rest of us – there’s more than a whiff of corruption about such a system – it stinks and it has to change,” he insists.

“There has to be a radical overhaul of the tax system.”

“We need a radical overhaul of our tax system,” demands our senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns in response to the Paradise Papers tax avoidance scandal.