Rico Whispered to Postal Workers. “Times have changed. Royal Mail Group is under new management. The storm is coming.”

100,000 Postal Workers whispered back “We are the storm.”

It is time to show Rico Back what working with a real Trade Union looks like

- Demand an end to bullying
- Fight against 20,000 job cuts
- No separation of the company
- Extend the legal protections

Rico Back has a £6m golden welcome.
He has a £2.7m pay package.
He has a £2.3m Swiss Villa.

What he will never have though is what money can’t buy. Pride, togetherness and a unity that only comes with being part of the greatest union in the UK.

This is the fight of our lives.
In the next few weeks we must pull out all the stops to ensure we get the highest possible turnout and YES vote for industrial action in our dispute with the Royal Mail Group.

In a nutshell, to defend your jobs, postal services and the very future of our industry, we must now collectively oppose the direction the company is taking.

It’s only your previous support that enabled us to achieve the ground-breaking legal protections and Four Pillars agreements and thus far, these have blocked the destructive asset-stripping of our company that has happened in every other privatised industry.

And those agreements also blocked the introduction of insecure, low-paid employment models that are now regrettably part of the very foundation of the UK economy.

Instead, for years, this union, with the support of its members, has continued to set the high benchmark on pay, pensions and working hours across our sector.

So, what’s changed?

The new leaders of the company have been less than honest and are drip-feeding their plans to the union whilst at the same time preparing for the biggest shakeup we have ever seen.

Their plans are not about growing the business – they are about growing shareholder dividends and personal fortunes.

The announcement that Royal Mail is now a parcels business has been followed by announcements of plans to remove parcel traffic from the vast majority of delivery offices and, most recently, to TUPE Parcelforce members into a different business. Make no mistake, this is the start of the break-up of the company and, if unchallenged, it will be followed by outsourcing, franchising, the down-dialling of the USO and the biggest attack we have ever seen on jobs, terms and conditions.

At the same time, there are countless examples of the company walking away from our agreements. There appears to be no willingness to introduce the next hour reduction in the working week, due in October.

Moreover, the commitment to improve the culture at local level is laughable – if it were not for the realisation that the relentless pressure on daily workload is now threatening the wellbeing of our members up and down the UK.

Whilst there are claims of bullying and harassment – the root of this daily pressure is the increasing technology that is now at the disposal of management.

I think that, over the years, the union and our representatives have done exceptionally well to control technology and its impact on our members – but, as this evolves, it’s now clear we are at a watershed moment.

The freedom that delivery workers rightly enjoyed to build customer relationships and the empowerment needed to make decisions when out on delivery is being replaced by a culture more akin to being tagged every minute of the day like a criminal.

This use of technology is not just a threat to the dignity of workers, it is a major barrier to our ability to create time to innovate and grow new products and services. I am not suggesting we can remove technology – but this union can achieve ground-breaking restrictions on its use, aligned to new systems of working that will create genuine opportunities for growth.

The new leaders of the business and their real strategy has been flushed out and it’s this: Anything that has the potential to grow (parcels, packets) will ultimately be moved to a different business based on insecure, low cost employment models and the thousands upon thousands of jobs that exist in this industry will be left to wither on the vine.

We cannot allow this to happen. Vote YES to defend your job, postal services and our industry.

“This is the start of the break-up of Royal Mail and we cannot allow this to happen.”
Defending workers’ interests

Anyone doubting the importance of the role played by trade unions in defending workers’ interests would do well to consider what might have happened had the CWU not been there for members in BT Fleet these past eight weeks.

Presented last month with reprehensible but unstoppable BT Group plans to sell the division, we took the principled decision to fight for what really mattered.

Having identified four key areas where members’ interests were seriously threatened by the disputed sale, in tough talks we secured crucial safeguards and guarantees for all those affected.

I’m proud of what we’ve achieved – outlined in the story below – but the CWU still believes this sale of a profitable division is wrong in principle and did not need to happen.

We’ll continue to drive this message home as the company persists with its ‘One BT’ transformation, because an injury to even one CWU member one is an injury to us all. That’s why it’s so important that, associated with our talks on Fleet, we’ve now reached agreement with BT Group on new protocols that provide significant protections for members in TUPE transfer/divestment situations.

Also bearing testament to the power of the union is a victory we’ve just secured in Openreach, with the rollout of Patch Lead roles further enhancing career progression opportunities that were largely absent just two years ago – as reported on Page Eight.

Andy Kerr

DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (T&FS)

DGS COLUMN

“In tough talks we secured crucial safeguards and guarantees for all those affected.”

Fleet Solutions – union forces robust guarantees

Key guarantees on contracts, terms and conditions, pensions and ongoing full union representation have been won by the CWU for our Fleet Solutions members following BT’s controversial decision to sell this part of the business.

Although the union strongly opposed and continues to oppose the sale of this division, in the circumstances, the deal achieved meets all of the principle negotiating aims that our negotiators had been set by members and their representatives.

Prior to the agreement being concluded, the CWU’s Fleet national team’s negotiating position was explained in detail to reps attending a special branch forum last month.

And Brendan O’Brien, the union’s national officer for Fleet Solutions members, told Voice that, at the forum, branch representatives had “supported the position we’d taken over the four key areas.”

Branch representatives also asked for full clarity from the business on a wide range of issues, including contracts of employment, pensions, pay and pension protection, safety, family-friendly policies, apprentices, recognition and the structure of the union within Fleet Solutions going forward, Brendan continued.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr said: “The CWU has not budged one iota in its belief that this sale of a profitable division is wrong in principle and did not need to happen. Other ways of funding Fleet’s future investment needs could and should have been explored – and it’s nothing short of disgraceful that the BT Board instead took the easy route of dispensing with around 950 loyal employees.

“Despite our resolute opposition to this sell-off – and our undiminished anger that BT has pursued a course of action that has caused considerable stress and anguish to our members across the division – the CWU’s national negotiating team is convinced the agreement we’ve reached with BT provides the reassurance that members need on their future employment and Ts&Cs going forward.”

No-one wanted this sell-off to occur less than the CWU, Andy continued, adding: “I hope our members in Fleet Solutions recognise that, in an extremely difficult situation, the agreement we’ve secured provides for a level of stability and continuity that would not otherwise have existed.”

“The CWU has not budged one iota in its belief that this sale of a profitable division is wrong in principle - it’s nothing short of disgraceful.”
Please use your vote – please vote YES

As you receive this edition of Voice, you should also be receiving your ballot paper regarding the current dispute with Royal Mail Group, including Parcelforce.

With all the workplace meetings, video broadcasts and Facebook posts over the past month since the ballot was announced, I’m sure you will be acquainted with the huge issues at stake here.

The proposal to make Parcelforce a limited company which would require our members to ‘TUPE’ to a different employer is a clear attack on this group of members – but it also heralds the start of the long-term intention to break up Royal Mail Group.

It’s ‘Parcelforce Limited’ today, but it will be ‘Deliveries Limited’ tomorrow, ‘Network Limited’ after that, and ‘Logistics Limited’, followed by Distribution, Processing, Fleet and Facilities.

And the TUPE process does not protect anybody in the longer-term. Once workers are put through TUPE there is then a gradual erosion of their apparently ‘protected rights’ in subsequent years, while new recruits at these outsourced businesses are brought in on lower pay, terms and conditions.

But as well as defending against the break-up of Royal Mail Group, we’re also fighting for the promise and commitments of our progressive 2018 Four Pillars Agreement. That agreement is a blueprint for the future, it interlinks a programme of benefits and behaviours, a commitment to each, a shared vision and the new RMG leadership is failing to progress within its spirit and intent.

Their position is dishonourable and disrespectful and our trust and confidence that we still have a shared vision has been lost.

We have to make a stand, fight off this attack and build a positive future.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY
(POSTAL)

“It’s time to pick sides again, pick the CWU or forever accept less.”

Reacting to company propaganda

While the union is using all of our communication channels to explain the importance of the issues at stake and why the biggest possible YES vote is absolutely necessary, the company has been and will continue to try to persuade people otherwise.

And if they take everyone off the floor to watch RMTV, then we say: Turn Your Back On Rico and don’t watch, but if they want to start a discussion on the dispute issues, let’s use that to win the arguments for the union,” says DGSP Terry Pullinger.

“Watch your Dispute Daily, check out the union’s Facebook – not only the national page, but your own divisional or branch socials – for the latest videos and other updates – watch that revealing German documentary (It’s got subtitles!) about what really happens to workers in GLS and ask questions about that at your WTLTs.”

Also, if chief executive Rico Back’s agenda is successful, unit and shift managers will be in a more precarious situation than our members – so why they are not supporting the CWU’s stance?

Outdoor secretary Mark Baulch says: “If the planned separation of Parcelforce, and the further split of parcel traffic out of most of our delivery offices, and then the down-dialling of the USO go ahead, the effect on jobs could be catastrophic.

“So, if unit managers want to open this debate in their own time – let’s use that to make the case for our alternative.

“It’s the union side who have supported trials of new equipment, methods and services, and it’s the management side who have been unenthusiastic, who have not followed through – let’s make these points,” he urges.

Davie Robertson, national officer for Royal Mail members in processing, logistics, area distribution and Royal Mail International, as well as Parcelforce, says:

“This union has always supported the need for change and modernisation – it was us who called for a redesigned operational pipeline, which could adapt to the changing market and grow the business to the benefit of all.

“If managers want to initiate discussions on all of this, then we should be welcoming the opportunity to put them on the spot, and to ask why they have not increased business revenues, when lucrative parts of the market are experiencing sustained growth.

“Equally, Parcelforce members should make sure management understand the strength of feeling over the company’s separation proposal,” Davie continues.

“And management should be asked why they’re unwilling to give the long-term job security and terms and conditions assurances that have been sought nationally.”

In the company’s briefings to unit managers, it is suggested that these ‘team-talks’ can be ‘an opportunity to relay facts and dispel myths’ and Terry Pullinger urges members to “take that at face value.

“Yes indeed let’s keep to the facts, and dispel myths’ and Terry Pullinger urges
magnificent effort from everyone – and we’re just getting started,” was the reaction of DGSP Terry Pullinger after the resounding launch of the union’s National Gate Meeting initiative during TUC Week.

With many hundreds of gate meetings, involving tens of thousands of members, the whole of our union has mobilised for what Terry has dubbed “The Fight Of Our Lives” to save our Royal Mail, protect jobs and defend public services.

General secretary Dave Ward and Terry were down in Brighton for the TUC and, while they were down there, they made an early-morning visit to Brighton Delivery office where a lively rally was held.

Speaking out in the street, with passing vehicles sounding their horns in support, our DGSP called for the “biggest possible YES vote” and vowed: “This is the People’s Post and we will fight to defend it.”

With CWU giant balloons, banners and placards waving, even passers-by stopped to hear what was going on, as Dave Ward made a rousing speech criticising the strategy and the attitudes of the company’s senior managers.

He also made it clear that our members will not put up with any management bullying anymore and, noticing a couple of local delivery managers among the audience, he pointed out that senior managers are bullying them too.

“You should be supporting our campaign,” Dave told them, to loud cheers from the workers.

While this was going on down on England’s south coast, hundreds and hundreds of gate meetings were taking place in every corner of the UK – and on the facing page, we’ve tried to cram in as many photos from those meetings as we possibly can.

Members rallied in Northern Ireland, at sites across Scotland and gathered in numbers in England’s North East and North West. Postal workers in North Wales and South Wales heeded the call and all over England’s South West, the Midlands, Anglia, the South East and South Central areas, and of course London, the women and men of this great union got together to send their loud, proud and united message to the leaders of this company that they will stand together, support each other, and unite with their union.

“We reckon something like 750 gate meetings took place during that initial launch period in TUC Week,” says Terry, “around 600 of them on the day itself – and it was absolutely fantastic to see the solidarity and support from every corner of the UK, from every function and from the largest mail centres right down to the smallest SPDOs.

“We also won the unanimous backing of the TUC for our struggle – so if or when we go in to action, we’ll get the active support of our comrades in the other trade unions as well.

“We need everyone to vote YES, to urge their colleagues to vote YES and to prepare for action.”

Dave Ward also praises the “sheer enthusiasm, and positive spirit of our members everywhere.

“As I’m always saying, this union is like no other – when we come under attack we stand together and we stand up.

“Now we need to encourage everyone to vote and to vote YES.”

‘A

We Rise Again – all around the country

Our fantastic army of representatives have done us proud during this dispute but you can also help us as members. Resources are openly available on our website. We encourage you to print them off and share with colleagues in your offices.

Our online campaign has been a massive success with hundreds of gate meeting photos alongside humorous, heartfelt and passionate posts. You can follow all of the action on our social media channels using #WeRiseAgain

One of the things that stand out for me is how proud members are of their union. There have been moments, particularly during our Facebook live broadcasts where we have been totally overwhelmed by the sheer level of support. We can’t thank you enough.

We’ve dispatched two home mailings to support the other forms of communications and to ensure no member is left out as we seek the best possible ballot result.

Finally, all of the above is important and worthwhile but what really matters, and always has, is engaging members in the workplace. It is absolutely critical that the gate meetings continue throughout the balloting period.

We will continue to improve and innovate our communications – we take nothing for granted.

Get the vote out #WeRiseAgain

Chris Webb

Head of Communications,
Engagement and Media

Check the CWU Facebook page and follow us on twitter @CWUNews for daily updates, latest videos and podcasts from your union.
WE ASKED FOR YOUR GATE MEETING PHOTOS - THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR SENDING THEM IN AND SO SORRY WE COULDN’T PUBLISH THEM ALL.
Promotion opportunities for hundreds of Openreach engineers have been unlocked with the introduction of the new ‘patch lead’ grade, which has been the subject of extensive negotiations between the CWU and the company.

The role, which sits just below the patch manager position, enables senior engineers to progress their careers further and addresses what has been seen as a lack of promotion opportunity.

Recruitment has already started, with an initial target of one patch lead for each group of 15 engineers and the first 266 posts are planned to increase to over 900.

An interim patch lead pay rate will be in place while a full NewGrid assessment is carried out – a process which both the union and the business have agreed to undertake.

And the CWU’s Openreach national officer Davie Bowman says: “If we manage to secure more money when this has reached its conclusion, we’ll be seeking full backpay to the date of appointment.”

On behalf of the union’s Openreach national team, T&FS executive member Julia Upton has attended training events preparing for the launch of these new roles.

“Patch Leads are clearly going to be a crucial element of the CWU’s Openreach membership going forward and will, undoubtedly, be an invaluable source of feedback,” she said, adding: “It’s highly positive that the union’s national team will have had the opportunity to directly engage with almost every patch lead over the next couple of months.”

End of an era at Fujitsu Birmingham

Telecom equipment manufacturing and repair work at the Fujitsu site in Birmingham came to a virtual end last month, with the last day of service for all but a handful of the workforce.

CWU assistant secretary John East says that the members at the site, after many years of decline, lay-offs and outsourcing had “made it clear to their local representatives that, this time round, they no longer had the heart to fight for their jobs.

“I take no pleasure whatsoever in the fact that CWU and other unions opposing the mass lay-offs and outsourcing of 2017 have been proved right in our warnings at the time.”

In conclusion, John says: “I’d just like to thank all those Fujitsu members in Birmingham, who have left the business, for their loyalty to the union and to wish them all the very best for the future.”

Union aims for new BT Consumer bonus scheme

As Voice went to press, talks were due to get under way on a new bonus system in Service areas, following the company’s announcement that the existing OPI (Overall Performance Indicator) no longer reflects its priorities.

CWU assistant secretary Nigel Cotgrove reports: “Following consultation with the union, BT has agreed to pay advisors either their three-month personal bonus average or their on-target bonus, whichever is the greater as an interim arrangement.

“We welcome this approach, not least because for a significant number of members this will result in an increase in their monthly bonus payments. “Negotiations commence shortly and we’ll agree a new bonus system before the end of the year,” he continues.

• In the meantime, the union has received assurances that the interim arrangement - which commenced in July, will continue until the new agreed bonus system is in place.
Openreach engineers call for solidarity

‘A brilliant response so far, and we’re stepping it up with specific plans being developed in each CWU region by our regional co-ordinators,’ Davie Bowman tells Voice, as the numbers signing CWU Openreach Our Hours petitions grow and grow. Davie adds: ‘Members should contact their local branch and get actively involved.’

Our campaign is all about standing together for what’s right – and this union is all about solidarity, so we’re asking every member for support and solidarity,” adds the union’s national officer for workers at the company.

Openreach engineers employed since September 2012 potentially have to travel for up to one unpaid hour at the start and end of each shift, while for employees recruited prior to that, no such contractual commitment exits.

And this personal travel time (PTT) has become an acute grievance across the business, with suspicions that under-pressure operations managers have, over time, come to regard PTT as a daily requirement rather than an exceptional circumstance – as it was perceived initially.

This interpretation of the contracts by some managers – described as “outrageous” by the union – has led to a situation where “we’re hearing branch reports of timesheets being amended, pushing back into what was indisputably work time, causing a loss of Flex,” Davie says, referring to the time-recording system operating within the company.

Another consequence of the management’s perception of PTT as a requirement is the way that it has impacted Openreach’s job allocation system, which reportedly hands the majority of ‘last-job’ out-of-area work to PTT-contract workers towards the end of the day, while jobs which will finish their day closer to home are invariably given to pre-2012 recruits.

This works as a double benefit to the business at the expense of the workforce – reducing overtime or ‘positive flex’ for the longer-serving member, while maximising excess and unpaid travel time for the post-2012 recruit.

Campaigning began earlier this year, with branch reps visiting engineers at their yards and out in the field, winning strong support for the key demands.

And activists from all parts of the UK have been playing their part in taking the message out there, with South East Central Branch secretary Chris Power reporting back from specially held member meetings that those in attendance were “very keen on the campaign and getting involved in taking it further.”

Kayleigh England, a North East Branch campaign sub-committee member commented that “it can be a lonely job at times, but this campaign is bringing us all together,” while over in Wales & The Marches, Graham Colk said: “Virtually every engineer we’ve spoken to has expressed support and signed the petition.”

And from North Anglia, Sara Miah said that “the response was great” and added that it was important to also engage with longer-serving members who are not on these contracts.

The online petition was launched just last month and the support for this, added to the many paper petition signatures, is now reaching extremely high levels among the membership.

“The work that’s been done around the branches on the face-to-face aspect of the campaign and the new surge of signatures since we launched the online version have been tremendous,” says Davie.

“CWU members have a proud record of recognising and standing up to injustice and the more sign-ups we get from all across the union, the stronger our position will be when we take this into the company and insist on meaningful steps forward to end this unfairness.”

See inside back cover for your Our Hours poster.

‘We want a pathway to NewGrid for all’ argues Northern Ireland Telecom member Fiona Curtis, (In My View P29)
National industrial officer Davie Robertson tells Voice: ‘Our members in Parcelforce do not want this separation, they do not want TUPE, they want to continue to be Royal Mail Group employees working for Parcelforce.’

Others have also spoken up at the Coventry gate meetings about their experiences of the TUPE process, she continues, which vary from private companies to local councils and even the NHS.

And this is why promises from the leadership of Royal Mail Group and Parcelforce that their proposed changes will not impact detrimentally on staff are just not being believed, Nimisha explains.

“We had the Four Pillars deal signed, sealed and agreed just 18 months ago and already they’re trying to change it. We also had the legally-binding agreements on keeping the business together, which they’re also trying to change.

“So why would we believe them when they make these promises now?” she asks.

“When people get those ballot papers, what I want everyone to think is what a YES vote means and what it’s for and most importantly who it’s for.

“A YES vote is not a vote for the union, a YES vote is a vote for you – for your own future.”

The union has heard their voice and we are challenging the business proposal nationally, but our members also need to let the employer know the strength of feeling that exists across RMG members.”

“Please take the time to read these views from some of our frontline depot reps detailing their feelings and concerns and those of their members – and consider that what they’re being threatened with now is what the rest of our Royal Mail membership could be facing in the future. That is why is absolutely essential that all members support the national ballot and vote YES.”

“Here at the depot, I think everyone will vote YES,” he forecasts, pointing to the extremely high levels of apprehension among the workforce and the absence of trust in senior management.

“Nobody trusts Rico Back, especially when you look at his track record – but on the other hand, we know we can trust Davie Robertson and Terry Pullinger completely, with their track record of fighting for the members,” explains Chris.

“If the management are allowed to get away with this in Parcelforce, it’ll be open season on the rest of the Royal Mail Group membership.

“We’ve got to all stand together and now’s the time to do it.”

Parcels Section secretary Nimisha Vekaria says that people at the giant Coventry Hubs are “very angry” with the company’s separation plans, and that the “very sound of the word ‘TUPE’ has sparked off fury, fear and worry” among the workforce.

This is by far the company’s largest site, employing around 750 staff at its National and International warehouses.

“We’ve held eight gate meetings here, speaking to people in both parts and from every shift,” she tells us, “and whenever the word ‘TUPE’ comes up, there’s always someone who has been through it before, at other companies.

“My own husband went through TUPE when he worked for British Gas before joining Parcelforce in 2000 and they did a split and re-organisation – and within weeks his contract had been changed and his terms and conditions were worsened.”

Others have also spoken up at the Coventry gate meetings about their experiences of the TUPE process, she continues, which vary from private companies to local councils and even the NHS.

And this is why promises from the leadership of Royal Mail Group and Parcelforce that their proposed changes will not impact detrimentally on staff are just not being believed, Nimisha explains.

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“So why would we believe them when they make these promises now?” she asks.

“When people get those ballot papers, what I want everyone to think is what a YES vote means and what it’s for and most importantly who it’s for.

“A YES vote is not a vote for the union, a YES vote is a vote for yourself – for your own future.”

“We’ve got to all stand together and now’s the time to do it,” urges Newcastle Depot rep Chris Nicholas.

And Chris, who has worked for the business since 1996, tells us that “in all my time here, right now is the most worried and concerned I’ve ever been.”

There are “massive concerns and stress” among his colleagues – the drivers, sorters, loaders and admin staff he represents at the Chester-le-Street unit, he continues.

“We’ve got people here who’ve previously been through TUPE situations and they say what happens is they bring in new people on lower pay, terms and conditions and this gradually undermines the TUPE people.

“The business are telling us nothing will change, but not one person here believes it.

“When Royal Mail Group announced the separation plan, “it came as a terrible shock to me and my members,” he says.

“Here at the depot, I think everyone will vote YES,” he forecasts, pointing to the extremely high levels of apprehension among the workforce and the absence of trust in senior management.

“Nobody trusts Rico Back, especially when you look at his track record – but on the other hand, we know we can trust Davie Robertson and Terry Pullinger completely, with their track record of fighting for the members,” explains Chris.

“If the management are allowed to get away with this in Parcelforce, it’ll be open season on the rest of the Royal Mail Group membership.

“We’ve got to all stand together and now’s the time to do it.”
Keeping the current arrangements is exactly what Michelle Reid-Hay and her members up in Aberdeen cite as their ideal outcome to this dispute.

Describing Royal Mail’s new chief executive Rico Back as a “soulless man,” she had been “shocked at how one man can have the audacity to think he can do such a thing in this day and age.”

And the big concern for her and the rest of the depot is “the sheer uncertainty of what the future will hold” if Parcelforce were to be separated off.

“TUPE is no guarantee – it’s not worth the letters,” Michelle continues.

But morale has improved since the union announced the national, Royal Mail Group-wide strike ballot.

“I was at the Parcelforce briefing and also at the big all-Royal Mail briefing the next day and I spoke in the debate and said I wanted to thank them all from my heart,” she tells Voice.

“And when I got back to Aberdeen and reported back the solidarity from the whole union, everyone became more hopeful and optimistic – it’s really made us all more positive.”

Michelle was selected as a delegate to the TUC in Brighton and addressed Congress during one of the debates, as well as visiting Hove Delivery Office on National Gate Meeting Day.

“It was really, really inspiring,” she reports, and concludes by urging all our Royal Mail Group members: “Please vote and please vote YES.”

Marcus Hibbert, from the company’s London Central Depot, shares the same worries as reps and members elsewhere about the threatened TUPE process.

Workers at the Camden site are “seriously concerned” that a future, separated ‘Parcelforce Limited’ would move towards only employing owner-drivers, he reveals.

“People are deeply troubled about it all – and some I would say are frightened about the prospects for the future.

“What we all want to know is why we need to become a separate ‘limited’ company,” he comments, pointing out that Parcelforce already has the ability to carry out all the modernisation that it needs to – such as improve its technology and updating its fleet for example.

“I myself and the members don’t see the relevance of converting to a ‘limited’ company.”

For Marcus, this job is “first and foremost about a livelihood and when you’re on a wage which is just about enough, the last thing we need is this extra stress.

“It seems to us those at the top can do what they like, but those at the bottom – who are doing the most work – are the ones who always suffer.”

Such is the strength of feeling at this depot, that the rep predicts: “I think it’s going to be unanimous here – our backs are against the wall.

“It’s a crucial time and we welcome every single YES vote.”

“Nimisha, Chris, Michelle and Marcus are saying what I’ve been hearing from every depot and every rep I’ve spoken with since this separation plan was first announced,” comments Davie Robertson.

“They all make excellent points, but if I had to single out one sentence for repetition, it would be: A YES vote is not a vote for the union, A YES vote is a vote for yourself – for your own future.”
‘Tetra’ is the name given to a kit and operational method, which secures ladders to walls, keeps our engineers safe and enables them the full and confident use of both hands while working at height.

Voice was invited along to the BT/Openreach learning centre in Croydon, Surrey, to see the new kit in operation, speak to the trainers, and also meet some of our engineers being shown the new procedures.

Onsite instructor Earl Wilson explains the new system and the reasons for it, highlighting the number of falls from ladders that cause injury, or even fatalities, when people are working at height from unsecured platforms.

“The most common direct cause of ladder falls is working at height and stretching for something, or reaching backwards when working directly under the eaves,” he says, adding that this shifts the distribution of the body weight on the ladder and then it can slip.

The Tetra system provides a solution to this by positively attaching the ladder to the wall, by means of a strap clipped to an eye-bolt drilled into the mortar.

And a rope with a large ‘cowtail’ hook on the end is looped through the ladder and attached to a ‘rope grab’ tracking device, which the engineer attaches to from their harness’s lanyard while climbing and then attaches to the nearest rung of the ladder when starting work.

Since the new kit was introduced towards the end of last year, “hundreds” of engineers have been trained in the new method here at Croydon, according to Earl and his trainer colleague Sam Foot – who are both former customer service engineers themselves.

Sam tells us that “once an engineer has completed the Tetra course, the system is then mandatory.

“Other companies have already been using this,” says Earl, citing British Gas and Sky as examples.

“And although it probably does increase the time on the job – I’d say that once you get the hang of using this, it’s probably just about an extra 10-15 minutes’ prep.”

Sam leads a class of engineers and Voice is interested to hear their views on the new kit, so we speak to some of them before and after they use it.

Chris Kluge has worked the South Downs patch for the company since April of last year and, as he sets up, he says: “Anything that improves safety is a good thing – but I hope time is built into jobs with the new method.”

We get a snap of him at the top, and when he comes back down again, he tells us that he feels reassured at being fully secured – and of the benefit of being ‘hands-free’.

“Once I get properly used to this, I reckon I’ll be able to work the same as I can at a DP up a pole for example,” he comments.

Another ‘Class of April 2018’ member on this Tetra course is Dan Morrison, who did his induction training with Chris when they were both new recruits.
"I expect it might be a bit of a hassle, especially when it’s raining for example, but ladder climbing does need to be made safer” comments the south Londoner, who notes afterwards that, using the new system, “you can concentrate on what you’re doing more, rather than on hanging on.”

Imran Saadi has just over two years’ service, working the south west London area, and tells us that he has had some “scary” experiences “up ladders on windy days.”

He also strongly welcomes the new Tetra equipment, but he asks whether a job which might involve continuous vertical movement – such as “cleating along” – might require repeated set-ups and strip-downs of the whole kit.

In response, Sam demonstrates the ‘triangulation’ method – which secures the ladder to the wall using two eye-bolts placed some distance apart – and he shows how the ladder can then be easily repositioned along the wall by loosening one strap and tightening the other.

This method is also helpful when the area directly under the intended work point is perhaps a window and cannot be drilled into, he explains.

The CWU was closely involved with the business in the introduction of the new system and Davie Bowman comments that “it’s interesting to hear the feedback from members that, not only do they feel safer, but that they report improved manual dexterity as well – because they’re that much more physically secure.

“The safety of our members is absolutely paramount – but it’s good to hear also that working safely helps to do the job as well.”

T&F Executive member Tom Cooper has been the union’s national safety lead on the Tetra project and he tells Voice: “I have been involved with Tetra from Day One.

“In my 40 years with BT and the CWU, Tetra is the most important safety innovation I have been associated with.

“It’s the safest way to work at height from a ladder you can get.”
Do the Job PROPERLY

‘With a national ballot getting under way, now more than ever it’s vital that we all do the job properly in delivery,’ says CWU outdoor secretary Mark Baulch following visits to offices in the North East and North West recently.

Starting daily duty at the allotted shift start time, taking full meal relief and using all of the recommended equipment provided are the three key elements of this.

“If we want to keep this as a decent job – and we do – then first and foremost it’s up to all of us to treat it like one and protect it,” Mark explains – “and for all that we criticise the management – quite rightly – over workplace culture, we’ve got to firmly leave behind the old culture of ‘job & knock’ and rushing around just to finish early.”

North East CWU division rep Steve Warren tells the Voice of the work being done across his area on this – and of the progress being made.

“The first phase of our campaign up here has been on the issue of taking breaks,” he begins, outlining the progress that has been made so far in ensuring everyone takes their allotted daily meal relief of 40 minutes for full-timers and 30 minutes for part-time workers.

“We’ve got around 150 delivery units across the division, so it’s been a big job of work – but we’re explaining to members why the Do the Job Properly (DtJP) campaign is so important – particularly in the current national dispute situation.”

Another new factor, he continues, is the introduction of the new enhancements to the PDA (postal digital assistant) devices, which can now track the whole working day.

“If people aren’t doing the job properly – not starting at the proper time, and not taking their allocated breaks – then the information to the PDA will be flawed,” Steve explains, warning that the data fed through will indicate that there are hours, and ultimately jobs, that can be cut, because the system will show that the duty was completed much earlier than anticipated.

“So that’s why we’re advising all delivery members that DtJP is the best way to protect the job.”

With serious progress having been made on breaks, and in light of the developing overall situation, the division is bringing forward its second phase focusing on start times and equipment use.

“And the national Four Pillars dispute situation makes the Do The Job Properly campaign even more important and timely,” says Steve.

Voice joined Mark, Steve and area rep Dave Dowling on a site visit to York MPU, which has around 170 staff in post, and where we also met new unit rep Simon Partridge, who volunteered for the role after the unit had not had its own rep for over six months.

Simon says that the developing situation with the forthcoming national ballot has increased interest in the union and is a good opportunity to focus as well on issues around starting times, breaks and equipment.

At York, members take the first half (20 or 15 minutes) of their break during the indoor part of the duty and the other half during their delivery.

And the rep explains that he takes a “one-to-one” approach with members who are not taking breaks or who may be coming in early – “I ask them: ‘Why are you not taking your break? and ‘Why are you coming in early?’ – and we have a conversation about how those bad habits will cause bad effects for the workforce.

“Doing the job properly is the way to protect jobs now and into the future,” Simon concludes.
Mark Baulch says: It was great to meet Simon and Mike on the recent visits to York and Preston and I really liked the idea of setting out CWU answers to frequently heard comments, so I’ve asked Voice to highlight some of these – and added a new one at the end...

“I have to get finished early today.” – If you have an appointment within duty time (dentist, doctor, hospital), speak to your manager.

“It saves me hassle and it doesn’t bother anyone else.” – Coming in early and not taking breaks costs jobs and overtime. This affects everyone ultimately.

“I won’t have time to do my lapsing.” – Any agreed lapsing is only intended to take you up to your finishing time, not beyond it.

“If you have an appointment within duty time (dentist, doctor, hospital), speak to your manager.”

“Doing the Job Properly defends delivery jobs - a key part of the Four Pillars which we’re balloting to protect’.

Mark Baulch
Autumn election?
Choose jobs, Choose rights, Choose security, Choose YOU...

With speculation mounting over an autumn election, Voice takes a look at the big issues affecting our members, the companies they work in, and the wider world of work...

With a national ballot on the cards, the roots of the current dispute go back to the privatisation of the service seven years ago.

Since it was sold off, over £1bn has been paid out in dividends to private shareholders, executive pay has sky-rocketed and Royal Mail’s recent plans – from the separation of Parcelforce to the new parcels strategy and the attempt to get out of the legal protections on terms and conditions – are signs of private owners putting profit before public service.

DGSP Terry Pullinger says that the pledge the union has secured from Labour to bring Royal Mail back into public ownership “is the most important issue of all for our members – no doubt about it. “We need to re-establish the public-service ethos of this great British institution – and shift its focus from maximising private profit, to promoting high quality jobs and guaranteeing the future of the service for the public.

“It’s the post-privatisation agenda, the agenda of putting private shareholders first, that has sparked this dispute and which is at the root of so many of the problems we’re being confronted with – and this is what we need to change.”

Our general secretary Dave Ward adds: “We’ve been working with the Labour Party to not only get that renationalisation commitment, but also for a democratic model of public ownership.

“This means giving our members and communities a key say in how Royal Mail is run,” he continues, pointing out: “It’s their voice, not that of wealthy executives, that matters.”

Your election choice:

The policy of the Labour Party is to bring Royal Mail back into democratic public ownership, safeguard decent jobs and put the workforce at the heart of decision-making.

The Conservative-led coalition government privatised Royal Mail back in 2013.

Their junior coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats, supported the privatisation, and they also added the idea of separating the Post Office from Royal Mail.
Our country stands on the brink of the fourth industrial revolution with the introduction of new telecoms and internet services – from the rollout of ultra-fast fibre to the premise (FTTP) broadband to new 4G and 5G capacity.

But this requires significant public investment and the CWU has always been clear that it has to be done in a way that promotes good unionised jobs and employment standards and that every community and all parts of the country should benefit from the new infrastructure.

DGS T&FS Andy Kerr says: “We need an ambitious digital infrastructure programme – rolling out universal FTTP and 4G and 5G services could create thousands of good jobs and raise productivity and pay.

“If it’s done in the right way, it will ensure no community is left behind and has full access to public services. But we need a government that is prepared to commit funding to deliver this.”

Dave Ward agrees, saying that “we have been working with Labour to ensure it will significantly invest in broadband. And it has also committed to use this investment to drive up employment standards in the industry.”

“At a time when we have been campaigning against outsourcing and the break-up of BT, the commitments from Labour to prevent undercutting – by setting minimum standards across the industry – and raise the floor for employment rights, are also significant wins for CWU members.”

Your election choice:

Labour will use public funds to uprate our broadband communication network infrastructure in every corner of the UK – and it will ensure that this investment leaves a legacy of good unionised jobs.

Wider world of work

With all workers coming under ever greater pressure to work harder and faster for less there is an urgent need for fundamental change in the world of work and the way we run the economy. The union has made this a key focus of our political work, in particular the work we do in shaping the policies of the Labour Party.

Our general secretary Dave Ward says: “It is no exaggeration to say that, because of the work all unions have been doing with Labour, it is now promising the single most ambitious programme to grow trade union membership and enhance employment rights that we have ever seen in this country.

“For trade unions, it would give us the ability to negotiate minimum standards across an industry to end undercutting, give us the right to get into new workplaces to go and recruit members and it would crack-down on employers targeting union reps and members,” Dave explains.

And for individuals, he continues “it would end insecure employment by banning zero-hours contracts and bogus self employment – like we see in the parcels industry.

It would give agency workers the same rights as permanent staff from Day One, meaning they can’t be used as cheap labour – as we know happens in the telecoms industry.

And it would make the minimum wage a true living wage of at least £10 per hour for all workers over 16 – raising the floor for everyone.”

Dave concludes: “We have been fighting for a New Deal for Workers and we have a once-in-a-generation chance to win this at the next election.”

Your election choice:

Labour will ban zero-hour contracts and introduce a legal minimum wage of £10 per hour. A Labour government will scrap the 2016 Trade Union Act and improve rights at work for all employees.

The Conservatives believe telecoms companies should compete to be the cheapest broadband provider, which will inevitably pit workers against each other in a race to the bottom and huge swathes of the country without coverage.

The Conservatives brought in the 2016 Trade Union Act, and they also brought in nine anti-union laws between 1980 and 1996, with a further six between 2010 and 2016.

The Liberal Democrats assisted their Conservative coalition partners with their anti-worker legislation – their support was key to the establishment of Industrial Tribunal fees in 2013.

DAVE WARD SAYS:

“The CWU has always been affiliated to Labour and we have been working to ensure that it will deliver for our members on employment rights and the future of our industries. In or out of the EU, we have got to get the domestic agenda right – and only a Labour government is going to deliver on the issues that matter for our union.
Find the 14 union words below including ‘unwrapping’ the hidden word and the first 10 correct solutions received will win a Full CWU ‘Goodie-Bag’.

Please take a photo or scan-in and send your entry to mmurray@cwu.org with the subject line of ‘Autumn Word Search’.

- Solidarity
- Unity
- Strike
- Equality
- New Deal
- Branch
- Conference
- Pole
- Postbox
- Uniform
- Wildcat
- Frontline
- Organise

You’ll have to box clever to find my hidden word!

**WARD SEARCH**

O E L O G I Q O P M O J X F A L W E P F
A G E E P S L U G I D Y M C U L A R F C
E E X L A E D W E N T I J N D L S X B A
O L L C R P H F Q W M L E H O J P V O I
Y D D P C O W C U P U E U A N G U A W B
T T N R E V W I A Y O R G A N I S E U R
I G B E L T T N L C H S Z V B S J Q C A
R O Q K S N L B I D M O T G G L V B Z N
A U O M E K E N T B C A Q B P Z S B P C
D Y W B B Z Y N Y R C A T H O R R B Q H
I G E I K J T N I U B B T W L X P J J C
L G K U H U L Y F L P S L W E M N F S K
O B I X B M J C V V T J D L X K L I C R
S R R K S T I M F B S N M K H Z B E D Z
J A T I E C N E R F N O C X D H X I Y
K S S K I F U G Y O X I Q R Y S N W V M
H S P U Z Q N D N Y Q U N I F O R M B V
X U T V T I I M W T P C X V R X J J D D
Z B H D W D T Q W E C U Q C B I O N S
F G E U I W Y W Q X K E P L B U V P G A

**CAPTION COMPETITION**

What is Anglia Divisional Rep Barry Jennings saying to members?

The best entry, as decided by our independent judge, will receive £100. Please send your entry to mmurray@cwu.org with the subject line of ‘Autumn Caption Competition’.

**REP OF THE EDITION...**

We want to give our army of hard-working workplace reps the recognition they deserve.

So we’re launching a new Rep of the Edition accolade, based on your nominations.

So if you want to nominate your own rep, please contact us, telling us about her or him and why you think they deserve this award.

Please email mmurray@cwu.org with your nomination.
Welcome Your NEC Young Worker reps

Our national executive council welcomed Erin Brett and Luke Elgar to their ranks last month as our first NEC Young Worker representatives and Erin, a Merseyside contact-centre worker, and Essex postman Luke are determined to be positive role models for other younger members.

“We’ve got to fight to stop them carving up the company.”

“... As my Nan used to say: ‘go on, step up, give it a go’.”

Both work in relatively large units – the BT site at Warrington with its 400-plus workforce and nearly as many working out of Southend Royal Mail Processing Unit – and, when Voice asked what had motivated them both to become activists, we discovered that trade unionism runs in both the Elgar and Brett families.

Erin recalls her grandmother Maureen, who had been a shop steward for the retail workers’ union USDAW, and tells us: “She fought for workers’ rights and when I used to complain about things at work, she’d encourage me to become a union rep at BT. ‘Go on, give it a go’, she’d say.”

Mersey Branch elected Erin as their Young Worker officer two years ago and, since then, she’s been regularly shadowing the senior reps in their work and has taken on cases herself – as well as a major role in the branch’s recruitment activities.

Luke’s father, Keith, is the unit rep at Southend and so fighting for members’ rights at work was something instinctive to Luke when he started work for Royal Mail.

And when he started going along to branch meetings and speaking up on issues, he was asked to take on the vacant Young Worker role.

“I’ve seen at first-hand how hard our reps work, in resourcing, in negotiations – when everyone else has finished for the day, the rep’s still there grafting – and that’s why the mentoring of new reps is so important, so they can learn on the job from the experienced ones.”

Asked about the biggest problems and issues facing members, Erin points to BT’s current business strategy – specifically the recent outsourcing of its facilities (BTFS) and vehicle maintenance (BT Fleet).

“Both times, the company just did it without giving the union the chance to put an alternative plan or strategy forward,” she tells us, adding that “people are wondering if they’ll be next for transfer or sell-off - I’m in BT Consumer and that’s the fear.

“The union’s right to oppose these moves and I’d much prefer to see the whole of BT Group being kept together in the same company – to bring back BTFS and Fleet, and keep it together.”

For his fellow Royal Mail members, the biggest challenge is “clearly the fight to defend our Four Pillars agreement,” which Luke predicts is “going to be the fight of our lives.”

Specifically, he identifies the critical need to ensure that there is no separation of the company, insisting: “We’ve got to fight to make sure they don’t separate letters and parcels and that they don’t carve up the industry into separate businesses.”

On aims and aspirations, Luke says that he wants to use his role to try to encourage “more young people filling into the industrial roles, shadowing reps and learning the job.”

“Young workers support the union and what the union does in the workplace, and we need to build on this and encourage people.”

Erin’s ambition for her period of office is for “the top table to be fully representative of the membership.

“I want young activists, women and BAME members to see the faces of the leadership and to be able to think to themselves: ‘They’re just like me – and if they can do it, so could I’.

“And my message to them is, as my Nan used to say: ‘go on, step up, give it a go’.”

If so, there may still be places available at next month’s 2019 National Young Workers’ Education Event, which takes place in Manchester over the weekend of 18th to 20th October.

If you’re an under-30 CWU member and would like to attend, please contact your branch as soon as possible, referencing LTB 528/19.
On the Spot

The first volunteer for a Voice grilling is our new head of equality, training, education & development Kate Hudson, who has most recently been serving the union as Midland Region Secretary...

What was your first job in Royal Mail?
My first job in Royal Mail was based at Barrack Road in Northampton. My duty consisted of letter & packet sorting.

What was your first CWU post and why did you decide to stand for it?
My first role within the CWU was the late shift processing representative I was asked to consider standing by another rep, Adam Lansbury, as a vacancy had arisen. He said to me: ‘You have a lot to give and a lot to say, so why not give it a go? And I thought to myself: ‘What’s the worst that can happen? And here I am.

Where are the biggest challenges for you in the equality aspect of your new role?
It has to be bringing people through the CWU at every level of our union and to do this I need to be clear on the work that has been done previously on proportionality and representation.

It is important to understand where we are now and how we look so we have a starting point and something to measure against in the future.

I am looking to open up more two-way communication between our membership and representatives and I want to link education and equality together around events, so members can get more involved and can see the CWU as an opportunity to progress.

Do you have any plans for new education and training initiatives within the union?
I want to review what we do now and look at what works and what could be improved.

This obviously will involve liaising with my team and getting out to the speak with the ULRs and with people who are currently involved with education and training.

I’d like to open up more courses to help representatives deal with their everyday roles such as time management for example. And maybe offer refresher courses to long-serving representatives – as what was relevant five to 10 years ago may not be today.

My initial three priorities overall are to build my team, review and liaise with representatives at all levels, and to build short and long-term strategies.

If you could change one law, bring in one new Act of Parliament for example, what would it be?
I know it’s controversial, but I would like to see a law regarding voluntary euthanasia for terminally-ill people.

It would have to have safeguarding incorporated into law to avoid any doubt of the actions taken, but I believe in certain circumstances you should have the right to choose.

Away from the CWU, what hobbies, pastimes do you enjoy the most?
I love to cook and try new recipes. Anybody who knows my family will know it’s a passion in the Hudson household – we talk about dinner whilst eating breakfast!

Also, in the past two years, I’ve started to swim and the best thing I have bought are prescription goggles. I find swimming helps you to de-stress and keep fit.

What’s the best book you’ve ever read?
Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption, which is a novella in a book of short stories by Stephen King.

Why? – because I read the book before seeing the film which is always better and the book is about friendship and hope.

I also love the line – ‘Get busy living or get busy dying’.

What’s your favourite film?
All of the Alien films are a must. I love Sigourney Weaver (Ripley) – she’s such a strong female character.

And your top tune?
I’ve been a massive Pink Floyd fan since I was 12 so it’s hard to pick one, but if I have to, it would probably be Wish You Were Here.

“I am looking to open up more two-way communication between our membership and representatives and I want to link education and equality together around events, so members can get more involved and can see the CWU as an opportunity to progress.”
Jean Sharrocks was BT’s first female engineer in the north east – after having persuaded her boss to give her a chance “out in the field.”

After eight years working as a clerical assistant for the company in Middlesbrough, her boss challenged her to climb a pole, promising her an opportunity if she completed the climb.

“Of course, back then, we ‘free-climbed’ the ladder with the old Belt Safety Number 8 over the shoulder – no harnesses in those days – but I did it and true to his word, he gave me a job as a customer service engineer.”

Unfortunately, there are no photos from Jean’s day’s ‘up poles and down holes’ (we did ask - Ed) although she tells us that she enjoyed the role, and quickly became accepted by her colleagues – “although when I became pregnant, they put me straight back on clerical duties and took away my van.”

While it does not seem unreasonable to take a pregnant woman off climbing duties, Jean points out that there was no need to take her off engineering work altogether and explains that, nowadays, “they do risk assessments to judge when people need to come off active field duty – but there are invariably other engineering functions they can still do.”

It was this experience that encouraged Jean to get active in the union and she soon became the chair of Middlesbrough Branch – now a part of the CWU’s North East Branch.

“We cover a huge area – from the Scottish border in the north, right down to mid-Yorkshire,” she explains.

Although there are more female engineers than there were back in the 1990s, women are still hugely under-represented in these positions and Jean says that “good role models” are an important part of meeting the challenge of trying to change this.

Other considerations are how different jobs can be gender stereotyped, or how and where they are advertised, or perhaps the length of the working week, she adds, noting that, the company’s current recruitment drive provides a good opportunity to raise this.

And changing work-related gender stereotypes in general is critical in the fight for full equality in her opinion – “we won equal pay for the same work – but there’s still the gender pay gap and that continues because women are under-represented in certain occupations, so we’re still not there.”

Replying to the question of what motivated her to step forward for the CWU’s national executive, Jean tells how she “thought this was an opportunity to make ground-breaking moves for women in the union.

“I want to see real empowerment of CWU women, more women in senior industrial positions and IR training for branch women’s officers as a means towards that.”

“It’s not a tick in a box.”
Mark Anthony Bastiani: We’ve got to understand what disability is...

“We all need to understand what a disability is – it’s not always something you can see,” explains Mark Anthony Bastiani, whose speech impediment is one of those non-visible conditions.

“I’ve had a stammer from the age of six and I’ve been aware of it since I was a small child. Experiencing this myself has made me passionate about disability rights – particularly in the workplace.”

Working at Barnes Delivery Office – working a shared van – and a member of the union’s South West London Postal Branch, Mark’s activism has led him to take on various roles within then CWU, including workplace IR and health & safety positions.

“I’ve also served as the equality officer for the branch and I’m active on the London Region Equality Committee,” he adds, commenting that “other people with disabilities have told me that seeing me up there inspires them.”

Mark makes the point that, for frontline Royal Mail workers, “everything is about time – with a set time to do everything. But for me, talking and conversing with customers just takes that little bit longer – as it would for anyone else with a severe stammer.

“And so, the business must be making reasonable adjustments in this respect, as it would be expected to for a member with a physical disability for example.

“But we’re still perfectly capable. I’ve served in the Enquiry Office for two years, where you need to talk to members of the public all day long and there’s no problem. The public, the customers, are fine to deal with, but it just takes a little longer.”

Within Royal Mail, the issue of workers with disabilities should be featured in the WTLI sessions, he suggests, which would highlight the need for a better understanding across the business, while if a member from the T&FS part of the union comes to him with an issue, he will aim to help with the general disability rights, but would also speak to a T&FS representative about the specifics of the job.

Mark tells us that he put himself forward for the union’s NEC disability representative, with the key aspiration to “move disability access forward” both within the union and within society as a whole.

And one area where he wants to see prompt progress is information and transparency – having accurate knowledge of how many members with disabilities we have, what those conditions are and who they are.

“We don’t have enough information and this is crucial if we’re going to inspire and encourage more of our members with a disability to come forward.” he notes, adding that, equally importantly, this knowledge will enable the union to accurately prioritise its disability campaigning agenda.

“In the CWU, we’ve got to have a planned strategy – as I said, the union needs to understand what a disability is, to be able to offer a person with a disability the confidence and the self-belief to come forward.

“So that they know we’re on their side.”

“I’ve had a stammer from the age of six and I’ve been aware of it since I was a small child. Experiencing this myself has made me passionate about disability rights – particularly in the workplace.”

And equality...
Members at Barnstaple Royal Mail Delivery Office have been represented by Helen Cooper for the past two years, when she stepped up at the request of her predecessor who was leaving the unit.

Having previously served as CWU rep in Ilfracombe Delivery Office, further up the north Devon coast, she already had some experience.

“Members here have been very supportive towards me, and I haven’t seen or experienced any homophobia”, Helen tells us, but she adds that in the north Devon area as a whole, “there isn’t really a visible LGBT community as such – there’s no gay bar in Barnstaple for example.”

“I’ve been out as a lesbian for over 30 years, and what I want is to be a positive role model to encourage more people to be comfortable expressing their sexuality especially in areas like north Devon – which is similar to a lot of small towns around the country, and completely different to London, where I used to live.”

To this end, Helen is seeking to gain wider public and trade union support to make Barnstaple’s local Diversity Festival a “bigger and better” event in the future.

“It’s brilliant to see the CWU banner at all the regional Pride events around the country – and the representation that Jason Reynolds and John Monk from the LGBTAC have given our LGBT members has been particularly impressive the past couple of years”, she says.

A strong enthusiast for the concept of “mainstreaming the equality agenda,” she interprets this philosophy in terms of the “importance of to understanding and relating to the similarities between people of various orientations as well as the differences.”

It is also easy to become complacent about the need for LGBT rights due to greater visibility of our community within society as a whole, and the reason why mainstreaming is so critical, explains Helen, is in order to win the widest possible majority in society to mobilise against homophobic hate crime, which, she warns, “is on the rise, after many years of progress, due to the rise in populism.”

More recently, the issues of transgender and non-binary people’s rights have started to become more widely recognised as important aspects of the equality agenda – “and the union needs to be present and at the forefront of this debate too.”

But most important of all, is “listen to the members and to our regional equality leads - we’ve got a great opportunity to forge really strong connections and to out what they want the agenda to be – and try to form a serious programme of action from that.”

It is also vital, insists Helen, that our equality representatives are also involved in the day-to-day, so-called ‘bread and butter’ issues at the workplace – supporting our members against management bullying, defending agreements, and protecting terms and conditions.

“For example, for a member on delivery, in some situations sexuality might be an issue and in other respects not,” she points out.

“I’ll consider this two-year term to have been successful if I’ve continued to serve members in the workplace, while also raising the profile of the LGBT community within the union and to have created a good space for the next person who gets the role – my successor – to build on.

“This is pioneering stuff we’re doing.”
Ali Moosa: No slipping back to the bad old days...

Ali was closely involved in supporting the setting up of the union’s equality strand advisory committees and that was why, when last year’s special conference decided to integrate the equality agenda into the mainstream of the union, he wanted to stand for one of the newly created NEC equality positions.

A BT/Openreach engineer since 1988, this Midland No1 Branch activist first became a CWU IR rep back in 1997 and says that “I put my name forward because I want to maintain and increase the focus on equality and to be part of spreading this throughout the union,” he explains, adding: “So I thought I have to step up and do this.”

Ali is concerned that, after many decades of struggle against racism and discrimination on the basis of ethnic or cultural background, UK society had made “huge progress,” but he worries that, over the past few years, there seems to have been some “slipping back.”

“There’s no doubt in my mind that we’ve come a long way forward since the 1970s for example, when racism in general speech or in TV comedies was pretty mainstream.

“But we’ve got to make sure there’s no slipping back – and that’s why it’s crucial that the CWU is extra vigilant to any examples of discrimination either inside or outside of the workplace.

“If we don’t keep the momentum, or if we take our eye off, it goes backwards.”

Within his own company, BT, Ali says that there is more diversity among the engineers than when he first started, recalling that “there was one Asian and two black guys” across his area back then.

But, although the union has achieved progress here, in the non-BT Group companies, Ali says that he has received complaints of discrimination in redundancy situations.

“What seems to be coming through is people being selected are disproportionately from BAME groups,” he explains, adding: “I recently had a complaint from two BAME women from one of these non-BT companies that they felt they had been unfairly selected on these grounds.

“We managed to change that situation, but had it not been for the CWU intervention, that would have gone ahead.

“What we need to do is work with the industrial departments and gather evidence that we can then present formally to those companies,” Ali explains.

Within the CWU, Ali wants to be the inspiration for more BAME activists coming through and into positions of responsibility – “particularly BAME women,” he emphasises, suggesting that this is perhaps the union’s biggest single equality challenge.

“There are some brilliant BAME women workplace reps, but we’re not seeing them coming through into national positions, or even to branch officer posts – I want to find out why and to work with the regional secretaries and in particular the new regional equality leads to change this,” is his pledge.

Our identical question to each of the new NEG equality strand representatives was to ask them to imagine themselves two years’ hence, at the end of their respective terms of office and by which specific criterion will they judge their tenure as a success or otherwise.

And our BAME NEC rep’s key aspiration is for “every region to have good equality officers, regular meetings and people coming through from these BAME groups into IR roles.

“If this is achieved, I’ll judge my term of office to have been a success.”
Come to our Conference – Retired Members 2019

I’m looking forward to our Retired Members’ Conference next month and I’m hoping there’ll be some good debates,” said new NEC member Brian Lee when Voice spoke with him recently.

Brian, who was recently elected onto the union’s national executive as the representative of CWU retired members, says that with the current state of politics, he’s expecting some varied and lively debates.

“We’re grateful to Birmingham & District Amal Branch for volunteering to host our event – which makes a really convenient location for people to get to,” he says, adding that as well as the overall situation outside the union, there are of course the big issues within the union too.

“How retired members can assist their colleagues in dispute

By Norman Candy

Those of us that have been around for a few years will remember the battles the union undertook in the past decades to ensure our members could earn a decent living and if our members in Royal Mail and Parcelforce are forced to take industrial action, it’s important that all sections of the union fully support them.

We’ve got over 14,000 retired members and there are plenty of practical actions we can take to back up our fellow members if strikes take place.

Firstly, let’s get organised to visit our nearest picket line, which will be at the local delivery office, processing or distribution unit or Parcelforce depot.

If travelling is a problem, get in touch with your local branch retired members’ secretary and perhaps car shares could be organised

Or contact your nearest postal branch and volunteer your time helping to print and distribute leaflets, help hand out leaflets around your local community.

Many retired members may have previous experience of this, because of their involvement with the union before they retired. Local branches will need to hold meetings with the members so having someone willing to respond to phone calls during this time can be important too.

As we all know from previous disputes, the union will come under the usual attacks from the media and, whilst the national media response will be handled from the CWU Communications Department, local press will also be looking for information and statements.

And this is another area where retired members may be able to assist in liaison with branches. And forwarding the union’s messages on Facebook in particular will ensure we get our point of view across, quickly, to large numbers of people.

Retired members can get involved with radio phone-in programs both nationally and locally. Some of these have massive audiences and a contribution from a retired postal worker or CWU member can have a big effect.

And let’s not forget the controversy of the TV Licence concessions for over-75s as well,” he reminds us.

“I’d also like to thank retired members for electing me to represent them on the NEC and I’ll do my very best to make sure our case is always heard at the highest levels of our union.” CWU Retired Members Conference 2019 will take place on Wednesday October 23rd at Birmingham & District Amal Branch office and the deadline for applications and registration is fast approaching.

“So,” Brian urges: “Calling all retired members, please get in touch with your local branch retired members’ secretary and get yourself along to Birmingham if you can.

“We’ll be hoping to see you there and, in the meantime, check the CWU Retired Members’ website for updates.”

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These days when I sit in the canteen taking my break before my delivery, I am confronted by the offerings of the rolling BBC news feed dishing out nothing but bad news. So far, we have seen more strikes announced from airports and railways, major attacks on workers contracts in ASDA, Harland and Wolff shipyards going into administration, unofficial and official action by those of us in Royal Mail and further cutbacks in BT.

Across the country workers and businesses are under severe pressure as the price of continued private profit is costed in human welfare and human dignity with the proliferation of ‘flexible’ contracts and the attempted stripping of workers’ terms and conditions.

Amidst this rolling turmoil was a situation faced by some workers in Scotland which began in December 2018 when Gemini Rail Group announced that it wanted to shut the Caley Railway works in Springburn, Glasgow. With the announcement of its closure, the Caley – a locomotive works in existence since about 1856 – would lose 200 jobs, to the personal devastation of the workforce and the working class of Glasgow; with one worker highlighting that he was the third generation of his family to work there. It finally shut on 26th July and workers were led out with their heads held high by a piper as the door was shut on 150 years of history.

While this situation was ongoing, the workers and their union put up a brave fight using all official channels to raise their plight: contacting politicians, leading protests, speaking at rallies and highlighting alternative proposals for the future in order to preserve these works, pointing out their strategic importance to Scotland’s industrial capacity. Sadly, neither Conservative UK nor Nationalist Scottish Governments decided to intervene to save highly skilled jobs in the face of the priorities of private business.

Questions could be asked that why, if I am fed up with the daily misery inflicted by the rolling news coverage, that I wish to reiterate the same here? Well there is a very good reason - we have the power to stop it. Our situation as workers today is plain to see, governments stand weak before private business and some workers are powerless in the face of different governments’ shifting priorities. If we are to survive, we must rely on our own strength once again to protect ourselves from being thrown on the scrapheap.

Our responsibility as trade unionists in larger firms like BT and Royal Mail is to lead the way in establishing what workers’ rights should be and can be once again for all our people.

With pressure and insecurity prevalent after years of neglect, as bosses squeeze every penny out of workers in order to line their own pockets and with Brexit indecision sowing the seeds of confusion, we are the only line of defence for working people.

We must stand together and stop seeing bad news for workers and start delivering bad news for bosses.
I’ve worked for Openreach Northern Ireland for the past seven years, starting as an apprentice to become a customer service engineer and I was one of the lucky ones, as I got on the NewGrid contract just a couple of years before the new Workforce 2020 contract was introduced in 2014.

For those of you who don’t know the difference, employees on WF2020 do not get equal sick pay arrangements compared to their NewGrid colleagues. They have 1.5 more contracted hours per week, three fewer annual leave days on entry, receive a 0.25 lower overtime ratio for Sundays, and have a different grading system with an unconsolidated bonus.

As well as being a CWU Branch IR rep, I’m also active within the union’s Young Workers Committee and, at our last national forum we discussed this issue during the industrial session – not surprisingly, this issue particularly affects young workers within BT/Openreach and so it was an important subject to many people there.

We’ve done some work on collating and listing the differences between the two contracts and now we really want to raise the profile of this inequality right across all our T&FS branches and work together to change it for the better.

And let’s also remember that although this affects mostly younger members, not all new recruits are necessarily in the under-30 age group and so we’ve got to aim to reach all post-2014 recruits.

I would love for us to start a campaign amongst the members for fairness for all. I think new recruits to the business will understand that more experienced colleagues are on better terms and conditions, but surely a pathway to a full NewGrid contract should be something that’s available to everyone?

Some people don’t even realise the difference in contracts and the difference between them could mean a lot to people.

Imagine getting an extra hour-and-a-half back in your week.

Imagine getting three extra days holiday from Day One.

Imagine if, unfortunately, something happened to you and you could rely on six months’ full sick pay instead of three.

We need to build and create the momentum for change and that’s a task for us all. Spread the word in your branches and among colleagues, bring up the issue in your ‘team meetings’ and let’s push the fight for contract fairness right to the top of the union’s national bargaining agenda.

If our CWU branch secretaries and regional representatives are reporting to the national leadership that this issue is coming up at every meeting, and if local managers are reporting to their area and regional bosses that contract unfairness is the biggest gripe among CWU grades – then it can’t be ignored.

Before I got active within the CWU just a few years ago, I honestly did not know what a union could do for you. But the more I learnt about it, the union has helped me to realise what we can do to help each other improving our terms and conditions.

So, let’s get campaigning, let’s spread the word, and let’s create the change our members need.

What do we want? A pathway to NewGrid for all!

We want a pathway to NewGrid for all

By Fiona Curtis / Northern Ireland Telecom Branch

The great value CWU 2020 diaries are now available for dispatch!

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Marcia Murray,
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Please make sure you enclose a cheque or postal order made payable to ‘CWU Diaries’.

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BT HYBRID PENSION DEADLINE 30/09/2019

If you are one of the BT members eligible for the new BT Hybrid scheme make sure you don’t miss the 11.59pm deadline on Monday, 30th September.
Paying tribute to our union’s early pioneers

By Norman Candy

Pay increases of 14 and 10 shillings
‘Establishment’ for all after three years
A reduced working week from 60 hours to 48
Full pay for sickness
Three weeks’ annual leave
Improvements to travel and overtime pay
Weekly, not fortnightly pay

This was the list of demands put forward by the Postal Telegraph Lineman’s Movement to a Royal Commission back in 1887, at a time when the Post Office was rapidly expanding its network to cope with rising demand for the new telephone services.

I’ve recently read Frank Bealey’s 1976 History of the Post Office Engineers and a 1962 booklet Short History of the POEU compiled by John Golding, which both tell of this early attempt at collective representation by men who were the pioneers of the trade union movement at the time – and with some fascinating images of their time. It’s an inspiring story and puts our own struggles of today into some historical perspective.

In the mid-19th century, the telegraph was the cutting edge of communications technology, with competing private companies operating telegram messaging services via overhead wires and poles running mainly alongside railway lines, with telegraph offices located at railway stations.

But the growing need for fast communication within cities and outside of the rail network led to increasing demands from businesses in particular for a nationwide expansion of this network – on a scale which only the Government was able to achieve.

The telegraph network was nationalised by Act of Parliament in 1868 and placed under the Postmaster General, who created a specific Post Office Engineering Department – rapid expansion almost quadrupled the number of telegrams sent within just a few years, while annual revenues rose to almost £1.5 million.

And from 1880, when the Post Office was granted licensing control of the new telephone service – following a high court judgement that all telephone calls were, telegrams – a further and even more significant expansion to the network was required.
And the workers who put in the poles and attached the wires were determined to win their own fair share of this rapidly growing new industry – and a fair recognition of their skills, for a job which was becoming more specialised.

Most of the pre-nationalisation ‘linemen’ (as they were then known) had worked on telegraph lines near or alongside railways and they were offered employment by the railway companies. Their terms and conditions included rail-travel concessions as well as compensatory payments from the Post Office for the transfer of employment.

For those transferring from their private companies into Post Office employment, hopes were high that they would gain ‘civil-service’ employment status – the Post Office being, at that time, a Department of State in itself.

“The lineman may have to walk 20 miles after a fault, along roads, fields or mountains and all the time his eye is on one wire, perhaps among many.”

And this was where that list of demands at the start of this article comes into the story, with the linemen’s demands for “establishment” (job security and pension rights) and “incremental pay” (another of the civil-service employment norms) at the forefront.

With a view to making a formal submission to the Inquiry, a small group of linemen met in Liverpool in 1886, elected Bridgend lineman Robert Wallace as its general secretary and gave him the task of drawing up their statement.

The group set up a membership structure, charging a one shilling fee to join and, by the following April, membership had risen to several hundred – Bealey (P25) writes that Wallace reported a figure of 509 to a national conference held in London that month.

This gathering, in Moorgate, approved the list of demands and made him the task of drawing up their statement. This time, the representations of the linemen – made more robustly, with stronger and organisation and having learned hard lessons from the setbacks of the previous decade – made modest progress on their demands, winning pay increases, subsistence allowances and improvements on overtime rates as well as uniform changes.

As the 19th century drew to a close, many of the problems these workers faced still existed – and other issues, such as divisions within their own ranks over gradings and skill levels meant that some workers advanced further.

But, despite the setbacks, some local groupings continued to exist and, in 1896, again in response to a Government-level consultation, a new organisation the Linemen’s and Mechanics’ Association of Great Britain was inaugurated, and Birmingham lineman Edgar Morgan was elected as its chairman. (Bealey P34/35)

An agenda similar to Wallace’s 1887 submission was put forward – raises in pay, a shorter working week, job security and pension rights – with additional demands for improved uniform and travelling expenses.

Golding (P9/10) writes movingly of the evidence given to the Inquiry on behalf of the linemen by their chairman, noting that Morgan had first been employed “as a potboy between 10 and 12 years old in 1870” and had later “lost his sight for several months as a result of working in the rain.”

Golding quotes direct from Morgan telling the Interdepartmental Committee: “The lineman may have to walk 20 miles after a fault, along roads, fields or mountains and all the time his eye is on one wire, perhaps among many.”

And Morgan continues: “He arrives home late at night, completely done up, exhausted and fit only for bed.”

This time, the representations of the linemen – made more robustly, with stronger and organisation and having learned hard lessons from the setbacks of the previous decade – made modest progress on their demands, winning pay increases, subsistence allowances and improvements on overtime rates as well as uniform changes.

As the 19th century drew to a close, many of the problems these workers faced still existed – and other issues, such as divisions within their own ranks over gradings and skill levels meant that some workers advanced further.

But the principle of collectivism, of combining together to win improvements, concessions, rights at work and safer working conditions – had been well and truly established.

And for me, this is the historic achievement of brave pioneers such as Robert Wallace, Edgar Morgan and their lineman comrades.

The authors

Frank Bealey (1922-2013) was Aberdeen University’s professor of politics and he wrote several books on political theory and Labour and trade union history. Bealey was also a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

John Golding (1931-1999) will be a name known to many of our older readers, as he was a general secretary of the NCU in the late 1980s, after having served as a Member of Parliament during the 1970s. When he compiled the Short History booklet in 1962, Golding was working as a POEU researcher.
**By Lynn Lambert**

**WE ARE MANY – THEY ARE FEW**

I f you visit St Peter’s Square in Manchester today, you would be hard pressed to imagine the fields which formerly lay there. St Peter’s Fields were, in 1819, being prepared for building as the town expanded. Yet these fields were the site of a significant and cruel event in the history of our democracy.

Two hundred years ago, profound changes were taking place in Britain. Chief among these was the industrial revolution, which changed forever how things were done, and how people lived. Also, the Napoleonic wars, which ended in 1815 with Wellington’s victory at Waterloo, had stung the British taxpayer. Returning soldiers struggled to find employment, food was scarce and expensive, and wages had slumped. Poverty abounded.

Not surprisingly, unrest prevailed, with working people increasingly frustrated at having no voice. The Government, only too aware of the mood, and desperately fearful that the recent French revolution might take hold on this side of the Channel too, clamped down hard on any dissent, such as the Pentrich rebels of 1817. So when news filtered through that the people of Manchester and nearby towns were planning a meeting at St Peter’s Fields in August 1819, the authorities prepared themselves.

The workers and their families who had arranged the meeting, were anxious for political reform. They knew that Manchester had no Member of Parliament, whereas un- or under-populated areas, such as Dunwich and Old Sarum, returned two MPs. This meant that the increasingly industrialised towns and cities, largely in the north, had no representation. However, the people also knew that the franchise must be extended to all – that their needs could never be met whilst only those of privilege could vote. There was even a group of women campaigning for female suffrage. They had arranged to have the greatest speakers of the time, including the famous Henry ‘Orator’ Hunt. He was positioned on a cart, along with a female speaker. Upwards of 60,000 people assembled to hear them.

The organisers recognised that the authorities would be quick to accuse them of law-breaking, so they went to enormous lengths to prove they were gathering in peace. Men took their families, holding hands with their children. They wore their Sunday best. Women wore white as a symbol of purity of intent. They had no weapons.

This was to no avail however. The magistrates notified the yeomanry and special constables who were waiting nearby, and who charged in, some on horseback and some on foot. They slashed left and right with sabres, and the people attempting to flee were hemmed in, unable to escape. The first fatality was a baby.

Naturally, the immediate reaction and official opinion, was that the crowd had started the violence. However, unusually, journalists from many national and regional newspapers – including John Tyas from The Times - had come to witness the speakers, and they reported the truth. The editor of the Manchester Observer likened the atrocity to the Battle of Waterloo, coining the term ‘Peterloo’, 18 people were killed, and 654 required hospital treatment.

The immediate result was a clamping down on reformist activities by the Government, but ultimately it led to the start of electoral reform, with the Great Reform Act of 1832, enabling Manchester finally to send its first Members to Parliament. It was still a far cry from universal suffrage, which took another century to complete.

Why is Peterloo important? It is always important to remember the huge struggles and sacrifices made by our ancestors to gain the vote. It is worth remembering that history is written by the victor, and that even nowadays we cannot guarantee an unbiased report which does not feed into stereotypes – you just have to look at the violence. However, unusually, journalists were waiting nearby, and who charged in, some on horseback and some on foot. They slashed left and right with sabres, and the people attempting to flee were hemmed in, unable to escape. The first fatality was a baby.

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Why is Peterloo important? It is always important to remember the huge struggles and sacrifices made by our ancestors to gain the vote. It is worth remembering that history is written by the victor, and that even nowadays we cannot guarantee an unbiased report which does not feed into stereotypes – you just have to look at Hillsborough for that. Blame is still attached to the victims. And now, as two hundred years ago, we are in a time of great change. Provision to enable people to cope still fails to be adequate.

In the immediate wake of the massacre, the poet Shelley wrote

**Rise like lions after slumber**

**In unvanquishable number**

**Shake your chains to earth like dew**

**Which in sleep had fallen on you**

**Ye are many – they are few.**

And it was this famous verse – the final stanza of Shelley’s Masque of Anarchy – that actor Maxine Peake read out to the crowds who gathered in central Manchester in August to commemorate the passing of two centuries since this atrocity.

Manchester Combined Branch secretary Ian Tomlinson, who attended the memorial event, told Voice that people organised to arrive via feeder marches into the city from different directions, just as the demonstrators back in 1819 had done.

‘There were several hundred in each of the ‘feeders’ and altogether there were thousands at the town hall,’” he said, adding that, as well as Ms Peake, the marchers also heard from Labour MP Chris Williamson, who gave a “rousing speech” linking today’s current issues for working class people to the struggles of history.

Ian described the commemoration as “a brilliant event” and he continued: “It’s so important to make people aware of how our democracy came about because of these hard-fought struggles that these incredibly brave people fought.

“They were repressed at the time, but their cause prevailed in the end – and today, we’ve got to keep up the fight to defend and improve people’s democratic rights.”

**OUR HISTORY**

**THE VOICE | Autumn 2019**
The CWU is calling for the unagreed Personal Travel Time commitment to be removed and the commitment deleted from the contracts of all new recruits going forward across Openreach Ltd.

Sign the petition today at www.cwu.org/our-hours-campaign
I SUPPORT MY POSTAL WORKER

#WeRiseAgain