Tensions rise as chaotic talks on disputed BT Facilities Services outsourcing go right to the wire.

Anger at Openreach over two-hour travel time discrepancy prompts new CWU campaign.

Joint visits to Royal Mail units across the UK aim to improve workplace environment.

Parliamentarians join us handing in Save Our Post Office petition to Number 10.
The past couple of months have been AGM season in the CWU, which provides an important opportunity for us all to come together and talk about where we are as a union.

At these meetings I’ve met and been able to talk to many reps and members across both the Postal and Telecoms & Financial Services constituencies, and I’m always struck by individuals’ dedication to the CWU and their commitment to fighting for change in their own workplaces and wider society.

Protecting and enhancing terms and conditions will always be at the core of what we do. At the same time it’s clear to me that, across the union, members and reps increasingly understand that our ability to do this is connected to what’s happening in the wider world of work and throughout the sectors they work in.

The CWU has set the standard for terms and conditions in our industries over many years. But the growth of insecure employment around us means our members are coming under ever greater pressure from the race to the bottom – whether it’s on pensions, pay or hours, or stemming from more direct measures employers are taking to cut staff costs like outsourcing or franchising.

A major reason for this is the fact that, outside our employers, the majority of workers in our industries aren’t members of a trade union. And we have to be honest that, for a number of decades now, the CWU hasn’t made real strides forward in its efforts to recruit and organise in new employers.

The vast majority of our members are in two big businesses, which increasingly view the low cost employment models of the competitors growing around them as the future.

So, if we’re going to continue to deliver for our members, it’s vital that we now move forward with a new strategy and a major push on recruitment.

We need to get into new employers in our industries and do something about the growth of insecure employment we see across our sectors. We should also look to new opportunities to organise workers online, with the CWU leading the way on social media across the movement.

Growing the CWU’s membership is a must if the union is to survive. And when I think about the kind of union we want to be, I know we need to fight for change in the wider world of work, just as we have to in our own workplaces. I know for sure that our reps and members see this connection themselves, and we’ll be saying more about the new strategy the NEC has agreed on recruitment and organising over the coming months.

The truth is, taking on this fight by throwing the full weight of the union behind a fresh strategy, is the very essence of trade unionism and the core value of what the movement exists for.

Dave Ward
GENERAL SECRETARY
Alex Tiffin is a freelance journalist and welfare campaigner who’s spreading the word about the hostile effects of Universal Credit. He thinks unions hold the key to forcing change.

Universal Credit, everyone’s heard of it. There’s rarely a week goes by when it doesn’t appear in the news. Work and Pensions Secretary, Amber Rudd, finally admitted that it is to blame for the sky rocketing use of foodbanks. Bar that, she thinks it’s going swimmingly. The UN however, accused the Government of creating a “human catastrophe” with Universal Credit.

While the old system kept those looking for work and those in work separate, Universal Credit does not. This is where things get messy.

If you work part-time, it’s highly likely they will require you to seek more hours, even if you don’t want to. This is because the Government has decided that “work is the only way out of poverty.” What they fail to mention is that in-work poverty is on the rise.

People think of benefits as primarily affecting those who are out of work. However, increasingly it is those in work who are struggling to stay afloat.

A major issue is the initial five weeks you must wait for your first payment. The DWP will offer you a 100 per cent advance to tide you over; however, from personal experience, I’d strongly advise against taking it if you possibly can. I was left with £10.50 a fortnight for food after paying my bills because they claw it back, taking 30 per cent of your benefit money for six months.

If you have childcare costs, you’ll need to find the money yourself before the DWP will pay you back. Parents are going without food for days at a time, just so they can pay their childcare bills. Schools are having to take bookings for breakfast clubs they run throughout school holidays as parents look for any way to ease the burden.

Foodbank Charity, The Trussell Trust, found that 71 per cent of all new claimants fell into debt due to claiming Universal Credit. Some landlords are now refusing to take Universal Credit claimants due to rising rent arrears.

You may be wondering what the CWU can do about this? Well, I, like many other campaigners, believe that unions are key to tackling the hostile environment claimants face.

CWU NEC member Steve Halliwell summed it up perfectly at last year’s CWU Annual Conference; “As trade unionists we have a responsibility to encourage a more humane approach that is designed with users in mind. It’s vital that the CWU and other trade unionists campaign on this issue and are resolute.”

Your 2018 Conference passed a motion calling for Universal Credit to be scrapped. The TUC, PCS & Unite unions have all followed suit. This was a huge relief to thousands knowing we can rely on the trade unions.

We need unions to apply pressure to the Government. We also need them to push Labour into formally committing to abolish Universal Credit.

We are only 30 per cent into the roll-out of the benefit. Unless we act now we face a crisis on a massive scale.

If you work part-time, it’s highly likely they will require you to seek more hours, even if you don’t want to...

Alex Tiffin

You can follow Alex on Twitter: @RespectIsVital or by searching; Universal Credit Sufferer online
W e’ve just completed our third nationwide tour – meeting, speaking to and listening to your unit reps in every part of the UK – in what’s becoming an annual event.

The first time we set out on the road, we were building support for what was then the Four Pillars campaign, while last year’s tour celebrated the excellent deal your support and solidarity had achieved.

This year, it’s been a bit more sombre – we face challenging times, with worse than expected financial results and a new management team at the top of the business.

So, the message has been to maintain our unity and defend all aspects of our agreement – and also the urgent need to push the company on development of new products and services, and a redesign of the operational pipeline to respond to the changing delivery mix.

We’ve also just completed a series of workplace visits to take what we’re describing as a “temperature check” of culture at work, and the responses from the discussions are being discussed and collated in meetings between the union and the company and will form the basis of a robust programme of improving the Royal Mail workplace.

We remain totally committed to landing an agreement – and also the urgent need to push the company on development of new products and services, and a redesign of the operational pipeline to respond to the changing delivery mix.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

DGS COLUMN

Negotiations are ongoing between the CWU and Isle of Man Post Office bosses to seek to resolve a long-running dispute over pay, pensions and terms and conditions.

Our members on the island have taken five days of strike action in protest against plans announced by the company and backed by government at the end of last year, which fail to reward our current members, change benefits and contributions to the pension scheme, close the scheme to new entrants and reduce the USO from six days to five. Equally, management proposals pull up the ladder on the next generation of postal workers, bringing two-tier reduced wages for new members.

“Our members on the island have been magnificent in their solidarity,” reports deputy general secretary postal Terry Pullinger “and each one of the five strike days have been solidly supported.”

This dispute is different to others because of the differences in governance, he explains, pointing out that “the Isle of Man has full autonomy on all domestic matters and the Post office here is completely separate from Royal Mail.

“So, as well as fighting the employer, our members over there are up against the island’s government too – so it’s a very tough fight for them and the messages of support from our branches all over the country have been very much appreciated. Now we need to achieve an agreement which will protect jobs and job security going forward.”

Back on the mainland, the start of 2019 has seen difficulties at several delivery offices, where issues around alleged management behaviours, workloads, and claims of unfair disciplinary actions have created a number of flashpoints.

At Bangor in Northern Ireland and Wythenshawe in Greater Manchester, these issues have sparked industrial action ballot and strikes, while at other units our members have held canteen meetings and spontaneous protests.

“These flashpoints should have been a thing of the past, as we developed a new culture in line with our agreement, but management have taken their eye off the prize with their self-imposed leadership change,” says Terry. “It’s therefore no real surprise, but also worrying.

that the old managerial structure and approach they have put back in has seen more workplaces with these problems emerging in all parts of the country.”

From a CWU perspective, our DGSP says that it is “heartening to see that our reps and members are rightly standing together to expose what they consider to be an unfair and bullying managerial approach, which is totally at odds with the agreement that they voted on and is not yet a year old.

“In each of these individual disputes, the CWU at branch, area, divisional and national level has fully supported members and has worked extremely hard to find fair solutions,” Terry points out.

“But what’s really needed is fundamental change in the longer term and that’s why our nationwide programme of culture visits is such an important initiative, along with ensuring that our agreement is respected and deployed in full.”

Searching for solutions on Isle of Man

Terry Pullinger
At the time of writing – just three weeks before the impending transfer of our BTFS membership to either CBRE or ISS – discussions with BT and the receiving companies are far from satisfactory. Last-minute bombshells the union has had to contend with include the revelation that low-paid housekeepers will have to wait a month after their last BTFS pay cheque to receive just two weeks’ money because of the way a move from monthly to fortnightly pay is being handled.

The CWU has also been challenging the change of the pay review date to January 2020 for housekeepers and security officers transferring to ISS, as this will result in no pay review in 2019 – contradicting earlier assurances secured by the union that Real Living Wage pay levels will be protected.

Some progress has been made in these and other areas (see page 6), and the CWU continues to battle for members’ interests against a ticking clock. Outsourcing, however, has been unmasked for exactly what it’s designed to do: cut costs, attack pay and Ts&Cs and save money.

Meanwhile, our new Our Hours campaign kicked off in February, highlighting the unfair treatment of some Openreach engineers who are being forced to work for up to two hours a day for free. (See page 9). This unfair practice, which has been going on for far too long, is contributing to a two-tier workforce and I urge all members to sign the union’s petition, downloadable at www.cwu.org/campaign/our-hours/

The joining process for BT’s new ‘Hybrid Pension’ is now underway – with the new scheme scheduled to become fully operational for future accrual from April 1.

It is open to team members who were active Section B or C BT Pension Scheme (BTPS) members when it closed for future service.

Combining both defined benefit and defined contribution elements, the new scheme is a key element of the 2018 Pensions Agreement – designed to reduce investment risk and also provide more certainty over pension benefits compared with other options.

Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove said: “Those eligible to join can now do so until the end of September. “I’d therefore urge members to carefully consider the information being put out by the company, and in Letter to Branches No.138/2019 at www.cwu.org/ltb/ltb-138-19 without delay.”

BT Hybrid Pension – time to decide

Big ‘yes’ vote in landmark EE pay ballot

Members in EE have overwhelmingly accepted the first pay offer in the company’s history to have been subject to consultation with a trade union.

No less than 83 per cent of members who cast their vote in an electronic ballot gave the thumbs up to the CWU-brokered package. Never before has pay been subject to consultation with a union at EE. Neither have employees ever before been given the opportunity to give their verdict on pay rises via a ballot.

Thanking members for backing the union’s recommendation of the deal by such a wide margin, assistant secretary John East said: “This is a massive endorsement of the first negotiated pay deal at EE, and represents a watershed moment in the CWU’s long-running efforts to forge an all-new industrial relationship with EE now that the mobile giant is a BT subsidiary.

“Following the outcome of the vote intense discussions are taking place on the details of a formal recognition agreement, with both sides intent on reaching a conclusion in the near future.”

Full details of the EE pay settlement for 2019 were given to members in advance of the ballot and workplace meetings were held at every EE call centre site to explain it. “In summary, the deal secures many of the union’s key objectives for the pay round, even though individual awards are calculated using the methodology traditionally used by EE that the CWU believes needs re-examining,” continues John.

“As such, we’ve been particularly pleased to secure a firm commitment from EE for an urgent joint review of the use of the so-called ‘Quintile’ system for future pay reviews – opening up the genuine possibility of us being able to simplify and improve the salary review process in the future.

“Taken in conjunction with the solid progress being made towards a formal recognition agreement, this is a promising time for the union’s future relationship with EE.”
Four months after BT’s shock decision to outsource its Facilities Services division triggered the launch of the CWU’s #ENDGAME campaign, Simon Alford reports on the highs and lows of a spirited fightback that’s been conducted against a ticking clock.

From the moment BT dropped the bombshell last November that it had already signed contracts that will result in 1,700 BTFS employees transferring to ISS and CBRE on April 1, it was clear time was tight to resolve a raft of serious employee concerns arising from outsourcing that the union believes is wrong in principle.

Few, however, would have predicted that, as The Voice went to press – just three weeks prior to the now imminent TUPE ‘D-Day’ – the CWU would still be locked in tense and increasingly urgent negotiations over a plethora of unresolved issues.

Following a whirlwind series of CWU protests at key BT sites across the UK late last year – culminating in a national demonstration outside BT Centre at the start of January – the key reassurances the union has been seeking for members on job security and the protection of Ts&Cs could not have been made plainer to all parties.

Yet it was only in mid-March – on the eve of this magazine being printed – that serious progress began to be made in some of the thorniest areas.

Astonishingly, two of the biggest issues facing those transferring to ISS only came to light in late February when the union was given sight of the detailed TUPE matrix documentation.

One concerned the unforeseen bombshell that ISS’s planned move from monthly to fortnightly pay would mean housekeepers – some of the lowest paid people in BT – would have to wait nearly a month after their last pay cheque from BTFS to receive just two weeks’ money.

The other concerned a proposed shift to the annual pay review date that would have resulted in those transferring to ISS receiving no award whatsoever in 2019 – despite earlier assurances secured by the union that Real Living Wage pay rates will be maintained for the duration of the five-year contract.

After furious representations to BT, some movement has been secured on both issues – and, at the time of printing, belated progress was also finally being made in a number of other areas including:

- Union recognition agreements with both companies that crucially cover new joiners as well as existing employees
- Union demands for a detailed redundancy agreement offering enhanced packages for any ISS or CBRE transferees made compulsorily redundant within the duration of the five-year contract
- Assistant secretary Sally Bridge told The Voice: “At last it seems things are finally moving in the right direction – but, at the time of writing, the jury is still out on whether all the issues will have been satisfactorily resolved by the time the TUPE becomes effective on April 1.”
- Sally continues: “This whole TUPE has been mishandled from the start by BTFS, placing our members in an appalling situation.

“Despite the CWU’s tireless efforts to bring some clarity to the process, and the successes we’ve had in certain areas – such as the early assurance we received that the Real Living Wage would continue to be paid by ISS – we’ve repeatedly been trounced by unexpected nasties coming out of the woodwork.

“It’s impossible to overstare the distress the two-week pay fiasco caused our members – all because no-one apart from the union bothered to consider what it would mean to low paid workers to have two weeks’ pay effectively withheld for a month.

“While BTFS has finally accepted that its outgoing housekeepers were being placed in an impossible situation, and is belatedly offering a two-week salary advance that needs to be paid back in 24 fortnightly payments over a 12-month period – the CWU still believes transferring staff have been shoddily treated by a major blue chip company.

“Frankly BTFS was ill-prepared in its approach to this TUPE from the outset, never drilling down into the detail of how loyal employees were going to be impacted – and the CWU has already made it clear to BT Group this can never be allowed to happen again.”

Given the fluidity of the situation as The Voice went to press, members are advised to watch out for updates at www.cwu.org
“Hey’re driving decline, not just managing decline,” pointed out York (Central) MP Rachael Maskell at a packed meeting in Parliament on March 11.

The Westminster summit was called by the CWU and supported by the All-Party Parliamentary Post Office Group and it attracted MPs from across the country, all deeply concerned at the ruthless and relentless programme of closures.

Ignoring nationwide protests, and unanimous opposition from local communities, the Post Office Board has blithely continued its destructive strategy, the meeting heard.

Ms Maskell told of the demonstrations, petitioning and protests that she had been involved with in her own constituency, trying to save a city-centre Crown office that has been serving the people of York since 1884.

“There’s been a constant refusal to listen to the people,” she said, exposing Post Office bosses’ claims to have ‘consulted’ communities over their plans.

“York Post Office is making a profit – but they don’t even want to save their own business - they’re driving decline.”

Ipswich MP Sandy Martin told a similar story from his town, while Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) reported that “several post offices have closed down” in her constituency, where “we’re having an almighty battle” against the destruction of this vital public service.

Matt Rodda (Reading East), Anna Turley (Redcar) and Coatbridge, Chryston & Bellshill’s Hugh Gaffney were also among MPs vowing to oppose the post office closures.

As well as the assembled politicians, and unanimous opposition from local communities, the Post Office Board has blithely continued its destructive strategy, the meeting heard.

Ms Maskell told of the demonstrations, petitioning and protests that she had been involved with in her own constituency, trying to save a city-centre Crown office that has been serving the people of York since 1884.

“There’s been a constant refusal to listen to the people,” she said, exposing Post Office bosses’ claims to have ‘consulted’ communities over their plans.

“York Post Office is making a profit - but they don’t even want to save their own business - they’re driving decline.”

Ipswich MP Sandy Martin told a similar story from his town, while Emma Dent Coad (Kensington) reported that “several post offices have closed down” in her constituency, where “we’re having an almighty battle” against the destruction of this vital public service.

Matt Rodda (Reading East), Anna Turley (Redcar) and Coatbridge, Chryston & Bellshill’s Hugh Gaffney were also among MPs vowing to oppose the post office closures.

As well as the assembled politicians, the CWU also had a large contingent at the event, and both our general secretary Dave Ward and assistant secretary Andy Furey addressed the audience, as did National Pensioners Convention deputy general secretary Dot Gibson.

Gill Furniss who chairs the APPG, told the meeting: “It’s our job to stop this.

“We’ve got to raise public awareness and get the people behind our positive vision for the future,” Ms Furniss continued, highlighting the CWU’s proposals for a National Post Bank, and other new products and services that the Post Office could provide.

Citing the union’s campaign petition and its hundred thousand signatures, the Sheffield, Brightside & Hillsborough MP then asked the assembled audience to join her in handing it in to the Prime Minister.

“Let’s stand together, let’s head to Downing Street and tell Theresa May what we think,” she urged, as she closed the meeting for the short march to Whitehall.

Around 20 MPs joined Dave, Andy and Dot Gibson handing in the petition to Number 10 and afterwards, both our general secretary and assistant secretary thanked everyone for attending.

“It’s brilliant to get such strong and broad political backing for our campaign,” said Dave. “Now we need to take our campaign to a new level, build on that Parliamentary support to get our Post Bank proposal actioned and build a positive future for this great British institution.”

Andy agreed, saying: “Post Bank is a great idea whose time has come – and there was a strong consensus in favour of this concept, which was great to hear.

“But also, there’s a growing awareness of what a complete and total sham these so-called ‘local consultations’ are – MPs now know that the Post Office leadership is just completely ignoring community opinion and bringing the whole process into disrepute.

“Our campaign is now going to be stepped up – and we need to turn this support into action.”

 MPs back Post Office fight

Dave Ward (second from left) and MPs marching to Downing Street
Telefónica pay deal receives big thumbs up

96 PER CENT ‘YES’ VOTE

Members in Telefónica have overwhelmingly accepted an across-the-board and fully consolidated 2.75 per cent pay offer that was brokered by the CWU in a whirlwind set of negotiations and put out to ballot with a strong ‘vote yes’ recommendation.

A staggering 96 per cent of those participating in last month’s poll voted to accept the deal, which also secures pay progression payments for Telefónica (rather than NewGRID) contract employees.

Those performance related payments, which apply to Technical Specialist, Business Support and Technical & Engineering grades, give ‘good performers’ an additional 1 per cent, ‘high performers’ an additional 1.25 per cent and those deemed ‘outstanding’ an additional 1.5 per cent. Developing performers will receive 0.25 per cent, meaning only those graded as ‘under performing’ will receive no pay progression payment at all on top of the 2.75 per cent ‘base-line’ increase.

Thanking members for their 20-to-1 ‘yes’ vote, assistant secretary Sally Bridge said: ‘From the outset of talks the CWU was adamant that the settlement for 2019 had to take into consideration both the rising cost of living and the contribution our members have made to the company’s success over the last 12 months.

“It was the firm view of the national team that the company’s final offer met both objectives – delivering a fair and reasonable settlement that, now ratified by members, will come into effect, on time, on April 1.”

Ericsson pay increased

SOLIDARITY PREVAILS

Members in Ericsson have overwhelmingly accepted a CWU-brokered two-year pay deal that will deliver above inflation rises for all team member grades on April 1.

The company’s full and final offer – which received four-to-one backing in a consultative ballot in January – draws a line under months of tense talking during which industrial relations were tested to the limit.

The turning point in talks came about after an earlier membership ballot in August in which members trashed the company’s initial 2018-specific offer – one that would have resulted in eight out of ten employees receiving nothing at all.

Branded ‘paltry and insulting’ by the union, no fewer than 97 per cent of those polled voted against that deal – with nine out of ten also expressing a willingness to take industrial action to secure a better one.

Assistant secretary Allan Eldred concludes: “There’s no doubt in my mind that the strength of members’ resolve to achieve a fair pay settlement, as demonstrated in last August’s ballot, was the decisive factor in us being able to achieve a very satisfactory outcome.

“The settlement we’ve achieved is above all of the forecasts for inflation and, for the first time in years, sees a consolidated increase for even those whose salaries are above the 120th percentile.”

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/ericsson-pay-up/
OUR HOURS – not Openreach’s

The patently unfair treatment of an ever growing percentage of Openreach engineers who are being forced to work for up to two hours a day for free has prompted the launch of a major new CWU campaign. Simon Alford reports

“UR HOURS – which swung into gear last month with the launch of a petition and an associated publicity drive to make sure the company is left in no doubt as to the scale of employee anger – is demanding fair and equal treatment of engineers on the vexed issue of travel to and from the first and last jobs of the day.

Frustration at discrepancies in contracts that see some engineers compensated for their travelling time, but others forced to give up to ten hours a week for nothing, has been mounting since 2011 when the business introduced the Mobile Workforce and put new recruits outside the existing Parking at Home policy, with no agreed commute time.

Following CWU protests a 2012 agreement briefly resolved the issue by extending that policy to cover those affected, but in September that year Openreach reneged on the deal, introducing a 60-minute Personal Travel Time (PTT) system for all new recruits.

“We’ve been battling ever since to try to get PTT removed,” stresses CWU national officer for Openreach, Davie Bowman – but despite strenuous efforts the union was unable to prevent PTT being included in Workforce 2020 contracts when they were introduced in 2014.

High levels of recruitment since then means thousands of engineers are now affected, having to put in up to two hours of unpaid personal travelling time a day on top of their contracted hours – either 36 hours, for those employed before September 2014, or 37.5 hours for those employed subsequently.

Amid evidence suggesting that those on PTT are being deliberately allocated further-flung jobs that maximise the number of unpaid hours Openreach receives from them, the company has blanked repeated CWU calls for a rethink.

That’s despite a 2015 European Court of Justice ruling which means 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’ – therefore counting towards the 48-hour maximum allowed under the EU’s Working Time Directive (WTD).

The ECJ’s so-called ‘Tyco’ ruling means that an ever-growing number of Openreach engineers are falling 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 47.5 hours – just half an hour shy of the WTD limit,” Davie points out.

“Our objective in launching the OUR HOURS campaign is very clear indeed: We want fairness, equity, justice for all, and a cessation of a situation where this terrible PTT commitment is ruining many of our members’ work-life balance.”

See video at www.cwu.org/campaign/our-hours/

workforce with some people having to work up to ten extra hours per week is totally unfair and unjustifiable.”

Viv Heys, NORTH EAST SPOC: “Clive Selley (Openreach CEO) needs to hear from the members themselves just how upset and aggrieved they are.”

Paul O’Hagan, NORTH WEST SPOC: “The company is exploiting a contract variation that is both unjustified and bordering on morally wrong.”

Paul McGrath, MIDLANDS SPOC: “The impact on work-life balance is serious. The fact PTT is unpaid but expected and being abused is a further kick in the teeth.”

Dave Patterson, SPOC FOR SCOTLAND: “The balance of responsibility across teams is not fair and not even – and in rural areas, where PTT is especially utilised, there’s a double unfairness.”

Gordon Mason, SPOC FOR EASTERN REGION: “People are all on a certain wage, yet some have to put more hours in because of the travel time. It’s grossly unfair.”
While I’m working, I don’t feel disabled – I feel just like another worker,” says Home Counties North (HCN) Mail Centre worker Amar Ahmed, as he sorts at his frame.

Amar has been confined to a wheelchair since suffering a traumatic (off-duty) fall in 2016, which left him with severe spinal injuries. He was taken to the major trauma centre at St Mary’s Hospital in Paddington, where, Amar recalls: “They operated on me that day. But when I woke up, I couldn’t move. I was at St Mary’s for about eight weeks and then taken back to Watford General, where I stayed for nearly a month and then after that, to Stoke Mandeville Hospital,” Amar continues.

He remained at Stoke Mandeville’s National Spinal Injuries Centre for several months, and in the meantime, his family were getting a lift installed at his Watford home.

Amar’s CWU branch secretary Chad Croom (South Central Postal) and his area processing rep (APR) Colin Ince kept in regular contact with him, visiting him in hospital and also having regular conversations with HCN management about a phased return to work.

“Amar’s CWU branch secretary Chad Croom (South Central Postal) and his area processing rep (APR) Colin Ince kept in regular contact with him, visiting him in hospital and also having regular conversations with HCN management about a phased return to work. The branch has supported him as much as possible. And also, the branch has supported Amar from our welfare fund – in terms of his expenses etc,” says Chad, who adds that Colin Ince “has done a brilliant job representing him.”

Colin says: “At first, we were concerned that the business might have been looking at ill-health retirement, but local management have been very supportive of our aim of getting Amar back to work.”

Before his injury, Amar had worked on a large sorting machine, which was a job involving standing, regular movement to clear backlogs etc and was clearly not a position he would have been able to return to.

So, working with the shift supervisor and site manager, it was agreed that Amar would work at a sorting frame, specifically on the lower rows. Colin also negotiated different hours for Amar, his previous 2pm to 10pm shift being unsuitable for his medication routine in particular, as well as his travel-to-work arrangements.

“He needs to be able to take his medications at particular times and also because of his condition, he’s reliant on his brother to bring him to and from work,” the rep explained, adding that he has also managed to obtain the use of the on-site first-aid room for Amar to carry out his exercise and stretching routine during his scheduled breaks.

When The Voice visited HCN recently, we also met CWU area safety rep Andy Macleod, who told us that the union is trying to persuade the company to purchase bespoke adjustable sorting frames for members with disabilities, which are currently available through the business’s reasonable adjustment catalogue.

“Our understanding is that funding is available from the DWP’s access to work scheme and if members like Amar can have these, not only is that a better working day for him, it will also mean increased productivity,” Andy told us, adding that there are two other wheelchair-using members of the workforce here at HCN.

Amar was a speaker at this year’s CWU Disability Conference, where he told his story to delegates and received a warm ovation in response. “I really enjoyed speaking at the Disability Conference,” he said, “because I’m very grateful for the help and support I’ve had from the union – and Colin’s a top guy.”

“I’m 33, so I’m still a young guy and I want to work, not be sat at home and when I’m working, I don’t feel disabled – I feel like a worker, which is what I want.”
Safe and Connected – helping in our communities

Three delivery offices have been trialling a new community initiative, which provides support for vulnerable and elderly residents...

Safe and Connected pilots have been under way in Surrey, Yorkshire and Merseyside, where our delivery members have been calling on selected volunteers and asking them questions about their general wellbeing.

Everyone within those three units who receives a visit is on an official “client list”, organised by the Early Intervention Team (EIT) – a group formed by the Local Authority, a charity and Royal Mail, with the whole trial funded by the Home Office.

“We’re in full support of the Safe and Connected concept and our unit reps at the three nominated offices – New Malden, Whitby and Liverpool North – have each played an active role in the practical aspects of the trials,” explains CWU executive member Bobby Weatherall, who is overseeing the initiative and the trial on behalf of the outdoor department.

The Voice spent a morning with our New Malden Delivery Office rep James Street recently, to get an idea of how the project is working out on the ground.

The EIT in New Malden is provided by local age-awareness charity Staywell, who have recruited 25 participants and provide any follow-on support required, reflecting the primary aim of the scheme to combat loneliness in older members of society.

“We’ve been working on this trial since October,” he tells us, as he wheels his HCT around his walk. “All of us here are participating in Safe and Connected and we have 25 clients altogether, who we call on twice a week. The list was compiled by the local EIT and the delivery office manager Alan Overington and myself discussed and allocated them to walks. And of course, we work closely with our Royal Mail project lead for this trial, Leah Tipping.”

James has worked for the business for 17 years and has served as CWU unit rep at New Malden for the past five years, so he has witnessed at first-hand how the job has changed and continues to change.

With the decline in letters and the increase in packets and parcels, initiatives such as this are important in order to maintain Royal Mail’s presence in the community – particularly the USO – and as an example of how we can develop new and useful services at local level.

“This project is a great idea in my opinion,” he says “and everyone in the office is enthusiastic about it too.”

There was some scepticism towards the plan initially, James tells us, but the built-in safeguards have reassured people and provide clear instructions, procedures and clarity about the extent of their role.

Our members – who are not expected to cross the threshold of the resident’s property – are given specific questions to ask the clients they call on, and there are clear guidelines for what to do if any of the residents’ answers flag up potential problems.

“There’s a recommended 10 minutes per call, during which we ask some basic questions about how they’ve been feeling this week, whether they feel better and happier or less so than the last time we called, if there is anything bothering them and whether they want someone from the EIT to contact them,” explains James.

His client this morning is Daphne Pharaoh and after their conversation, Ms Pharaoh agrees to a photograph – “as long as I get a copy” – and tells us that she appreciates James’s calls.

“I think it’s a really good idea – it picks me up,” she smiles.

We also have time to pop round for a quick chat with postwoman Ana Abreu, who’s calling on Ian Coates in a neighbouring street.

“I’m very grateful with our postlady calling and asking how our week has been,” says Mr Coates.

Ana fully supports the Safe and Connected trial too, saying: “It helps the local residents in the community – some of them are lonely or vulnerable – and it brings some light to people’s day.

“And also, it’s a good idea for our Royal Mail too.”
Disturbing examples of how vulnerable members with mental health problems are continuing to be failed by unsympathetic managers and inflexible processes in BT and Openreach have once again been brought to the fore by frustrated CWU reps. Simon Alford reports.

Despite general agreement that BT’s Group-level policies and online advice for those undergoing mental health crises are industry-leading, speaker after speaker at a special CWU branch forum cited troubling examples of how fine words are all too often not being put into practice – with sometimes devastating consequences for those suffering mental health meltdowns.

That stark message was delivered to BT’s global health & wellbeing clinical lead, Bruce Greenhalgh, and senior BT Employee Relations personnel on January 29 at a specially convened follow-up to an earlier branch forum that the company was unable to attend in October.

Billed as an opportunity for reps to hear direct from BT Group about how it plans to address deficiencies that were brought to the fore at last April’s CWU Annual Conference, the Forum was attended by no fewer than 50 CWU reps from all four corners of the UK.

Many of those present had been instrumental in the CWU Conference votes that committed the CWU to:

- Enter into discussions with a view to ensuring that comprehensive mental health training is delivered to all BT managers within three months of their appointment
- Press for any declared mental health issues to be taken into consideration by managers when they are formulating coaching or performance plans
- Secure changes to the highly insensitive wording in standard letters sent out under the attendance process to reduce the particular distress they cause to people already suffering mental health problems.

Nine months on from Conference, speakers were adamant that, despite positive high-level talks with the company, little has yet changed at the grass roots.

David Simpson of Northern Ireland Telecom explained: “BT has some great policies in place, but they fail to trickle down – especially, in my experience, in the call centre environment.”

Recounting a case where a member who’d struggled to even leave their home during a period of intense stress, anxiety and depression had been hit with a warning for performance just weeks after a personally challenging but successful return to work, David said: “The question I’d like to ask is how does it help someone who’s struggling with mental health issues if you take them down that road? It only adds to the stress.”

A BT GROUP-WIDE PROBLEM

Sara Miah of North Anglia Branch insisted Openreach was another problem area – citing the stress suffered by new joiners in Service Delivery as they struggle to meet expected performance levels while still effectively learning on the job.

“Recounting a case where a member who’d struggled to even leave their home during a period of intense stress, anxiety and depression had been hit with a warning for performance just weeks after a personally challenging but successful return to work, David said: “The question I’d like to ask is how does it help someone who’s struggling with mental health issues if you take them down that road? It only adds to the stress.”

Michelle Sherry of Coventry Branch agreed, citing her particular concern for young recruits in Service Delivery who find themselves struggling to keep up with onerous workloads while still learning the ropes.

“Nine months on from Conference, speakers were adamant that, despite positive high-level talks with the company, little has yet changed at the grass roots.

David Simpson of Northern Ireland Telecom explained: “BT has some great policies in place, but they fail to trickle down – especially, in my experience, in the call centre environment.”

Recounting a case where a member who’d struggled to even leave their home during a period of intense stress, anxiety and depression had been hit with a warning for performance just weeks after a personally challenging but successful return to work, David said: “The question I’d like to ask is how does it help someone who’s struggling with mental health issues if you take them down that road? It only adds to the stress.”

There was a collective view of how the stress experienced by new joiners had a cumulative impact on those struggling with mental health issues.

“We’ve all got a plethora of horror stories,” she began. “One of my roles in the branch is welcoming all our new members and when they start they’re full of promise, enthusiastic and can’t wait to get going. If you talk to them a few months later, however, it’s a very different story.

“I’ve lost count of the number of new joiners that have left – not just because they are being managed out for performance or attendance, but because they decided they don’t want to work for BT or Openreach because they’ve decided they are not the companies they thought they were.

“I’ve had an engineer who actually had a nervous breakdown on the side of the road and the ‘support’ he had from his manager afterwards was disgusting – more to the point of bullying to try to get him to come back (to work).”

“The support just isn’t there.”

Michelle Sherry of Coventry Branch agreed, citing her particular concern for young recruits in Service Delivery who find themselves struggling to keep up with onerous workloads while still learning the ropes.

“I was one of those new recruits four and a half years ago, and the stress it causes is so unhealthy it’s unreal,” she recalled. “I can only describe it, from my own experience, as like having your head in a vice. “You’re having to learn all this new...
triggered by multiple health issues, including high blood pressure and an altered mental state associated with the menopause. The other has just received the infamous long-term sick review letter with its warning of the possibility of ‘employment being terminated’ having had time off for cancer treatment.

Rob Roberts of North Wales & Chester Branch outlined his horror at a “particularly disgusting” disciplinary involving a member displaying such extreme signs of stress that the manager sought advice – only to be told that ‘if she hasn’t got suicidal tendencies or thoughts carry on with the meeting’.

“The woman was then suspended and allowed to drive away,” Rob added, concluding there had been “a total lack of duty of care to the person.”

LISTENING AND LEARNING...

Despite the uncomfortable messages conveyed to BT, the highly constructive meeting signalled a shared desire of all those present to work together to ensure good policies are translated into much improved practice at the sharp end.

Assistant secretary Dave Jukes concludes: “The Forum was really useful and it was clear to everyone that the BT people in attendance are absolutely genuine in trying to change things for the better. The points made by the branch representatives were really powerful – the key message being that the company already has great policies but it is in the implementation of those policies that it is sometimes falling short. There’s clearly an issue we need to deal with in regards to new starters, deficiencies in mental health awareness that need to be addressed and a particular issue with the training of managers that our reps are keen to see happen quickly.

“These are all things the CWU national team have raised with the company previously, but I think that giving BT the chance to hear direct from CWU reps who are dealing with this issue on a day-to-day basis was a useful step that amplifies the importance of positive action to tackle the mismatch between great policies and how they are sometimes applied.”

knowledge, you are not given time to absorb it – all you’re worrying about is the job you haven’t yet got to, so you’re running around like a headless chicken.

“It makes me so sad that you see these young boys and girls being reduced to tears in fact findings. Why are they even being looked at? They’re new and they’re learning!”

Colin Wilks of Lancs & Cumbria Branch agreed. “What are you going to do to help new starters overcome stress and mental health issues when they are under such pressure to produce and are just new to the business?” he asked.

“You’ve invested money in the engineers for future years, yet the moment they make a mistake they’re under pressure, called into meetings and being disciplined. Of course they are going to make mistakes – they are new – and managers should make allowances.”

PROCEDURAL CRUELTY

Some of the cases recounted by reps drew gasps from the room.

Josh Williams of Greater London Combined Branch recounted a fact-finding and discipline case levied against a member for an ‘inappropriate message’ she’d sent to her manager late at night saying she was considering suicide.

Malcolm O’Brien of Lincolnshire & South Yorks Branch, meanwhile, told of an initial formal warning that had just been issued to a member who’d been diagnosed with suspected cancer – a cruel blow to someone already experiencing major stress that was compounded when he was refused special leave having been summoned to hospital for an emergency operation. “Now he’s been told that any sick leave he has could lead to a final formal warning,” Malcolm continued.

“That’s how they’re treating people in call centres – and it’s not just isolated to Consumer – it’s Business and VVS as well. They’re beating people over the head with a big stick to get them back into work – and not giving any consideration to the personal circumstances.”

Rossana Hawkins of Capital Branch told of the crass insensitivity displayed by extremely young managers to two long-serving middle-aged female employees.

One, she explained, is now off sick having suffered three heart attacks shortly after being disciplined for lateness that had been
Our deputy general secretary postal Terry Pullinger explains that this nationwide Workplace Culture Survey has visited 62 of Royal Mail’s 1,500 workplaces across every division of the UK and he describes it as “an ambitious initiative, but also a vitally necessary one.”

“Some of the cultural challenges which have been prevalent in Royal Mail may also exist in Parcelforce and we want to ensure that our Parcelforce members have the same opportunity to voice their opinion,” he continues, adding that culture visits to an additional 12 Parcelforce units are getting under way.

“We’re very grateful and appreciative of the reps and members who have taken part in these discussions, which we estimate have involved over 2,000 Royal Mail workers.”

At the nominated units, volunteer groups of members of staff came into the meetings, which began with some key questions being asked of each group:

1. Would you be happy for a friend or a member of your family to work here? Why is that the case?
2. Have you seen any significant change in this unit since the 2018 Four Pillars agreement was introduced?
3. What is good about working here and what would you say is positive about ways of working and relationships?
4. What would you like to see changed or improved and what can you do locally together to overcome these challenges?

“That first question has been the key to this, it’s really at the heart of what we’re trying to achieve here,” says Terry, “and it’s a core test that was originally developed as part of our mutual interest work in Parcelforce.”

To get a taste of these conversations The Voice joined divisional reps Steve Warren (North East), Les Evans (South Wales/South West), Paul Garraway (South Central) and John Simkins (London) at five of these units to listen to the workplace discussions and speak to some of our representatives and members.

At Reading East, Paul Garraway co-chaired three discussion sessions – each of which gave differing responses to the questions.

“At Reading East, Paul Garraway co-chaired three discussion sessions – each of which gave differing responses to the questions. “Although this unit overall gave a positive response to the questions, there were some noteworthy differences – for example, it seemed there was more negativity from the longer-serving members and less from the newer recruits,” reflected Paul.

“And also, a couple of times there were
references to ‘banter’ in response to some comments about shop floor language,” he continued, suggesting that “maybe we need to think a bit more about the language we use to each other at work.”

Les Evans tells The Voice that Cardiff North Delivery Office is considered to be a good unit and he puts this down to the office manager Nick Hunt working well with the CWU Unit rep Paul Trevelyan.

During the two sessions here, again there were differences expressed – some ‘No’ replies to the first question, with some saying that all new recruits are being employed on a part-time basis and opportunities to advance to full-time roles are quite limited.

But on Questions 2 and 3, replies were positive – an almost unanimous consensus that the atmosphere has improved here, that working relationships are healthy and respectful and that the office is well-organised by the management team.

As well as workplace relationship issues, a common concern in the delivery offices that The Voice visited is the future of the business – specifically how it will respond to long-term letter decline and whether the company can grasp the opportunities presented by packet and parcel growth.

The Cardiff workforce felt that Royal Mail does not adequately promote its own products and services – and suggestions on this ranged from more advertising on our vans to delivering our own bespoke ‘D2D’ leaflet setting out all of the extra services that we offer.

Several anecdotes were told during this part of the discussion of conversations with residents and small business owners in which they used other companies for services which they were unaware that Royal Mail provide.

Summing up the visit, Les Evans said: “It’s been very useful to listen to the discussion and learn about why it’s a good office and whether this good practice can be transposed elsewhere.”

The office with the worst employee survey results in West London was our next port of call, Ealing Delivery Office, where the answer to the opening discussion question was almost a universal ‘No’.

Bullying, unfair workloads, people coming in too early and missing breaks and lack of parking facilities were among the responses to the other debating points here.

Before, it was:
‘You hit us, we’ll hit back’ – now you’re not hitting us. Our culture as well as theirs has changed”...

John Simkins told the meeting that the union was strongly opposed to people coming in too early and that everyone should make sure they take their proper breaks – a point to which operational manager David Jackson expressed agreement.

“This has been a difficult unit – no doubt about it,” said John afterwards. “And one of the reasons is that there’s been a long period when they haven’t had a unit rep. But hopefully with the appointment of a new rep recently, and now we’ve had the chance to listen in detail to some of the root causes, we’re keen to do what we can to try to turn this around.”

Distribution, processing and logistics units at different ends of the country provided commercial similarities – both experiencing growth in throughput and staff numbers – and sharp contrasts – praise for an improved management style at one unit and a series of complaints about frontline managers at the other.

Steve Warren explained to The Voice that Yorkshire Regional Distribution Centre had previously been the site of several disputes due to a previous management style which many members felt had been confrontational.

“But there’s been a change over the past couple of years and also our own organisation here is better – we’ve got reps and sub-reps on every shift and also representing the drivers, and the management regime has changed for the better,” he said.

This was referred to in the culture discussion, with one worker saying: “Before, it was: ‘You hit us, we’ll hit back’ – now you’re not hitting us” and another said: “Our culture as well as theirs has changed.”

Better access to kit and general operational organisation were also given the thumbs-up at the West Yorkshire unit, while areas cited for improvement included managing of space and lifting practices.

Questions on pay, shift patterns and job security received positive responses here, and those questions also received positive replies at HWDC’s International Logistics Centre, but down at the Langley site members directed a lot of criticism of their managers to Royal Mail International director of operations Mike Sibley and export director Pauline Vickers.

Pigeons in the building, a lack of canteen facilities and annual leave booking were among the issues raised, while shift managers were criticised for “not working as a team,” “not listening to us,” and even “not speaking in English.”

In the hot seat, Mike Sibley promised immediate action on the pigeons, suggested further discussions with the CWU area processing rep Gurmeet Virk to improve the facilities and confirmed that Royal Mail policy is for English to be the single operational language.

“It was a tough session there’s no doubt about it,” reflected South Central divisional rep Paul Garraway afterwards, “but to be fair to Mike Sibley, he took all those points on board and promised to work with us on rectifying them.”

Terry Pullinger told The Voice that he and Royal Mail Group’s chief HR officer Sally Ashford are planning to follow up with six joint site visits over the coming weeks, which will include Wythenshawe, Prescott, West Park and Aireborough delivery offices, HCN and Edinburgh Plant.
**Victory on low-level letter boxes**

**CAMPAIGN WIN**

“huge step forward” in our union’s long fight against back-aching low-level letter boxes was achieved last month, when the Government agreed to amend building regulations to outlaw them in new builds.

CWU national health, safety and environment officer Dave Joyce explains that “bending or stooping to deliver to low-level letter boxes presents many potential problems to postmen and women.”

Back, arm and joint injuries are among the hazards that this design presents, he explained, adding that back injury caused nearly 17,000 absences within Royal Mail last year.

The issue rose up the political agenda at the end of January, following the nationwide publicity given to Chelmsford MP Vicky Ford’s Ten-Minute Rule Bill calling for this change in the law.

With Ms Ford being given her time-slot immediately after Prime Minister’s Questions and just before a big Brexit debate, Parliament was full of journalists and the issue received welcome publicity.

MPs unanimously backed the Ford Bill and the matter was referred to the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, which recommended the change to Housing Minister Kit Malthouse.

“Mr Malthouse has indicated to us his support for the change and we hope it can be pushed through quickly,” Dave Joyce reports. This is a huge step forward for the health and safety of postal workers.”

**‘Inspirational’ Cyril loses his fight for life**

**IN MEMORY**

Tributes have been paid to long-serving CWU activist and representative Cyril Onyejekwe, who died on March 10 after a long battle against cancer.

Cyril, a member of the CWU London Postal Engineering Branch and an electrician by trade, was employed in what is now Royal Mail’s Property and Facilities Services (formerly Romec) and represented engineering members at workplace, branch, area and national levels.

After having battled myelofibrosis – a form of leukemia – since 2006, and campaigning for Afro-Caribbean men to become bone marrow donors, he was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2014.

But despite being given just months to live, Cyril fought this too and also campaigned for greater awareness of the condition – particularly within the black community, among whom the effects of prostate cancer are more aggressive.

In the same year, he played a major role in the campaign to bring Romec fully back within Royal Mail, making a memorable conference speech describing the union as ‘a family’ and urging delegates to give national backing to the campaign.

London Postal Engineering Branch secretary John Humphries said: “Cyril was the most selfless, caring, dedicated person I’ve ever had the honour to work with and through all his health battles, he always had a smile and joke with those he met.

“His positive attitude and strength will always be an inspiration.”

“One of my dearest friends and the most inspirational person I’ve ever known,” says NEC member Steve Jones, who recalls: “We worked in the same office together from 1979 when he first started.

“He was a true giant of a man who never sought anything other than what he could do for others. The light and love he brought into our lives will never go out.”

CWU assistant secretary Ray Ellis described Cyril as “a man who loved life, was devoted to his family and fought tirelessly for the members he represented.

“He was a man of tremendous energy, enthusiasm and good humour, and he will be remembered with tremendous affection by all of us.”

General secretary Dave Ward also paid tribute to Cyril, saying that he had been “a great man, a true trade unionist and an inspirational figure both in and out of work.” And, deputy general secretary postal Terry Pullinger added his respects and praised Cyril’s “massively positive contribution” to the Pensions Working Group, adding: “Despite his own circumstances, he was working hard to help make a better life and retirement for other working people.”

**Tributes to Pat O’Hara**

**IN MEMORY**

Heartfelt tributes have been paid to former CWU president, NEC member and Postal Executive chair, Pat O’Hara, who died last month after a lengthy illness.

General secretary Dave Ward told The Voice: “Pat was a great comrade, trade unionist and activist of our union in every sense of the word.

“He was a proud member of the Merseyside Amal Branch and served our members with great distinction at all levels of our organisation.

“In the most difficult times we have faced we could not have had a better president/chair of the union. It was during these moments, in our big dispute, that his real inner strength and wonderful sense of humour set him apart from others and kept the union moving forward.

“Pat was also well known for his strong belief in family values and we pass on the sincere condolences of the whole of the CWU to his wife Patsy and family.”
Bid to break Santander pay impasse

TALKS RESUME

As The Voice went to press, talks were about to resume with Santander in a bid to break the messy stalemate into which the company’s 2019 pay review has descended.

Despite the overwhelming rejection of the company’s ‘final’ offer by members in Santander UK and Santander Operations – and its equally emphatic acceptance by a much smaller number of employees in Santander Technology – the Bank had initially refused to either enter into meaningful negotiations on the rejected Santander UK/Operation offer, or to honour the ‘Yes’ vote in the San Tech subsidiary.

Prior to last month’s ballot, the CWU had reluctantly recommended acceptance of the offer to both groups on the basis that it was the best that could be achieved by negotiation – though the union had already warned company negotiators that the deal was likely to go down in Santander UK.

Assistant secretary John East explains: “Although the Bank viewed it as one deal, we always knew it would be judged more favourably in San Tech than in the rest of the Bank, because of a number of special factors in that subsidiary which substantially changed the maths as to what the offer meant for members in practice.

“Conversely, 70 per cent of our membership in Santander UK /Operations saw the deal as unfair and inadequate – just as we suspected they would. “Obviously the CWU negotiating team is hoping new discussions will break the deadlock.”

Watch out for updates at www.cwu.org

Delivering for members to the end at iPSL

LAST EVER PAY DEAL

Members at iPSL in Bootle have given their unanimous backing to what will be the last ever pay rise negotiated by the union prior to the complete cessation of cheque processing on Merseyside.

Just over two years after the December 2016 announcement of the phased closure of the former Girobank cheque processing operation, the final 50 of a once 800-strong workforce has again demonstrated its solidarity by voting 100 per cent in favour of a 2.5 per cent pay rise.

Crucially, that rise will flow into redundancy payments in line with the Decommissioning Agreement.

Assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove explains: “Following several rounds of departures that have seen nearly 100 people leave since the Autumn, we’re now entering the final phase of the decommissioning of iPSL’s Bootle site.

“More of our members will be leaving in April and, given the 2019 pay review falls due on April 1, it was important we secured the best possible increase for those still in service as of that date - including those who either are, or will be, working their notice or on ‘gardening leave’.

“The deal we secured with iPSL means the redundancy payments have effectively been increased by the current RPI inflation measure, providing a valuable boost to final payments.”

Nigel concludes: “At a sad and difficult time for our iPSL members, and even though it is now nearly the end of the road for cheque processing on Merseyside, the CWU has once again delivered for members in the hardest of times.”

Fujitsu pay up

BELATED 2018 SETTLEMENT

Members in Fujitsu have voted in favour of a CWU-brokered pay deal in which the CWU finally fulfilled its long-standing objective of securing a single salary rate for all ‘senior tech’ grade employees at the two sites where the union is recognised for collective bargaining purposes.

Following a lengthy impasse in talks over the 2018 pay round – which technically became due last October – the company’s ‘final’ offer builds on the 2017 pay deal in which the union had sought to begin to restore differentials between senior tech grade staff and assembler /repairer grade employees.

The latter have received substantial pay rises in recent years following the union’s success in persuading the company to adopt Real Living Wage pay rates – resulting in a significant erosion of skill-based differentials for senior tech members carrying out more complex work.

Meanwhile assembler /repairer grade members are set to see their pay rise by a total of 2.8 per cent by April 1 when their Real Living Wage rise comes into effect – though 1 per cent will be paid immediately, backdated to October 1, 2018.

Full story at www.cwu.org/news/fujitsu-pay-up
CWU welcomes call for HSE to ‘up its game’

HEALTH & SAFETY

A wide-ranging review of the HSE, which calls on the government agency responsible for the enforcement of workplace health, safety and welfare to “up its game on safety inspections and prosecutions”, has been warmly welcomed by the CWU.

Crucially, the Tailored Review of The HSE - which was commissioned by the Department of Work and Pensions - challenges many of the changes that were forced on the HSE by the Tory/LibDem coalition government and subsequent Conservative governments, making a total of 27 recommendations.

CWU national health & safety officer Dave Joyce said: “The review is generally positive about the HSE but also makes a number of recommendations that will reassure a lot of those who’ve been concerned about the direction the HSE has been going since 2010.

“That’s when the Tory/LibDem coalition government instructed the HSE to stop all proactive safety inspections in the vast majority of sectors, including the communications industry. Royal Mail Group and BT Group, amongst others, were categorised as ‘Low Risk’ industries - which is nonsense - and in came the so-called ‘light-touch’ approach and deregulatory agenda, removing so-called ‘burdens on business’.

“The report’s recommendations are a strong reminder to the current Government that the HSE is there for a reason.”

Discover your family history the CWU way!

FREE CWU LEFT-CLICK COURSE

With TV programmes like Who Do You Think You Are? and the proliferation of online genealogy sites, more people are delving into their family history than ever before.

And now, thanks to the Time Team-like sleuthing skills of two CWU reps - Scott Taylor of Glasgow & Motherwell Branch and Denise Hennigan of Eastern No.6 - an ever-increasing number of CWU members are accessing the union’s online learning portal for guidance on how to find out about their ancestors - often dredging up unexpected surprises from the past along the way!

The Discovering Family History course on CWU Left Click provides the fundamental pointers required to help budding time-travellers populate and understand their family tree.

Key elements of the course include guidance on the interpretation of old writing and language, how to extract information from official documents and how to place the findings of such research into a historical context.

Assistant secretary for education, training and equal opportunities, Trish Lavelle, concludes: “All credit to Scott and Denise who’ve devoted their time and energy to making the free Discovering Family History course on Left Click one that compares with the very best out there.”

To find out more about the Discovering Family History course, and the wide range of other learning resources on CWU Left Click - visit www.cwu.org/leftclick

Playing for Cuba

MUSICAL APPEAL

Have you got a trumpet in your loft, a violin in your attic, a trombone in your shed or a guitar collecting dust at the back of a cupboard?

If so, now’s the moment to put long-silent musical cast-offs to good use – because the CWU has joined forces with the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC) which is amassing a cultural treasure-trove that will be shipped to the socialist Caribbean republic next month in defiance of a longstanding American blockade.

Amongst the many items on board will be a huge consignment of ballet shoes donated by London’s Royal ballet, which are currently the somewhat unexpected responsibility of CWU assistant secretary Allan Eldred – the union’s representative on the executive of the CSC.

Allan explains that, despite Cuba’s worldwide reputation for music and dance – and the unparalleled integration of creative arts in its entirely free education system – Cuban youngsters and their teachers are crying out for the equipment they need because of the illegal economic blockade.

“I’d urge anyone with unwanted musical instruments to donate them to this very good cause – along with any associated items such as reeds, strings, bows, drum sticks, carrying cases and music stands,” Allan concludes.

For details of regional collection hubs visit www.playforcuba.org – but don’t delay because the consignment will set sail from Liverpool in just three weeks’ time.
New agency triumph as Government pledges to abolish Swedish Derogation

Just months after the CWU secured BT’s belated agreement to long-standing union demands for an end to the use of exploitative ‘Pay Between Assignment’ (PBA) contracts, the union’s wider political campaigning has notched up an even bigger victory.

Following concerted lobbying by the union, the Government has announced proposals that, if enacted, will abolish PBA contracts in their entirety - something that has been the ultimate aim of seven years of CWU campaigning under the ‘Closing the Loopholes’ and ‘Close the Gap!’ banners.

Under the new legislation, announced just before Christmas in response to the recommendations made by the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices, the Government signalled its intent to close a legal loophole in the UK Agency Worker Regulations that allows agency workers to be paid inferior pay rates to permanent employees.

That travesty of unequal pay for identical work by colleagues working side-by-side has been tirelessly highlighted by the CWU since 2011 when PBA contracts were first introduced by a recruitment industry that immediately cottoned on to the so-called ‘Swedish Derogation’s’ potential to sidestep the equal treatment aims of the EU’s Temporary Agency Workers Directive on account of the way the exemption had been introduced in UK law by the then Coalition Government.

Fulfilling the worst fears of the CWU - which had highlighted the danger of the legal loophole throughout consultation on the details of the UK’s Agency Worker Regulations – the introduction of what quickly became the ‘default’ agency contract issued by Manpower when employing staff to work in BT call centres effectively placed a time limit on the huge victory that had just been won for an earlier generation of the CWU’s agency members.

Although thousands went on to equal pay when the Agency Worker Regulations first came into force, by the time BT finally agreed to phase out its use of PBA contracts last autumn, just a handful of agency workers who’d been taken on prior to 2011 remained on equal treatment.

**LOOPTHOLE CLOSED BY 2020?**

The Government’s proposed scrapping of the Swedish Derogation within the UK Agency Worker Regulations is part of a number of legislative changes that take forward recommendations made not just by the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices but also by two cross-party Select Committees.

Assuming the proposed law change makes its way onto the statute book - by no means a certainty in today’s uncertain political environment, the legislation announced just before Christmas will close the loophole that, outside of BT, still allows countless thousands of agency workers to be employed on far cheaper rates than their permanent counterparts.

In theory, such an outcome would tie up unfinished business within the CWU’s last two agency campaigns – but, following previous let-downs, assistant secretary Sally Bridge stresses the union will be monitoring events forensically and vigorously challenging any backtracking that may occur.

“If there’s one thing the CWU has learned over well over a decade of continuous campaigning on behalf of our agency members, it’s that hard won victories can all too easily be snatched away by a combination of political forces and powerful vested interests,” Sally points out.

Amid indications that the Taylor Review recommendations the Government has accepted in principle may not be enacted until 2020, Sally stressed the union is already awake to the possibility of foot-dragging.

“Now everyone’s agreed the PBA loophole is wrong, it’s hard to fathom why action to close it can’t happen straight away,” she explains.

“At face value, however, the Government’s current position represents a complete vindication of years of CWU campaigning on an issue on which our union has led the trade union movement.

“Although BT has already done the right thing, these contracts remain rife in the wider world of work – so the CWU won’t consider it ‘job done’ for our agency campaigning until PBA contracts have been abolished across the board, once and for all.

“Rest assured we won’t be taking our eyes off the ball – particularly in the current febrile political environment!”
The Voice is invited along to join a delegation from the union visiting one of the charity’s community partners – the Triangle Adventure Playground in south London – to see the work they do and discuss how we can help.

Despite the pouring rain, youngsters on their spring half-term are still out and about playing football, swinging on rope ladders and taking rides down the parachute wire – while in the hut, a pasta lunch with fresh vegetables and a fruit salad to follow are all being prepared by eager young hands.

As well as providing fresh food, Kitchen Social also helps to support locally sourced produce and children here are encouraged to get involved with The Triangle Allotment – learning about planting, growing and harvesting their own food.

“The activities and the facilities here are great – and the provision of food here during school holidays, the involvement of the children in the preparation of the food and all that they’re learning is so important, as well as the fun they’re having here too,” explains Ian. “It’s shocking really that, in the richest city in the World’s fifth-richest nation, a charity is needed to ensure every child has a nutritional meal every day. But the fact is that these children need our help and support – and over the coming weeks and months, CWU London Region is planning to organise fund-raising and awareness raising of this extremely good cause.”

London CWU is asking members in the region to support a city-wide charity which provides healthy meals during school holidays to children in the capital.

The wealth of the City contrasts sharply with the levels of poverty in other areas, and children on free school meals and from low income families struggle and can often face undernourishment on those 170 days of school holiday each year.

Kitchen Social, a Mayor’s Fund for London programme, started out in 2017, working across five boroughs to fight holiday hunger with free healthy meals for school children. Since then, its reach has expanded to 100 community partners, including housing associations, adventure playgrounds, libraries, schools, churches, sports and youth clubs.

The charity is now present in 23 boroughs and, to date, has provided, more than 50,000 meals to over 10,000 children and young people. Kitchen Social estimates the cost of providing a child with a nutritious meal of school food standards, free activities and a safe place to play at £6.26 per child per day and their aim is to raise £2 million to reach thousands more children across London by 2020.

CWU London Region secretary Ian Murphy invited The Voice along to join a delegation from the union visiting one of the charity’s community partners – the Triangle Adventure Playground in south London – to see the work they do and discuss how we can help.

Despite the pouring rain, youngsters on their spring half-term are still out and about playing football, swinging on rope ladders and taking rides down the parachute wire – while in the hut, a pasta lunch with fresh vegetables and a fruit salad to follow are all being prepared by eager young hands.
When rumours of an early General Election are being officially denied, we know we need to be ready,” remarks general secretary Dave Ward.

“And the CWU has been working closely with several election candidates to help them for the big campaign.”

Members of our union have been selected as Prospective Parliamentary Candidates in Blackpool, Northampton, Truro and Glasgow South.

Chris Webb, Gareth Eales, Jennifer Forbes and Matt Kerr will all be aiming to unseat incumbent MPs with the support and assistance of the CWU.

We caught up with several of our candidates when they came down to CWU HQ last month and asked them about their priority campaign policies.

Jennifer needs to overturn a 3,792 majority to turn Truro & Falmouth from blue to red – in a region where party membership increase has been the strongest in the country.

In 2017, Labour’s vote in Truro & Falmouth rose from 7,814 to 21,331 and she says: “We’re working really hard to build on that progress.

“There are huge issues of jobs, public services and housing in this area and Labour’s key policy messages really strike a chord with people.”

Jennifer previously worked for BT as an engineer and was an activist within the CWU’s Young Members’ section, before moving on to an education and training role for the TUC.

Gareth Eales is targeting an extra 1,159 votes to replace Andrew Lewer as Member for Northampton South.

Area processing rep for Royal Mail workers, Gareth wants to fly the flag for workers’ rights at Westminster.

“Homelessness is a massive issue in Northampton South,” he points out.

“And locally there’s also the big controversy over our local authority too.

“If we work really hard we can win here and if we do, it’ll be a victory for the people of Northampton South.”

Poverty, lack of job opportunities and the need to revitalise the town are top of Chris Webb’s campaigning agenda in Blackpool North & Cleveleys.

And the fight against rising crime is a massive issue too, he points out.

Chris reduced the sitting MP’s majority from 3,340 to over 2,003 in 2017 and he’s determined to win those extra votes to swing this seat.

“The population in the north of the town tends to be older, and traditionally this has also been the wealthier end of Blackpool – but poverty and crime have been increasing and a Labour government is sorely needed for all of us.”

Down in Wimbledon, Jackie Schneider’s bid to represent the constituency containing our national headquarters is also being strongly backed.

Affordable housing is a major concern for Jackie, who wants her children to be able to live in the area.

“When I was younger, a school teacher’s salary could buy a house here – but it’s totally out of reach for my children,” she explains, adding that Labour’s housing programme is “really resonating on the doorstep.”

Matt Kerr was the nation’s most disappointed candidate on election night 2017, when he just missed out on taking the Glasgow South West seat by an agonising 60 votes.

“We’re absolutely determined to win those extra votes to get over the line next time,” he vows.

“Up here, as a traditionally industrial area, it’s Labour’s programme for large-scale investment in manufacturing for the future that gets a positive audience among the electorate – we urgently need good quality skilled manufacturing jobs and Labour has the plan.”

Former CWU Parcelforce rep Hugh Gaffney sprung a surprise two years ago when he took the Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill seat from the SNP, but he stresses that “we’ve got to fight to win it again in the next election – and we’ve got to work as hard as possible to achieve that.

“It’ll be brilliant if we can win here again – and I really hope our excellent CWU-supported candidates in these other seats can win too.”

Dave Ward told The Voice: “Our candidates are ready for the fight – now we’ve got to win these constituencies and get these brilliant candidates into Parliament.”
In a damning report, Age UK estimate that 50,000 people have died whilst waiting for a comprehensive care package for the elderly that was pledged by the Government in March 2017. Ministers promised to overhaul the funding of social care but claim that delays to the proposed Green Paper have been caused, in part, because of Whitehall’s focus on Brexit.

The Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC), a cross party body of MPs, has lambasted the Government for its inaction – accusing Ministers of being in denial about the perilous state of English local authority finances which have been pushed to the brink on account of growing demand for the care of vulnerable adults and children.

Overall spending by local authorities on care services fell by 19.2 per cent in real terms between 2010 and 2017. Last autumn the Chancellor, Philip Hammond, announced a boost to funding which will amount to £1.4bn between 2018 and 2020 – but PAC claim this is a ‘short-term fix’ that will not deal with the underlying problem.

Age UK claim that 895 people a day have had requests for social care refused since March 2017, and that a million elderly people had developed an unmet care need during that period.

Philip Hammond announced the Government’s intention to produce a Green Paper on the subject during his Spring Budget in 2017. However this has been delayed on several occasions and the latest information is that it will be published ‘at the first opportunity’.

**HUMAN COST OF DITHERING**

During the intervening period Age UK calculate 626,701 people have had their requests for social care refused and 7,240 elderly people have had to run down all their savings because of their care bills.

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns told *The Voice*: “Most reasonable people will agree that the current situation is completely unsatisfactory and that Brexit is not a reasonable excuse for the delay of the Green Paper. The vast majority of pensioners have paid thousands of pounds in tax and National Insurance during the course of their lives and it is unacceptable that, when they need help, it is either inadequate or non-existent.

“The elderly have a right to expect help when they are unable to care for themselves, in the same way as the sick are. They are entitled to care and treatment when they need it. However it’s not just a problem for the elderly. “Families are often left to face the difficulties of looking after and caring for an elderly relative without adequate support and backup from authorities whose responsibility it should be to provide this.”

Tony concludes: “Let’s not forget it was only two years ago, during the General Election of 2017, that Theresa May came up with the idea of what was dubbed the ‘dementia tax’. As Labour said at the time, this would force elderly home owners to sell their homes to fund care.

“Absent from the subsequent Queen’s speech, in the face of opposition from all sides, the Government has failed to come up with an alternative to their original idea of making people pay.

“Care for the elderly is a serious and at times distressing issue that this Government has clearly shown it is incapable of addressing.”

---

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
Looking to the future

Following the best attended CWU Young Workers’ Conference ever, CWU general secretary Dave Ward reflects on the event and his determination to ensure young workers feel motivated across the union.

The Labour movement is all too well aware of its need to reach out to young workers. The movement is at a fork in the road: we have a major task ahead of us when it comes to recruiting new young members given the backdrop of insecure work and the continued rise of the gig economy.

We know the figures well; only 2.4 per cent of young people in work aged 16 to 19 are in a trade union, and only 11.6 per cent of those aged 20 to 24.

Though the Conservative Government has certainly made recruiting members more difficult, it is also the changing nature of the world of work that leaves us with a major problem. In contrast to the highly unionised workplaces of the past, young people find themselves employed in precarious and casual work patterns. Over a million people rely on zero-hours contracts – a figure that has risen by over a quarter since 2015.

But our union has no intention of giving up when it comes to young workers. There is no proof that young people are any less political or that they are anti-trade union. In fact, the opposite is true. In acknowledging that we need to reach young workers in a different way, we set about exploring a different strategy which was put into practice at this year’s National Young Workers’ Conference held in Birmingham.

We trebled attendance on the previous year and had a lot more motions on the agenda pad. Such support only proves the rising interest of our young members.

Industrial motions on the day ranged from the idea of lobbying the Postal Executive to negotiate an agreement with Royal Mail that would secure an advantage for younger applicants in the postal industry, to instructing the National Young Workers’ Committee to lobby the T&FSE to enter discussions with BT to secure an annual meeting of Young Workers and BT managers. Delegates also agreed on the need to tackle the scourge of workplace mental ill-health by exploring a reduction in the working week across industry - and argued the case for an agreement with Royal Mail which would see the conversion of agency workers to permanent contracts. The level of debate was incredible, with some fantastic contributions made from the floor.

National motions also represented a range of issues, from instructing the education department to launch a training course on the appreciation of neurodiversity in the workplace, to instructing the Young Workers’ Committee to work with the NEC to tap into the rise of political activism by running Regional Young Workers’ political networking/training events in each of the regions. Issues surrounding the European referendum and the ongoing challenge of increasing rent prices for young people were also discussed. Some of these debates were heated, but well informed, and our young workers showed that the best way to thrash out some of these contested issues was through a formal and proper discussion.

Overall, we left Birmingham with an incredibly positive beginning to our new strategy concerning young workers. It was great to see such a high level of engagement, coupled with informed and frequent interventions from the floor.

Such events are proof of the fact that young people are interested in the trade union movement and the wider labour movement. It is now our task to continue to engage with young people on their own terms and to reach out across our industries. It will not be an easy task – but it is one that we are committed to delivering.
‘Education, training and support for reps in the workplace must underpin our struggle for equality,’ Trish Lavelle tells The Voice, as she sets out her agenda for bringing these aspects of the union’s work together...

As part of the Redesign process, equal opportunities and education have been merged to form a single department which will be headed up by Trish who has been head of education and training for the CWU since 2002.

“Bringing these areas of work together makes sense and I think it’s a natural fit,” she explains, “because Redesign is about bringing our equality issues into the mainstream of our union’s activity and that will require education, training and support for reps and a drive to recruit reps from under-represented groups.

“It’s also about taking a good look at ourselves as a union and where we are on equality, measuring progress on proportionality, identifying where we need to improve, and deciding how we’re going to do it – but most importantly, it’s about meeting this challenge together through a whole union approach.”

In terms of where we are as a union at the moment, Trish points out that currently 20 per cent of our members are female, while the percentage of black and minority ethnic membership stands at 10 per cent.

And are our female and BAME members represented proportionately at all levels within the union?

“We’re in the process of gathering new data on proportionality, but when we look at our branches, for example, we have 12 BAME branch secretaries – which, out of a total of 129, is not far off 10 per cent,” Trish answers.

“But in terms of gender balance, we only have nine female branch secretaries – a figure that has actually gone down since 2013, when we had 16 – and if we’re comparing this with the 20 per cent female membership proportion, this number should be closer to 25.

“So we need to find out why this has happened and address any barriers to members getting active in the CWU.

“As a union, diverse representation makes us stronger, so we need more female IR reps and we need more BAME representation – particularly BAME women who are poorly represented,” insists our equality officer, “and this is where the mainstreaming of equality under Redesign will play such an important role.

“We are working to address this with some positive action – such as the proposed four new NEC posts for each of the equality strands, and the new regional structures which will provide equality leads and committees for each of our 10 regions.

“Clearly, it’s also got to be about education and support – that means bringing forward new activists and providing the appropriate mentoring and training, while also working with our existing cadre of reps, branch officers and activists to ensure that equality issues are no longer seen as peripheral to the union’s core work.”

NEXT STEPS...

A number of vital Redesign changes will be put to Annual Conference next month, including moving from separate equality conferences to a designated Equality Day at General Conference, something that several delegates have expressed concerns about.

“Again, the answer to that is education, and it’s got to be a two-way education process. It’s about ensuring that all our IR reps are fully up to speed on equality issues such as disability and women’s health, and also crucially that we make sure our equality motions and propositions are relevant to the workplace – making clear the links between fighting discrimination in wider society and at work as well.

“Bringing together our industrial and social justice agendas as a union is what mainstreaming equality is all about.

“The challenge ahead is a tough challenge and major change is never easy – but success depends upon us all taking up the challenge. Approaching the future as one union, committed to equality, has got to be the right way forward.”

Mainstreaming equality

Trish Lavelle is heading up the union’s new combined equalities and education department

Agrees Trish, “and we certainly take those views on board as we go forward. Perhaps the most serious worry that I picked up on was that some delegates might not participate in the Equality Day proceedings and that the hall could empty when these items come onto the agenda.

“Bringing together our industrial and social justice agendas as a union is what mainstreaming equality is all about.

“The challenge ahead is a tough challenge and major change is never easy – but success depends upon us all taking up the challenge. Approaching the future as one union, committed to equality, has got to be the right way forward.”

Mainstreaming equality

Trish Lavelle is heading up the union’s new combined equalities and education department

Agrees Trish, “and we certainly take those views on board as we go forward. Perhaps the most serious worry that I picked up on was that some delegates might not participate in the Equality Day proceedings and that the hall could empty when these items come onto the agenda.

“Bringing together our industrial and social justice agendas as a union is what mainstreaming equality is all about.

“The challenge ahead is a tough challenge and major change is never easy – but success depends upon us all taking up the challenge. Approaching the future as one union, committed to equality, has got to be the right way forward.”
Members of the CWU’s Race Advisory Committee have recently returned from a mercy mission to Calais amid mounting concern for the plight of refugees living in conditions that have deteriorated markedly since the French authorities’ dismantling of the notorious ‘Jungle’ camp.

With Europe’s refugee crisis showing no signs of abating – and grim evidence suggesting that the number of asylum seekers drowning in their desperate attempt to cross the Mediterranean is once again on the up – there are still estimated to be more than 3,000 refugees sleeping rough around the French channel port of Calais.

This winter the UK-based Care4Calais charity has been one of just a handful of organisations providing rudimentary support for destitute individuals who are now more isolated and vulnerable than ever.

For some years the CWU’s Race Advisory Committee (RAC) has supported the charity’s efforts to provide the very basics of life to stateless individuals who are living on the margins of society – and last autumn it launched an appeal with a view to delivering a substantial consignment of aid just when it was needed most.

That came to fruition in January when six RAC members in two vehicles – including a Transit van packed with warm clothing, sleeping bags, tents, toiletries and non-perishable foodstuffs – made the journey from CWU headquarters in Wimbledon to a bleak and rainy Calais by Eurotunnel.

Their first stop was Care4Calais’ warehouse on the outskirts of the channel port, where RAC members Amarjite Singh, Sajid Shaikh, Winston Richards, Colin Bell, Prince Kingsley-Faborode and Linford Gibbons helped unload and sort the aid.

They then accompanied outreach workers and paramedics from an associated charity on a distribution run to a desolate area close to the former ‘Jungle’ – which, despite its notoriety, at least provided some semblance of sanctuary for its desperate inhabitants.

Fevzi Hussein of the union’s equalities department – who organised the mercy mission – explains: “Since the dismantling of the ‘Jungle’, and the forced dispersal of its residents, the plight of refugees has, if anything, got even worse.

“Instead of there being one big settlement of refugees which at least had running water and some basic attempts at sanitation, now smaller groups of refugees are living under bridges, on wasteland and in forests without power or running water at all.

“Although weather was really cold when we visited we came across Ethiopian guys who were wearing flip-flops without any socks, and it immediately strikes you how thin everyone is...they’re literally wasting away.”

Yet, despite the awful conditions, the basic human instinct to carry on persists – and during their visit to Calais some RAC members joined in with a game of cricket being played by a group of young men from Iran and Afghanistan.

See full feature at www.cwu.org/news/to-calais-with-love/

Reflections of the RAC...

**Winston Richards:**
“Despite the appalling conditions I saw a spirit of make do and mend and cooperation – a humbling experience that will stay with me.”

**Colin Bell**
“We can never know the pain they must be enduring in their minds, with humanity letting them down so badly.”

**Sajid Shaikh**
“These brothers and sisters rely on support from us and we must carry on doing what we can to help them.”

**Amarjite Singh**
“It’s my third trip to Calais and every time I visit it gets more emotional and I want to do more to help.”

**Prince Kingsley-Faborode**
“It was an unforgettable experience for me. Calais refugees need continuous helping hands and provisions.”

**Linford Gibbons**
“Humanity has failed these people. Driving to Folkestone the vastness of the Kent countryside makes a mockery of the far-right rhetoric that this island is full to bursting.”

To find out how you can get involved contact Fevzi Hussein on 020 8971 7388 or email fhussein@cwu.org
SHORTER WORKING WEEK

Having read Mark Baulch’s response to the shorter working week letters in the last issue of The Voice I nearly fell off my couch! Is this man a union rep or manager? All this ‘letter volumes have dropped by 7 per cent’ nonsense is ridiculous. It hasn’t – and, if Mr Baulch thinks it has, maybe he should go out on delivery with five lots of D2Ds, mailsort – or ‘junk mail’ as is better known, a van full of small and large packets and see what it is like to have less time to do it in. No wonder staff have massive problems with managers every day with people like this representing us.

Nigel Whittle, Merseyside

CWU outdoor secretary Mark Baulch responds: “Thanks for your letter, but it has been proven, not just to the CWU but also to Ofcom, that letter volumes have been declining nationally at an alarming pace for some years now. Maybe your own delivery office has not experienced this – as local trends can and do vary in some rare instances – but the overall national trend is that fewer letters are being posted. The figures provided by Ofcom show total addressed letter volumes have fallen by 24 per cent in the last seven years – from 14.5 billion items in 2011 to 11 billion items in 2017-18. Letter volumes decreased by 5 per cent in 2017-18 and by 5 per cent in 2016-17. Meanwhile, parcel volumes increased by 11 per cent in 2017-18 to 2.4 billion items.

The recent profit announcement from Royal Mail sadly confirms yet more decline in letter volumes.

I’ve been a CWU rep for over 30 years, for most of that time in Delivery, so can assure you that I am certainly not a manager – as Royal Mail will readily testify as a result of the arguments I take up on your behalf every day! Problems with managers should be reported to your local reps and we have robust procedures agreed with the company to deal with these issues. Maybe I will take you up on your offer to come out on delivery with you after all…”

TORY-VOTING PENSIONERS

I was interested to see the article headlined ‘Why do so many pensioners vote Tory?’ on page 24 of your Winter issue. You might also like to reflect on the fact that somewhat over thirty per cent of paid up trade union members also vote for the Conservative Party.

A little accuracy would not go amiss; the Labour Party manifesto was not seen as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March. During the time I was working for the Conservative Party as Trade Union Envoy it became fairly clear to me that a significant proportion of TU members regard the Movement itself as being more ‘elderly friendly’ than the Tories. I’m not aware that the triple lock has been removed, nor that winter fuel allowance is means-tested. For some time I have personally advocated the allowance should be treated as taxable income in the same way pensions are, because that would mean better off pensioners who pay 40 per cent income tax would at least pay some of the money back. This could, of course, be used to increase the overall level of winter fuel allowance – although frankly it might be more sensible to abolish the whole allowance and just add the amount to the winter time pension for say the coldest months of the year, November through to March.
take any great notice of the politics that the unions put forward.

Lord Balfe, House of Lords, London

Senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns responds: ‘Lord Balfe raises an interesting point in his letter regarding the claim that over 30 per cent of paid-up trade union members vote Conservative. This comes as no surprise and demonstrates the fact that workers, whatever their political allegiances, recognise the value of trade union membership. It also shows that 70 per cent don’t vote Conservative and, whilst welcoming their membership, the Movement needs to work harder at convincing them that the party to which their union is affiliated is working hard on their behalf to improve the lives of them and their families.

The other point Lord Balfe raises is that ‘the Labour Party was not seen as more “elderly friendly than the Tories” at the last General Election – doesn’t stand up to closer examination, but don’t take our word for it’. Conservative MP for the Ribble Valley, Nigel Evans, described their manifest policies towards the elderly as like “trying to steal your granny’s house after she had died” and “that the only thing missing was compulsory euthanasia for the over 70’s.” The fact that the policies he was referring to – scrapping the ‘triple lock’ that protects the value of the state pension, ditching universal winter weather payments and introducing the ‘dementia tax’ – were dropped from the Queen’s Speech makes our point.”

DOOR-TO-DOOR

I am an AG with Royal Mail and get paid pro-rata for doing some parts of the job. Since 2010, however, I’ve been doing D2D the same as my full-time colleagues; I prep up and then deliver the same amount of D2D as they do, but I get paid less and this leaves a bitter taste. Will it ever get looked into and resolved?

Paul Hibell, Stoke-on-Trent

Outdoor secretary Mark Baulch responds: “Thanks for your letter, Paul, but this argument is nine years old. Just to be clear, you are not paid pro-rata for simply D2D at all. The Delivery Basic Pay Supplement is made up of money formerly paid out for D2D and Early Shift payments and is basic pay, some of which is pensionable for some of our full-time members who used to receive the pensionable shift allowance. So, you see, in the very same way as you are paid for the hours that you are contracted, the supplement is paid in the same fashion. For example – the full weekly amount, which is £25.16 is then divided by 38 and multiplied by the number of contractual hours that you work.

D2D is part of workload in the same way that letters and parcels are, and has been since the agreement was reached in 2010. I hope that explains it, but if you need to contact us for a more detailed explanation, please email outdoorsecretary@cwu.org

DELIVERY METHOD TRIALS

Near the front doors in our office there’s a RM propaganda poster stating ‘Everybody likes Door-to-Doors’ but in my 15-year experience it is only RM that likes them because they get the revenue from a market they cannot afford not to be part of. In reality posties view them as a huge waste of time in a much overloaded day – as do the public who want to cut out all unnecessary rubbish in their lives. If they want radiators or blinds or another broadband network they know very well how to go and find them.

The two-page article about amalgamating D2Ds into our delivery day in the last issue of The Voice really demonstrates the amount of wasted effort that has gone into trying to deal with unwanted paper adverts that are really nothing but a distraction from our real work. You mention that Stoke Newington office has a ‘non-D2D day’. How does that happen? Can we have one please? It would make my week.

Simon Rickman, Wellingborough PDO

Outdoor secretory Mark Baulch responds: “Part of the Guiding Principles Agreement reached last year committed the CWU to trials of new working methods that the company had been looking to introduce for some time. The trials had to commence as the enabler for the first hour’s reduction of the Shorter Working Week. Whilst recognising the difficulties that some D2D products create for our members, we would have to question ourselves as a responsible trade union if we wanted to tell the employer that we don’t want this type of work.

The ‘non-D2D day’ is possible by managing your delivery of the items over fewer days as long as the items are delivered by the end of the week, which is still an agreement between the CWU and the company.

See full letter and response at www.cwu.org/letters-extra/

OPENREACH MEDICAL RETIREMENT

I would like to thank the Portsmouth, West Sussex and IoW branch of the CWU, which has fought tirelessly to enable me to retire on medical grounds from Openreach. Ken Woolley in particular has given so much to allow this to happen.

I’ve been under immense pressure over the past few years to achieve targets that I was unable to attain due to my health. When medical retirement was mentioned to me I was under the impression that this was a thing of the past. After a number of years, however, this has now been achieved with the help of a tough and sympathetic union.

I hope this letter offers hope to others who are suffering.

Terry Green, Worthing

TPO REMEMBERED

January 4, 2019 marked the 15th anniversary of the cessation of the Travelling Post Office (TPO). These overnight trains ran all over the British Isles carrying and sorting the mail throughout the night. It took a certain kind of person to love the job, as most of us did. The 520 staff came from all parts of the country and had all sorts of distant points to stay during the day before making the return overnight journey. Needless to say, travelling in teams, the comradeship amongst us was second to none in this very unique job.

I personally had the privilege of working on the TPOs for 34 years and being the Area Rep for the last four years, until the cessation of the TPO in January 2004. Representing and visiting staff on the various trains from as far away as Glasgow, Edinburgh, Plymouth, Swansea, Cardiff, Norwich, Penzance, Dover, Carlisle, Birmingham, London etc. was an absolute pleasure and one I will always have fond memories of. No North/South divide here!

The cessation of the TPOs brought upon us a very difficult time but with the support I received from the loyal TPO staff, my superb local reps and help of our CWU through the brilliant work of Bob Gibson we fortunately secured an exceptional package to suit all. Without the CWU none of this would have been possible.

I must also say a big thank you to Dave Ward and Norman Candy for their assistance as well.

To all of you at CWU HQ, those retired and those I travelled with, I’m eternally grateful and miss you all and the days of travelling together.

Roy Dixie, Hertfordshire
Our ‘house is on fire’ warn school climate strikers

Young climate activist Greta Thunberg sparked school walkouts and protests with her dramatic warning to world leaders at Davos in January that Global warming is now so serious that we should ‘act as if our home is in flames’.

Ms Thunberg – a school student from Sweden – began striking from school last year in order to highlight the issues, first on her own, then being joined by her classmates and then by others from around the country.

In the months since then she has spoken at the UN Climate Conference, the World Economic Forum in Davos and also to the EU Parliament, while school students in many countries around the world have co-ordinated school strikes and protests – starting last December, with follow-up Climate Action Days in February and March.

An estimated 15,000 walked out of their classes to protest in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast, Glasgow, Brighton, Oxford and Exeter, while similar actions have taken place in Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, the USA, Japan and many other nations around the World, including New Zealand, Uganda and Colombia.

Governments are being urged by these school students to declare a ‘Climate Emergency’, to achieve ‘100 per cent clean energy’ and to ‘keep fossil fuels in the ground’.

CWU senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns says: “They’re certainly not exaggerating the seriousness of the climate crisis,” and he points to the October 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report. “IPCC is a world body consisting of leading scientists from across the globe and they titled their report ‘Final Call to Save the World from Climate Catastrophe’ – so for a campaigner to warn that we need to act as if ‘our house is on fire’ is not unreasonable,” Tony continues. “That’s why the policy adopted at TUC Congress last year – that only energy unions can set TUC policy on this issue – is wrong. It’s an issue that affects us all – and that’s why we opposed that policy.”

Man-made global warming is calculated by comparing average World temperatures in pre-industrial times with today and projecting those trends forward. If all carbon emissions stopped today, average World temperatures are projected to rise by between 0.5 and 1 degree celcius over the course of this century – a rise which there is zero chance of avoiding, because those elements are already in our atmosphere, explains Tony.

“So we’re already going to see significant global warming, whatever we do – with Arctic ice melting, oceans warming, mountain mudslides and arable land becoming a dustbowl desert... and the World needs to plan for that reality,” out SDGS points out.

DAMAGE LIMITATION...

In 2015, World leaders – meeting in Paris – agreed a package of carbon-reducing measures with the aim of limiting the rise in World temperatures to between 1.5 and 2 degrees.

“If world leaders can agree to work collectively then so can the trade union movement,” stresses Tony. “This isn’t about ‘saving the Planet’ – let’s stop saying that – the Planet will survive regardless, but many of the Planet’s species – plants, insects, sea creatures, land mammals, and humans, will be endangered. “It’s about limiting the further damage we’re going to do to ourselves and our species. “As such, we must support school climate strikers,” Tony urges. “And as a nation, we’ve got to massively increase the energy we generate from renewable sources – wind, wave, solar – and get our top scientists and engineers working on industrial-scale solutions for renewable energy storage.

“That’s going to take big public investment and public ownership. “And, with transport pollution having actually overtaken energy generation as the UK’s primary carbon contributor, let’s invest massively in electric vehicle manufacture and all the necessary infrastructure that goes with it.”

Tony stresses the recent announcement about the Honda car factory in Swindon was “horrible news”, but argues “we should be making the argument there – and also up in Sunderland, where the big Nissan factory is facing uncertainty – for public ownership and a transition to electric vehicle production.

“There’s a lot we can do as trade unionists and as a society – yes our house is on fire, but we can put out the flames.”

“I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. Act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.”

Greta Thunberg

Greta Thunberg