Stop playing games BT!
CWU fights back against the outsourcing of Facilities Services

P6 MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS
Vulnerable members in BT still being failed by unsympathetic managers & inflexible processes

P10–11 MAIL CENTRE SUCCESS
Peterborough reps achieve full-time contracts for 78 members in big resourcing step forward

P16–17 SAVE OUR POST OFFICE
Campaigners take to the streets in towns and cities the length and breadth of the UK
am writing this at the start of December to meet The Voice deadline – I don’t know the outcome of the Parliamentary vote on May’s Brexit deal, or whether there is even going to be one, but by now you will.

Like you, I’ve watched an incredible political storm unfold. I try to second guess what happens next and then accept it’s best to expect the unexpected. It’s in these moments that I fall back on my instincts and experience – so let me tell you how I feel.

Whatever I hear or read on Brexit I keep coming back to the same two points.

First, with record levels of in-work poverty, with the pressure CWU members are coming under at work, with a generation unable to access a decent home and with public services pushed to crisis point, we need fundamental change in this country. In or out of the EU, I know this will only come with a transformative Labour government.

Secondly, for all the statistics we hear about Brexit, the most important fact for us is this: in the past forty years as a result of privatisation, competition and attacks on trade union rights, the share of the economy going to workers’ wages has fallen from more than 65 per cent in 1976 to less than 50 per cent today.

This reflects a huge shift in the balance of forces in this country and, again, in or out of the EU, it is our responsibility to reverse this. I have never been more convinced of the need to mobilise the trade union movement to campaign for a bold new deal for all workers and this fight starts not in Brussels, but here in the UK.

In 2018 we have led on this agenda in the TUC and I believe it has been another good year for the CWU.

Industrially, the union has delivered very good agreements for our members on pay, pensions, terms and conditions. We are now a far more effective campaigning organisation and we have significantly raised our political profile.

On communications and engagement we are now seen as the union that sets the benchmark for others to follow. And, through Redesign, we have shown the courage to address the financial and organisational pressures that threaten our future as a stand-alone union. So well done to everybody for making all of this happen.

In 2019 we will build on all of our achievements by increasingly acting as one union and connecting our industrial, wider trade union and political agendas. With the forces that are against us this is the best and only way to face the future. A key priority will also be to overhaul our recruitment and organising work and develop a more effective and ambitious approach.

Finally, to all our representatives, members and your families I wish you a great Christmas and a very happy New Year.
CALL TO ACTION – support our campaigns

The CWU currently has two major campaigns running.

As part of the #SaveOurPostOffice campaign we have held events across the UK in a bid to increase political pressure on the Government, the Post Office and WHSmith. (See pages 16 & 17)

Alongside this we are also promoting #EndGame – a campaign aimed at protecting our BT Facilities Services members from outsourcing. (See page 9)

Both of these campaigns include petitions, which raise support and awareness of the serious issues facing our members.

We ask that all members take just a few seconds to fill out the adjacent petitions, cut out that section and hand it to your local CWU rep.

Local representatives can then pass the completed forms onto your branch secretary or send them directly to CWU HQ via the address at the bottom of this page.

* Get behind both our Postal and T&FS colleagues: We’re one union!

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SIGN THE PETITION TO #SAVEOURPOSTOFFICE

The Post Office recently announced the plan to ‘franchise’ 74 Crown Post Offices. Conservative estimates suggest that some 800 jobs will be affected by this move – this equates to almost one-third of the whole Crown network.

We believe that franchising is simply privatisation by the backdoor and we seriously oppose this move. There was no negotiation and no formal engagement with the Communication Workers Union prior to the announcement of the privatisation. This move will leave the remaining Crown Offices extremely vulnerable.

It is an outrage that this government is allowing well rewarded jobs to go from a public service, handing them straight to a second-rate employer like WHSmith – recently rated as the worst retailer on the high street.

We call on you to abandon this franchising programme and support the CWU campaign for a Post Bank. Let’s put Post Offices back at the heart of our High Streets.

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#ENDGAME

Fighting for our members in BT Facilities Services

We, the undersigned, condemn the decision taken by BT to outsource its facilities services to private contractors CBRE and ISS.

Given the poor track record of outsourcing companies on labour and service standard not only is this a direct threat to the job security and terms and conditions of the employees in scope but risks reputational harm to BT as a company.

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Please hand all completed forms to your CWU rep or post them directly to CWU HQ, 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, SW19 1RX
New Deal for EE workers – recognition talks to include pay

As The Voice went to press, discussions between mobile giant EE’s parent company, BT, and the CWU were taking place over the detail that union recognition would involve. In a significant development, following a request from the CWU, the company has offered to discuss the 2019 EE frontline Contact Centre pay review, with the union.

This follows on from BT’s announcement in August that it was “entering into discussions with the CWU on how we will include (the union) as part of consultations in EE contact centres going forward.”

Assistant secretary John East explains: “Those recognition talks have taken longer than we’d have liked or expected, but we’re making progress and, despite the fact that we’ve not yet concluded recognition talks, this represents another significant milestone in the CWU’s long-running quest for full collective bargaining rights at EE.

“T is a historic development in EE where, until now, individuals have simply been told what rise in salary they are getting, if anything, without any clear understanding of the rationale.

“Tis our aim for the 2019 pay round is to reach a clear and transparent settlement that gives everyone who works in EE contact centres an increase in their salaries. It is important to us that a premium brand, such as EE, values it workforce by rewarding them appropriately for their efforts.”

While EE’s 2019 pay round technically becomes due on January 1, in its call centres pay rises have generally been finalised in the first few months of the year, and then backdated - and the CWU anticipates the same will be the case this year.

In advance of talks beginning, however, the CWU is seeking absolute clarity on the scope of the bargaining unit.

“Whatever the outcome of our negotiations, members will be fully consulted by the union on whether or not it is acceptable in a way that has never happened before in EE,” John stresses.

Meanwhile, CWU reps in all call centres continue their activity to recruit new members both at the monthly “Access Days” and on a daily basis inbetween.

John concludes: “I want to thank all our reps for their hard work in 2018 to build a mass union in EE with a fully engaged membership, and I’m sure they’ll join with me in welcoming this excellent news for 2019.”

Members in EE should watch out for updates at www.cwu.org

Images from some of the latest Access Days in EE

DGS COLUMN

BT dropped a bombshell last month by announcing the outsourcing of its Facilities Services division and the transfer of 1,700 CWU represented grade employees to ISS and CBRE.

T CWU immediately signalled its disgust and determination to defend members against profound threats to their job security and terms & conditions.

Our new #ENDGAME campaign, which features on pages 1 & 9 of this magazine, kicked off just 48 hours after the announcement and has already seen 14 demonstrations nationally. Thousands have signed a petition (see page 3) and the BT Board is being bombarded with letters from furious employees.

Why are we so angry? The whole outsourcing model has been shown to be fragile. Firms underbid for contracts, overstretching themselves financially to win work. Carillion is a case in point.

Worse, it has a lamentable track record on labour standards - with TUPE’d employees typically transferring into cost-cutting agendas that feed a relentless race to the bottom.

There’s also grave concern that Facilities Services could be just the start. Coming in the wake of unsubstantiated media reports about the sale of BT Fleet, serious concerns that the business could seek to outsource or sell other units it deems ‘non-core’ have sent shivers through the wider workforce.

Challenges clearly lie ahead, but as the year draws to its end I’d like to wish everyone a restful break, in the knowledge that the CWU will never give up the fight for all our members, wherever they work.

Andy Kerr

DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY
(T&FS)
The early months of 2019 will see the drawing up of legislation for the proposed new CWU and Royal Mail Group ‘wage in retirement’ collective defined contribution (CDC) and defined benefit (DB) lump sum pensions scheme, which is expected to feature in the Queen’s Speech in May.

Our experts at First Actuarial, along with RMG advisors, have ‘modelled’ this CDC/DB plan against every economic situation the UK has faced since 1925 – the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the 1930s Great Depression, World War II, the 1970s oil crisis and the credit crunch of 2008 – and the results are stunning, demonstrating that the scheme is robust and would massively outperform standard DC.

Royal Mail has seen some major changes at the top – particularly the arrival of Rico Back as RMG CEO and the departure of Sue Whalley. We’ve built a strong working relationship with Sue and we wish her all the best for the future as we look forward to working constructively with Rico.

It’s reassuring that the new leadership remain committed to the Four Pillars Agreement – a pledge we will be upholding – and a joint challenge for 2019 will be to improve workplace culture.

There are 50 joint site visits planned for early 2019 and at each visit we will ask the key question: ‘Would you be happy for a member of your family to work here’?

A big thank you to all members who have been supporting our union through all our struggles and campaigns – it is crucial that we remain and live up to our claim that we are the strongest, most relevant workplace trade union in the land.

Finally, all the very best to you and yours for Christmas and the New Year.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

Solidarity with our members everywhere

As The Voice went to press, members on the Isle of Man had just begun a strike after voting by 93 per cent for action against what the union has described as an “outrageous attack on their job security, pensions and terms & conditions” by the Isle of Man Post Office (IoMPO).

The company plans cuts to pensions benefits, a two-tier employment model, the buyout of a range of allowances and a move away from long-established voluntary redundancy arrangements, while they also want to reduce delivery days from six to five per week, reports our deputy general secretary postal Terry Pullinger.

From the picket line on the first strike day, Terry said: “It’s a tremendous turnout from our Isle of Man members. Management said they wouldn’t stand together, but they’re rock-solid here.”

And from all over the UK, CWU branches tweeted solidarity greetings and pledges of support.

Back on the mainland, workers at Bristol’s South East Delivery Office (SEDO) achieved a positive outcome after returning an 86 per cent strike vote against a compulsory transfer of one of their members.

The member – an SEDO postman – was initially sacked by the company and then, following a vote at a meeting of his fellow workers to request an industrial action ballot, the member was reinstated but told he would be transferred to another office.

Balloting went ahead, with the union opposing a compulsory transfer, but the action was rendered unnecessary when the company then agreed to the member returning to SEDO.

Congratulations members for standing by their colleague, CWU outdoor secretary Mark Baulch said that this dispute had been “one of several flashpoints during what has been a difficult autumn.”

Over this period, units in Wigan, Hamilton, Bangor, Blaydon, Maidstone and Hayes all saw angry gate meetings taking place, sparked by various issues around bullying allegations, disciplinary actions felt to be unfair and resourcing problems.

“In all these local disputes, members have stood together in the very best traditions of this union and we are and have been working hard with area, branch and unit representatives – and with management – for fair resolutions,” he said.

“But this is still a cause for concern, and it makes it all the more important that we make real progress on workplace culture – as well as on the linked issues of resourcing and operational improvements.”

Delivery methods trials... please read the latest full update from outdoor secretary Mark Baulch here (https://www.cwu.org/voice-extra/) and we will bring you full details of further developments in our next edition of The Voice.
Mental Health

Concerns in BT Under the Spotlight

The urgent need for BT to provide better support for staff with mental health problems was reaffirmed at a major branch forum in October.

R
eps from across the country have provided
disturbing examples
of how vulnerable members in BT are still being failed by
unsympathetic managers and
inflexible processes.

Talks were initiated with
the company shortly after
CWU Annual Conference
in April, where delegates
overwhelmingly committed
the union to enter into
discussions with a view to
ensuring that all BT managers
receive mandatory mental
health training within three
months of their appointment.

Amid concerns that
employees who are already
struggling to cope are being
seriously impacted by a lack
of understanding, the union
is pressing for any declared
mental health issues to be
taken into consideration by
managers when they are
formulating coaching or
performance plans.

As well as seeking better
training and refresher training
for managers - to ensure they
fully understand how they
should support members
experiencing mental ill health
- the CWU is demanding
the rephrasing of standard
letters sent under the
attendance process to reduce
the distress they cause.

ENCOURAGING SIGNS
Following encouraging
progress in negotiations,
October’s forum had been
billed as an opportunity for
branch reps to hear direct
from BT’s global health &
wellbeing lead about the
company’s current thinking on
how glaring deficiencies can
best be addressed.

In the event, however, BT
pulled out of the meeting at
the eleventh hour, citing a
serious H&S incident requiring
immediate investigation.

Admitting that the last
minute cancellation was
“bitterly disappointing,”
assistant secretary Dave
Jukes stressed it was now
vital that BT heard from reps
at the sharp end - pledging
that contributions would be
fed back to BT in advance of a
rescheduled forum.

What followed was a no
holds barred discussion in
which rep after rep recounted
harrowing examples of how
BT’s laudable Group-level
policies on the responsible
management of employees
with mental health problems
are all too often failing to be
observed in practice.

GOOD, BAD AND UGLY
“BT’s corporate message is
really good,” observed Geoff
Hodge of Somerset, Devon &
Cornwall Branch, “but once
it filters down though all the
tiers of management the
message appears to have
been lost…and our people are
being damaged as a result.”

Recurring themes raised
by reps included a profound
ignorance amongst tier
one and two managers as
to how to deal with team
members with declared
mental health problems - let
alone individuals displaying
warning signs of distress that
are increasingly prevalent in
an ever more stressful and
demanding world of work.

Karen Kendrick of
Manchester Combined
Branch cited the insensitive
application of the attendance
policy, with some managers
attempting to force line
reports into face-to-face
meetings within a fortnight
of employees going off sick.
She recounted how, even
that morning, she’d implored
one manager to “just leave
in peace for a few weeks” a
member who’d just had a
breakdown.

DEVASTATING WORDS
Widespread concern was
expressed about how highly
insensitive wording in the
long-term sick review letter -
particularly surrounding the
possibility of “employment
being terminated” - is
perceived by those already
struggling with mental health
problems.

Such crass insensitivity, reps
agreed, can all too often lead
to a downward spiral that
can lead to super-stressed
individuals falling foul of the
performance management
process.

David Simpson of Northern
Ireland Telecom Branch
recounted a case where a
woman who’d struggled to
even leave her home during
a period of intense stress,
anxiety and depression had,
following a successful phased
return to work, been hit with
just such a warning for her
attendance.

“How does anyone think
that giving someone with
mental health problems
a warning is going to help
them?” he asked. “It’s a slap
in the face to them and it sets
them back.”

See full story at www.cwu.org/
news/mental-health-bt
Every worker on the new Parcelforce night shift in Hatfield is a member of the CWU, thanks to the sterling efforts of local activists Tom Walker and Mark Wakeling – secretary and chair respectively of Northern Home Counties Postal Branch – and the assistance and support of CWU Eastern Region organiser Paul Malyan.

“Earlier this year, the business decided to start a new night processing shift and install a huge parcel sort machine here,” Tom tells us, adding that this site already hosted Parcelforce’s local delivery (LD) facility and Royal Mail’s vehicle operation centre (VOC) for the area.

And the area of the plant where Parcelforce put the new night processing facility was previously Royal Mail’s regional distribution centre (RDC), which is why the CWU’s NHC branch office is in the building.

“Being based on the site, we were able to keep in close contact with the refurbishment of this part of the site and the company’s recruitment of new staff,” he continues, adding that, through ongoing discussions with the management, the branch managed to secure a slot during the induction sessions of the new recruits.

Giving us an insight into how he handles these presentations, organiser Paul Malyan says that he explains what the CWU is and what its role is and then takes a direct approach to the new starters.

“I say: ‘It’s your workplace and you should be able to shape it’, but I don’t just try to get them to sign up as members. I also ask them to get involved and become active,” Paul tells us, adding that he and the two branch officers also used the presentations to invite volunteers for unit rep roles.

GREAT ENTHUSIASM

Mark Wakeling tells us that, of the 57 employees now working in the processing section, “41 of them are completely new to the business, and the others have transferred here from various other Parcelforce or Royal Mail jobs.

Almost every one of them decided to join the CWU in the inductions,” recalls Mark, “and then we got 10 volunteers for the three representative posts, which meant that we had to hold contested elections for each position. “At that point, the one person who had not joined at induction then decided to join so that she could vote for her friend who was standing as a candidate.”

Tom says that “it was great to see the enthusiasm from our new members – and as a result of this, we also got a volunteer from this shift to be our NHC Branch Young Workers Officer, which was a vacant post for a long time previously.”

Davie Robertson, assistant secretary told us that the introduction of the South East Processing Centre at Hatfield represents a significant investment by the business to increase processing capacity and enable later LAT offerings in Parcelforce.

“Because it is a shared site, discussions to progress the deployment have involved national, regional and branch representatives across Parcelforce and Royal Mail Logistics to ensure that the various operations can co-exist,” he said. “There have been a few teething problems along the way, but the branch and our representatives have worked tirelessly to achieve a successful outcome.”

On recruitment Davie added: “Recruitment techniques for Parcelforce is something we are actively working on and the efforts of Tom and the branch show what can be achieved when it is done well.

“The site has always been a union stronghold and it is fantastic that the NHC Postal Branch have been able to fully engage with the new processing employees, ensuring that they will now enjoy the protections and benefits of CWU membership. It’s also great that they’ve encouraged new members to step up and become representatives.”

The unit, which became fully operational in October, runs from 6pm until 7am Monday to Friday, with two full-time shifts (6pm-4am and 11pm-7am) and a part-time shift from 6pm until 11pm and between 35,000 and 40,000 items are processed through here each night.

‘We’re 100% CWU at Hatfield Parcelforce’
BT Hybrid Pension moves closer...

NEW PENSION OPTION REVEALED

Following months of complex negotiations with the CWU, BT has launched a major communications exercise detailing an innovative and completely new BT pension option for former contributors to the BT Pension Scheme (BTPS).

Fulfilling one of the key elements of the 2018 Pensions Agreement, the so-called BT Hybrid Scheme (BTHS) will be available to around 19,000 team members in BT, Openreach and BT Fleet who were active members of the BTPS when it closed for future service accrual earlier this year.

Come April 1, those individuals will have the option of switching to the new ‘Hybrid’ scheme, which has both defined benefit (DB) and defined contribution (DC) elements. By combining both types of pension benefit, the BTHS is designed to reduce investment risk and also provide more certainty over pension benefits compared with other options. DB pension benefits are guaranteed – whereas DC pension outcomes depend on a number of factors, including investment returns.

Members of the BTHS will get guaranteed DB pension benefits on the first £17,500 of salary and DC benefits on the residue. The £17,500 threshold is pro-rated for part-timers and will generally increase in future by inflation.

‘CWU assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove told The Voice: “It’s now important that anyone eligible to join the BTHS weighs up the alternatives before making an informed decision as to what is best for them.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/bt-hybrid

BT loses BTPS indexation appeal

COURT BATTLE

The Court of Appeal has ruled against BT in a case about the indexation of pensions for some 80,000 members of Section C of the BT Pension Scheme (BTPS).

BT had asked the Court of Appeal to overturn an earlier High Court ruling that blocked its ability to switch from the RPI measure of inflation to the invariably lower CPI measure when calculating pension increases for Section C members.

However, the Court of Appeal dismissed BT’s claim, concluding that the Scheme’s rules had been interpreted correctly in the earlier ruling which found that the RPI had not become an ‘inappropriate measure’ for the purposes of uprating pensions. As a result it is currently not possible for BT to change from RPI to another index.

Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove told The Voice: “The CWU welcomes the Court of Appeal decision. Given that any change to CPI would take money from current and future pensioners this ruling will come as a great relief to Section C members.

“We’re disappointed, however, at BT’s statement that it is now ‘considering its next steps’ as Section C members want closure on this issue.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/bt-loses
C WU has reacted furiously to BT’s announcement that it intends to outsource its Facilities Services division - moving with breakneck speed to oppose a move that poses huge risks to the Ts&Cs and job security of more than 1,700 CWU represented grade employees.

Just 48 hours after the outsourcing bombshell was dropped on appalled staff on November 19, reps attending a hastily convened National Briefing at TUC Congress House to discuss the union’s fightback set the scene for what was to follow when they seized the moment and marched en-masse along Tottenham Court Road in the direction of BT Tower intent on mounting an unexpected ‘pop-up’ protest.

The noisy and eye-catching rally that ensued at one of BT’s highest profile central London locations was just the precursor of a torrent of regional protests that took place virtually daily for the next three weeks - taking in no fewer than 13 further BT sites.

Coming in the wake of unconfirmed media speculation that BT intends to sell its Fleet division, the extent to which its BTFS outsourcing announcement has struck fear and foreboding well beyond those directly affected has come through loud and clear.

Fed by BT’s attempt to ‘justify’ its outsourcing decision to the union by arguing that Facilities Services is not a ‘core’ business, and therefore not part of the ‘One BT’ plan, suspicions are growing that the decision to re-outsource a division that was only brought back in-house in 2012 - after an earlier flirtation with outsourcing was deemed to have comprehensively failed - may have a wider significance.

“We understand that the decision was taken at Board level, and are deeply concerned that a dangerous precedent is in the process of being set,” explains CWU deputy general secretary Andy Kerr.

“If things genuinely have gone full circle, and we’re witnessing the return of a business mantra where any functions that are not deemed ‘core’ are liable to be outsourced, this would represent a profound and deeply unwelcome shift in Board-level thinking.

“Either way, the CWU will not sit back and watch our members’ jobs and livelihoods being sold off.”

A MASS BETRAYAL

There’s no doubting the very real threat to job security and Ts&Cs that the planned TUPE transfer of BTFS members to two companies - ISS and CBRE - on April 1 poses.

With BT arguing that “efficiency savings” can be made by outsourcing housekeeping, security, grounds maintenance and Facilities Services’ engineering functions - and ISS (to which all but the engineers are destined) renowned for the minimum wage/ part-time employment model it operates - all the indications are that staff will be transferring into a cost-cutting agenda.

For some years BTFS has paid the Real Living Wage as a minimum. Contrary to the assurances given to some members by ill-informed local managers, however, while Ts&Cs cross over intact at the point of transfer, the protections subsequently provided by TUPE law are weak. That sad reality is widely understood amongst BTFS employees - many of who have previous experience of TUPE transfers or even, in some instances, employment with ISS.

“Going round the country it’s been heartrending to witness just how fearful these people are for the future,” stresses CWU assistant secretary Sally Bridge.

“The fact that, at present, we cannot give them any of the reassurances they crave has stiffened the union’s resolve to achieve everything we possibly can for our BTFS members in the talks that lie ahead and, in the meantime, to continue exposing BT’s betrayal of this section of its workforce through our #ENDGAME campaign.”

Shock and outrage at BT’s outsourcing ENDGAME

If BT ever doubted the CWU’s resolve to fight the outsourcing of Facilities Services it’s had a rude awakening – courtesy of the union’s #ENDGAME campaign. Simon Alford reports on a fightback that has gathered pace with exceptional ferocity for good reason.

Videos of all the #ENDGAME protests - which began at BT Tower, taking in Doncaster, Salford, BT Sport, Leicester, Sevenoaks, Belfast, Northallerton, Cardiff, Leeds, Swindon, Adastral Park and Glasgow, before culminating in Lincoln on December 14 - can be viewed at www.facebook.com/ThecommunicationsUnion/
**INDUSTRY NEWS**

But amid all the praise for their efforts from their members and from their national officer, area processing rep Ernie Orviss and his sub Luke Smith put it all down to the success of the union’s national campaign over the past year and were keen to thank and praise all the reps and members’ hard work in Peterborough Mail Centre.

“We couldn’t have done it without the Four Pillars national agreement,” explains Ernie, who points to the resource realignment section as the key enabler.

Other factors are a rise in throughput volumes – an increase of around 200,000 items per week, bringing average weekly totals up to the 2 million mark – and a local management willing to engage positively with the union, he adds.

Back in September, the Peterborough reps agreed with local management a realignment of duties and then the vacant and new jobs were advertised.

**JOB ASSURANCES**
The CWU had pushed for an assurance that existing employees on less than full-time hours and existing full-time staff wanting to switch shifts or duties be considered first, rather than recruiting more temporary, part-time or agency staff and so in this first phase – and in the second ‘pick’ that was opened at the beginning of October, applications were restricted to people already working in processing.

“Leading up to this, while we were talking to management and then when we started the process, we held member meetings and every single member was involved,” continues Ernie.

“And we were also able to update people on this during our WTLL sessions as well,” he added, explaining that this was thanks to the mail centre manager Su Redshaw, who had, he said “been very reasonable and fair towards the CWU reps here and the job we do.”

Ernie has been the area processing rep since 2011 and Su is the eighth site manager he has worked with.

Over 800 people are employed on this site altogether, with over half of them – 465 – working in processing. Other functions here include distribution, network, collections and a call centre, while there is also a large, 200-strong, delivery unit here too.

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**Peterborough reps achieve big success for members**

CWU reps at Peterborough Mail Centre have negotiated increases to contracted hours for 118 workers, with 78 of them moving up to full-time hours – an achievement described as “phenomenal” by assistant industrial secretary Davie Robertson.
And in the third phase of the duty realignment process, applications were opened up to others across the site.

**FOUR PILLARS BENEFITS**

“Through this, five delivery workers were able to come over into processing and also a Romec (RMPFS) cleaner,” Luke explains.

“The union and management realised, through the growth section of the Four Pillars agreement, the potential to take more people on,” he says, “so we argued that, instead of bringing new people in, to give the part-timers the chance to take a full-time job and to give temporary-contract workers the opportunity of a permanent contract.”

Of the 78 who have been moved up to full time, 35 had previously been on 20-hour contracts and 28 newly full-time workers have moved straight up from eight-hour Saturday-only contracts, while another 27 eight-hour Saturday-only people have been brought up to 20-hour contracts.

Luke estimates that these improvements have, overall, lifted the full-time-to-part-time ratio in processing from “around 65:35 up to near enough 75:25 now.”

Sub-area processing rep for almost a year now, Luke also has responsibilities at branch level – deputy secretary of Eastern No.5 Branch and the branch recruitment officer who gives the CWU presentation to new Royal Mail inductees.

And speaking to some of the workers who have benefitted from the improved contracts, it’s clear that both Ernie and Luke are held in very high esteem here.

Shehzad Akhter had been on a 20-hour contract here for a year, after four years at nearby Orton Southgate Delivery Office.

Now parcel sorting and tug-driving on a full-time contract on the early shift, he tells The Voice: “It was all thanks to the union’s support. “Ernie and Luke have helped me and I’m really thankful.”

Arriving for her late shift on the CFC machine, Lynn Stevens recalls how she first started here as an Angard Christmas casual back in 2013.

“I got taken on by Royal Mail direct in April 2014 on a 20-hour contract – but I’ve been working full-time hours on a temporary basis and have now been made permanent full time,” she explains, adding her appreciation for the efforts of her CWU reps and her enthusiastic support for the Four Pillars agreement.

“It’s very good at Royal Mail – especially this shift. I love the shift I’m on. It’s a very friendly group I work with.”

**ALL CREDIT TO OUR REPS**

Late shift sub-rep Allan Killingworth worked with Ernie and Luke to achieve the contractual improvements and he highlights the central importance of the Four Pillars agreement and the campaigning around it, saying that it had “showed we are up for a fight and that we wanted to be listened to.”

And his late shift colleague Dave Parkin – with 30 years’ experience here – told us that there should be “a huge amount of credit to our processing reps, especially Ernie and Luke.

“To have created this massive amount of permanent full-time duties and have them implemented at the same time as the shorter working week.

“And well done too, for local management working with the CWU to achieve this,” he added.

At a national level, industrial assistant secretary Davie Robertson believes that this kind of success can and is being achieved across the country.

“As I said at the recent national briefing of Royal Mail reps, what the guys at Peterborough have done is phenomenal and we hope we can help and support other units in achieving similar upgrades and conversions,” he told The Voice.

“Resourcing is the key area in which our representatives can make a real difference going forward. We should always remember that it is our ability as a trade union to effectively influence change in the workplace which makes the CWU great and in this regard, nothing is more important on a day-to-day basis than resourcing.

“Yet, despite great progress, too many of our mail centres are reporting that they’re not having regular resourcing meetings.”

To assist reps, the department will be issuing Resourcing Handbooks, incorporating all of the Resource Realignment, Model Week, Meeting Template and checklists issued in recent months. And, in conjunction with the DGSP department there are also plans to launch resourcing training in the near future.

“Making sure we get resourcing right and that we are able to continue to deliver excellent earning packages, attractive duty structures and that our members get the fair opportunity to improve their contracts – is hugely critical to the overall challenge facing our industry’s operational pipeline,” Davie concluded.

“As we all know, the growth area in the market is parcels, but we run this product through a pipeline that was designed for letters. Redesigning a pipeline which meets the joint aim of facilitating parcel growth by meeting customer aspirations for later LATs, while protecting the letter product is our key aim.”

The operational pipeline includes everything from the post box or collection point to the letterbox and the union’s industrial departments are working through the issues collectively.

“Our members’ futures depend on Royal Mail continuing to match customer demand and that will require change and we know that change is never easy, but we’ll never face away from it,” Davie insists, but points out that “it must be the right change that meets the commitments in our agreements and delivers benefits for our members.

“And in the pipeline review that’s coming up, the CWU will strive to make sure we get it right.”

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**FOUR PILLARS**

The Voice
CWU turns up the heat on BT London Weighting

CAMPAIGN BEGINS IN EARNEST

Efforts to force BT into talks over London Weighting payments that have stood still since 2012 have stepped up a gear with the production of eye-catching campaign material that is becoming a familiar sight for members across the capital.

The CWU’s BT London Regional Committee (BTLRC) has produced posters and flyers urging members to do their bit to ‘get BT to the table’ and has been blitzing union notice boards and conducting desk drops accordingly.

The move comes after a consultative ballot of around 6,000 members of the union’s four T&FS branches in August recorded 99 per cent support for an increase in inner and outer London Weighting levels which have languished at £3,380 and £1,637 respectively for six long years.

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 years of stonewalling.

Full story: www.cwu.org/news/bt-london-weighting/

Good news on Airwave job security

RADIO WAVE-BASED SYSTEM STILL VITAL

Further delays to the rollout of the new emergency services network (ESN) that will ultimately replace the current radio wave-based communications system mean that, as yet, there’s no end in sight for the vital public safety work that is conducted by members in Airwave.

The first phase of an already delayed switch-on of the successor network was supposed to happen in September last year - but 15 months on there’s still no certainty when that will occur, with developmental work still underway to overcome a raft of intractable reliability and robustness issues.

“The net result is that, despite all the uncertainty of recent years, there’s still clearly a long way to go before the Tetra network is switched off,” explains assistant secretary John East.

“While we were deeply concerned about our Airwave members’ future when the Coalition Government served notice on the emergency services contract way back in 2015, the secure communications network our members provide is still as essential as it always was, with no indication that will change anytime soon.

“As such, our earlier concerns about job security have proved very premature indeed.”

Full story: www.cwu.org/news/good-news-airwave
Half century not out in Bootle

SANTANDER INVESTS

Fifty years to the day after Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson opened Girobank’s national headquarters in Bootle, Santander delivered the best possible news to a new generation of the union’s financial services membership by announcing a £75 million investment that will secure banking jobs on Merseyside for decades to come.

The dramatic vote of confidence in Bootle, which will involve the complete rebuilding of the ageing 1960s facility and the creation of what will become Santander UK’s main contact centre and operations hub, was revealed with fanfare at a surprise presentation on October 18.

Introducing staff to an artist’s illustration and architect’s model showing how the site is to be completely reconfigured to provide a state-of-the-art environmentally friendly facility, which will incorporate a new public park and community facilities, Santander UK Board chair, Shriti Vadera said: “I’m delighted that we’re celebrating 50 years in Bootle with this long term commitment to our people and the area. Bootle has been a significant part of Santander’s story and we see it as a crucial part of its future.”

Just prior to the public announcement the scheme was revealed to ecstatic local CWU reps, who’ve been invited to contribute ideas to ensure the design details fulfill the expectations of not just the current 2,500 employees but also the wider community.

Bootle Financial Services Branch secretary Tracey Griffiths stressed that, from the branch’s perspective, the investment in Bootle was “setting in stone, timber and glass the job security of our members”, adding: “This was amazing news to receive, and something we’ve been seeking for quite a number of years.”

Assistant secretary John East concludes: “This announcement is testimony to the quality of the staff working in Bootle and represents a fantastic commitment for the foreseeable future turning Bootle into the contact centre and operations hub for Santander UK.”

Travel time justice demanded in Openreach

NEW CAMPAIGN

A major new CWU campaign is getting underway in Openreach, with the union demanding fair and equal treatment of employees on the issue of travel to and from the first and last jobs of the day.

Anger at discrepancies in contracts that see some engineers paid for their travelling time, but others forced to give up to two hours a day for free, has been mounting since 2011 when the business introduced the Mobile Workforce and put new recruits outside of the existing Parking at Home policy.

Following negotiations with the company, a 2012 agreement briefly resolved the issue by extending that policy to cover the Mobile workforce - but then Openreach reneged on the deal, introducing a 60-minute Personal Travel Time (PTT) system for that group of workers.

“We’ve been battling ever since to try to get PTT removed,” stresses assistant secretary Davie Bowman - but Openreach has remained intransigent despite profound doubts being cast over the appropriateness of its position by a 2015 European Court of Justice ruling.

The Court’s decision in the so-called ‘Tyco’ case means that travel time spent by mobile workers getting to, and returning home from, their first and last allocated jobs of the day is now legally deemed to constitute ‘work’.

As such it counts towards the 48-hours allowed under the EU Working Time Directive - leaving many mobile engineers at Openreach within a whisker of that limit - even before overtime is taken into account.

“Openreach can’t get away from the fact that if you travel for an hour at the beginning and end of the working day, and work a 37.5 hour week, you’re already up to 475 hours,” Davie points out.

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/travel-time
“A highly successful Conference,” which has “enabled the whole union to come together and agree a united plan to take the CWU forward,” was the verdict of our general secretary Dave Ward on the union’s historic Redesign Special Conference in Bournemouth last month.

Developing a New Deal for Reps, strengthening our branches, extending democracy and increasing grassroots involvement at regional and national level, mainstreaming the equality agenda and stabilising the union’s finances were the agenda items over the two-day event.

“All of those aspirations are equally critical to the future of this union,” Dave Ward told The Voice when we spoke to him shortly after the event.

“And so, although the Redesign proposals that the national leadership – the NEC – presented to Conference delegates was presented in six separate sections, we had deliberately constructed it as something that only works as a package.

“And of course, money is necessary for all this, so the right balance has to also be struck between branch funds and national funds.”

Money is also the reason why the union is reviewing its concrete assets – the buildings we own – and considering whether realising the potential of some of our assets is necessary to achieve financial stability, to clear our debts, and then to fund an ambitious strategy of CWU growth in the future.

“It all hangs together as a strategy – nothing works on its own and no part of this programme works if other parts are taken out.”

With Bonfire Night just a couple of days away, fireworks were expected as delegates settled in to debate the opening session on branch funding. In the run-up to Conference, opposition to the NEC’s proposals had been voiced from several locals and a series of alternative propositions had been lodged.

COMPROMISE SOLUTION
But compromise was the order of the day, and the initial plan to ‘nationalise’ branches’ withheld funds was withdrawn in favour of a ‘joint’ approach, dividing these monies between local and HQ level.

“It was a classic case of both sides honestly recognising the need for compromise in order to move forward in unity,” reflected Dave.

“The most important part of the Branches section was the adoption of the 14 Measures of Success improvement plan,” he continued, pointing out that this commits the whole union to providing equally high standards of service and consistent levels of engagement to members in every branch.

“It’s a big win for members, who will have the right, under rule, to equally high standards of service from their union, wherever they are and whatever part of the union they’re in.”

Up next was the union’s Regions, and the changes to our regional structure aim to raise the importance that activists attach to their region – “as the place where the whole CWU comes together, where we connect our political and industrial agendas, engage with other trade unions, and step up the fight for all strands of equality.”

There was a surprise in store for the CWU leadership in the following National Structures section, when a strong case was put by delegates from the Midlands, London, and Manchester for an extra four ‘open contest’ seats on the union’s ruling NEC – and Conference voted it through, despite the opposition of the Executive.

“We didn’t see that one coming,” admitted Dave, “but fair play to them for presenting a strong argument and winning the hearts and minds of the conference floor.”

In her speech moving that motion, Midlands Region secretary Kate Hudson argued that the NEC’s proposed reforms – for extra reserved spaces for young members and members of equality strands – “don’t go far enough” and that there should also be
up policy-making in response to events.

CWU head of education & training Trish Lavelle introduced the next session, with a pledge that the planned improvements here will be “part of our New Deal for Reps.”

The union will remain fully committed to delivering high-quality residential, local and online training, she told Conference, pointing out that the top priority is to ensure that every rep in the union is able to access the learning that they need.

In the thought-provoking discussion which followed, several delegates said that meeting fellow CWU activists from other parts of the country had been a valuable part of the residential training experience – while other speakers made the point that residential courses are, unfortunately, not possible for many reps – often because of work release issues or family circumstances.

“Some people like to travel, but some people can’t travel – one size doesn’t fit all,” was the opinion of Scotland No.2 Branch delegate Gary Clarke.

With an “asset review” under way as part of the Redesign process – and the possibility that this could impact on the union’s residential training provision – Conference unanimously adopted a motion instructing the NEC to “draw up a full strategic financial plan” which must be “published to branches” before a final decision.

Speaking in support of this motion, our senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns said: “We need to take education & training out to our reps and we need to recruit and organise among the unorganised workforce,” he said, adding that the asset review is a necessary prerequisite to the development of an investment strategy to realise those aims and ambitions.

Reflecting on the two-day event, Dave Ward told The Voice: “It’s time to build a stronger one-union identity that focuses on providing greater support to our representatives and members on the front line.

“We now have an agreed plan to drive this union forward, tackle the financial realities this organisation finds itself in and build a union that’s ready to face the future.

“Our aim is to build a connected union that excels inside and outside the workplace,” he explained.

“The Conference reinforced understanding and support for the Redesign project, although there’s a lot more work to do. In 2019, as well as implementing the Conference decisions, our focus will be on the reorganisation of headquarters,” Dave concluded. \*
This was Save Our Post Office Action Day, and its resounding success – despite the stormy winds and pouring rain – was a tribute to the determination, dedication and sheer organisational skill of CWU members.

Activists turned out at high streets and town centres from Belfast to Bristol, from Cardiff to Crawley, and from Exeter to Edinburgh, winning the signed support of tens of thousands of people – people angry and outraged at plans to close prime Crown Offices, give away the franchises to failing retailer WH Smith, slash services and cut jobs.

On Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp groups, photos and video-snaps from all corners of the country were being sent and shared all day, while our campaign also received widespread local and national broadcast and press coverage too.

From CWU North West, Carl Webb reports that his region plans to build on the Action Day success by organising town hall meetings, more petetting in public – as well as around CWU workplaces – and circulating the Save Our Post Office petition “to all North West MPs, Labour councillor groups, the regional TUC and pensioners’ organisations.

“And we’re also continuing to push for more councils to adopt policy motions against the franchising plans,” he said, adding his “thanks to everyone who turned out in big numbers at our two Action Day protests – at Kendal and Oldham,” where protesters were joined by local MPs Jim McMahon (Oldham West & Royton) and Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne).

Down in London, MP David Lammy (Tottenham) was welcomed by protesters at Harringay Post Office to the north of the city, one of six around the capital’s outer suburbs – the others being Orpington, Dartford, Hackney, Sutton and Wood Green.

And it was at Wood Green where assistant secretary Andy Furey started his day, before heading onto nearby Dalston, and he described the nationwide actions as “fantastic, with excellent turnouts everywhere.

“We’re on the march and it doesn’t stop here – this is the start of the campaign and there’s much more to come,” he added.

London Region secretary Ian Murphy also praised volunteers for their efforts on the day, saying: “Despite the rain, the public were all very keen to sign up – hardest thing was keeping the paper dry enough for the pens to work!”

Ian adds that he has written to all of the London Members of Parliament seeking support for Early Day Motion 1751, “and we’ve received support from both parties.”

CWU general secretary Dave Ward spent Action Day up in the Midlands, where he joined regional secretary Kate Hudson outside Solihull Post Office, and then they joined Nottingham protesters fighting to save their Crown Office from a similar fate.

PUBLIC SUPPORT IN EVERY REGION

“Public support in Solihull and Nottingham was brilliant – anger and in many cases astonishment at plans that nobody has agreed to,” said Dave.

“The task for us going forward is to try to turn this huge public support into public action.”

Kate told The Voice that “we had people queueing up to sign the petition – people were astounded to hear their post office is under threat.”

Midlands campaigners “followed up the Saturday action with a highly successful public meeting in Solihull on the Friday after, which was widely reported in the local press,” she added.

Five local councils were set to debate motions on the issue across the Eastern Region when we spoke to Paul Moffatt, who told us that there had been nine Action Day protests across his patch – Cambridge, Clacton, Ipswich, Lowestoft, Norwich, Southend, Stevenage, Colchester and Bedford.

“Our Save Our Post Office motion was also
adopted by the East of England Labour Party Conference and we have meetings planned with representatives from all of the councils in closure/franchising areas,” he continued, adding that the region is hoping to organise further campaign events at other towns going forward.

CWU South West also organised nine actions – at Hereford, Gloucester, Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Truro, Andover, Yeovil and Barnstaple.

“It was a great success all round,” says Kevin Beazer. “We had TV interviews in Bristol and Exeter and press coverage right across the region.

“And we were joined by CLPs, councillors, retired members and a Mayor.”

Down in the South East, campaigners targeted Basingstoke, Wokingham and Crawley – where activists went straight from the Post Office to the town hall for an afternoon public meeting.

“At the Crawley meeting, the Labour Council leader and the Conservative Member of Parliament both slammed the franchise move,” reports regional secretary Paul Carpenter, “and Labour councillors in all three towns submitted motions opposing the plans.”

Scottish CWU activists took their protests to Edinburgh’s Waverley Station and WH Smith in Argyle Street, Glasgow, with a further protest being planned for East Kilbride.

“Our own Hugh Gaffney MP (Coatbridge, Chryston & Bellshill) and MP Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) came along to our action in Glasgow, while our Edinburgh members were joined by MSP Neil Findlay (Lothian) and MP Marion Fellows (Motherwell & Wishaw),” says acting CWU Scotland secretary Craig Anderson, who adds that Neil is taking a Save Our Post Office motion to the Scottish Parliament.

**TAKING THE CAMPAIGN INTO 2019**

Dave Kennedy tells The Voice that WH Smith has less of a presence in Northern Ireland than over here, “so there is no WH Smith franchise plan here at this time.

“But there are rumours that they might try to franchise our Post Office into Henderson outlets,” he adds, explaining that Henderson is a similar retailer to WH Smith.

“If that is proposed, we’ll be out protesting again,” vows the CWU Northern Ireland secretary, whose members held Action Day protests at Newtownards and Belfast and “we got great support from the people – everyone here is determined to Save Our Post Office.”

York was the venue for our North East campaigners, who rallied in large numbers outside the city’s under-threat Lendal Post Office, where regional secretary Paul Clays praised the North East’s “massive turnout, which shows the depth of feeling from the public against what is, in effect, the closure of a public service.”

And Gary Watkins reports that members in the Wales & the Marches Region contributed “great efforts” at their protests at Chester and Cardiff with “brilliant support from the public and local councillors and MPs too,” adding: “We’ll be taking this forward into the New Year.”

CWU deputy general secretary postal Terry Pullinger had warm words of praise for the nationwide efforts by everyone, saying “a massive thank you and very well done to all our members, activists and supporters who turned out on the day – fighting not just to save the PO for ourselves, but for the whole country.

“This is a Great British institution which, ultimately, needs to be put back together with Royal Mail – the retail and delivery arms – so that we can start to build them both together, with Royal Mail renationalised,” the DGSP insisted.

And Dave Ward said: “Our thanks to regional secretaries, political officers, branches, postal executive members, representatives, members and headquarters staff for the hard work and effort which went into organising and participating in what turned out to be an exceptionally good campaign day.”

Looking forward, our general secretary said that he wanted the CWU to be “working with different organisations, with metro mayors, local councils – let’s open a Post Office, let’s open one on a completely new model and let’s keep pushing our policy of a Post Bank.

“Save Our Post Office and push it forward into the future.”
AWARDS

CWU Midlands Region secretary Kate Hudson told The Voice that she had been “extremely proud” that a CWU member has been awarded a special TUC Lifetime Achievement Award.

At the Midlands TUC Awards event last month, which Kate hosted in her role as regional TUC chair, our very own Ernie Coggins of Midland No.1 Branch was handed the honour by our general secretary Dave Ward.

Ernie, a retired telecoms engineer, held a number of positions within the CWU, and its predecessor unions NCU and POEU during many years of loyal service to the trade union movement.

“And his retirement did not stop him from playing an active part within the CWU,” continues Kate, adding: “He’s always helping out with our campaigns and activities, he sits on our regional retired members committee and is also an active member of the union’s national retired members advisory committee.

“So I was extremely proud that one of our own received this special Lifetime Achievement Award. Congratulations Ernie once again from all of us – and also well done to Andrew McLean, a CWU health and safety rep from the same Midland No.1 Branch, who received a Commendation for his work.”

Hosting the awards evening rounded off a busy year for Kate, who took on this regional TUC role on top of her CWU commitments at the start of 2018.

“It’s certainly been a hectic 12 months,” she says, “but it’s definitely been worth it – particularly when our own members receive the recognition they deserve.

“And another highlight of the year was hosting the huge open-air anti-austerity rally up here in Birmingham when the Tories came to town for their conference a couple of months ago.

“There must have been thousands at the event – which was the biggest audience I’ve ever spoken in front of – but it was brilliant to show what trade unionists in the Midlands can do when we all work together.”

Winning team proudly sponsored by local CWU branch

Unbeaten and sitting proudly near the top of the West Herts Youth League and through to the semi-finals of the West Hertfordshire Junior League Cup, under-16 team Herons have enjoyed the first half of the 2018/19 season.

Ably coached by CWU activist Jason Barter, the youngsters have scored a total of 54 goals, only conceded 17 and hopes are rising that 2019 could be their double year.

“It’s great to be doing so well and being on this winning run,” Jason tells The Voice, “but, most importantly, they’re all enjoying their football - and this season it’s been brilliant to have been sponsored by our local Harrow & District Branch.”

Jason is a deputy unit rep at Edgware Delivery Office and he started coaching the Herons – who his own stepson Blake plays for – at the start of this season.

“Supporting grassroots community football is vital,” he continued. “We’re all really appreciative of the CWU providing kit for the team and it’s a proud sight for me to see the team displaying the union’s name and logo.”

Team manager Kevin Wheatley told us: “We’re all very grateful for the support and sponsorship of the CWU. It’s brilliant that the branch is backing the Herons - and, so far this season, it’s brought us good luck as well.”
The CWU has expressed its shock and dismay at news that 12 long-serving Manpower employees based at BT’s Alness call centre have been served with ‘end of assignment’ notices – triggering a possible redundancy situation.

The announcement, made to members on the BT Business Switch Order Management team at the Scottish Highlands site at the end of October, prompted outrage and upset in equal measure across the tight-knit workforce.

Coming in the wake of a high-profile victory in the CWU’s ‘Close the Gap’ campaign against unequal pay for agency workers, and the mass rollout of permanent BT contracts to loyal agency employees across much of BT Group, staff were shell-shocked at the development.

Directly employed BT Business staff on the Switch Order Management team at Alness – whose work is being relocated to Brentwood in Essex under a ‘strategic review’ conducted by BT – are to be redeployed on to different workstreams.

The future employment prospects of the 12 agency employees impacted, however, are reliant on Manpower finding alternative assignments before their work is transferred to Brentwood on February 1 next year.

If Manpower cannot identify work prior to that date – an outcome that is sadly probable, unless alternative BT work can be found, given Alness’s remote geographical location where comparable jobs are scarce – the loyal agency workers will have no option but to seek redundancy compensation payments.

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge, lead officer for the union’s Manpower membership, said: “This is clearly a very serious situation for all the Scotland No.1 branch members affected – and the outrageousness of how they are being treated is underlined by the fact that, between them, they’ve put in around 100 years of loyal service to BT.

“Needless to say the CWU will be making every possible representation on their behalf.”

‘Openstreet’ shows the way ahead for training

A resounding thumbs up has been given by the CWU to an innovative new approach to training in Openreach that seeks to better prepare new recruits and existing engineers receiving refresher/upskilling training for the real-life challenges they will face in the field.

Complementing classroom learning – which itself has been made far more ‘realistic’ than it ever was before – the first of 12 new ‘Openstreet’ facilities that mimic the actual environment that engineers operate in once they are unleashed on the streets opened in Bradford earlier this year.

Training in Openreach has always been highly practical, but what makes ‘Openstreet’ different is that it seeks to replicate a complete end-to-end network for all circuit types – fibre as well as copper – allowing for ‘real’ scenarios to be created for students, including blocked ducts, open joints and intermittent faults.

‘Close the Gap’ victory tour draws to a close

We Closed the Gap! That’s the resounding message that has gone out loud and clear at BT Consumer call centres across the country in a national celebration of the momentous victory the union has secured against the travesty of unequal pay for identical work.

Following BT’s landmark agreement to end in entirety its use of exploitative ‘Pay Between Assignment’ (PBA) agency contracts, the mass rollout of permanent BT jobs to around 1,000 agency workers in

Consumer is now drawing to its climax - well in advance of the March 31 deadline for a total cessation of the use of PBA contracts across BT Group.

As such, the CWU’s Close the Gap campaign has now fulfilled its objective within BT - ample reason for a two-week ‘Victory Tour’ which commenced in Leicester on October 1 and concluded in Gosforth on October 9, taking in BT Consumer call centres in Doncaster, Warrington and Dundee along the way.

Close the Gap on Twitter: @CWU_News
Over the past six years, working-class people have found it increasingly difficult to access justice,” is how CWU head of legal services Tony Rupa opens our conversation on the subject, pointing to the 2012 Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) and the Government’s introduction of fees for industrial tribunals.

“That had an immediate impact on people at work,” Tony commented – “putting employment tribunal claims out of reach for the vast majority of workers.”

Along with this, LASPO brought in means testing for legal aid, along with the removal of various aspects of law from legal aid provision – divorce, custody disputes, the majority of clinical negligence claims, most employment law and welfare benefit litigation, and many debt and housing cases.

“And of course all these changes hit people hard outside of the workplace as well – ordinary working-class people gradually losing access to justice.”

The results of these changes were the subject of an in-depth 2017 study by the Law Society – Access Denied? – which concluded that…

“LASPO has had a negative impact across a variety of areas, restricting access to justice and creating additional pressures on the justice system and the wider state.”(P30)

…and then listed 26 separate recommendations to the Government aimed at addressing this mounting unfairness, recommendations that, so far, have not been progressed.

As the Access Denied? study showed, the net effect of this part of LASPO has been to start to move our society away from a system of universal provision of justice underwritten by the state – and a move towards a system in which, for individuals, the quality of justice received depends on ability to pay.

The Act also impacted on the legal profession directly, bringing into law many of the recommendations of the 2010 Jackson Review into Civil Litigation Costs.

This range of measures included ending referral fees, limiting compensation awards, and introducing fixed-costs and tighter deadlines.

“Taken together, these parts of LASPO largely disincentivised the legal profession from taking on personal injury claims,” continues Tony. “And as a consequence, many legal firms pulled out of this area of law, while other specialist personal injury claims law companies went out of business altogether.”

This made it even more difficult for individuals, who suddenly found it much more difficult to find a lawyer, to take on their cases.

CHALLENGES FACED

“The challenge for us – and for all unions – was to try to ensure that we maintained our full range of legal services, at no cost to our members.

The best way for workers to access justice – whether at work or outside of the workplace – is through the CWU

If you or a family member has had an accident in the last 3 years, you could still be in time to make a claim; call 0300 333 0303

CWU MEMBERSHIP = ACCESS TO JUSTICE & LEGAL SERVICES

The Voice met with CWU head of legal services Tony Rupa to talk about access to justice
If you or a family member has had an accident in the last 3 years, you could still be in time to make a claim; call 0300 333 0303.

Some trade unions have considered responding to this challenge by either taking a percentage of members’ compensation awards or by offering the option of an increased membership subscription rate to cover this service.

But the CWU took a different approach to how we delivered legal services, and one option was to establish our own law firm - which was allowed for the first time on account of changes made by LASPO. Prior to this, only lawyers were allowed to own law firms - and, as such, in May 2014 UnionLine was created.

“Other non-legal organisations entering into the legal sector for the first time included Co-op Legal, AA Legal, Eddie Stobart Legal and several other private companies who set up their own law firms.”

WHAT WE’VE WON FOR YOU

The big advantage of us having our own law firm is that we can provide members with unfettered access to justice – free of charge.

“Since we set up UnionLine back in 2014, CWU Legal Services has processed 9,733 personal injury claims ranging from slips, trips and falls to major accidents and injuries – recovering a total of £15,667,000 in civil compensation,” Tony continues.

“Every one of these members kept 100 per cent of their compensation – and not one of them had to pay anything more than their regular CWU membership contributions.”

DID YOU KNOW CWU LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDES ALL CWU MEMBERS WITH:

- Access to all CWU legal services benefits
- Advice and assistance on all employment law related issues for members only
- Free legal representation for work and non-work-related accidents for YOU and your immediate family
- Free simple will service (preferential rates for complex wills) for members and their family
- Preferential rates on all areas of Power of Attorney (lasting or general)
- Free motor claims service providing free legal cover – RING US FIRST IN THE EVENT OF AN INCIDENT
- Fixed rate conveyancing (buying, selling or re-mortgaging)
- Free legal advice covering a broad range of issues from consumer rights, divorce and family matters, immigration, neighbour disputes
- Assistance with Criminal Injuries Compensation claims
- Assistance with claims for Industrial Injuries benefit

UNIONLINE IS:

- Not for profit – with no equity partners or shareholders
- Any surplus revenue is ploughed back into the union
- UnionLine pays out 100% of any compensation awarded to members & family members

HOW TO CLAIM:

- Contact your branch secretary, who will assist you with your claim
- Ring the UnionLine advice line on 0300 333 0303
- Make your claim online www.unionline.co.uk

UnionLine is a trading name of Trade Union Legal LLP. UnionLine is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority under number 608309. All legal services are provided under CWU national rule 4.1.7.
it is hard to deny that the union movement faces an uphill task in recruiting and retaining young workers. Membership levels among those under 30 have fallen from just over 20 per cent to just under 16 per cent in the last 17 years. Much is to blame for this collapse: Tory anti-trade union laws, the rise of the gig economy and mass public sector job cuts to name but a few.

But our union has no intention of accepting defeat when it comes to young workers. Despite the unnerving statistics on young membership there is no evidence that young people are anti-trade union. In fact, the problem is partly one of our own. As a movement we need to ensure that young people know who we are and what we are doing.

That is exactly what we will be doing on January 22nd in Birmingham when we host our annual CWU Young Workers Conference. An event for reps and members under-30, this Conference will serve as the launch for a new strategy on young workers within our union.

Across the labour movement, young people have been approached as somewhat alien to politics and organising. The truth is that young people simply want meaningful engagement. All the recent evidence points to the fact that young people want to be more, not less, involved in the society of which they are a part. We stand ready to work with these young people to better our own union as well as wider society.

This Conference will be an opportunity for our young workers to debate motions and to engage in workshops, training and activism. With a social event the evening before on January 21, we hope to be able to get our young workers together to recognise the importance of collective organising. The Conference will be an opportunity for young members to set their agenda for the upcoming year and to plan their own activism and organising. We have as much to learn from our young members as they have to learn from us. Sharing ideas and experience will be crucial as we go forward.

The best way for young workers to change the future and to alter the world of work is to get involved with the trade union movement. We want as many of our members and representatives to come to the Conference as possible. Speak to your branch secretary if you are interested in attending, and you can contact our young workers committee if you have any other questions (email info@cwu.org and put Young Workers Conference in the subject box).

We believe in putting young workers at the forefront of the fight against the current Tory Government and the working conditions that they allow to continue. There is much work to do in the task of unionising young people and engaging young workers. But it is a task that cannot be neglected or talked-out. We’ve got to get a grip of things right now and that is what our union is doing. We hope to see as many of you as possible in January with what looks set to be an engaging and inspiring event.

Many people talk of the young workers as the future of our great union. This is not true – you are the now.

Follow @CWUYoungWorkers on Twitter and like our Facebook page: CWU Young Workers for more news and views.

- A report from the recent CWU Young Workers Education Event, at which participants took to the streets of Peterborough to promote the union’s Save Our Post Office campaign, can be viewed at yaw.cwu.org/news/yw-to-streets

West Highland Charity Walk nets £10,000

n June a team of 8 young workers and members of CWU staff took on the challenge of the West Highland Way – walking 96 miles through the Highlands of Scotland from Milingavie to Fort William.

Conditions were, at times, treacherous and the weather see-sawed between rain and a heatwave. The conditions also made it perfect for a record number of midges plaguing their every step!

The purpose of the walk was to raise money and awareness of the work of three amazing charities: Papyrus, Centrepoint and the Ron Todd Foundation and was part of the overall Charity Promise that CWU Young Workers has as part of their campaigning agenda.

The team worked tirelessly to raise as much money as possible... and the final tally was a remarkable £10,016.12!

General secretary Dave Ward told The Voice: “This is a great achievement and big slaps on the back should go to the team: Scott Hartles, Fiona Curtis, Elli Long, Andy Mercer, Adam Gibbins, Jimi Brown, Charlie Pullinger and Jo Thair – and Tom Cooper who supported the group at their campsites.”
Opposition to Mrs May’s deal came from all across the political spectrum – the DUP did not like the prospect of different customs and trading arrangements for Northern Ireland, while others objected to the amount of money that we were set to be charged for leaving, and some people just do not want to leave the EU at all.

With the prospect of the Government and the Prime Minister facing no-confidence votes and widespread opposition to the deal, we head into the Christmas break with uncertainty and several unanswered questions:

■ Will Theresa May be replaced by another Conservative leader?
■ Is the UK likely to leave the EU without any deal?
■ Might there be a second EU referendum?
■ Will there be a general election?

We posed these questions to CWU general secretary Dave Ward, also asking him what position, if any, the CWU will take on all of this and how it may affect the businesses our members work for.

“Obviously, this is a dynamic situation and every day brings new developments,” he began, adding that “the political situation is fluid and things can change very quickly.”

As general secretary, Dave has led detailed political discussions at the last two National Executive Council meetings and he explains why the union has opposed the deal that the Prime Minister brought back from Brussels.

“In simple terms this isn’t a deal that delivers for our members or workers in the UK. It is weak on employment rights while preserving elements of EU law – like state aid and competition – that we know have been used to damage our industries.

“CWU Conference in 2016 collectively decided upon a ‘remain but reform’ position,” Dave reminded us, adding that “we have never defended the status quo in the UK or in the EU.

“So while we were, on balance, more in favour of staying in than leaving, we were by no means uncritical of the EU and, since the result was declared, we’ve been of the view that the verdict of the people should be respected and carried out – but in a way that protects jobs, trade and living standards going forward.

“At the same time, any deal must avoid a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The people of Northern Ireland must be listened to – on all sides of the community – and the hard-won peace there must be protected at all costs,” he insists.

The CWU NEC agreed to oppose the Government’s deal and that the priority for the union should be to call for a general election to elect a Labour government that would deliver on a number of priorities for our members. These include the re-nationalisation of Royal Mail, significant investment in broadband, setting up a Post Bank and overhauling employment rights to put power in the hands of workers.

Reflecting on the debate at the NEC, Dave explained that “when you look at the world of work and what’s going on in our industries, it is clear that we need fundamental change in this country – but in or out of the EU, that’s only going to happen with a transformative Labour government and that’s why calling for a general election has to be the priority.”

Dave also expressed his concerns that the campaign for a second referendum was simply re-running the debate from two years ago – where the country was faced with a choice between two right-wing alternatives – and prolonging the divisions this caused.

“Since the referendum result I have felt that it is our responsibility to try to move the debate on and unite the movement around the fight for a new deal for workers. While some form of public vote on a deal may end up being the only way to break a deadlock in Parliament if we can’t get a General Election, this isn’t something the CWU has been campaigning for as our priority.

“Our nation, our people, our society need a Labour government, because only this way will we bring our country back together and deliver the change our members need – and that has to be our priority,” Dave concluded.
Why do so many pensioners vote Tory?

With Tory divisions over Brexit fuelling speculation that another General Election may not be far away, Norman Candy argues that a recent survey suggesting a person’s age is now the best indicator of their likely voting intentions has to be taken seriously by the labour movement.

One of the largest post-election surveys ever carried out – involving more than 52,000 adults who voted in the last General Election – has indicated that age could now be the new key predictor of voting intentions in the UK.

Whether or not this turns out to be true long term, or whether exceptional factors were at play in the 2017 General Election, remains to be seen – but the data is certainly interesting and shouldn’t be ignored, especially by those of us who’d like to see Labour back in power at the earliest possible opportunity.

A SHOCKING CORRELATION

YouGov’s evidence for the correlation it found between age and voting patterns lies in detailed analysis of the remarkable contrast between the way different generations behaved at the ballot box.

Amongst the first time voters (aged 18 and 19) polled by YouGov, Labour was a decisive 47 percentage points ahead. However, amongst the over-70s who took part in the survey, the Tories had a lead of 50 percentage points.

Furthermore, the pollsters found that the likelihood of voting Conservative increased by nine points for every 10 years in age.

Further number crunching revealed that the age at which voters became more likely to vote Tory was 47 – and although there was an increase in the youth turnout at the last election, youngsters were still less likely to vote than older people. The turnout for the 70 plus age group was 84 per cent, whilst this fell to 57 per cent for first-time voters.

Those with higher education qualifications were significantly more likely to have voted either Labour or Liberal Democrat, and women were slightly more likely to have voted Labour than Tory, although the gap was small. Unsurprisingly, the better off were more likely to have voted Tory, while Labour was ahead amongst less affluent voters.

Perhaps the most startling statistic to come out of the YouGov survey, however, was the percentage of retired people who voted Conservative as opposed to Labour at the last General Election – a staggering 63 per compared to 24 per cent for Labour.

These figures should be of concern to the labour movement for a number of obvious reasons – and a follow-up survey of why the retired voted the way they did would be interesting, because retired people rely more on the state than the young and it’s not just the state pension. They are more likely to use the NHS or social services than the young. They are more dependent on local authority services and public transport. They’re also more likely to have benefited from the welfare state, state funded further education and locally-provided council services – yet they voted overwhelming for a party dedicated to shrinking the size of the State and reducing government support for these services.

The Labour Party, trade unions and the National Pensioners Convention need to take these figures seriously. With another General Election possible, sooner rather than later, the vote of the elderly will be crucial.

The Labour Party’s manifesto was much more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories’ – yet huge numbers of pensioners voted for a party pledged to remove the protection of the ‘triple-lock’ for the state pension, introduce means testing for the winter fuel allowance and increase the cost of social care for many.

This must be of concern to the labour movement and is an issue that needs to be addressed before the next election by everyone who wants to see a Labour Government.

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
Working with Openreach to improve its diversity

Chair of the CWU’s Openreach National Team, Julia Upton, is on the prowl for ideas that could help the company recruit more women and people from the black and minority ethnic (BAME) community to the company’s field engineering workforce.

Urging not just the union’s race and women’s advisory committees, but also branches and individual members, to feed in suggestions, Julia explains that the company is keen to “work collaboratively” with the union towards the joint aim of making the company more representative of the communities in which it operates.

With Openreach’s long-stated public commitment to increasing the diversity of its workforce now being reinforced with a new recruitment advertising campaign, Julia points out there have already been some notable successes.

As things stand at present, 14% of both applications and hires are coming from the BAME community – up from 12 per cent of applications and 9% of hires last year.

There has also been an increase in both the number of women applying for field engineering and those being taken on – albeit from a low base point. At present women account for 4% of all applicants for field engineering jobs (up from 3% last year) and 5% of all hires (up 2%).

As shown in the table above, the percentages of women applying for, and securing, jobs in Openreach are pretty consistent across the country. With regards to BAME applications, however, there are profound regional variations – not just in terms of the numbers that apply but also in the percentage of those applicants who are eventually hired.

Some 69% of applicants in London came from the BAME community, with 65% hired. In the North West, however, some 13% of applications came from the BAME community, with just 7% hired.

While East Anglia saw 11% of applications coming from BAME people, with 10% hired, North Wales and the North Midlands saw 16% of applications coming from that community, only half of whom were hired.

“No one is denying we’re still a very long way off from where we want to be, but we’re encouraged by the movement and keen to build upon it,” stresses Julia.

TIMELY INITIATIVE

The welcome drive to recruit more BAME and female staff into Openreach follows some heavy criticism of BT Group’s recruitment policies at CWU’s Telecoms & Financial Services Conference in April.

Describing entering his own workplace in the diverse city of Bristol as “like going into Dr Who’s tardis and being transported back in time to the 60s and 70s,” Eddie Beese of Bristol argued that, despite portraying itself as diverse, the company’s recruitment policy was “flawed and not reaching out to the BAME community.”

There was also criticism of Openreach for its failure to increase its female recruitment – though Executive speaker Ken Woolley told delegates that the union was “already on the case” and that the company “accepted it needs to do a lot better on both counts.”

That message is now being reinforced by Julia Upton, who points out that Openreach is trying various methods of increasing application levels from BAME and female candidates. These include the targeting of schools and colleges, Connecting Women Events, housing associations, community leaders and various foundations in those areas of the country that are considered to be ‘hotspots’. Openreach has also used social media targeting, specifically focusing on BAME and female sites.

There have also been a number of positive local initiatives – including a link-up between Openreach, the CWU and the Mayor of Bristol.

Whilst this partnership is still at an early stage, there’s genuine excitement over what it could deliver – and, if successful in increasing BAME and female recruitment, this is something that could be rolled out to other areas,” concludes Julia.

“We’re certainly heading in the right direction and that is why, in addition to working with the union’s race and women’s advisory committees, the Openreach National Team would like to hear from anyone with innovative ideas as to how the company can further boost recruitment from the BAME community and women in general.”

Email your ideas to: jupton@cwu.org
The “I” rate includes Political Fund contributions – while the “O” rate is the rate paid by members who have opted out of the Political Levy.

**MEMBERSHIP**

**Subscription rates**

The current subscription rates were last increased in April 2015. The NEC has taken a decision to increase subscriptions of all active members by 2.5%. From 1st January 2019, CWU Subscriptions will therefore be as set out in the table to the right.

The rates are determined by the number of hours worked per week and whether or not the employer recognises the CWU for collective bargaining purposes.

**CWU Rule 11.5.2** contains the following instruction: The rate for retired and retired associate members shall increase on 1 January each year by the same percentage increase as the known CPI at the time.

The known rate for CPI is currently 2.4% therefore in accordance with the rules of the union from 1st January 2019 the membership subscription rates for Retired and Retired Associate Members as set out below.

**CWU Death Benefit**

In accordance with the terms expressed in CWU Rule 4.1.11, from October 1, 2018, the CWU Death Benefit payment will be increased to £814. Any enquiries should be addressed to the Senior Deputy General Secretary’s Department at sdgs@cwu.org

**CWU CONTRIBUTION RATES FROM JANUARY 1, 2019**

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<th>£ Rate</th>
<th>New Weekly Contributions</th>
<th>New Monthly Contributions</th>
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<td>1.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retired Associate Members</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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**CWU DIARIES 2019**

The great value CWU 2019 diaries are now available for dispatch!

**Enjoy Shopping for less with your CWU member savings**

- Enjoy cashback at your favourite retailers with Lifestyle Vouchers
- Choose the ultimate tech from Apple
- Look sharp in the New Year with men’s and women’s formal wear from T.M. Lewin
- You can save at the supermarket or at several high street retailers with My Cashback Cards
- Save up to 40% on cinema tickets for that traditional Christmas eve trip*
- Amazing deals on magazine subscriptions – save up to 80% off TIME, New Statesman and The Week. CWU members get an extra 10% discount!*  
- Discounted green fees with Open Fairways
- A summer of Lord’s cricket next year with half price Middlesex Cricket membership*
- 25% discount on salon, spa and beauty treatments from with Fabyouless membership
- Pamper a loved one with salon and spa treatments and save an additional 12% with Spafinder
- 20% off unforgettable Virgin Experience Days including supercar driving and indoor skydiving*

For these and many more benefits log in to CWU Member Benefits:  
https://www.cwu.org/my-union/member-benefits/

*Terms and conditions apply to all benefits. See website. The Cinema Society - Discounts vary between cinema venues. Please check when purchasing vouchers, registration to The Cinema Society required to access discount. Isubscribe - Please note that the extra 10% discount is only applicable to debit/ credit/Paypal orders and cannot be used against Direct Debit orders. Prices are subject to change. Virgin Experience Days - Discount code cannot be used against the excluded range or already discounted products) CWU Member Benefits is managed and run on behalf of CWU by Parliament Hill Ltd.
SHORTER WORKING WEEK
Gaining an hour through a shorter working week should have been a good thing for delivery staff. Management could have taken 30 minutes off the finish times on the Tuesdays and Saturdays to make our hours more ‘family friendly’. Remember that? Instead they’ve taken it off the start by bringing us in later on Mondays, Tuesdays and Saturdays. This means we haven’t gained at all by a shorter working week in our office.

Darrell Taylor, Gloucester

In theory, the reduction by an hour to a postperson’s week could only be seen as a good thing. In practice, however, it is not. Now we’re starting even later on 3 days of the week rather than across the week – which is more of a nuisance than a benefit – but are still expected to complete exactly the same workload. If we get another hour taken away next October and it’s organised in a similar way then it will do more harm than good.

John Gibbons, Saxmundham, Suffolk

Assistant secretary Mark Baulch responds:
“The nail has been hit on the proverbial head here – the Shorter Working Week (SWW) for delivery members is predominantly to offset the reduction in indoor work in the mornings, hence the hour coming from the front of the duties on the lighter days. Royal Mail’s recent results showed letter traffic has reduced once again by 7 per cent in the last year – but that’s not the case with outdoor work where parcels are changing the dynamics of our workload. With the desire for later shopping online, the delivery window has got later. This trend in letter reduction is set to continue and, in order to maintain full-time jobs, we must address that. The SWW is a perfect means to do so.”

Assistant secretary Sally Bridge responds:
“Keith is right that this outsourcing represents the ultimate betrayal of loyal employees in Facilities Services and – as reported on page 9 of this magazine – the union is fighting it every inch of the way. With regards to Keith’s appeal for an industrial action ballot, the CWU is ruling nothing out – but our preferred outcome would be a negotiated settlement that fully safeguards members’ interests.”

LONDON WEIGHTING
I read with interest the article headlined ‘Patience runs out on BT London Weighting’ in the last issue of The Voice.

Whilst I agree BT is dragging its heels, there was no mention that London isn’t the most expensive place to live in the UK and now lies second to Oxford. Why isn’t there an Oxford Weighting allowance?

Richard Beane, Oxfordshire

Assistant secretary Dave Jukes responds:
“Richard makes a good point. There are disparities in the cost of living throughout the country. However, although studies have shown that Oxford tops the list of the least affordable cities for house buyers, based on the ratio between property prices and average earnings, average house prices in London remain the highest in the UK at £467,001 compared with £385,372 in Oxford. London also remains the UK’s most expensive place to live when taking all costs, including transport and childcare, into account – and that’s why London Weighting continues to be important for CWU members working in the capital. Nevertheless, we recognise that the cost of housing in Oxford and elsewhere is a major problem. One of the ways the CWU is trying to address the issue is our support for far greater investment in affordable housing – and we’ve campaigned strongly on this issue. We also continue to strive to improve pay and conditions for all our members at a national level.”

TRAVEL TIME INJUSTICE
Could you imagine a job driving for the council emptying bins where you’d check the company vehicle and sign on to receive your route for the day – then drive the first hour unpaid? Then at the end of the day give another hours’ drive home unpaid? Well that’s EXACTLY what happens in Openreach under the Workforce 2020 contract’s Parking at Home ‘agreement’ for all new hires from 2014 – potentially forcing us to give 40 hours per month free to the company! It leaves a bitter taste when your colleagues get paid to travel at both the start and the end of the day. Will this injustice ever get resolved?

Paul Rayner, Scarborough

Assistant secretary Davie Bowman responds: “The CWU is already on the case, and a new campaign that seeks to address just the injustice Paul refers to is outlined on page 13 of this magazine.”

WAR AND PENSIONS...
I quite understand why The Voice has shrunk to the size of a match box in these modern times, and I understand all the pressing issues affecting the CWU members each day – but I would have thought that in last issue at least one line could have been spared for the 100th anniversary of the end of the Great War. If only a ‘thank you’.

I also think our union, along with others, should push for a set age for the government retirement pension – especially after the article in the Autumn Voice about the establishment of the new CDC scheme in Royal Mail. Yes, there are perhaps 70-year-olds tramping the streets, but light duties, indoor duties and those famous ‘ladies walks’ have long gone.

Delivery isn’t easy and the amount of bullying by managers is now legend. How strange they seem to be young. Whatever happened to the Lord Sawyer Report?

Brett Robinson, retired member, Stockport

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns responds: “The CWU has been resolute in its opposition to raising the state pension age, indeed I’ve spoken on this matter on three separate occasions at TUC conference in recent years. At every opportunity we get we oppose the raising of the state pension age and will continue to do so.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: A major feature commemorating the GPO’s unique role at the heart of the UK’s 1914-1918 war effort, and the extraordinary contribution of a workforce that found itself on the front line in every possible sense, was posted on the union’s website on November 11 at the moment the guns fell silent 100 years ago. Last Post: WW1 remembered can be viewed at www.cwu.org/news/last-post-ww1-remembered/
Post Office: Why is it in crisis – how can we save it?

With the CWU campaigning against Post Office management’s latest offensive against our members and against the network, The Voice asks Tony Kearns about the roots of the crisis and asks if there is a positive alternative.

When the Liberal Democrat Postal Affairs Minister Ed Davey announced the separation of the Post Office from Royal Mail back in 2012, he promised that “separation is part of our cure” for “a demoralised Post Office.”

Mr Davey accompanied his announcement with a promise of “government support and investment but without any closure programmes” and vague talk of “winning new contracts.”

But unlike others at the time, the CWU opposed the split, warning that it would “pave the way for the end of the Post Office as we know it” and pointing out that no other country in the world had separated postal delivery and postal retail.

And, speaking to The Voice last month, CWU senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns said: “Looking back, it’s crystal clear who was right and who was wrong.

“Let’s remember that the Liberal Democrats are primarily to blame for the separation – privatisation had long been the Tories’ aim, but separation was an entirely LibDem idea. It was a bad idea then and it’s still a bad idea now,” he insists.

“This is the same Liberal Democrat Party which today bemoans the future of the country under Brexit, but who bear responsibility for these job losses that are happening now.

“The LibDems’ 2010 promise of no closures was about as reliable as their promise not to raise tuition fees – we’re down from 373 Crown Offices, to potentially around 150, we have postmasters leaving the industry in droves and far from ‘winning new contracts’, the network has had more and more work taken away.”

PATTERN OF DECLINE

As our older readers will recall, Tony preceded Andy Furey in the role of assistant secretary for the union’s Clerical/Counters & Cash Handling department – and before that he worked at Old Swan Post Office in Liverpool as a counter clerk.

From 1997 until 2002, in the assistant secretary role, he remembers well the beginning of the attacks that we are now seeing and the action this union took to defend jobs and services.

“But, despite our action, Crown Offices closed and jobs were lost as the then Labour Government oversaw a closure programme,” he recalls.

Tony adds that this pattern of privatisation and separation is not specific to the postal industry.

“Look at what’s happened within the other major business our union represents, BT. Over the past year or so – an imposed legal separation of Openreach, plans unveiled to outsource their maintenance and facilities operation BTFS, and a similar proposal for BT Fleet,” he points out.

“Back when I first started work at Old Swan Post Office, it was a company that not only encompassed all of the postal industry, it owned, operated and ran the whole UK’s telephone service as well.”

And our senior deputy general secretary adds that this is why our Save Our Post Office campaign is “not just about stopping this privatisation, it’s about also developing a new strategy, a new role for the Post Office network as a whole.”

The union is keen to develop a model that places the Post Office at the heart of communities. With high street banks closing, the Post Office can and should be, CWU argues, the provider of local financial services to both the public and small business.

“This is why we argued successfully and were pleased to see Labour’s 2017 general election manifesto calling for a study to set up a Post Bank,” Tony explains.

“We need a publicly owned Post Office that delivers new and expansive services for the community and, after that, who knows? Maybe it’s time to start talking about a different model of ownership that delivers for people and provides decent jobs for workers.”

THE LAST WORD

With the CWU campaigning against Post Office management’s latest offensive against our members and against the network, The Voice asks Tony Kearns about the roots of the crisis and asks if there is a positive alternative.