Centre stage at Labour

Corbyn endorses new CWU campaign in triumphant week for union P19 & 25
What type of union do we need to be to face the future?

This is the key question that will be debated at the Special Redesign Conference in November. And we are pushing a strong agenda that continues the direction we are taking and is fully in line with the commitments I made when I stood for GS.

This is about breaking down barriers and allowing us to work better as one union – continuing to refresh our work on communications, politics, education and training; to bring more young people through and to bring equality into the mainstream of what we do.

The overriding aim of Redesign is to build on our position as the strongest workplace union in the country and ensure the CWU leads the way in the fight to reassert trade union values. All of our members know the importance of this from their own experiences. In the postal sector we’ve seen new companies coming in to undercut Royal Mail and post offices being closed. In the telecoms and financial sectors we’ve seen increasing pressure on staff through targets – and competition driving down, rather than encouraging, investment.

NO MORE RACE TO THE BOTTOM

I’ve never been more convinced that in response to these things we need to change the rules of the game and shift the balance of forces in the world of work. This is why our campaign for a New Deal for Workers is so important.

As part of this campaign, in May this year thousands of us marched in London calling for an end to the ‘race to the bottom’ on employment standards and a bold new range of employment rights for workers everywhere. If the trade union movement is serious about delivering this we now need to drive the campaign forward.

We set out our plan for this at the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party Conference in September – crucially I believe we need a day of action in 2019 and we will be working with other unions to mobilise workers to take part in this.

CRUNCH TIME FOR BREXIT

As we approach crunch time on Brexit we will, of course, also be making clear that we will campaign against a deal that leaves our members worse off. But I’m not in favour of a second referendum that would simply be a re-run of the debate that has divided our country. And, although I support all options being left on table, the priority must be to campaign for a General Election. The job of the trade union movement is to unite workers - whether they voted ‘leave’ or ‘remain’. I’m clear that the real fight for workers’ rights starts here in the UK – not in Brussels.

Finally, I enjoyed the recent show on LBC where we were able to put forward proper trade union arguments on national radio – more of this to come!
Changing the CWU

With activists from across the country poised to gather in Bournemouth for a Special General Conference on the Redesign of the CWU, CWU national president Beryl Shepherd explains the crucial importance of an event that will help determine the shape and strength of the union for many years to come.

We are now only days away from the union’s Special General Conference that has been called specifically to discuss the Redesign of the CWU. This conference is the culmination of a process of consultation that has taken place with branches and the output of which has been considered, at length, by the National Executive Council. Whilst it is the culmination of a process it is only the first step in the transformation of the CWU.

Redesigning the CWU is a real opportunity for us to ensure that we have a union that is fit for life in the 21st Century. A union that is capable and effective in representing the best interests of our members both inside and outside of the workplace. A union that can stay strong and stand alone without the need to seek merger with others.

Redesigning the CWU is a real opportunity for us to ensure that we have a union that is fit for life in the 21st Century...

BERYL SHEPHERD

To achieve all of this we need to manage our ‘financial resources’ and have the most effective structures possible for our ‘people resources’. Managing our financial resources is not simply about cost-cutting, although a reduction in costs does play a part. It is also about investing money in the right places to provide the very best services to members and their representatives that we can.

Many employers are heard to say “that our people are most valuable asset” (I’m not convinced that their subsequent actions always prove that to be their deeply held belief!) – but, in the CWU, our people resources (our employees, members, activists, representatives, executive members and officers) are, undoubtedly, our most valuable asset and we must have the structures and organisation in place that will work positively for everyone.

This undoubtedly means change but there is still a place for everyone and plenty of work to be done for all those who want to contribute within the CWU. Titles, committees and the makeup of committees will change – we need that change to be effective – but opportunities will remain for everyone who wants to, to be able to make their contribution.

I have been a member of this union and its predecessor unions for all of my working life and have been an active trades unionist for most of that time also. It is a privilege to represent my peers in the workplace and to try to influence society outside of the workplace, and I know that many readers of this article feel the same way. To carry on this work effectively going forward means that it is time to review, reshape, and redesign the CWU.

This is a significant moment in our history, our present and, most importantly, for our future. It is the members and reps of today who look forward to a bright tomorrow and it is the responsibility of all of us, when we take part in the Special Conference in November to face up to the challenge of change and move forward with a redesigned CWU that will serve the loyalty of our members and their representatives both now and in the future.

See video at: www.facebook.com/ThecommunicationsUnion/videos/2220016854897854/

Listen to a special CWU podcast on the Redesign project at: https://soundcloud.com/user-53225609/cwu-podcast-pilot/s-Sne3Z
Openreach mass TUPE delivers no unwelcome surprises

Categorical assurances have been sought and received by the CWU that this month’s mass TUPE of around 30,000 Openreach employees to Openreach Ltd will not result in any unwelcome surprises for members.

The long-anticipated TUPE, which concluded on October 1, stems from Ofcom’s demands for a beefed-up ‘legal separation’ of Openreach from the rest of BT Group. It represents the biggest TUPE transfer of employees from one legal employer to another in UK corporate history.

While opposed from the outset by the CWU, even before the formal consultation commenced in July the union had received categorical assurances from BT that, barring the name change of Openreach members’ legal employer, little else would change.

That was reinforced at a special branch forum in August where Openreach CEO Clive Selley explained that the TUPE process had not been a decision made by the business, but one imposed on it by statutory regulator Ofcom.

“There’s no ‘sneaky plan’ to use TUPE to do something else and there’s no agenda to change Ts&Cs – we’re just fulfilling our legal obligation, imposed on us by Ofcom,” he insisted.

Mr Selley told the briefing that the TUPE process had already happened to him and it had “not made a jot of difference to me.”

It wouldn’t make any difference to Openreach workers either, the CEO continued, assuring them that they will still see their pay, terms and conditions negotiated “at BT level,” although there are plans for a new uniform and a new Openreach logo.

There is, however, no TUPE process in Northern Ireland at this time, because of various complications relating to its specific circumstances.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told The Voice: “Despite the early assurances we secured from the company that there would be no changes to the terms and conditions of our members as a result of the transfer, throughout the consultation period the CWU stuck rigidly to its Conference policy that any deviation from that line would be met with the strongest possible resistance from the union, including a campaign for industrial action if appropriate.

“I’m pleased to say, however, that the TUPE agreement we’ve ultimately secured meets all the terms of the Conference motion, not just safeguarding our members’ Ts&Cs but also ensuring that free movement is maintained between BT and Openreach Ltd, including redeployment rights as defined in NewGRID. Importantly, assisted job search for ill health reasons has been maintained across BT Group.

“As such, although this is a TUPE that the CWU would have preferred not to have happened, we are as confident as we can be that it will prove to have been a seamless process without any detriment to our members.”

Andy Kerr
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (T&FS)
Last week the CWU agreed a joint statement with the business setting out how the shorter working week is being implemented across Royal Mail Group.

The union’s successful bid to reduce working hours (which delivers the biggest phased cut in working time for a generation by 2022 or before) along with the other benefits in the Four Pillars agreement, was a proactive and progressive response to the numerous challenges members face from the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’, the gig economy, unfair competition and growing workplace insecurity.

The shorter working week aims to protect members’ employment, standard of living and retirement security, while defending the future of this great public service.

The agreement provided for a one-hour reduction (or equivalent benefit) to be deployed in October 2018 and the CWU’s national officers and representatives at every level have been working hard to achieve it.

Despite many differing starting points for different groups of members, the CWU has made excellent progress and agreements are now in place to deploy the first one-hour reduction from October in the vast majority of units, functions and grades.

Those units that have not yet deployed are being offered as much support as possible to ensure the hour reduction and revised pay arrangements (increase in the hourly rate and flow through to other pay elements) will take effect at the earliest opportunity.

Securing the first hour reduction for so many of our members in such a short space of time represents a monumental achievement and I would like to thank everyone for their effort and hard work.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

RMPFS workers set the agenda

Branch secretaries, senior field reps and workplace reps gathered in Birmingham last month for the first national policy forum for Royal Mail’s Property & Facilities Services workers.

In his opening speech, assistant secretary Ray Ellis reminded everyone about the “massive achievement” of bringing the operation – formerly known as ROMEC – wholly back within Royal Mail Group two years ago.

ROMEC had been partly owned by Royal Mail and part-owned by a private company, but back in 2014, Royal Mail had initially intended to completely outsource the operation – which sparked off a big fightback by the union and a national campaign to bring ROMEC completely in-house.

As well as putting forward the logical business case for in-housing during discussions with the company, the union also had the unanimous support of CWU Conference, with the potential of large-scale industrial action on the issue.

And this mixture of the “iron fist and the velvet glove” had been “useful in convincing Royal Mail that outsourcing would not be pain-free for them,” Ray pointed out.

“Our members remained loyal to Royal Mail and that loyalty must be repaid by the business,” he continued, as he introduced the agenda of the day, consisting of 13 policy recommendations and 12 amendments from branches.

As delegates got down to work, speakers came to the rostrum from branches all around the country and the issues were debated with seven of the 12 amendments being approved, and card votes held on others.

Pension parity – specifically, auto enrolment in the CDC scheme – the Real Living Wage and upper quartile pay rates, the shorter working week, an improved IR framework, and a big push to in-house as much contracted-out work as possible were the key demands of the day, a programme which “sets a high bar,” according to assistant secretary Mark Baulch.

“A lot has been achieved,” he continued, highlighting last year’s pay deal for this group of members as a “demonstration of what can be achieved when we all stick together,” but, he added: “There’s still a lot to do and pensions will be a difficult issue, but we’re determined to get the same deal as the rest of Royal Mail Group.”

In an enthusiastically received speech, deputy general secretary postal Terry Pullinger told the forum that he welcomed the positive strategic programme they had adopted and added that, although the agreed policy agenda was ambitious, the CWU “shouldn’t limit our ambition.”
“Steady and timely progress” is being made towards the establishment of the new collective defined contribution (CDC) pension scheme, reports CWU deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger.

A key component of the Four Pillars of Security national agreement, CDC will mean that every Royal Mail employee can access equal pensions benefits and can look forward to retirement security in the future.

Some new legislation is required in order for the scheme to be introduced and, in the time since the Four Pillars deal was struck, both the CWU and Royal Mail have been working together to try to get this legislation passed as promptly as possible.

“The more support from all sides of industry, business and politics that we can garner now and in the next couple of months, and the broader the consensus we can build for CDC, the better able we will be to get this legislation passed as promptly as possible.

“The more support from all sides of industry, business and politics that we can garner now and in the next couple of months, and the broader the consensus we can build for CDC, the better able we will be to get this legislation passed as promptly as possible.”

When The Voice caught up with Terry, he had just given a keynote speech to a seminar of the Westminster Business Forum, where he and Royal Mail governance officer Jon Millidge shared the stage with senior figures from the UK pensions industry, senior figures of leading companies, professors, academics and business editors.

The seminar was chaired by former DWP Select Committee chair Archibald (now Lord) Kirkwood, and the subject of CDC took up the whole second half of the event.

“It was certainly a very experienced and knowledgeable audience,” said Terry, “and it was extremely encouraging to hear such a positive response from some of the UK’s real experts on pensions.

Just a few days before that, Terry had been up in Manchester, addressing the Trade Union Congress and winning the formal support of Britain’s labour movement for “the introduction of CDC as an alternative to DC provision” and a united call “for the Government to permit CDC schemes in the UK” within a wider TUC composite motion on pensions.

“It was a proud moment for me to have the chance once again to address the TUC on behalf of this union,” says Terry.

“This time last year, I was asking for their support and solidarity as we moved towards an industrial action ballot and this year, I was able to report to them on the success of our Four Pillars campaign and there was a very warm reception from our fellow trade unionists.”

A significant milestone was reached last month when the Government announced the launch of a formal consultation into CDC, a process which starts on October 18th and will last until December.

In his September statement to Parliament, Under-Secretary of State for Pensions and Financial Inclusion Guy Opperman said: “Collective forms of pension saving offer interesting new possibilities, and the Department (for Work and Pensions) is currently working through proposals for the first collective defined contribution schemes in the UK.

“We intend to launch a formal consultation in the autumn.”

Describing this as a “welcome step forward on the journey to a new pensions scheme,” Terry explained that, after the consultation, the next stage would be the publication of a Government White Paper, and then a new Pensions Bill by next summer.

“We’ve been working very hard on this, and over the next period, we’re going to be working even harder to ensure that, when CDC does come before Parliament, its benefits to workers – and to the economy as a whole – are widely known and, most importantly, it can be introduced as promptly as possible for our members in Royal Mail Group.

“So far, it’s been steady and timely progress – and going forward, we’ll be moving further in the right direction to achieve our historic objective of fair pensions for all.”
Agency campaign triumph as BT ditches PBA contracts

A major victory has been won in the CWU’s Close the Gap campaign against the travesty of unequal pay for identical work – with BT finally agreeing to long-standing union demands for an end to the use of exploitative ‘Pay Between Assignment’ (PBA) contracts.

Simon Alford reports

Following a breakthrough in talks with the CWU, BT has pledged to phase out PBA contracts by the end of March 2019, spelling an end to a decades-old resourcing model under which thousands of workers have been employed long term on agency contracts with pay rates and Ts&Cs well below that of their directly employed counterparts.

Despite wave after wave of agency conversions in recent years, which have seen more than 800 Manpower employees offered permanent BT contracts, over 1,000 agency employees continue to conduct predominantly call centre roles across the company.

All that is about to change, however, with most of those agency workers now set to be offered BT contracts by the end of the financial year.

The vast majority of those benefiting are currently on particularly exploitative PBA contracts, which sidestep agency workers’ rights to pay equal to that of directly employed counterparts after 12 weeks in a given role by way of a legal loophole in the UK’s Agency Worker Regulations. The new deal will mean job security, better pay, pension rights, improvements to sick pay and other key rights.

If agency workers are hired in the future, BT will no longer use PBA contracts and will commit to equal pay from Day One.

Initially, the main effect of this new deal will be felt in the company’s Consumer Division, but the principles of the agreement will be carried out across the company as a whole.

In BT Consumer the resourcing revolution will be implemented in two tranches, with the vast majority of Manpower employees in the division being offered permanent BT contracts in either this month (October) or in November.

Additionally, the division will be creating 600 new direct labour jobs as part of a wider commitment to answer 100 per cent of customer calls in its UK and Ireland call centres by 2020.

VINDICATION FOR CWU

Welcoming both the immediate announcement by BT Consumer – and BT Group’s wider commitment to draw a line under an exploitative agency resourcing model that the union has bitterly opposed from the outset – deputy general secretary Andy Kerr said: “This is a major shift in BT’s call centre resourcing strategy and vindicates the hard work that has been carried out at every level of the CWU to expose the many injustices that agency workers have faced since their usage became widespread in the early to mid-2000s.

“BT Group’s belated decision to call time on the use of PBA contracts is fantastic news – and there’s no doubt that tireless CWU campaigning has played a significant part in bringing this change about.”

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge, who has led the CWU’s agency campaigning for more than a decade – spearheading no fewer than four separate campaigns in that period as the precise nature of the injustices faced by agency workers have evolved in an ever changing political and industrial landscape – concludes: “While it’s very welcome that BT is finally doing the right thing by the hard working agency employees on which it has relied for so long, it needs to be remembered that agency injustices, which have become increasingly synonymous with the usage of exploitative PBA contracts, are rife in the wider world of work.

“As such, although our Close the Gap campaign has now achieved its aims within the context of our own membership, there will be no let up in the CWU’s ongoing and highly successful political campaign for what’s really needed – namely a change in the law that abolishes PBA contracts once and for all.”

See the latest on the political campaign at www.cwu.org/news/campaign and reactions from across the country to the CWU’s ‘Close the Gap’ campaign victory in BT at www.cwu.org/news/CTG-victory/
Launching these trials is one of the agreed enablers for the first hour off the working week that came in this month and could be the vehicle for further reductions to the working week with a one-hour reduction next year linked to any implementation of changes from the trials on delivery methods – however, this will be the subject of joint national review and further discussion with Royal Mail.

Alternative methods being tested out at these trial units are all aimed at reducing either unnecessary or duplicated preparation (prep) by merging walk-sequence (often referred to as ‘coded’ or ‘mech’) and unaddressed (D2D) mails outside of the frame.

“There are two different ways to do this – indoor, at the RM 2000 frame/bench and outdoor, on the delivery – and we’ve agreed to trial five different variations on these two categories for the eight trials,” explains CWU outdoor secretary Mark Baulch.

“Each location has a joint working group (JWG) consisting of equal representatives from both management and the union, and each method is monitored and evaluated by the JWG against a set of pre-agreed criteria, with the mutual intention being to provide recommendations on a preferred method or methods which would then progress to wider roll out and form part of the new delivery agreement,” Mark added.

The Voice went along to three of these locations – Newport East in south Wales, north London’s Stoke Newington, and Shirley, in Birmingham – to look at this in practice and to get some idea of the feedback from members on the systems.

NEWPORT
Newport East MPU is a medium-sized office, with 94 staff in post and 58 delivery walks and the ‘outdoor merging’ method is being trialled here.

Speaking to us at his frame, assistant CWU unit rep Keith Atwick explains:
“Normally, I’ll put the D2D in the frame, as well as the coded (walk-sequenced mail), but now, we don’t put that in, we break it down into bundles which are put on a york.”

The D2D mails are separated into column bundles of 20 and put on the top of the frame with the packets, he continues, adding: “The only things we prep into the frame are the manual sorted addressed items and the ‘Wave Two’ walk-sequenced items.”

Outdoor merging is aimed at reducing and saving on indoor working time, and although time is still spent on the bundling of D2D and sequenced mails, there is less time spent on the indoor part of the duty.

However, Keith says that out on delivery, ergonomic and logistical problems are created, because there are three separate bundles to carry.

Explaning his point, he holds up his mail from the frame and walk-sequenced mail and manual mail in his right hand – organised in a way he describes as “front-to-front” rather than the original back to back method – and his D2D in his left hand and says: “I’m going up to each door like this.”

Out on the street where it could be raining, three separate bundles can become “quite tricky” to handle, Keith points out, adding that the added complication of having signed-for items to deliver, needing to use a PDA (postal digital assistant), has the combined potential to make this method extremely difficult indeed.

Another issue with this method is that any mis-sorted/mis-sequenced mail is not discovered until the postman/woman is already out on delivery – meaning that these items are not brought back to the office until the end of the shift, which delays their delivery.

STOKE NEWINGTON
Stoke Newington DO is a little smaller than Newport, with 63 staff in post and 36 walks and here, and an ‘indoor bench-merging’ system is being tried out.

Mick Gillies is the unit rep here and he tells us that walk-sequenced mail is not prepped into the frame here either – but rather than taking out separate bundles, an indoor process is completed via a bench-merging tool, which is used to feed the manually-sorted items from the frame into the walk-sequenced letters.

“The object of this trial is to see if this saves more time indoor, than the normal practice of throwing your letters off (putting the sequenced mail into the frame) first thing in the morning,” he explains, as he works at his bench.

On a non-D2D day – as it was on the day The Voice visited – the postman/woman has just the one bundle of addressed mail, to handle.

When there is D2D in this office, the postman/woman has to organise this into bundles of 20 and then have two bundles of mail to handle, which is done by either adding D2D items to the back of the addressed bundle or using the designated delivery equipment to carry those items.

As well as the different prep method, and its consequence on outdoor handling, another key contrast here compared to Newport, is that mis-sorted/mis-sequenced mails are discovered at this early stage of the day and so can be corrected on the same morning before delivery.

Speaking to The Voice at the Stoke Newington visit, Tony Bouch, the CWU postal executive member who is overseeing the trial on behalf of Mark, said: “What the trials have done so far is shown first-hand the difficulties that our members experience day in day out in delivery.

“Both in terms of the presentation of mails – i.e. walk-sequencing errors and the variability of the percentages each day – but also the challenges that OPGs face whilst out on delivery, whether that be the terrain, delivery points, or the weather which a change of method exposes further, the trial is enabling these to be captured and investigated, based on facts and not purely the CWU nationally voicing these as areas of concern,” he explained.

SHIRLEY
Members at Shirley DO are piloting a method similar to Stoke Newington, with the difference being that their D2D is automated/collated at Swindon Walk Bundling Centre before being sent to the delivery office – something which is proving popular here.

Around 60 delivery workers work here and all of them are working to this system, which has been running for nearly three months.

Unit rep Matthew Somerville tells us that the fact that bench merging is done sitting down is something members like – particularly those who deliver from HCTs, and so are normally on their feet throughout the indoor and outdoor parts of their shifts.

“They get a chance to sit down and they feel less tired,” he said “and the collated D2Ds are a massive positive in this office – it saves time, definitely.

“What I am pleased about in this office is the members have given it a real good go.”

Speaking to The Voice, Mark Baulch said: “I’ve been to visit four out of the eight trial units and intend to get round to them all, however we have full CWU support and involvement in all the units which are being overseen nationally by CWU Postal Executive members.

“I want to say a big thank you to the members for taking part in these trials and for their involvement, feedback and support – it’s greatly appreciated.

“It’s not been decided yet exactly when the trials will complete,” Mark continued, explaining that, although continuing them through the heavier traffic period could present difficulties, there is a counter-balance to the summer when traffic tends to be light, whereas this time of year and into the autumn would also give the methods a more robust test.

“What we can definitely promise,” he concludes, “is the new method we end up with will be safe, sustainable, capable of deployment and will be the best method taking all of the above factors into account, for our members and the industry.

“These are all things that are included in the terms of reference for the trial and are key tests as part of the joint review.”
Union intervention secures nine Fujitsu jobs

“In situations such as this, TUPE protections are barely worth the paper they’re written on as, although the individuals technically transfer with their jobs, those affected can be asked to commute somewhere it is physically impossible to get to – meaning that, in reality, a redundancy situation is triggered,” explains assistant secretary John East.

Faced with a serious job security threat, the CWU made urgent representations to Fujitsu to reconsider the necessity of a TUPE at all.

“We vociferously made the case that we believed there was enough work in Fujitsu to keep the individuals gainfully employed on account of two new contracts that are already in the pipeline – making the point that it would be insane for nine loyal and highly experienced employees to be TUPE’d into a certain redundancy situation, only for Fujitsu to then have to recruit and train replacements in the very near future,” continues John.

“From the outset it was clear that the operational managers we deal with at both sites were sympathetic to the case the CWU was making, and I’d like to personally thank them for their own discussions with higher-level management that resulted in our members being taken out of scope of TUPE.”

Agency conversions in BT Supply Chains welcomed

Longstanding CWU demands for more agency conversions in BT Supply Chains have been heed by management, with permanent BT contracts being allotted to around 100 agency staff across the division.

The latest round of conversions, which follow on from an earlier batch at Northallerton and Magna Park, involve 25 further BT contracts being issued to agency staff at Magna Park, around 45 in transport operations, 15 in Forward Stock Locations (FSLs) and the remainder in Control Tower/contact centres.

“The number of agency staff receiving BT contracts is 100.”

Representing a further step forward in the union’s efforts to ensure that any roles that are clearly ‘permanent’ are covered by in-house resource, the 15 agency conversions in FSLs represent a particular breakthrough for the CWU after months of intensive lobbying.

Assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien explains: “We’ve always regarded FSLs as the frontline, the visible face of Supply Chains, so the CWU has argued long and strongly that those providing the interface for anyone collecting stores should be full-time employees and not agency.”

FSLs, which are predominantly located in the Telephone Engineering Centres (TECs), are currently part of a major refurbishment programme, which has also been championed by the CWU, with 84 locations receiving an uplift.

Full story at www.cwu.org/agencyconversions

news in brief

VVS BINS PBA CONTRACTS
Agency workers in BT Ventures Voice Services (VVS) are being switched from PBA (Pay Between Assignment) to AWR (Agency Worker Regulations) contracts in the latest good news to flow from the recent BT Transformation Agreement. (See page 7)

Around 100 Manpower employees are in line to receive significant hourly pay rises from December 2 because they will then qualify for pay equal to that of their directly employed counterparts.

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/bt-vvs and letter on page 26

RECOGNITION AND PAY WIN
Former BT ITS employees – including ex-Computacenter members – who were TUPE’d into BT Business & Public Sector in 2016 have secured full collective bargaining rights, a 3 per cent pay rise and a pledge that the CWU will be fully consulted on a new grading structure designed to iron out a raft of unfair anomalies. The breakthrough follows the conclusion of protracted and often difficult talks that began in 2016.

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/triple-boost

TELEFÓNICA H&S BOOST
The CWU’s long-held aim of securing formal recognition from Telefónica of the important role conducted by union safety reps (USRs) has finally borne fruit. After years of lobbying by the union, Telefónica has now agreed to recognise and provide time for the activities of three branch-based USRs and one covering retail stores across the UK.

Full story at www.cwu.org/HealthSafetyTelefónica
Grading row sparks staff grievances

On the road to recognition at EE

**FORMAL TALKS UNDERWAY**

A major milestone has been passed in the CWU’s campaign for full collective bargaining rights at EE. Formal talks are now underway with the BT-owned mobile giant with the jointly-stated aim of reaching a voluntary union recognition agreement to cover all front-line staff in its contact centres.

News of the breakthrough was brief to employees in August, with the company telling staff that it was “entering into discussions with the CWU on how we will include them as part of consultations in EE contact centres going forward.”

Simultaneously the CWU issued a statement welcoming the move – which has been precipitated by a growing clamour for union representation amongst EE employees that has seen well over 1,000 new members join the union since May this year.

Assistant secretary John East explains: “For many years our union has been representing individuals throughout EE and its predecessor companies – but, since BT acquired EE in 2016, many of these members have been asking us to go further and begin to represent them collectively in the same way as we do for team members in the rest of BT.

“The decision to begin formal discussions is an important milestone on that road. Over the coming weeks we intend to sit down with EE and shape a recognition agreement which works for both our members and for EE. An important element in reaching agreement will be the involvement of our workplace reps from each of the contact centres.

“EE is now publicly committed to reaching agreement on union recognition with the CWU which will cover both team members and team leaders – and we jointly expect to achieve recognition this side of Christmas.”

As The Voice went to press the first national meeting of EE reps had just taken place at CWU HQ to map out the union’s priorities both before and after recognition is achieved. See full story at www.cwu.org/EErecognition

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Grading row sparks staff grievances

**ANGER IN GLASGOW**

Dozens of formal grievances have been submitted by staff at BT’s Business Complaints unit in Glasgow following a long-running row over pay grading.

Members are furious that the company has re-evaluated previously agreed grades to a lower level in an assessment process which has been strongly criticised by the union for its apparent lack of independence and impartiality.

The members involved deal with what are categorised as ‘high-level complaints’, which are referred to them for resolution by senior managers in the company. Typically the complainants are business owners or executives of large companies and corporations with high-value service contracts with BT.

£2,500

**THE PAY HURT BEING FACED BY SOME EMPLOYEES IN GLASGOW**

Yet, despite the sensitivities of an often challenging role, BT is looking to downgrade these jobs, lowering the existing C3 work to C2 and current C1 graded work down to B2 - both of which will mean a lower salary maximum of approximately £2,500.

Although existing employees who are already substantively on the higher grades qualify for pay and pension protection, for individuals who’ve been covering these roles - often for several years, pending the grading outcome - will not get the grade and salary they either anticipated or were promised.

Therefore, for a significant number of staff, this constitutes an immediate and substantial cut in pay.

In response to the union’s objections, the company tried to defuse the row by bringing in ‘independent’ adjudicators to review the classifications at Glasgow and another site.

But, CWU assistant secretary Allan Eldred explains: “What sounded like a good idea in theory turned out to be frankly a bit of a farce in practice.

“They were both BT managers - with links to the people who had made the initial decisions – and, not surprisingly, both of them upheld the BT management position.”

Scotland No.1 Branch secretary Bobby Kelly told The Voice: “Management should be in no doubt about the strength of feeling here on this issue. If they don’t respond positively to these grievances, this situation can only get worse.”

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**Telecoms & Financial Services**

**INDUSTRY NEWS**

**INDUSTRY NEWS**
**Manx workers pledge cuts fightback**

**DISPUTE**

As The Voice went to press, postal workers stood ready to ballot for action against Isle of Man Post Office (IoMPO) attempts to drive down pay, terms and conditions.

Speaking after our Isle of Man Branch took the strike vote decision, our deputy general secretary (postal) Terry Pullinger praised the “dignity and self-respect” of our members and described the employer’s agenda as “the greatest attack ever brought upon our IoMPO members.”

The business is on the offensive on pensions, wage rates, allowances, sick pay and job security, and is also seeking to reduce service delivery, he explained.

**ON PENSIONS:**
- IoMPO want to close the existing DB pension scheme to new entrants and put them into an inferior DC scheme, while also reducing employer contributions to the DB scheme.

**ON PAY:**
- IoMPO want to bring in a new starter rate of £18,159 (compared to the current £26,012) with a maximum rate of £22,194 (currently £26,343 basic).

**ON JOB SECURITY:**
- IoMPO want to replace the agreed voluntary redundancy scheme with a new ‘Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme’ – which the union suspects is a device to encourage existing employees to leave in order to bring in more of the new lower paid employees.

**ON PUBLIC SERVICE:**
- IoMPO is consulting the public on moving from a six-day down to a five-day USO, severely reducing quality of service and impacting particularly on the vulnerable within the community.

As well as criticising the IoMPO Board, the union is also highly critical of the island’s government for “aiding and abetting the financial decline of IoMPO” by “taking £2 million per year out of the company and even this year, despite IoMPO’s first financial losses, taking £500,000.”


**Gatwick MC’s cricket glory**

**CRICKET TOURNAMENT**

“Thanks for coming and we hope to see you all again next year,” was event organiser Abdur Rasheed’s message to participants after Gatwick Mail Centre workers brought the summer to a victorious close by retaining their Royal Mail Cricket Champions crown.

Enthusiasts from north and south London, the Midlands and elsewhere headed to the company’s third annual Cricket Championship seeking to capture the trophy from the hosts.

Following a hotly contested group stage, three mail centre teams – Gatwick, Peterborough and Jubilee – joined Crawley Delivery Office in the semi-finals.

And the seven-over semis saw Jubilee overcome Peterborough, while Gatwick won the ‘local derby’ against their delivery colleagues.

In the final, Gatwick opened the batting and set their Middlesex visitors a tough target of 79, to which on-form Shahzad Ali contributed 33.

Jubilee began the chase strongly, but were slowed down by the robust Gatwick attack and at the last ball they were still 25 runs short, leaving the home side in possession of the trophy for another 12 months at least.

Event organiser Abdur Rasheed said: “It was a great day of cricket and a big thank you to all the teams and players and spectators who came down.

“We’re looking forward to doing it all again next year – hopefully with more teams taking part and possibly in a more central location.”

Abdur also added his thanks to the sponsors Unionline and Commsave Credit Union, and to Tony Rupa, CWU head of legal services, and Vicki Harris, Gatwick Mail Centre manager, who presented the trophies.
New reps to take on new challenges

ELECTIONS

“Congratulations on your election, now we’ve got some serious work ahead to deal with the various challenges our members face,” was assistant secretary Andy Furey’s message to the newly elected Post Office, Supply Chain and Admin representatives, after the results were announced last week.

These elections are the first since the union and the company agreed a new Collective Engagement Framework (CEF), during the summer. All those elected have previous experience in either industrial relations or health and safety, which will assist considerably as the new reps will have to develop their knowledge given that they now have responsibility for both key areas.

Garrie Bond and Clive Tickner will represent members in North, West and East London, while Peter Meech, Susan Angell-Whyte and Chris Roche take on the South East, South Central and South Wales/South West ‘patches’ respectively.

Scottish and North Eastern members will be represented by Carole Bowmaker, and the North Wales/North West area saw a closely-contested election between Neil Barry and Steph Mulholland – which saw Neil elected.

The CEF agreement provides for 11 full-time reps performing both health and safety and IR responsibilities. Two of these are Supply Chain reps, covering South Area and North Area & Northern Ireland – the latter also covering Crown members as well. Robert Jones was the choice of our southern Supply Chain members, while another ‘CWU hustings’ was needed in North/Northern Ireland to decide between Dave Bowmaker and Michael Moroney – which saw Dave elected.

Another factor under the new CEF arrangements is that the reps will undergo extensive training with accredited courses for the extra health and safety responsibilities they will have on top of their IR roles.

“The CEF agreement we have with the Post Office means this training will ensure they are all fully equipped with the necessary skills for these important roles,” explained Andy, who thanked the new reps for coming forward and also praised the two unsuccessful candidates as “both committed activists in the CWU.”

Axing of central London Crown proves need for political change

JOB LOSSES

Describing the current strategy of the Post Office in regard to the future of the Crown Office network as “extremely challenging”, Andy pointed out that, sadly, one of the first duties newly elected area rep Garrie Bond had undertaken was an urgent trip to Trafalgar Square Crown Office to advise and assist members still reeling from the shock news that their flagship office is to be axed.

“This type of shock announcement shows once again the very tough environment, industrial, as well as political, that we’re in at this time,” Andy said, adding that the union is “totally committed” to ensuring those members who want to stay within the business have full opportunities to be redeployed.

Given that, ultimately, the Government is the owner of the Post Office, and therefore political change is critical to the future of the entire network, the CWU warmly welcomed Labour’s Shadow Business Secretary Rebecca Long-Bailey’s promise to halt Post Office closures during her party conference speech.

“And it was also great to hear about the formation of the new All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Post Offices, which is supported by Labour and Conservative MPs and Peers as well as Members from other parties,” Andy continues.

An APPG is similar in structure to a Select Committee, but without its formal authority, he explained, describing them as “informal cross-party groupings which campaign on particular areas of interest.

“It’s extremely positive that the importance of our nation’s Post Office network is recognised by so many MPs across Parliament,” commented Andy, “and, as well as the vital issues of franchising and office closures, we will be promoting our Post Bank campaign to the APPG Post Office who will, hopefully, highlight the vital need for all communities to be able to access a Post Bank.

“ This is particularly relevant now with so many bank closures across the UK, leaving the Post Office in many instances as the sole place to deal with key financial transactions.”
Engaging with our members has always been one of the key strengths of the CWU – after all it wouldn’t be great if the Communication Workers Union wasn’t able to communicate effectively!

The challenge in recent years has been to build on what we have traditionally done well but also to adapt to the modern world of social media, 24/7 news and a constant demand for information.

The CWU Communications Department has set out and worked to a plan over the last two years which has brought about some positive results - notably including the outcome of the Four Pillars, BT Pensions and Close the Gap campaigns and the 2017 General Election.

**VIDEO**

We took the decision in 2016 to bring our video operation in house. This has proven to be a major success with over 15 million views on our Facebook videos alone. We have changed the style to be earthier, include humour where appropriate and to push boundaries. The videos we now produce are a mixture of 3-6-minute information pieces to members and shorter, sharper versions which are more suitable for platforms like Twitter.

All of our videos are now subtitled which is a key part of our commitment to the union’s equality agenda. We have used Live video with great success. Major Q&A sessions during disputes with employers have drawn tens of thousands of views and one particular feed outside the High Court during the Royal Mail dispute was watched over 200,000 times. This enabled us to both reach a massive external audience but to also set the agenda immediately after losing the injunction at the High Court. This was critical because we did not give the employer any time to set the narrative.

The speed and adaptability of our video strategy is one of the key armouries of our communications strategy.

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

First used heavily during the general secretary’s election, it has been fantastic to see the whole union grow and come alive online. From a national perspective, the CWU’s following on both Facebook and Twitter has risen dramatically. Alongside the main website we also have new Young Workers and Education and Training sites that complement each other. In a world where traffic to websites is generally falling away it has been great for us to buck that trend.

**WEBSITE**

We have revamped cwu.org and the visits to key pages such as the home page and news have risen dramatically. Alongside the main website we also have new Young Workers and Education and Training sites that complement each other.

**PUBLICATIONS**

Our flagship publication, The Voice, has undergone major change with it becoming a one-union edition that now includes an Equalities supplement that goes to everyone, in keeping with our view that the issues it covers deserve the audience of the entire union. There is also a targeted Retired Members’ supplement.

We have consistently used The Voice as part of our campaigning armoury with various front covers devoted to promoting major campaigns within the union. The next step for us in publications will be to survey the membership to ensure our material is being widely read and to ask members for more general feedback.

**WHATSAPP**

Free and effective, we now have 1,900 representatives and 10,000 members on the WhatsApp broadcasts. We have used this tool during disputes, to promote various campaigns and to share replays of our senior officials in the media. Want to know how to join the broadcast? Please send your full name, workplace and employer and, if applicable, CWU position to the correct number below:

- REPS: 07583 725 644
- MEMBERS: 07907 502 190

**MEDIA**

The world of media is changing. Less print, more diverse online voices and a shift change in how people digest news. The truth for us is we need a foot in each camp. For example, we have tried to mix an improved social media strategy with securing Dave Ward a slot on LBC Radio, or a newspaper column. Our view is we won’t put...
the view of workers and trade unionists across using just one media channel – we have to excel on all fronts.

We’ve built solid relationships with many high-profile journalists at the BBC, Sky, ITV, the Daily Mirror and The Guardian - but at the same time we’ve supported the rise of online organisations such as Huffington Post and Novara Media. This means when we have something to say there is a far greater chance that someone will be there to help us carry the message.

**EVENTS**

As a union, we have many formal procedures which must be respected. We have, however, tried to spice up the way we approach events – whether that be 10,000 people at a People’s Post Rally, or putting the general secretary on the stage in front of thousands of younger people at the World Transformed Festival, we’re doing things differently.

Recently, the CWU turnout at the New Deal for Workers demonstration was our best ever. The challenge is to keep this momentum going and make sure people know when the CWU announce an event it is going to be something special.

**THE NEXT STEPS**

The key for us all now is to not sit back and think ‘we’ve made it’, but to really use the platform we have to kick on. We have new initiatives in the pipeline, including the launch of a CWU Podcast, a brand-new smartphone app, a new website for our retired members, a fresher and even more lively social media strategy and plans to take our live videos to a whole new level.

We’ve even discussed the possibility of creating our own media platform so we do not have to rely on others to publish our messages. These are big but achievable plans.

We want to engage with our branches, representatives and members on our strategies. This is a new communications course. We want every CWU branch to build a communications network and we will help you with the training and equipment needed to deliver this.

As well as this, we want your ideas. Our general secretary, Dave Ward, is often heard saying that not all the best ideas come from CWU HQ – we believe he is right.

If you have any ideas on how we could improve the way we communicate as a union please get in touch. Tweet us, send us a message, email us at info@cwu.org or write to us via more traditional means.

Finally, thank you to every representative and member who has helped us raise the profile of the union in recent times. We can have the best set of systems and structures in the world but if our branches, reps and members don’t engage it won’t work. Whatever we put together as the Communications Department our best advocates will always be you.

Follow us on Facebook: The Communications Union Twitter: @CWUNews @DaveWardGS
Tackling mental health concerns in BT

INITIAL TALKS ‘CONSTRUCTIVE’

Discussions have commenced with BT in a bid to improve the support provided for employees experiencing a range of mental health issues.

The talks were initiated by the CWU after delegates at CWU Annual Conference highlighted a number of areas where members with mental health problems have experienced difficulties getting the assistance and understanding they need from managers.

Particular concerns were raised with regards to how employees who are already struggling to cope are being impacted by the performance management process.

Delegates overwhelmingly carried a motion committing the union to enter into talks with BT to ensure that all managers receive mandatory mental health training within three months of their appointment - and that any declared mental health issues are taken into consideration when formulating any coaching or performance plans.

The union is also seeking better training and refresher training for BT managers in Mental Health First Aid to ensure they fully understand how they should support members experiencing mental ill health.

Following positive initial talks, next week (on Wednesday October 24) a special branch forum will be held at CWU Headquarters in Wimbledon at which BT Group’s lead on health and wellbeing will outline the company’s thinking on the concerns articulated at Conference.

Welcoming the constructive response the company has taken since talks got underway in July, assistant secretary Dave Jukes told The Voice: “All the indications are that the company is keen to work alongside the CWU to address the concerns raised by branches - and that’s a very positive first step in the right direction.”

See full story at www.cwu.org/news/tackling-mentalH

Patience runs out on BT London Weighting

NEW CAMPAIGN

Members across the capital have delivered an unequivocal message to BT that patience is running out at the company’s persistent refusal to increase London Weighting payments that have stood still since 2012/13.

In a consultative ballot of around 6,000 members of the union’s four London T&FS branches, 99 per cent of respondents agreed it is now essential that London Weighting (LW) is increased.

With 92 per cent of respondents confirming they are “prepared to take part in the campaign to engage BT in negotiations” the scene is now set for a concerted CWU drive to secure movement from the company after six years of stonewalling.

Following repeated company brush-offs to successive CWU requests for talks - the latest of which was lodged in 2017, assistant secretary Dave Jukes stressed the decision to hold a consultative ballot was “just the first step” in a campaign that is, first and foremost, driven by a groundswell of anger from the grass roots.

“The four London branches have quite simply decided that enough is enough,” he explains.

“BT needs to reflect on the fact that we’ve been very patient up to now - and that patience has finally expired.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/blondonweighting

news in brief

HYBRID PENSION ON TRACK

As a result of the Pension Agreement the CWU has been working closely with BT to set up the totally new BT Hybrid pension. This will be available for all those who were active members of the BT Pension Scheme on June 30, 2018, and will combine both defined benefit and defined contribution elements. While a range of issues still have to be resolved, assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove said: “We’re making good progress and are on track to launch in March. More details will be available in November.”

BTPFS PAY DEAL

Members in BT Property & Facilities Services (BTPFS) have overwhelmingly accepted a CWU-brokered pay deal that delivers increases of between 2.3 per cent and 3.6 per cent for the majority of CWU-represented grades. 82 per cent of those who cast their vote gave their backing to the company’s final offer, which had been heavily shaped by the union’s determination to achieve a meaningful rise for as many members as possible.

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/huge-support

2.7% RISE AT RR DONNELLEY

Ex-Swiss Post members who were TUPE transferred into RR Donnelley in March have voted to accept a fully consolidated 2.7 per cent pay rise that applies to all CWU-represented grades paid above the National Living Wage (NLW). The deal, which is backdated to April 1, comes in the wake of tough discussions with the new employer in which the CWU successfully moved RR Donnelley from its initial position that there was no budget for a pay rise at all this year.

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/first-ever-pay
‘Intolerable’ Saturday attendance levels tackled

Agreement has been reached with Openreach on a series of new mechanisms and protocols that will reduce the number of Saturdays engineers are being forced to work – bringing the company back into line with the Service Delivery Transformation (SDT) agreement.

With huge numbers of engineers across the country having to work well over the 12 Saturday attendances per year allowed under the SDT agreement, the issue triggered an outpouring of anger at CWU Annual Conference, with delegates adamant that the situation was simply unacceptable.

No fewer than three motions condemning the ‘flouting’ of the SDT agreement in large parts of the country were on the order pad, proposing different ways of tackling the issue. Following passionate debate, a majority of delegates backed a South London, Surrey & North Hampshire branch motion calling for a major CWU campaign regarding member’s lack of work/life balance, potentially involving industrial action, unless Openreach reverted all team members back to the normal maximum of 12 Saturdays per year by the end of June.

Intensive discussions began just after Conference and, just days before the expiry of that deadline, agreement was reached on a series of measures that the CWU believes will defuse a potentially dangerous situation.

Central to the agreement is the introduction of a new ‘modeller’ that allows various ‘levers’ to be pulled which can amend the number of Saturdays required in each SOM patch.

That innovation – taken alongside additional resource on account of Service Delivery’s on-going exercise to recruit 3,000 new engineers this year and additional opportunities for voluntary overtime – has allowed most SOM patches to bring down the number of Saturday attendances required to the 12 stipulated in the CWU Conference motion. Where that number is not reached, additional factors have been brought into play to achieve that figure, including a revised approach to Saturday annual leave which, where required, will be subject to consultation and agreement with CWU Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) and local branches.

VOLUNTARY OPTIONS

There will also be an extension of voluntary options open to new recruits and existing employees who wish to adopt a seasonal working pattern on either a permanent or time-limited basis and, crucially for the CWU, the a trial of three-day week working for those interested in adopting such a pattern.

Assistant secretary Davie Bowman explains: “We’ve been pushing for a trial of three-day weeks for a long time, but this is the first time we’ve managed to get the company to commit to a trial in this work area. “The National Team is working through the final details, and further information will be shared in the near future.”

Davie continues: “The National Team believes that this overall approach fundamentally resets the situation regarding Saturday working in line with the policy set at CWU Annual Conference. “Going forward, any proposals to change the number of Saturdays our members are scheduled to attend will continue to be dealt with in line with agreed protocols – namely subject to meaningful negotiation and agreement with the appropriate CWU branches.

“If the modeller says there is an operational requirement for more than 12 Saturdays being worked, branches now have an additional enabler to get it back down to 12. At the end of the day the only ones who can agree to our members working more than 12 Saturdays are CWU branches and regions, with arrangements being negotiated and agreed locally.”

At Conference a number of delegates had cited the work/life balance issues caused by forced Saturday working – especially for members with sporting interests or those who simply want to spend time with their family.

Davie concludes: “For those engineers up and down the country who’ve been having to work up to 18 or more Saturdays a year, going down to 12 is going to make one hell of a difference – so this is a tangible victory for our members. “Within minutes of the new arrangements being communicated on Wednesday I received my first mail from a member thanking the union on behalf of his family – and feedback doesn’t come better than that.”
MAKING OUR VOICE HEARD AT THE TUC150 CONGRESS

The CWU’s proposed plan of action to take forward the New Deal for Workers campaign won the unanimous support of our fellow trade unionists at TUC 2018 last month.

The original four-point plan proposed by the CWU called on the whole movement to agree a trade union new deal manifesto and a common bargaining agenda to tackle insecure employment, convene a recruitment summit to strategise on organising the millions of unorganised workers in the UK, and organise a nationwide New Deal for Workers day of action next year.

Two new action points from other union’s original motions were added as part of the Congress compositing process, to develop links with other groups campaigning for social justice and for a change in the law allowing workplace or electronic industrial action balloting.

Moving the compositied motion, our general secretary Dave Ward explained that the intention was to build on the success of the national demonstration in central London back in May.

“This is the motion that connects the issues of today’s world of work,” Dave explained, adding that “this is the most pressurised world of work in living memory.”

Workers face a “daily grind” at the hands of employers who are constantly trying to “make their employees work harder and faster for less” and the situation could “get worse with the march of the fourth industrial revolution,” he warned.

The proposed day of action was not, our general secretary insisted, “a call for a general strike, but what we’re saying is that it should be deliverable action from a range of options in June of next year.

“We’ve got to re-assert trade union values and make sure that the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts,” Dave concluded.

National Education Union delegate Heather McKenzie seconded the motion, urging Congress to “set out a dynamic plan” to “challenge inequality with our solidarity” and the GMB union’s David Flanagan also spoke in support, making the point that “we need to use a whole range of methods to campaign among our members.”

Speaking later that day, Dave Ward said that he was “very pleased” that Congress had voted for the proposals and said: “Now we need to turn that decision into solid action on the ground.”

Our two industrial deputy general secretaries each made keynote speeches to Congress as well, with DGSP Terry Pullinger giving a robust contribution to the debate on workplace pensions and DGS T&FS Andy Kerr giving the fraternal address to the TUC from the Labour Party, in his role as the party’s NEC chair.

CWU president Beryl Shepherd took part in the ‘Challenging the Politics of Hate’ discussion and our senior deputy general secretary, Tony Kearns, intervened in the debate over climate change and the need for a just transition to a carbon-reduced economy.

As well as the debates and resolutions in the Congress Hall, delegates also had the opportunity to hear first-hand from John McDonnell, the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, who set out some of the key aspects of the Labour Party’s economic policies with a particular focus on the party’s proposed workplace legislation.

And away from the Congress Hall, the CWU invited delegates and visitors to its own Fringe Event, which provided an opportunity for some more informal further debate and discussion on our New Deal for Workers campaign.
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The most important thing is that we deliver a Jeremy Corbyn led Labour government, to bring about an irreversible shift in the balance of forces and wealth and power towards ordinary people...

DAVE WARD

The conference hall stood to applaud Steve for his deeply personal and heartfelt speech and Labour’s Shadow Health Secretary, Jon Ashworth, chased after Steve to embrace him for delivering such a strong message.

The chair of the CWU’s Young Workers Committee, Scott Hartles, also received an enthusiastic response from the hall when he addressed conference about the current housing crisis and his own personal experience as a young person attempting to navigate the mess created by the Tory government.

Scott was part of a delegation of young CWU workers who attended workshops and events at the conference as well as those at the World Transformed Festival, where our union was represented on panels discussing new forms of nationalisation for our industries.

Overall, this was an incredibly successful Labour Party Conference which, once again, saw our union setting the agenda and playing a leading role in the debate about the future of work. Dave’s speech also noted our plan for a nationwide New Deal for Workers day of action next year, which was received well by the hall. Coming away from Conference it was clear that the Labour Party is ready to offer bold and radical proposals for reforming the world at work and creating a fairer society for all.
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Beating the blockade of Cuba - with ballet shoes

CUBA

The CWU has taken its first foray into the elite world of classical dance - and is currently storing 1,200 pairs of ballet shoes that will be delivered to Cuba next year as part of a joint-union initiative to beat the vicious American blockade of the socialist Caribbean republic.

Next spring the consignment - donated by London’s Royal Ballet - will be despatched to Havana as part of a container load of musical instruments and ballet costumes that is being put together by the National Education Union and the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC). In the meantime, however, the 28 boxes of second-hand ballet shoes - destined for the world-renowned Ballet Nacional de Cuba - are the somewhat unexpected responsibility of CWU assistant secretary Allan Eldred - the union’s representative on the executive of CSC.

Admitting that in all of his time as a national union officer he never imagined he’d be signing for a massive delivery of ballet shoes at CWU national headquarters - especially ones from an organisation with ‘Royal’ in its title - Allan stresses he’s delighted the CWU has been asked to lend a helping hand to a special cultural link-up that is set to pirouette its way round the illegal 56-year-old US blockade.

Meanwhile, plans are taking shape for the CWU to play a full role in next year’s 60th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. General secretary Dave Ward explains: “It’s important we show solidarity with people in Cuba and other countries around the world that have put people before profit.

“We’ll be letting branches and members know about celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution next year.”

Full story at: www.cwu.org/news/blockade

FESTIVALS

CWU activists and their families and friends turned out in force once again for the big Labour movement festivals at Tolpuddle, Durham and Burston this summer, commemorating the pioneers of trade unionism and vowing to build the movement for the future.

South West Region secretary Kevin Beazer led our union’s delegation at the Dorset event, which pays tribute to the brave agricultural workers who were cruelly exiled to Australia in 1832 for the ‘crime’ of combining to push for better pay and conditions.

Up in Durham, Paul Clays organised the North East CWU festival-goers around a New Deal for Workers theme.

The Durham Gala commemorates the proud story of coal mining, which was once the dominant industry in the region.

“Although the mines have now gone, the fighting spirit of the miners lives on in our union and in others,” explains Paul.

Burston in Norfolk was where socialist teachers Annie and Tom Higdon created the famous ‘Strike School’, which taught local children for over 20 years in the early part of the last century.

“Every September, we hold a commemorative event on the village green to remember these amazing people and also to unite trade unionists and socialists in the area and across the region,” explained CWU Eastern Region secretary Paul Moffatt.

Full story at: www.cwu.org/news/festivals
Girobank Bootle – heralding the birth of the union’s staunch and intensely loyal financial services membership on Merseyside – a sad last chapter is drawing to a close for the final 150 of a once 800-strong workforce conducting cheque processing at the site. Simon Alford reports on the end of an era.

50 years after Girobank, the original ‘People’s Bank’, opened its headquarters in Bootle – as late as the early 1960s, after all, the majority of UK adults did not have a bank account and established banks did not actively court business from working people, who they regarded as unprofitable.

Against the backdrop of woefully inadequate financial services provision for a huge swathe of the population, the Wilson Labour Government identified that the GPO – with its then network of 22,000-plus post office branches, compared to only around 3,000 bank branches nationwide – was ideally placed to establish a viable mass banking system.

At a stroke the National Giro, as the service was initially known, set in train a transformation of the UK banking landscape.

POLITICAL FOOTBALL

Initially loss-making, on account of massive set-up costs, and viewed with hostility by the right wing press and established banks which regarded it as a threat, Girobank was a political football from the outset.

When the Conservatives came to power in 1970, there were pressures on Edward Heath’s government to close the fledgling ‘People’s Bank’. While that threat was seen off – partly by the Post Office’s inspired proposal that the government itself should start using the Giro for social security payments – Margaret Thatcher, with her rabid privatisation agenda, was unyielding.

Despite vocal opposition from the union, Girobank was sold to the Alliance & Leicester Building Society in 1990 and, following A&L’s demutualisation in 1997, the new bank attempted to persuade iPSL to diversify beyond cheque processing, but despite strong support from the then local MP, Joe Benton, and positive soundings from iPSL’s then ex-chief executive, the company’s major shareholders – the banks – refused to play ball.

BEGINNING OF THE END

Following round after round of voluntary redundancies – all on generous Girobank terms as a result of the CWU’s vehement defence of those terms – by 2016 the CUW-represented iPSL workforce at Bootle numbered just 150 – almost a sixth of the number TUPE’d out of A&L in 1998.

Then, in December 2016, the company announced plans to shut seven of its nine UK cheque processing sites – unilaterally declaring the site only had long-term future.
While the longstanding 10 per cent year on year decline in cheque volumes is the major factor in the company’s contraction, that contraction is now being accelerated by a phased government-led digitalisation drive that, once complete, will end paper-based cheque processing entirely.

iPSL branch secretary Gerry Culligan explains: “For the last 20 years we’ve dealt with job losses on a voluntary basis, but this year we cannot fight compulsory redundancies as the work we carry out will no longer exist.”

In September last year, after difficult talks in which CWU once again successfully defended generous redundancy terms, agreement was finally reached on the Bootle site’s decommissioning – something that was originally envisaged to be entering its final phase in April.

In the event, however, slippage in the closure timetable has given the majority of CWU’s loyal iPSL membership – most of whom have more than 30 years’ service – an additional six months-plus work.

**GOING OUT WITH HEADS HELD HIGH**

While the CWU’s long battle to save quality iPSL jobs in an area of comparative economic deprivation has reached the end of the road, assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove insists the union can be proud of its track record in a situation that ultimately proved unassailable.

“People have been talking about the demise of cheque processing for almost as long as iPSL has been in existence – so we can hold our heads up high about saving jobs in an industry in terminal decline for as long as we have,” he stresses.

“To have managed a transition from 850 staff to 150 now entirely on the basis of voluntary redundancy is a huge achievement in itself – and the fact that we’ve successfully fought off successive attempts to water down contractual redundancy terms means that our iPSL members in Bootle are going out on terms that are very good indeed – significantly better than those elsewhere in the company.”

Given the exceptionally long service of the vast majority of the union’s iPSL membership, most are leaving with two years’ pay.

“We’ve always punched above our weight as a union,” Nigel continues. “Membership has always been almost 100 per cent and fiercely supportive of the union, and that’s why we’ve managed to maintain our red line on compulsory redundancies for as long as we have.

“We’ve also successfully defended other Ts&Cs, such as leave, and prevented the use of performance related pay which applies on all other sites.

“There have been two strike ballots in the history of iPSL – both returning massive support for action – one was to defend redundancy terms and the other was about pensions. In both cases agreement was reached before any action was needed, and, on pensions, the deal agreed by CWU members was then applied to the whole company.”

As cheque volumes continued to fall away the CWU negotiated a job security agreement between June 2013 and December 2015 in which pay rises were traded for a cast-iron commitment by the company not to move to compulsory redundancies.

“Our members took a principled decision that jobs for everyone who wanted to remain working for iPSL for as long as possible were more important than pay rises – and that reflects the spirit of solidarity that been the defining characteristic of the iPSL Bootle Branch over many difficult years,” Nigel concludes.

Reflecting that solidarity, branch activist Anne Muscatelli told *The Voice*: “I know it’s a cliché, but we’ve become like one big family, and it’s difficult to see friends you’ve had for 30 or more years leave.”

Fellow activist Tom Creevy added: “When we were outsourced by A&L most of us expected redundancies within five years. The fact we’re still here 21 years later is not just due to the fact we’ve performed well as a workforce, but also that we’ve been prepared to fight our corner when required.”

Paying tribute to the grit shown by branch secretary Gerry Culligan and his membership during the toughest of times, deputy general secretary Andy Kerr concludes: “Gerry has served CWU members in iPSL with distinction and tenacity for as long as the company has existed.

“The iPSL Bootle Branch and its loyal membership has always been a credit to the CWU and will be sorely missed.”
Deputy general secretary postal Terry Pullinger has assured Royal Mail pension scheme members that the changes they are being notified of are “all purely administrative and do not affect funds or your pension in any way.”

Four separate letters (depending on scheme members’ individual circumstances) were sent out to RMSPS members’ homes during September advising of this administrative change. And there was also a further letter, from Joanna Matthews, the chair of Royal Mail Pensions Trustees Ltd, to all scheme members and it includes 10 ‘Q&As’ which is aimed at answering the key questions that members would be likely to ask with regard to this change.

**SERVICE QUALITY VITAL**

Terry Pullinger said: “We naturally have concerns that the current professional service provided by the RM Pension Service Centre will, following the transfer to Capita, deteriorate as they will no doubt look to make efficiencies and cost savings in order to achieve a greater profit from the contract and so it’s important that any complaints from members and our branches in respect of bad experiences arising from this change are investigated and, where appropriate, raised with the Cabinet Office.

“As well as ongoing monitoring, there is also a scheduled meeting of the RMSPS Governance Group due on October 25. And this will provide an early opportunity to highlight and discuss any areas of concern.”

A report from the National Office of Statistics (ONS) has found that life expectancy is no longer increasing and in some areas of the country is in decline.

The statistics show that life expectancy remains at 82.9 years for women and 79.2 for men. It is the first time that the indices have not increased since 1982.

Life expectancy for men and women in Scotland and Wales has declined by a month, with a similar drop for men in Northern Ireland.

A number of academics and commentators claim that the austerity policies pursued over recent years, with cuts to health provision and social care, are contributing to reducing life expectancy. Diets and more sedentary lifestyles may also be contributing factors.

The ONS says the change may be due to a bad flu epidemic and winter deaths during the period being surveyed (2015 to 2017).

The data also shows that the UK lags behind other leading countries for life expectancy, including Switzerland, Japan, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy.

Of the countries the ONS compared the UK with, Switzerland was the nation with the longest life expectancy for men. For women, it is Japan.

Men in Switzerland are expected to live to 81.5 years. Women in Japan are predicted to live to 87.

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

Barring workplace representation, retired members enjoy all the benefits of ordinary membership including free expert legal advice if required. Subs, which stand at £1.38 per week or £5.99 per month for those contributing to the political fund (£1.18 weekly or £5.12 monthly for those contracted-out), also mean you’ll continue to receive The Voice and a special supplement for retired members.

For more information please call 0800 731 7434 or email joinunion@cwu.org
The CWU has led the call for there to be access to free sanitary products for women, girls, trans men and non-binary people.

The campaign to end ‘period poverty’ arose following revelations that thousands of women and girls cannot afford to pay for sanitary products.

A study by Plan International found that a staggering 45 per cent of UK women have been forced at times to ‘make do’ with substitutes like socks and newspapers.

It is estimated that 137,000 have missed school due to not being able to afford sanitary products which, during the course of a lifetime, cost a woman around £4,800.

A motion from the CWU to the Labour Party Conference went beyond the previous Labour position of providing free sanitary products in secondary schools, foodbanks and homeless shelters, to providing access for all to free sanitary products.

The CWU position is in the spirit of Scottish Parliament member Monica Lennon’s Sanitary Products (Free Provision) Bill in Scotland, which also seeks to provide free sanitary products.

“I’m delighted that the CWU is backing the right to free sanitary products for all,” she told The Voice.

“Thanks to several early adopters who have backed my campaign in Scotland – including colleges, local councils and workplaces – we are beginning to see a step change in Scotland regarding attitudes to menstruation and period products. All schools, colleges and universities will now have free sanitary products – and my forthcoming bill will further safeguard rights of access in law.

“I hope we can continue to make quick and lasting progress across the UK on period dignity and with trades unions, like the CWU, leading the way, I know we can win this fight.”

Early Signs of Progress

Already, the tide seems to be turning over this issue with Milton Keynes Council joining several others across the UK in announcing that it will provide free sanitary products in schools to counter period poverty.

See more on the campaign at: www.cwu.org

Plea from the heart for greater prostate cancer awareness

Prostate cancer sufferer, Cyril Onyejekwe, has appealed for greater awareness of the risks and symptoms of prostate cancer.

The London Postal Engineering branch activist was diagnosed with prostate cancer in August 2014 when the disease was already highly advanced.

Despite undergoing gruelling emergency chemotherapy, radiotherapy and oral treatments, last October, Cyril was given just four to six months to live.

He remains determined not just to beat his cancer for as long as he can, but also to raise awareness of prostate cancer to prevent others missing out on crucial early diagnosis and treatment that transforms survival rates.

Apart from stressing that any men with family members who have suffered from prostate cancer should watch out especially carefully for the early warning signs – including back problems, an increased frequency of toilet visits and general fatigue (see www.prostatecanceruk.org) – Cyril particularly wants to raise awareness of how prostate cancer disproportionately affects black men.

While one in eight men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer at some point in their lives, that figure leaps to one in four amongst the black and minority ethnic (BAME) community.

“The effect of prostate cancer in black men has been proven to be more aggressive compared to that in white Caucasian males. It tends to attack us in a very aggressive way,” said Cyril.

His message to CWU members across the country is as simple as it is poignant.

“It’s your life – do not take it lightly,” Cyril begins, “I can’t stress enough the importance of getting tested if you show any of the symptoms of prostate cancer, especially if you are over the age of 40 – and if there’s any history of prostate cancer in your family go to your doctor and demand a test. It’s your right.”

See full story and video at www.cwu.org/prostatecancerplea and for more information visit: www.prostatecanceruk.org
AGENCY DISAPPOINTMENT IN VVS

Whilst I absolutely congratulate the CWU on the campaigning it has done to remove inferior agency contracts from BT (see page 7), I am left dismayed at the fact that BT as a whole is still seeking to use agency employees in some lines of business.

In Voice Services we have been informed that Manpower will still be used to supply agency staff - and, though they might not be Pay Between Assignment contracts, they continue to provide little security with inferior terms and conditions.

This is so disappointing from BT, which should surely have one approach.

Joyce Jones, Nottingham

Assistant secretary Brendan O’Brien responds: “We’re in discussion with VVS on this very point. Although the new AWR agency contracts being issued to Manpower employees put individuals in a far better position with regards to pay levels, Joyce is quite right to point out that they don’t change matters with regards to job security in the same way as the BT contracts currently being issued elsewhere. The CWU appreciates that VVS has a challenge with regards to short-term peaks of work, especially in 999, but can see no justification for people effectively being ‘permanently’ employed on agency contracts - as the argument that they are providing flexibility to cover workload peaks ceases to be valid. In these situations, BT contracts have to be the best way forward.

See report on VVS developments at www.cwu.org/news/bt-vvs

ELECTION SUCCESS

I wanted to express my thanks to not only my branch (Northern Home Counties Postal) for its support during the May local elections, but also to the London branches which assisted with donations. We’re always going to be playing catch-up with the Tories when it comes to funding for election campaign funds but the CWU really did us proud. I’m proud to have been elected as a Labour councillor in Enfield North and the CWU was really praised by the Party, not only for the financial assistance, but also because CWU members got involved in the campaign as well. I never expected anything less. We’ll carry on campaigning as a General Election cannot be far away now and we need to be ready.

Rick Jewell, Northern Home Counties Postal

THIRSTY JOB

I’m an ill-health retired postman now, but when I was working the one thing I hated above all else was hot weather. Even some of the local NW10 police knew me as the postman who never wore a coat, even in the winter. Perhaps I’m now paying the price for that - but at least coats were provided! Thinking of my ex-colleagues during the recent summer heatwave, it struck me that it would be helpful if Royal Mail provided delivery bags with a netting pouch on the outside to hold bottles of iced water or whatever without damaging the mail with condensation. Individuals could then decide whether or not they wanted to use it to carry water - but I certainly would have… even though I never wore a coat!

David James Scanlon, London

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New Young Workers Committee brings fresh ideas to the table

A new National Young Workers Committee was elected in June of this year and will hold office until 2020. This will allow the committee to fully immerse itself into campaigns, organising and of course, contribute to the whole issue of redesign within the union.

The newly elected committee consists of 16 representatives from the Postal & T&FS constituencies with a further three members being co-opted over the coming months.

For the first time there is a healthy split between male and female members – 10 male and 9 female (including co-optees). This is both encouraging and exciting as the committee is beginning to look like the members they represent!

NEW WISHLIST
The newly elected committee met for the first time in July and put together a comprehensive wishlist of what direction they wanted to travel in and what work they wanted to carry out and be involved in.

Their main focus will be campaigning alongside the rest of the union to carry out the policies affecting young workers set by General Conference. These included campaigns on affordable housing, parental leave and votes for 16 and 17-year-olds. They are also keen to get involved in the newly launched Period Poverty Campaign.

Outside of these initiatives, the committee wishes to impart their solidarity with other unions struggling to get rights for their members such as the McDonald’s strikers, the TGI recognition campaign and the FBU with regards to its Justice for Grenfell campaign.

They were clear that, should a snap election be called, they will be ready to assist in any way they can to get a Labour government into power. This includes running both “register to vote” and “make sure you vote” campaigns.

The committee also expressed a desire to get more involved in recruitment, especially in unrecognised areas such as Amazon and DPD for example.

Newly elected Young Workers Committee chair, Scott Hartles told The Voice: “I think for me recruitment has to be a key expectation of the committee.

OUTWARD FOCUS
“We should look to get out to the workplaces and have conversations not just in union recognised workplaces, but also in unrecognised areas such as Amazon, DPD or other non-BT phone companies. “As well as that I hope to bring young workers’ issues to the forefront and make sure we are campaigning, supporting and showing solidarity within and across the whole trade union movement.”

Vice chair Fiona Curtis added: “For me, my hopes and dreams for this new committee are for us to bond and work together in achieving our goals. I want us to be able to help and stand together within the different workplaces that are going through different issues and campaigns.

“For me it’s about showing how strong we are and for us to make an impact on the future of our young workers.”

■ For more information on the Young Workers Committee please visit: www.yw.cwu.org
■ And don’t forget to follow us on social media: @cwuyoungworkers
The march will aim to bring people out onto the streets in the largest possible numbers to show defiance to the racists and send a message that discrimination and prejudice have no place in today's society.

Leading up to the march, SUTR is hosting a major international conference next week (Oct 20th), to which a range of speakers from the UK and abroad have been invited. Along with several other unions, the CWU is nationally affiliated to SUTR and our general secretary Dave Ward is its co-chair, while senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns also serves on its organising committee.

Speaking to The Voice about the importance of anti-racist campaigning at this time, Tony said: “We've seen a worrying upsurge in racism here and in several European countries over the past year or so – largely through scapegoating migrants and blaming them for economic problems.”

During this past year, the UK has witnessed the Windrush scandal, which saw long-standing UK residents being told they had no more rights than new arrivals, the growth of support for the former English Defence League organiser Tommy Robinson and the emergence of the Football Lads Alliance.

On the continent, recent reports of clashes on the streets of Chemnitz in eastern Germany, coinciding with rising electoral support for the far-right AfD party, the growth of the Hungarian far-right and nationalistic movements in Italy, Belgium, Poland, France and Spain.

“And we've also seen a surge of racism and anti-immigration attitudes over in the USA – the biggest irony being that historically, the USA was founded on illegal immigration and illegal settlement on native land,” Tony comments.

“People have been shifting all over the globe ever since the beginning of time,” he pointed out “and the nation we are today is a mix of all of those cultures and peoples – there has never been a 'pure English' or 'pure British' people.

“Ever since the 1930s, fascism has reared its ugly head in the UK from time to time in different forms: the names of their groups change, the main victims they target change, but the politics of hate, division and racism are the same every time.”

Mosley’s pre-WWII blackshirts attacked Jews, the National Front of the 1970s targeted Asian immigrants, as did the BNP in the 1990s, while more recently, the English Defence League specifically focused its hostility on Muslims.

All of these groups emerged during periods of economic difficulty and grew on the basis of scapegoating minorities, particularly the most vulnerable among them, Tony explains.

“But every time, the overwhelming majority of decent people, from all walks of life and all backgrounds, have stood up to them, got organised, fought back and won.”

The latest manifestation of this type of politics is the Football Lads Alliance, which has held several rallies over the past year.

“Once again, the fascists are presenting themselves as something new, something different, but it’s the same fascism under the surface,” Tony insists.

“That’s why the trade union movement agreed at the recent TUC Congress in Manchester that it was our movement who should lead the fight amongst the working class against those who seek to divide us.”

As well as urging maximum support for the demo in November the TUC established the need for a coordinated trade union-led approach to defeating the rise of the far-right.

To this end a special event will be held in the New Year for all trades unions to set out this strategy and place workers at the forefront of spreading the politics of hope and not hate.

“The true representative voice of workers is our movement – and when anyone seeks to divide us it is our job to organise the opposition to this, so the CWU will be fully engaged in this process,” Tony concludes.

The Stand up to Racism International Conference is at Friends House in Euston on Saturday October 20th

The march against racism will be on Saturday November 17th in central London, contact your branch for details of transport from your area.