

THE VOICE

Spring 2021

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IT'S TIME TO
MAKE A STAND

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GET IN TOUCH...

CWU HQ – all enquiries
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SW19 1RX T: 020 8971 7200

In most cases your branch should be your first point of contact. Details are on your membership card.

Harassment Helpline
0800 090 2303

Have you changed your address, workplace or hours?

Please inform CWU about any changes to your membership details. There are three different ways to update your membership details:

Option 1 – Log into the members' only section of the CWU website (www.cwu.org), using the username and password you have previously been sent, and change your own details.

Option 2 – Contact your branch secretary with your new details.

Option 3 – Contact CWU HQ on 020 8971 7447 or email your new details to membership@cwu.org and we will make the necessary changes.

Please help us help you – keep your details up to date.

UNIONLINE

YOUR TRADE UNION LAW FIRM

CWU Legal Services: UNIONLINE
0300 333 0303

UNIONLINE is the CWU's very own law firm offering members and their families a fast route to free, comprehensive legal advice.

To register a claim or for any legal advice call UNIONLINE on 0300 333 0303

More information at www.unionline.co.uk

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CWU DEATH BENEFIT

In accordance with the terms expressed in CWU Rule 4.1.1, branches are advised that from the 1st October 2020 the CWU Death Benefit payment increased to £857.

Any enquiries regarding this letter should be addressed to the senior deputy general secretary's department on telephone number 020 8971 7237 or email sdgs@cwu.org



It is just over a year since the first deaths from coronavirus were recorded in the UK and it's been a year when we've been reminded about whose work is really valuable to society. There's no doubt that CWU members have proved themselves to be absolutely essential in keeping the country connected.

In these circumstances, when key workers have been applauded for their efforts and there's a growing consensus that we must build a better society for the future, expectations on employers change. They must live up to their responsibility to the country and their workers.

In BT, we are now seeing the opposite. For the past nine months with the Count Me In campaign, our members have been taking a stand against a huge cost-cutting programme of compulsory redundancies, attacks on terms and conditions and site closures that is just getting started.

The 97.9 per cent yes vote in last year's consultative ballot sent a clear message to BT – our members won't accept this and we are not backing down. In Openreach, engineers are already taking strike action and we will now be balloting for industrial action across the whole of BT in the coming weeks.

To all our members in BT my message is simple – now is the time to stand together and the union will back you all the way. We have built a machine that can deliver and we will mobilise all of the resources of the union to do so.

The dispute with Royal Mail, and the agreement the union secured last year, is an example of what we can achieve. For years, the company had seen the key to its future as becoming a low-cost parcels operator, abandoning the USO and joining the race to the bottom in order to compete. It was clear this would never secure our members' jobs and terms and conditions for the future.

'BT members: Now is the time to stand together and this union will back you all the way.'

“
The latest from
Dave Ward, your
General Secretary

What is crucial in the *Pathway to Change* agreement, is the commitment from Royal Mail to working with us on a new strategy; to growing in new areas, to providing new services and to tapping into the knowledge of our members on the frontline in order to do this.

Expanding the role of postal workers in their communities, providing new products for local businesses and investing and innovating is the way Royal Mail stays relevant and has a future.

As negotiators, we know that this agreement was only possible because of the magnificent support of our members and our representative structures. We now have the platform to create our future and we must continue to work together to seize this opportunity.

Finally, in this edition of *The Voice* there is a focus on the union's equality and proportionality agenda, something that has become all the more important with the issues exposed by the pandemic.

But I also want to say this; bringing equality into the mainstream and ensuring our key political and industrial campaigns reflect *all* our members' priorities and experiences is fundamental to us as a union.

It is what allows us to bring people together and it underpins collective action. With the challenges we face across the movement, there has never been a more important time for this.

Dave Ward.

Dave Ward
GENERAL SECRETARY

We must now prepare for the dispute to come

Our ongoing dispute with BT over compulsory redundancies and multiple attacks on terms and conditions is drawing to a head, with BT showing no signs of backing down in negotiations.

We have had no alternative but to take the decision to hold a nationwide industrial action ballot and, when that ballot takes place, the telecoms and financial services executive is unanimous in urging you to vote YES.

There's a full and detailed article on the issue on the following pages, but for now, I want to express how much we appreciate the full support of the whole union in our struggle and ask every one of you to prepare for the dispute to come.



Of course, we all hope that the company will see sense and move away from compulsory redundancies – but we must all be prepared for action if this does not happen.

I'd also like to express once again my huge admiration for our repayment project engineers in Openreach who, by the time of reading, will have taken 10 days of strike action in the absence of any management rethink of imposed changes to the grading of the RPE role.



Their highly principled stand is an inspiration to us all and goes to the heart of what being in a trade union and working as a collective is all about. Please take a look at the article about our fantastic RPE members further on in this edition. (P9)

'Our ongoing dispute with BT over compulsory redundancies and multiple attacks on terms and conditions is drawing to a head, and we must prepare for the dispute to come.'

Of course taking industrial action in Covid times it not a decision we take lightly, particularly due to the impending impact the pandemic has and will continue to have on future jobs and the economy. Almost all of our telecoms and financial services members have worked throughout the crisis – keeping the UK connected, delivering fibre broadband and providing contact centre help and advice, including vital financial support to people and businesses. We're proud of the resilience and bravery they've shown. Our members' contribution over the past year should be recognised and rewarded.

For our members who have been fortunate to keep their family and loved ones safe by being part of the giant 'experiment' in working at home, this is now throwing up profound questions over the future world of work.

While some, but not all, employers have embraced new ways of working that seemed inconceivable pre-pandemic there's no doubt that employers are also waking up to potential benefits for their bottom line. Already it looks probable that some companies will never return to an entirely office-based model. Instead, more and more companies are contemplating a 'new normal' based on a hybrid of remote and office working.

Hybrid working could work for many members and it's an area we've pursued in BT, asking them to consider this as an alternative to redundancy for people whose offices are closing. However, whilst it may work for some, trade unions need to approach the potential new way of working with trepidation. Widespread homeworking has massively increased the level of surveillance and workplace monitoring taking place in



private homes and it's vital that the trade union movement seeks safeguards that protect privacy and ensures surveillance isn't used in a discriminatory way.

We must also recognise, that those who simply can't work remotely – often the least well-off and those living in cramped or shared accommodation – stand to be the worst affected by any widespread shift to 'expected' or 'enforced' homeworking.

The CWU will be watching closely and standing firm to ensure our members privacy is protected and those who are unable to work at home aren't faced with compulsory redundancy.

Andy Kerr

Andy Kerr
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY
(T&FS)

BT BOSSES: YOU WANTED A FIGHT- YOU'VE GOT ONE!

NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL ACTION BALLOT CALLED ACROSS BT, OPENREACH & EE

BT Group's refusal to properly negotiate with the union or halt its brutal compulsory redundancy programme has left the CWU with no choice. A nationwide strike ballot has been called and we're preparing for action...

The first national industrial action in BT in 34 years is now a racing certainty, with the CWU poised to go to war over an unprecedented and sustained company-wide assault on job security and hard-won terms and conditions.

Barring a dramatic 11th-hour about turn from a belligerent new senior management team which has now spent more than a year pursuing a brutal and needlessly confrontational agenda – despite incessant union appeals for meaningful talks to avert a full-scale industrial relations meltdown – the first national industrial action ballot in BT since 1987 will commence within weeks.

Just as soon as final membership data checks have been concluded – allowing the CWU to be sure it can fend off inevitable legal challenges by the business over the validity of the ballot – members across every part of BT, Openreach and EE where the CWU is recognised for collective bargaining purposes will be asked to confirm their willingness to take industrial action.

Ballot papers will be accompanied with an unequivocal: 'Vote YES' recommendation from the union's telecoms & financial services executive.

The momentous decision to trigger the ballot was taken with branches, executive members and the union's lead BT Group

negotiators unanimously agreeing that, without any apparent company willingness to negotiate meaningfully on the key areas of disagreement, the time for talking is over.

Just hours earlier, top-level talks – a last-ditch bid to avert the need for the ballot – had broken down without tangible movement by the company on the key issues the CWU has been highlighting in the union's *Count Me In* campaign of resistance.

Lashing out against the race-to-the-bottom strategy being pursued by a management team that has lost the confidence and respect of its workforce, deputy general secretary Andy Kerr told a specially convened BT branch forum that bosses only have themselves to blame for the gathering tidal wave of workforce fury that is about to engulf them.

"We didn't pick this fight," he stressed. "In fact, we've provided management with every possible opportunity to step back from the brink, consistently offering to work in partnership with the business to address whatever challenges it faces – just as we've done on numerous occasions over the decades since privatisation.

"But what we're not prepared to accept, however, is seeing members' cherished job security and terms and conditions being attacked on multiple fronts – with longstanding colleagues being picked off

one by one, simply because a new breed of management wants to stamp its mark by making compulsory redundancies as a matter of warped principle.

"If BT don't want us to ballot, then they can have us back round the negotiating table just as soon as they want. Our door is still open, and we want to resolve this dispute, but this will require a huge shift in attitude from the company. At this point in time, that doesn't look as if it's going to happen – and that's why we're gearing up to fight."

Multiple provocations

The looming conflagration in BT has been a long time coming. In fact, anger has been mounting for almost 18 months at multiple different manifestations of an aggressive new management approach that is sweeping across every line of business.

It was way back in October 2019 that BT Enterprise provided what was, in retrospect, the first foretaste of an all-out assault on time-honoured employment practices based on fairness, negotiation and voluntarism in job loss situations.

Following that division's announcement of what quickly became the first-ever compulsory redundancy exercise affecting team member grades, Technology swiftly followed suit. By July last year, with new attacks on job



security, terms and conditions, grading and career progression erupting across BT – and initial announcements associated with the *Better Workplace Programme* and different divisions' location strategies raising the spectre of mass staff displacement – the CWU launched the union's *Count Me In* fight back.

Since then, hostile salvos from the company have rained down, set against a steady stream of distressing forced exits. Last September, BT revealed its intention to slash maximum redundancy payments from June this year, with several divisions following that bombshell up with further compulsory job loss announcements – some stemming directly from cost-cutting decisions to offshore work to India and Hungary.

Just before Christmas, members across BT, Openreach and EE delivered the clearest possible warning that they had simply had enough. In what should have been a wake-up call to BT's top-brass, workers who had given their all to keep the company going and the country connected throughout the pandemic voted by 97.9 per cent on a 74 per cent turnout for the principle of taking industrial action unless the company changed tack.

Sadly, however, that warning has gone unheeded by a senior management team that instead seems intent on smashing 34 years of industrial peace based on partnership working with a recognised trade union as a matter of principle.

The consequences of an arrogant and confrontational management approach, which refuses to accept questioning of its high-handed diktats even when they are plainly wrong, came to a head this month, with the union's small but fiercely loyal membership of repayment project engineers in Openreach commencing the first industrial action in that division since 1987. (*RPE dispute article P9*)

That, however, now looks certain to be just the precursor of something much bigger.

Speaking in a special Facebook Live session that announced the decision to hold a BT Group-wide industrial action ballot, CWU general secretary Dave Ward insisted that bosses are reaping the consequences of their own disgraceful behaviour.

"Even by the most basic standards of how a big employer like BT should be treating its workforce the company's actions have been completely unacceptable," he stressed.

"It's quite clear management's plans are all about compulsory redundancies, attacking terms and conditions and carrying out site closures without any consultation with the union or the workforce.

"It doesn't need to be this way, but BT needs to decide whether it wants to change and transform *with* the workforce, or *against* them. As things

stand, it seems management have chosen the latter, and that's something the CWU can never stand for."

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr agrees, saying: "My message to management at this momentous moment is simple. If they think they can take BT's transformation forward without taking the workforce with them they do so at their peril.

"Strike action is always the last resort, but ultimately we have to challenge an arrogant and dismissive attitude towards team member employees by senior managers who seem to think they have a divine right to treat staff appallingly and without any dignity or respect.

"That's something that the CWU has never accepted in BT before – and we have no intention of doing so now," Andy concludes. ■

VOTE YES!

'It's quite clear management's plans are all about compulsory redundancies and attacking terms and conditions and that's something the CWU can never stand for.'
Dave Ward



'We won't accept our members' job security and terms and conditions being attacked on multiple fronts – that's why we're gearing up to fight.' Andy Kerr



Real opportunity for a more positive era in Royal Mail Group – thanks to all of you

As I draft this article, I have a strong sense of hope that from a Royal Mail Group perspective we are entering a far more positive era. Having spent the last few years fighting our employer for the right to shape a mutual interest future and honour our agreements, we are indeed now back in the room. If we had failed in our struggle, we would have only been talking about RMG in a historical context, something that used to exist.



However, now we are talking about RMG influencing the future, still being relevant and remaining a great institution providing a vital public service and decent jobs for years to come.

We are also seeing rays of sunshine coming through in respect of getting on top of this awful pandemic that has turned our world upside down for over a year. The vaccine programme is rolling out and there is a sense that our much unappreciated freedoms of the past may start to return. That should, however, not distract us from our need to remain vigilant and safe or to honour those who have lost their lives and remember those still very poorly or fighting for their lives.

Our hearts and thoughts go out to all those people and their families.

Whilst we have fought to be respected on how we shape the future, we should equally never forget that negative influencing factors – such as shareholder pressure, or changes to the board or to the managerial leadership – can see current ideology change in a moment. The worst forms of employer ideology are all around us at the moment as companies/government try to slash terms and conditions and jobs.

Just look at what is happening to CWU members in BT having to take strike action for the first time in years and I would like to record massive solidarity and respect from the postal side of our union to those members.

Look at what is happening to the NHS workers in respect of a 1 per cent pay increase after all they do and especially have done this year. It is hard to imagine how a government could have been more insulting.

'Massive solidarity and respect from the postal side of this union to our fellow CWU members in BT.'

So, against that backdrop in RMG we have imposed ourselves in a very positive way and following the overwhelming endorsement of the *Pathway to Change* agreement on 3rd February 2021, we have now commenced our next journey.



There is so much to be done, relationships and trust must be rebuilt and our culture must change for the better. There will be much change ahead as we create new jobs, move to a 35-hour week, embrace growth in our workload, drive new products and services, and open up our services seven days a week, all in a mutual-interest culture. (P7,8 & 11)

We now have Royal Assent for the legislation required for our new pension scheme and whilst it will still be a while yet, we now know it will happen.



Making history is what we do best and it must be remembered that all of these things we fought for, and combined, enable our core objectives of employment, standard of living and retirement security and the protection of a great public service to be achieved.

We did all this together, never forget our solidarity is our strength. We stood shoulder to shoulder, demanded our voice be heard on a vision of the future and the right to shape it and we won. Always keep your eye on the prize.

Once again, thank you to our representatives and members for your unbelievable support and service to the people of the UK.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY
(POSTAL)

Setting out on the change pathway in Delivery

Delivery members will be involved in either 'structural' or 'table-top' duty revisions over the next few months, with a completion deadline of October 31st – which will trigger an hour off the working week

Around two-thirds of UK delivery offices will be in the latter category, and CWU outdoor secretary Mark Baulch explains: "In these units, some 850 to 900, it's essentially an under the roof, local table-top exercise, with implementation of new products, dealing with parcels growth and a robust review process to ensure we're staying on the right track."

"But in the other 400 or so, the full revision process will apply, using the agreed revised agreement along with the geo-route outdoor planning system. We're doing these on a 'phased' basis, with 30 offices already under way. Phase Two will be a further 70 structural unit revisions and then all of the remaining 300 offices will carry out their revisions in the third phase."

The 'start-to-finish' period of the structural revisions is estimated at 14 weeks, which keeps the whole process well within the timescale.

"We're fully committed to on-time completion – but there's a lot to do and several aspects to this which will feature in all the revisions to a greater or lesser extent," Mark confirms.

It will be in the process of these revisions that the full significance of this national agreement – *Pathway to Change* – will become apparent, with an unprecedented package of positive changes set to be deployed into Royal Mail delivery over the weeks and months ahead, discussed and agreed between reps and managers and with the input and involvement of all.

Driving parcel growth

Dedicated parcel routes (DPRs), aimed at capturing as much of this growing market as possible, will be jointly worked up across an ever-growing number of delivery offices – alongside LAT development.

And those changes, building on top of the success of recently introduced new products such as *Consumer Collect* and *In-Flight*, as well as the increasing use of parcel post boxes, give Royal Mail the best possible opportunity to grow revenue and consolidate its position as the UK's number one choice in this sector.

Mark says: "One of the union's key aims during the *Pathway to Change* negotiations was to ensure parcel delivery continued to take place from as many delivery offices as possible – and

not to restrict parcels to just a small proportion of large specialist sites. We want Royal Mail to deliver products across the day, with core USO deliveries in line with current arrangements, but with parcels and new products from 7am-7pm.

"We've made real progress on this and we're determined to push forward further. It's vital in our view that this arrangement becomes an integral part of the whole delivery function, where there is the workload to do this."

Fighting back on letters

There is no denying that letter volumes have not reversed their long-established pattern of gradual overall decline. But there is a joint determination to fight back and seek ways to arrest and reverse this trend.

"The big news here is Royal Mail's new economy letter product – *Delivery To Specification (DTS)*," reveals Mark, who explains that this will be a "five-day, 'warm-call' product aimed primarily at the business-to-consumer (B2C) market.

"DTS will be addressed mail – not unaddressed D2D – and it will be 'warm-call', so it will be held back from delivery upstream through technology for up to four days unless there is another 'live mail' item for that same address," he explains.

Existing D2D traffic has fallen and efforts are under way to promote its regrowth, while Mark is also keen to promote the traditional 'personal letter'.

"One of the less publicised things that happened during Covid was people writing letters to each other," he tells the Voice. "There were several stories of parents, and sometimes schools, encouraging children to write letters to shielding grandparents or even teenagers writing letters to boyfriends or girlfriends who they couldn't see during lockdown."

"Could Royal Mail run a campaign encouraging the 'personal letter'?" he asks.

Shorter week, attendance patterns, efficiency

As well as becoming shorter, the 'new normal' working week – from when units introduce their revisions – is likely to look different from the 'old normal' in other ways too.

"There are going to be opportunities for new, innovative shift and duty patterns, which local areas will have the flexibility to introduce – provided certain criteria are met of course," says Mark.

"We need to be positioned to increase our parcel-market share, succeed with our widening range of new products, fight back on letters, meet increased customer demand for weekend delivery, introduce technology and improve operational efficiency, while reducing the working week by one hour.

"It's a challenge to say the least – but we must succeed.

"And our success will protect jobs and continue delivering sector-leading pay, terms and conditions."



Getting organised for our ‘new normal’, volumes 40% up!

Members in Processing and Distribution have had to adjust to the huge growth in parcel volumes during the Covid-19 period. With much of the retail sector shut down during the long months of lockdown, online shopping has expanded massively.

In terms of a pre-2020 comparison, parcel volumes have risen around 40 per cent year-on-year, with some products increasing by as much as 125 per cent. Letter decline, which was significantly increased in the early part of Covid, has also stabilised and returned to around the historic levels.

CWU assistant secretary Davie Robertson notes: “Last summer we were wondering whether this was just a temporary trend, but it’s becoming increasingly clear that this appears to be a more sustained shift in customer habit and the realignment revisions and network revisions agreed in *Pathway to Change* will be taking place on this basis.

“Covid did not create these trends but it has certainly accelerated the change and the increased workload provides real opportunities to secure and grow jobs in the upstream areas.

“And analysing current high volumes, projected traffic forecasts and aligning resource to workload is going to be a significant job of work for CWU reps over the coming period,” he adds.

“Fortunately, we’ve got extremely experienced and capable representatives who will be working through this and the department will support them throughout.”

Processing

Revision guidelines have been agreed for mail centres, RDCs (regional distribution centres) and WBCs (walk bundling centres) and this huge and complex task is now getting under way.



Davie tells the Voice: “At last month’s joint launch of this project, the talk was of ensuring sufficient staffing – resource to meet the workload demand – while still recognising the current limitations that ongoing Covid mitigations entail. The safety of our members remains paramount.”



Against the commercial backdrop, and the reduction of the working week on deployment, the real focus in these revisions is reducing the level of agency resource in workplaces. “Given this,” Davie continues: “We want to refocus activity on growing jobs and we do not anticipate widespread VRs as part of these revisions.

“This may disappoint some members, however the CWU’s priority must be to maximise jobs for our members and create opportunities for progression.

“Rather than overall internal headcount reductions, what we hope to see is the potential for part-timers to increase their hours, temporary contracts being converted to substantive and a significant reduction in the use of agency labour,” he points out. *Pathway to Change* also pointed to the opening up of the operation towards a 24/7 model, which is, Davie points out: “A reality in the parcel industry” and will “mean a greater demand for weekend working.”

But at the same time, he explains: “The realignment project will provide opportunities for a move towards inventive duty patterns, with fewer attendances or rotations which may make weekend working more attractive – all of which will be negotiated with this trade union.”

Future pipeline and technology

To deal effectively with the growth in parcel traffic and build on the *Pathway to Change* commitments to the existing mail centre/RDC network, discussions have commenced on the

National Pipeline Review. This will establish the future pipeline and define the relationship between mail centres and the new parcel hubs. Discussions are at an early stage but already plans to accelerate the level of parcel automation across the mail centre network are under consideration.

“While we understand all change can be difficult, real visible investment in the mail centres and RDCs should bring further confidence that they remain a key element of the future pipeline” said Davie.

In terms of technology, in line with *Pathway to Change*, SISO (‘Scan In/Scan Out’, previously ‘AHDC’) is currently being installed in several mail centres. Swindon, Birmingham, Manchester and South Midlands will join the initial ‘trial’ sites.

And on this, the assistant secretary comments: “It would be fair to say that there have been some teething problems with some of the initial plans, but we have been working through them to ensure that the final deployment and use of the data adheres in full to the very robust commitment secured in the national agreement.



Distribution

“We’ve also started work in Distribution. Data gathering has been completed on the *National Network Review* and is now underway on the PAD revisions,” reports Davie. “Both revisions will deliver the SWW or equivalent benefit for our Distribution members.

The expected growth provides a real opportunity to reduce the reliance on agency resource and create real opportunities for progression to driving roles. As an initial step, discussions are at an advanced stage on a major LGV recruitment drive, which is, Davie says: “Great news for our members in other parts of the business looking for opportunities to progress.”

Solidarity and respect for ‘brave and selfless’ Openreach RPE strikers

Small in number, but resolute to the core, 170 repayment project engineers in Openreach have emerged as hands-down winners in the battle for hearts and minds in a dispute that has laid bare the contempt with which management treat workforce concerns...



Multinational companies are not used to revolts by comparatively tiny sections of their workforces – but repayment project engineers (RPEs) in Openreach are providing BT Group bosses with a timely reminder that employees will only take so much disrespect before their patience finally snaps.

With industrial relations across BT at a 34-year low – reeling from a belligerent new management approach that has transformed the behaviour of a company that has hitherto been an exemplar of the benefits of a ‘partnership approach’ with a recognised trade union – the CWU’s small but fiercely loyal RPE membership in Openreach has emerged as a standard bearer for a fightback that is fast gathering steam.

By the end of the first week in March, the battle underway in Openreach had already seen RPEs take five all-out days of strike action. Significantly, that is the first industrial action to have taken place anywhere in the whole of BT Group since a single strike day, involving contact centre staff, in November 1999 punctuated a previously unbroken period of industrial peace dating back to 1987.

And barring any unforeseen change in management’s total intransigence towards RPEs’ concerns over the imposed regrading of their roles – these members stood set to take a further five consecutive weekday strike days, with more expected to follow.



Arguably the most depressing thing about the RPE dispute is just how avoidable it could have been – had management only listened to the legitimate concerns of those who best understand the intricacies of the role they conduct.

For eight months the highly skilled engineers have been calmly arguing, both individually and collectively, that placing their role on the lowest rung of the managerial ladder is a dangerous mismatch for their predominantly technical skill-set and responsibilities. In particular, they are convinced that the performance-related incentivisation that comes with management grades threatens the crucial bond of trust between them and third-party customers with whom they are supposed to act as honest brokers – potentially resulting in untold reputational damage for Openreach.

Yet, instead of giving such principled and selfless objections the fair hearing they deserve, management have resolutely dug in their heels – even in the face of an 86 per cent ‘Yes’ vote in a statutory ballot for industrial action on a 94 per cent turnout.

CWU national officer for Openreach Davie Bowman explains: “There couldn’t have been a clearer message that RPEs want this issue resolved in such a way that meets their objective that the role remains a team-member grade, not just for them but for those who aspire to the role in the future.”

Meanwhile, support for the RPEs’ brave stand for an important point of principle continues to mushroom across not just the CWU but the whole of the trade union and wider labour movement.



Speaking in the first of a number of online ‘Solidarity Sessions’ that have seen consciousness of the dispute explode across social media, TUC deputy general secretary Paul Nowak observed: “It beggars belief that right now – when your members are providing a vital service to the public as key workers – the company has forced you into this dispute by railroading through these changes.”

Praising RPEs’ “tremendous courage and resolve in standing up to BT,” CWU general secretary Dave Ward added: “It’s time to think about what the RPE members are doing today and what the rest of the constituency may need to do to turn management around.”

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr concludes: “I hope other parts of BT will see sense in the next few weeks or so, because if they don’t it won’t be 170 RPE members who will be out striking – it will be 45,000!”

Post Office pay deal approved, fight for Crown network continues



Early feedback from members and reps indicates our Post Office members are extremely likely to approve a pay deal combining an across-the-board pay rise with variable bonus consolidations and lifting guaranteed wages by between 4.7 and 7.1 per cent.

"I was not surprised, but still very pleased, by the positive reaction from members," Andy Furey told Voice. "It was an innovative pay agreement reached in negotiations with Post Office senior management that brought several different bonus schemes into pensionable pay and transformed a modest settlement into a much better overall package."

This was the overdue 2020 pay settlement and applies from April 1st last year. The 2021 wage round immediately becomes effective – negotiations that the union is keen to, in Andy's words, "crack on with as soon as possible."

The past year also saw a couple of notable successes in the ongoing campaign against the company's 'franchising' programme, with Crown Offices reprieved in the North West and in London.

"Great Portland Street Post Office was saved from the axe, as was Stockport, which was great news for members and customers alike – and a testament to the immense importance of determined, long-term campaigning and lobbying work by this union," Andy notes.

"However, we still have a real fight on our hands to save the Crown at South Woodford, although support for our resistance has been growing and includes two local MPs, councillors and local businesses.

"We're hopeful that we can make it a 'hat-trick' of successes, but the struggle goes on," he vows.

Sir Wyn Williams's Horizon Inquiry gathers pace

Postmasters' fight for justice continues, with senior retired judge Sir Wyn Williams and his team working hard to gather evidence in the first stage of his Inquiry into the Horizon scandal.

"We've been in close liaison with Sir Wyn and his office, as well as with our own postmaster members, to ensure their voices are heard loud and clear," Andy tells Voice.

The CWU fought for several years – alongside others fighting for postmaster justice – to get a full inquiry into this whole affair, which was one of the biggest scandals of recent times.

CWU Postmaster Branch secretary Mark Baker, who is a serving postmaster himself, says: "It's imperative that justice is done – for those who have been appallingly treated and also to ensure that our members are treated fairly in the future – and we're doing everything we can to make sure that happens."

• Please see here for updates: <https://www.cwu.org/campaign/cwu-supporting-justice-for-postmasters>

Pathway progress in Royal Mail CE, Finance & HR

In contrast with the vast majority of their Royal Mail colleagues, members working in Admin and Customer Experience (CE) have mostly been working from home during the Covid pandemic.

"In these functions, around two-thirds of staff are working at home – although the choice to remain in the office has been offered where possible," explains CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey, national officer for members in these parts of Royal Mail, as well as workers in Manual Data Entry Centres (MDECs).

"Some members in MDECs have continued to attend work, although many have been able to work from home where there is a need to do so."

Although the total numbers within these three groups are relatively small – approximately 1,500 working in Admin, some 800 in CE, circa 600 MDECs members – there are multiple different senior management teams at the top that the union engages with due to the diversity of the roles.

This has meant a series of separate negotiations for Andy and his team, as they have been getting down to business agreeing the relevant 'triggers' for the *Pathway to Change* hour off the working week.

"We're making meaningful progress on a number of fronts," he reports, explaining that "flexibility in ways of working and multi-skilling" is going to be a major factor in each of these functions.

"There's potential for nine-day fortnights and four-day working weeks – although fewer attendances will naturally come with extended working days.

"Management insist – and rightly so – that they need to 'plug the gaps' that the hour off will create and that customer needs must be met." Andy points out: "This is particularly critical if our functions are going to play our part in supporting the growth of the business in terms of new products and services.

"So, for example, five eight-hour daily shifts may convert to four eight-and-a-half-hour days."

In conclusion, Andy describes the situation in the various functions as "moving closer to agreement – certainly we are on track for our October deadline – and a positive way ahead across the board."

Fleet and Engineering – challenges and opportunities

'Positive and constructive progress' in Royal Mail Engineering and Royal Mail Fleet will mean our engineers and technicians can look forward to achieving the next phase of their shorter working week 'by October if not before,' reports CWU acting assistant secretary Carl Maden.

'After our national *Pathway to Change – Guiding Principles* agreement was approved early in the New Year, we got to work straight away with the Fleet and Engineering management teams to put in place agreed revision criteria – or 'triggers' – for the one-hour reduction.

And just a few weeks ago, Carl continues: "The company's chief engineer and fleet director James Baker and I were able to publish joint statements launching this process to our territorial, cluster and local representatives."

Revision activity will be negotiated locally with support from the appropriate Engineering and Fleet reps if necessary, to tackle hold-ups, obstacles or failures to agree.

October 31st 2021 is the deadline for completion – however, if local agreements are agreed and signed off earlier than this, then the hour off and the new working arrangements can be deployed straightaway.

"It is great to get this under way," Carl says. "However, let's not underestimate the challenges here either, or the absolute need for all of us to work together."

He explains these "challenges" – which are in essence the same in both Fleet and Engineering – as "achieving this working week reduction while maintaining and improving quality of service to Royal Mail operations, whilst also being able to increase operational capacity and quality of service in line with Royal Mail's growth."

In a lively online briefing to Engineering and Fleet reps and managers last month, Carl and James Baker emphasised each of these objectives – stressing their equal importance going forward.

"This was an important event, with what I felt was a determined and optimistic mood and it was great to have around 140 or so people on the session," says Carl.

"We want to raise the profile of Fleet and Engineering to receive proper recognition within Royal Mail Group for the vital service we provide – and it's further good news that our Parcelforce and HWDC/International engineering colleagues are coming under an integrated Royal Mail Engineering management structure from April.

"This is an opportunity we've all got to grasp – and alongside the undoubted benefits of a good pay rise, job security, and a shorter working week, we also need to approach and deal with issues around new duty patterns, working efficiently and covering 24/7 operations for the future.

"Working Together, we're going to get there," he vows.



Fleet

In Fleet, there is a firm commitment to bringing as much outsourced work back 'in-house' as possible, which Carl describes as "good news as we want to be doing our own work," while the hour off the working week will be achieved through improved technology and moving to a paperless operation.

There are plans to increase vehicle usage by Royal Mail as it grows capacity and widens its customer product offering, which may require extra shifts, and the agreement states that, should additional weekend or late working be required, voluntary 'overtime' solutions will be applied in the first instance – before agency resource is considered.

"These are important aspects of what's going to be happening within Fleet," Carl points out, adding: "We want to grow by bringing work 'in-house'. We want to maximise direct employment and minimise third-party resource – so a flexible approach on our part regarding new attendance patterns and extra weekend overtime will support our ambition."

Outside of the immediate shorter working week and revision activity, Fleet is also faced with longer-term challenges around recruitment, training and the move away from petrol and diesel engine vehicles.

Engineering

Royal Mail Engineering – which will also include Parcelforce and HWDC/International Engineering from April – is shaping up for the task of supporting Royal Mail's pipeline automation expansion, which will see new parcel sorting machines (PSMs) in mail centres.

"It's our Engineering members who repair and maintain these machines – and when Royal Mail moves to 24/7 operation, the increased machine use has to be supported," explains Carl.

As Engineering is so closely aligned with the company's mail centre operation, revisions will, to a certain extent, 'dovetail' with the outcomes at those units – although our RME reps will of course work jointly with

RME managers to agree function-specific plans.

"While most of our members are 'attached' to particular mail centres, we do also have a number of engineers who look after several smaller Royal Mail sites – such as compact sequence sorter (CSS) offices within the mail centre catchment area," Carl explains "and so the revision discussions will of course ensure their best interests as well."



'YOU ARE THE UNION – WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?'

Back in the early 1990s, telecoms clerical worker **Karen Rose** was “fed up with how they were treating us after we got redeployed from Cardiff to Newport.

“So, I went and banged on the door of the union office demanding to know what the union was going to do about it,” recalls Karen, who is now of course our CWU president.

“An older man opened the door and calmly replied: ‘Well my lovely, you are the union – what are you going to do about it?’

“And it was that moment when I made my mind up to become a rep.”

She tells *The Voice*: “That man was our South Wales Branch secretary Ken Lovell, who was always very kind and encouraging to me and to others. He sadly passed away last year.”

Karen was active in the CWU’s first equality structures, which, she says: “At the time were a huge step forward, but these structures gradually began to ‘box in’ people a bit.

“The structure created a mindset of ‘she’s an active woman, put her on the women’s committee’, or ‘here’s a keen black member – ideal for our race committee’.

“It was time for a rethink – for a fresh approach,” Karen explains, adding: “Mainstreaming and positive action are the way forward – more effective for proportionality and for encouraging new activists and reps to come forward.

“And what an important time it is to become active – when we’re hard in struggle with an aggressive BT management.”



KAREN ROSE

Mahmood Ali was an activist before he came to live in the UK – having been involved in the pro-democracy movement and protests in Pakistan in the 1980s.

“An elected government had been overthrown in a military coup, our Prime Minister had been hanged, and students like me were marching in the streets and demanding a return to democracy,” he recalls.

“Crackdowns on protesters, arrests and heavy-handedness of police were regular occurrences and I was arrested more than once although I was never actually charged with anything.”

These experiences had already politicised Mahmood when, as a 20-year-old, he moved to the UK in 1990.

“I strongly believed in the principles of social-democracy and when I started work for Royal Mail, becoming a union activist was something I strongly wanted to do,” he says, adding: “I appreciated the democracy and freedoms here and I wanted to be actively involved in the trade union and labour movement.

“I was a unit rep, a shift rep and an area processing rep before being elected onto the executive and I’d say this union’s done more for me than anyone else in terms of education and development,” he says, and adds: “This union’s for everyone.”

Mahmood describes the struggle to encourage more members from a BAME background to become reps as a “chicken and egg situation” between opportunities provided and people coming forward and he describes the CWU as “very welcoming and embracing.”

“We need BAME members to come forward – if they come forward, they will get elected as our membership isn’t biased when voting.”



MAHMOOD ALI

Voice spoke recently with several CWU reps and officers from different parts of the union, different businesses and various parts of the country, asking why they got involved in the CWU and for their message to potential activists of the future...

Denise O’Neill is a BT/Openreach engineer, providing fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC) connections in Northern Ireland.

Originally working for the company in a clerical role, Denise redeployed into an engineering position 10 years ago and says that her male colleagues had been “totally supportive” in her retraining efforts.

“I already knew quite a few of our engineers from my previous job and all I got from them was encouragement – it’s been the same within the union for me too.

“I reckon there are probably around a dozen female Openreach engineers over here,” she says, adding: “I think about four working on exchange jumpering, one or two are data engineers and then a few ladies in the field.”

As South Section Chair of Northern Ireland Telecoms Branch, Denise has one day per week for CWU duties and the rest of the week in her Openreach job.

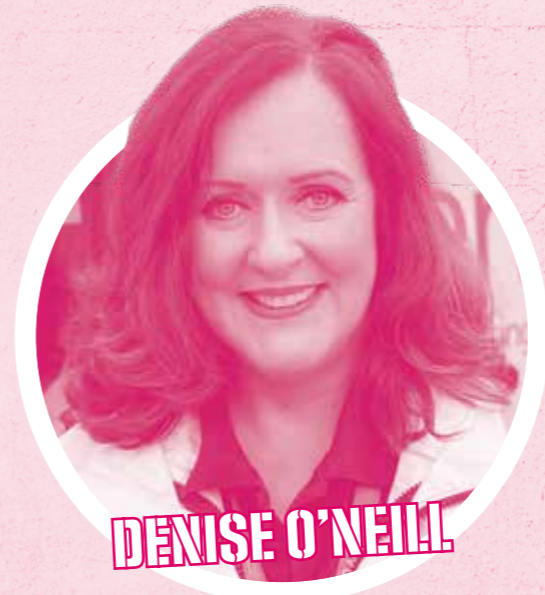
“I was elected as South Section Chair four years ago and I put my name forward because of how much the CWU had assisted me when I’d needed it, when I’d gone to the union with my own difficulties.

“I wanted to get involved with the CWU so I could help other people in return,” she tells *The Voice*.

“Erin Massey, our branch secretary, was my mentor and I still go to her if there’s a CWU issue that maybe I haven’t encountered before. She’s always massively supportive.”

“Personally, I find being a rep very rewarding. I’d really like more people to be reps – there’s always support and back up from this union and you can really make a difference.

“We’ll certainly welcome new activists coming forward to be reps in Northern Ireland.”



DENISE O'NEILL

Ishak Ali, a central London BT/Openreach engineer, represents members in Capital Branch and was elected as their Young Workers officer some 18 months ago.

“I spoke up often at our team meetings on various issues, particularly safety and near misses. And after one of those meetings a senior branch rep, Paggett Lewis, took me to one side and asked me to stand for the vacant youth rep position,” says Ishak.

“So, I agreed to stand, got elected and now I’m learning more and more about the CWU – the elections, the motions, going to the AGM – and I’m starting to get to grips with it all.

“Recently I’ve been very involved with the CMI campaign, speaking to members about the issues involved in this dispute and how important it all is to everyone,” he continues, adding that, if the company refuses to reach a fair agreement with the union, he expects members would strongly back a call for action if called upon.

“As the weeks go by, we’re just seeing more and more redundancies. BT is not listening to us at all, so something has to be done to make things change for the better – and for a better future.

“Nobody is safe if the management carry on in this way,” he warns, adding: “We’ve all got to stand together.”

“My view is, if there’s anything we think the union needs to do better, or any issues we want to push forward, getting involved in the union is the way to do it.”



ISHAK ALI

GET INVOLVED – THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE TO DO

The racist graffiti on the toilet walls was horrendous,” recalls **Ian Taylor** when asked about his first impressions when he began work at Manchester Mail Centre back in the 1980s.

“Back then, you could count the number of black members of staff on one hand and there were very few women too,” he continues, “and it was about then that the company was just beginning to start on the road to diversity – and the union was just getting to grips with the issue as well.”

Ian, a long-serving representative for the North Wales & North West Division, first became a rep in 1992, after becoming more and more determined to push for change at the Manchester unit.

“There was an almost militarised attitude from management and I found myself objecting increasingly to their treatment of the workforce, so I stood for election as late shift rep and I’ve been active within the union ever since.”

Ian was instrumental in the setting up of the first CWU Black Workers Conference back in 1996 and remembers the arguments against these early equality initiatives.

“People who didn’t like it asked things like: ‘We already have a national conference, what’s the need for a black workers’ conference?’ and ‘We don’t have a white workers’ conference, so why a black one?’

“But it was necessary at that time,” he insists. “It brought black members forward and it brought us forward as a union.”

However, circumstances change, workplace culture and the composition of the membership has changed – and with the redesign strategy, we are taking equality into everything our union does.

“What we really need is new people coming forward to drive that change on. And I’d urge members to contact their branches and be part of that.

“There’s something for everyone to do!”



IAN TAYLOR

Royal Mail delivery worker **Luke Elgar** first became involved as a young member representative for Essex Amal Branch, and tells us that his father, Keith, was his first inspiration.

“Dad was unit rep at Leigh-on-sea Delivery Office where I started work back when I was 18,” he recalls, adding: “But even before then, I often went on marches and rallies with him and his union friends.

“And a particular event that really got me interested was hearing Jeremy Corbyn speaking in Southend during the 2017 election campaign – for me, he said so many things I wanted to see happen.”

The Leigh office merged into Southend MPU several years ago and is now one of the larger delivery units in the company, Luke explains, and says that he has recently deputised as a substitute rep for delivery members.

“The Young Worker role is a great way to learn and a great place to start – in a way, it’s a bit like a ‘CWU apprenticeship’ in some respects and I’d strongly recommend this role to a new member who wants to become involved.

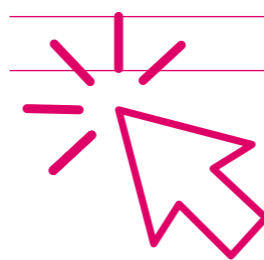
“When I first took on that position, I worried I was going to ‘fall’, but there’s always someone to help and advise you – an experienced rep who’s faced the same issue you might be needing advice about for example.

“Plus of course, the CWU provides brilliant training courses,” he points out. ■

“We absolutely need new people to come forward.”



LUKE ELGAR



UNLOCK

YOUR POTENTIAL AND GET INVOLVED

To get more involved with your union, why not take a look at **Unlock**, a new online tool developed by your CWU equality, education & development and communications teams to further improve our service to you...

A new online facility available to all members – unlock.cwu.org – is a way for you to find your route into CWU activism and leadership, as well as an important means of advancing our proportionality strategy.

Take a look and you can find the area of activity most suited to your own interests – and be directed quickly to the assistance you need to get to the next stage of your CWU journey.

Kate Hudson, the union’s head of equality, education & development, tells The Voice: “We’ll also be filtering this down through all of the union’s equality strands – Women, BAME, LGBT+, Disability – so that all members are encouraged and inspired.

“We want to build a new community of activists and future leaders. When people come onto unlock.cwu.org, they’ll be able to input their email addresses and get access to a regular Unlock newsletter, which will keep everyone up to date with new initiatives and ideas to get them involved.”

She continues: “We’ll feature articles about how members have become more involved, which issues really motivate them, and news of their activities. And Unlock will also provide up-to-date information about CWU education and training courses available.”

So, if you haven’t already, please take a look at unlock.cwu.org – it’s the key to unlocking all the wonderful energy and talent of this great union!



UNLOCK - HERE ARE A FEW TIPS:

Come to meetings...

Attending your workplace and branch meetings can be a great way to dive in and find out what’s going on. Ask your CWU representative or branch when your next meeting is.

- For branch contact details, go to cwu.org/contact-us

Help out at your branch...

Many branches organise and run local campaigns in the workplace and the community. These includes raising donations for foodbanks, period poverty and school holiday hunger programmes helping needy and vulnerable people.

- There’s something for everyone to get involved in.

Know your branch representatives...

Every CWU branch has representatives in different roles and functions. These reps cover workplace (IR) issues, political work, equality matters, as well as education and training. Branches and regions also have reps dedicated to representing younger members and retired section.

- It’s good to know the names, roles and contact details of your branch reps and you can find this out by contacting your branch.

CWU online, digital, social...

The CWU is well-known for our strong national, regional and local presence on Facebook and Twitter, for the various videos and podcasts we create and send out and the popular ‘storms’ we create together during our campaigns.

Your comms team is not standing still though, they’re currently building the CWU’s Instagram profile, they’re also keen on TikTok and, of course, the new CWU App launches this month. So, if you’re not already doing so, then please follow the union on all social media platforms.

- If this area particularly interests you, why not contact your branch and offer your help with local social media content

Sign up for equality events, workshops and equality news...

We’re building an inclusive union that supports and represents all our members. We demand full equality, cherish diversity and encourage openness in all our activities. So, whatever events and activities that interest or motivate you, we’re sure you’ll find them in the CWU.

- Sign up for events using the sign-up toolbar at the top of the Unlock homepage.

Become a rep...

CWU reps are the union’s backbone and becoming one is a great responsibility. But also, a very rewarding way to stick up for you and your work colleagues.

There are no specific entry requirements to becoming a rep and there are many different positions to stand for. But what you do need is a passion for equality, justice and fairness – and the CWU will support you to do the rest.

- Check out the ‘How to become a rep’ advice section. Go to unlock.cwu.org and follow the suggested ‘Steps to Success’.

UNLOCK CWU

FIGHTING FOR EQUALITY – BRINGING IT INTO THE MAINSTREAM

Voice caught up with our general secretary Dave Ward and the union's head of equality, education & development Kate Hudson to look ahead at next month's special conference and their aspirations for the event...

Next month, delegates from all across the UK will head to... no not Bournemouth, but to their laptops and computer screens... for a Virtual Special Rules Revision Conference, which is focussed specifically on taking concrete steps forward on equality and proportionality within the CWU.



Speaking with Dave Ward and Kate Hudson recently, Voice asked them why the union is holding this special event and to explain its importance to the union and our members. And in his initial reply, our general secretary was very open, stating the key reason plainly and robustly.

"The simple fact we can't ignore is that our women and black and minority ethnic (BAME) members are under-represented within the CWU at almost every single level," says Dave, "and we cannot continue to claim that we're an organisation committed to equality if we allow this to remain the case."

Kate adds that, "just over 20 per cent of our members are women and just under 9 per cent of CWU members are BAME – and if we take an honest look at our structures across the country as a whole, that is not what we look like at this time."

Looking back over our union's recent history, our women and BAME members fought hard to achieve steps forward in CWU representation and, as a result of these efforts, separate equality-strand conferences – along with separate equality-strand advisory committees – were created a couple of decades ago.

"These represented a significant step forward at the time and the people at the forefront of that were pioneers in terms of the equality and proportionality struggle", says Dave. "And when I first became general secretary in 2015, I made this clear.

"But by that time, many of those same activists who led that struggle were starting to argue that it was time to further develop our equality agenda – that we needed to bring the concepts of equality, diversity and proportionality right into the mainstream of our union and that those separate advisory committees and conference were actually starting to hold that process back."

It was this developing debate within the union, led by our women and BAME members and given free reign by the general secretary,

that, in part, led to the ground-breaking *Redesign* conference, an important part of which was dedicated to discussing and approving several significant changes in how we advance our equality agenda.

Kate tells the Voice that "I was a regional secretary back then and what really stood out for me in terms of the *Redesign* reforms was how much they strengthened the equality agenda at a regional level – as well as the important steps forward in terms of proportionality and diversity at national executive council level."

'If the special conference approves these reforms – we will be taking a huge step forward.'

Our general secretary agrees that those changes were "another step in the right direction," but adds: "Just like the changes that were made 20 years ago, the changes we made three years ago are not the 'finished product' either – the equality and proportionality struggle is an ongoing process, not a one-off event."

On her appointment as our union's new head of equality – newly merged with the education department – one of the first tasks Kate was set by Dave

was to, in his words, 'take an honest, detailed and robust look at where we are, nationwide, on equality, diversity and proportionality'.

And, although the *Redesign* changes have made a measurably positive difference at regional level – and have started to make a difference at NEC level – research and data-gathering carried out by Kate and her departmental team showed that we still need to go further.

"The bare facts are that the nationwide proportion of female branch officers, delegates and industrial representatives and conference delegates is nowhere near 20 per cent – and the proportion of BAME members in those categories is well below 9 per cent too," she reports.

"So, across our whole structures we're not proportional – and in these areas in particular we need to go further."

Both our general secretary and our head of equality are at pains to stress that none of our members, activists, reps or branch officers are to blame here. "This is very definitely NOT anybody's 'fault'," insists Dave, "but as an organisation we need to do more if we are going to be more representative of our members and to make us better placed to grow in the future."

Dave also stressed the positive engagement and work we have seen on equality issues in recent years. "Look at the fantastic turnout for the big anti-racism demonstration in central London in 2019 for example – we had the biggest union contingent on the march by far."

And in terms of supporting women's rights, Kate cites the "massively successful campaign against period poverty – which has led to some serious successes in terms of workplace provision and even changes to the law."

'The equality and proportionality struggle is an ongoing process, not a one-off event.'



So, where does the problem lie? What is the reason for the lack of progress on equality and proportionality within some parts of the union? Voice asks.

"This is the frustrating thing for all of us – and this is what we've discussed and debated throughout the union many times," admits Dave.

"We eventually came to a consensus that, if reforming our structures worked at regional level, then we need to take similar reforms to the other parts of our union. That means taking our NEC reform further and working with our branches to improve equality and proportionality there.

"That's why we're holding this special conference – and that's the reason for the specific changes the NEC is proposing."

On the NEC, the number of equality-strand representatives is proposed to be doubled, from four to eight. This will allow at least one person elected by each constituency of the union to specifically represent women, BAME and LGBT+ members and members with a disability.

"This is a huge step – doubling equality representation on the NEC in once go," points out Kate. "A real step forward."

Dave adds: "We also want to guarantee female and BAME representation on the NEC from the industrial constituencies. We're asking for a new rule that there must be at

least two women and a minimum of one BAME member from each section."

The NEC changes will come into immediate effect if Special Conference approves them, while the proposed branch reforms come with an implementation timetable of up to two years

Kate explains: "There are different demographics in each branch and we need to be cognisant of that. So, although we're recommending at least one woman must be among the four senior branch officer positions and 25 per cent and 10 per cent targets for branch committees and delegations – we're also saying this comes with a 'by 2023 and with help and assistance' caveat.

"The other key change we're asking branches to implement is for no one person to hold more than one of the four senior branch officer posts – secretary, chair, treasurer, and deputy secretary."

Dave says: "We believe these are positive proposals and we very much hope they'll be approved at Special Conference.

"But most of all – and I'm sure I also speak for Kate and all our officers and our NEC here – we're really looking forward to catching up with people at conference and hearing and taking part in the cut and thrust of debate.

"Roll on April 24th." ■

VIRTUAL SPECIAL RULES REVISION CONFERENCE

SATURDAY APRIL 24TH – SEE YOU ONLINE!

CARING FOR OUR MEMBERS LISTENING AND BEING AWARE

IN OUR LAST EDITION THREE CWU REPS WHO HAD SUFFERED THE COVID VIRUS SPOKE TO US ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH THE ILLNESS AND HOW IT IMPACTED THEM. HERE, SOME REPS TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING ON THE FRONTLINE DURING THIS CRISIS PERIOD...

Kerry Haines, Pagget Lewis and Sarah White are union representatives with a variety of different experiences over the past year – taking training in mental health first aid, using that union learning to help colleagues through hard times, suffering from their own difficulties, but those experiences then sparking a passion to assist others.

Kerry, delivery office rep at Horsham in Sussex, has also taken on a role as mental health ambassador – helping her colleagues through what has been an exceptionally difficult year.

“I took the training course about a year ago and it’s definitely something that’s occurred more since lockdown first started,” she tells Voice.

“Like everyone else, we’ve been under increased work pressures and had to adapt to new safe ways of working – so all the worries of becoming ill on top of massively increased volumes.

“And we also sadly lost two members in 2020 – they’d both worked here a long time and their passing was a huge blow to us all.”

Kerry asked for, and got, a counsellor to come in so that people could talk about the two workmates they had lost and share some of their thoughts and feelings.

And for one of the funerals, the office arranged a ‘van salute’, in which Royal Mail vans led the procession through the town behind the hearse.

“It was a really moving occasion, showing our respects and also I think that that, plus having the counsellor, helped members come to terms with things to a certain extent,” Kerry says.

At the office, one of the things Kerry did as mental health ambassador was to get one of the unused small office rooms for use as a ‘wellbeing room’, providing a calm space where people can go and sit down and reflect in a peaceful atmosphere – or talk if they want to.



‘WE WOMEN REPS ARE NOT JUST HERE FOR OUR WOMEN, WE’RE HERE TO SUPPORT OUR MEN TOO.’

“Some of our members are very shy – some will come and speak to me privately or sometimes someone else will speak to me for them,” she explains.

Like many Royal Mail units, Horsham has seen an increase in the proportion of female staff over recent years and Kerry estimates that women are “around a third” of the workforce here.

“It’s good that we have more female reps now as well to reflect that – but not only to represent the women, I find sometimes men are more willing to ‘open up’ to a woman rep particularly if it’s an emotional issue for example, where they might not feel able to show that side to another man.

“We women reps are not just here for our women, we’re here to support our men too.”

Capital Branch rep Pagget Lewis also finds that men can often be unwilling to talk about emotional anxieties, depression and sadness.

“It’s the ‘toughness’ thing – the ‘man-up’ attitude,” he tells Voice – and it’s something we need to get past.”

Pagget trained to be an MH first-aider after going through some extremely difficult personal unhappiness after the loss of someone close “hit me very hard.

“I needed to take some time out. I took some leave and some time away,” he recalls, adding that his distress affected him physically and that he was given medication as well as counselling.

“I’d say it was partly my own experiences – in terms of what I felt had helped me for example – and partly how someone I knew personally was treated when he suffered mental health problems and was not treated well in my opinion, which made up my mind to do this training.”

During the Covid crisis, Pagget’s home area of east London has been one of the worst-hit parts of the country he says, explaining: “I’m in Newham and here and in nearby areas like Hackney and Walthamstow we’ve had some of the biggest instances of Covid – and there’s no doubt this has massively increased levels of stress and mental health issues among the Openreach members I represent.”



‘I LISTEN. SOMETIMES THEY BREAK DOWN AND CRY AND I KEEP LISTENING.’

Apprehensions about entering domestic premises is the major concern, he tells us, as well as working at cabs in crowded streets.

“Yes, there are operational protocols, yes these protocols are robust and the union, particularly our health and safety department, and the company are vigilant in keeping these procedures – I want to make that clear and this is certainly not a ‘blame-game’ here at all,” he insists.

“But the fact is that the constant worry is still there. I’ve had engineers on the phone to me in a lot of stress about this – worrying that domestic customers might not have told them the truth, or that someone’s come too close behind them at a cab for example.”

“I listen, sometimes they break down and cry and I keep listening, calmly reminding about the protocols and trying to reassure – obviously as their IR rep, I’ll take up an issue formally if it’s necessary, but often people just want and need someone to hear them.”

“In my MH ambassador role, I don’t see myself as the person offering a ‘solution’ or a ‘cure’, but as a trusted person who will listen and if necessary, to direct someone to professional help and how and where they can access it.”

He continues: “The person suffering might only trust one person. Sometimes that person is me – sometimes it’s someone else. People need to train and learn and understand.”

“There’s a hell of a lot of pressure on reps – ultimately we’re doing two jobs,” says Dartford MPU rep Sarah White.

“A lot of reps don’t want to say it, but we need more support.”

Sarah has first-hand experience of how stresses and pressures can come to a head, having had to take some time off with depression a few months ago.

“I’ve been the rep here three years and I love doing it, but it can get you down as well,” she says, adding that her passion for helping colleagues can sometimes result in “a habit of taking problems and worries home with me.”

Having suffered with bouts of depression and extreme anxiety “from time to time” since childhood, Sarah recognises the signs of its approach – but until last year, she had been relatively free from it “for about six years.”



‘I FEEL OK TALKING ABOUT MY EXPERIENCE. IT HELPS ME AND IT MIGHT ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO ASK FOR HELP WHEN THEY NEED IT.’

However, on top of the trials and tribulations of 2020 – Covid of course, the stresses of ensuring work protocols are observed, the hugely increased workloads – her and her family also “had a run of really bad news.”

A loss, then a close relative seriously injured in an assault, added to a growing frustration at lack of progress in workplace problems, leading to a feeling of being bullied by management – all of this, on top of ‘2020’, simply overcame her.

“What happens to me is if I do get overwhelmed like that, and my depression comes, I draw into myself, shut myself off from other people. I kind of curl up into a ball. I want to cry and I want to sleep,” Sarah says.

It was the first crucial step of asking for help that was the most important point. And with the solid support of her partner, Danny – who she describes as “brilliant” – and her circle of close friends, Sarah took that step.

She contacted the CWU’s mental health helpline, sought support from occupational health – “the helpline was really good and I got four sessions talking with someone through OCH” – and Sarah also contacted wellbeing charity MIND, who provided further support.

“All this put me on the road to recovery and I got back to work again,” she continues, adding that this was not a magic sudden ‘cure’, but more of a gradual process of learning and recognising.

“I feel OK talking about my experience – I think it helps me and maybe it might encourage other people to ask for help when they need it as well.

“And I also want to learn more – perhaps train as a mental health first-aider for example.”

Steve Jones, who chairs the CWU’s national mental health project team, tells The Voice: “The CWU is doing tireless work to support our members – we have trained around 700 reps and are busy building support networks in every region. Our mental health leads are doing a fantastic job in increasingly difficult circumstances and I thank each and every one of them. If any member is having difficulty, please reach out, we are here to help.”



I AM WHAT I AM BECAUSE OF THE CWU – PROUD TO BE A MEMBER

When the voters of Birmingham Hall Green elected Royal Mail engineer Tahir Ali to Parliament in 2019, his father told him that he was ‘the proudest man on Earth.’

Tahir was the first person from his family to become involved in politics and the whole family shared his father’s pride, but Tahir tells *The Voice* that, for him personally, “it didn’t really sink in at first.

“It was such an awful result nationally that it was hard to feel positive initially.

“But, when I actually got there, and went through the inductions, then took the Oath, and then the first time I picked up my own mail – I think it was then that I realised to myself: ‘Yes, I am an MP, one of 650 in the whole country’ and the importance of what I’ve been given the opportunity to do.”

Like all the other new MPs, Tahir only had a couple of months to get used to the Westminster routine before the Covid-19 crisis forced the majority of Members into home-working, but he did manage to make his first (‘Maiden’) speech to Parliament last February.

“I spoke about the situation in Kashmir, which is a subject very close to my heart, as it’s where I was born. And, during National Apprentice Week, I expressed the need to value and to expand skills training for young people coming into the workforce.”

This is another issue close to his heart, as Tahir was a Royal Mail Engineering apprentice himself. He started with the company back in 1989, at the age of 18 and then became one of the crew repairing and maintaining machines and equipment at Birmingham Mail Centre.

“My union rep back then was a man called Robbie Harper and in many ways he was my mentor – always encouraging me to get involved in the union and I first of all was a mail centre engineering rep, then a sub-divisional rep,” he explains.

“I’ve lived in Birmingham since my family came here from Kashmir back in 1972, when I was just over a year old, and I grew-up in the inner-city. If ever I faced bullying or discrimination, I learned at a young age

to stand up to them – and it was this, this attitude I suppose, which made me want to be a union rep and then led me into becoming interested in politics.”

Much of Tahir’s early political inspiration came from the union and from hearing, and then taking part in, the political discussions and debates among his fellow activists.

“I was asked if I wanted to stand for election as political officer for our branch,” he says, and adds that it was while serving in this branch role that the opportunity arose in 1999 for Tahir to stand for election to Birmingham City Council, representing Nechells Ward.



And his experience as a city councillor was key to his being selected to fight the Hall Green Parliamentary Seat in 2019, which he describes as “a great honour.

“It was really strange fighting the election campaigning in winter though,” he adds.

“When we got the news that we had won the Seat, I felt very emotional, especially when my father told me he felt like “the proudest man on Earth,” Tahir recalls, adding that these are words he remembers often, particularly since his father sadly passed away last year.

“Although we won Hall Green with a big majority, 2019 was a terrible defeat for our party nationally and so we’ve got a big rebuilding job to do.”

Tahir places himself, politically, on the socialist wing of the Labour Party and has allied himself in Parliament with the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) of MPs.

“At the moment, we in the SCG are pushing hard for a ‘zero-Covid’ strategy, which means not only pressing to complete the vaccination programme as swiftly as possible, but also identifying and taking the steps to eliminate the virus altogether,” he explains.

“But what our party needs to be doing as well is setting out a strong programme for repairing the damage done to our economy.

It’s got to be a national plan for jobs, for manufacturing, for training our young people in skills for both now and the future.”

When asked what particular piece of legislation he would most like to enact, the Member for Birmingham Hall Green immediately answers: “I want to repeal all the anti-union laws and give workers back their full rights.

“I am what I am because of the CWU, and I’ll always be proud to be a CWU member,” he continues.

“Together with the CWU and our other trade unionists, we’re all fighting for the election of a Labour Government under Keir Starmer.

“And I’m confident that if we work together, we’ll get the Labour victory in the next election that this country really needs.”

“We need our Labour Party to set out a national programme for jobs and skills for the future of our young people”

LET’S MAKE IT A GREEN ‘NEW NORMAL’

‘Beyond Covid, there needs to be a redesigning of the economy,’ says our senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns, as he introduces us to the *Labour for a Green New Deal* campaign group...



“Talk of rebuilding and recovery needs to imagine a system that ensures the urgent issue regarding the environment is at the forefront of this rebuilding,” he continues.

“A number of people from within the CWU have long advocated for greater trade union involvement and support for the fight against climate change and for a transition away from a carbon-based economy – but crucially, a transition which is planned, just and which prioritises high-skilled and high-paid unionised jobs.



Tony Kearns (SDGS)

“*Labour for a Green New Deal* is a campaign group that has emerged from this mindset and it’s really good that one of its co-founders, Chris Saltmarsh, has agreed to write a column for this edition setting out the group’s agenda and perspectives.

“This is an interesting and thought-provoking article that we hope that *Voice* readers will engage with and most importantly, take this vital debate further forward within our union and our movement.”

As the government continues to offer piecemeal solutions to the climate crisis, it is vital for workers to make their voices heard. Faced with the Tories’ half-baked proposals, we must argue for a radical programme of government investment. One that will deliver the rapid de-carbonisation that we need to stop the planet burning – and which, at the same time, will create a million unionised green jobs, tax the big polluters, and put democratic, public ownership at the core of our new green economy.

That is why we founded *Labour for a Green New Deal* in 2019, and pushed Labour to adopt an historic programme of mass green investment in that year’s election manifesto. Now we are building a strong left coalition to grow the movement fighting for that *Green New Deal*. As the pandemic exposes the inequality that continues to wreck the planet and funnel profits to the few at the expense of the many, it is urgent that we rebuild in a way that puts social and climate justice first.

That means building power in local communities, trade unions and within the Labour Party, to make the case that climate change is a class issue. We believe that economic, social and climate justice cannot be separated, and that any response to the climate crisis must tackle each of these interconnected crises together.

Within Royal Mail and BT, there are vital opportunities to expand and democratise our communications networks. Firstly, by bringing these essential services back into public ownership, and organising them so that workers have a direct, democratic role in the way they are run. Second, by expanding and widening access to their services so that everyone in the country is able to access them.

When it comes to BT, this could involve the rollout of fibre broadband to everyone in the country. As argued by the TUC in their *Rebuilding after the Recession* report,

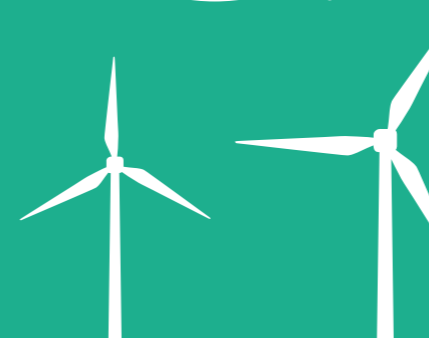
investment in rolling out high-speed fibre nationwide could create 40,000 jobs, and could – along with a raft of other infrastructure investment – be paired with a *Just Transition Commission*, so that the transition to zero carbon will protect and create good jobs.

And when it comes to Royal Mail, this could involve expanding the role of the postal worker to offer new services, as a way of meeting changing local needs. On the one hand, this would be a way to protect good unionised jobs. And on the other, it could be another plank of a greener, fairer future to meet the basic needs of everyone in society. And by bringing Royal Mail back into public ownership, it can give workers a say in how the service evolves.

We need to mobilise the entire economy to address the scale of the climate crisis and economic injustices. We need system-wide change, and communications workers have a vital role to play in that. The past year has shown how essential our communications networks are in keeping us connected, and we need to fight to make them greener, more accessible and ensure that they provide quality jobs long into the future. In order to get the ambitious industrial strategy that is vitally needed to deliver this, workers need to demand it. That is why we are calling for all trade unionists to work with us in fighting for a *Green New Deal*.



Chris Saltmarsh (LGND)



TRANS AWARENESS BEGINS WITH LISTENING



Photo by Robin Silas Christian

Voice invited writer and film-maker Juliet Jacques to tell us something about her own experiences, about the realities of being a trans person in today's society and to interview two of our own CWU trans members...

It seems like every day there are hysterical headlines in the British press about trans and non-binary people, but most of the community just want a quiet life. For some people, the pitch of the media coverage makes even the prospect of meeting a trans person seem daunting, let alone discussing the issues around trans politics.

But the whole thing is simpler than it seems. Most trans people at the workplace, and especially those who come out, just want to be treated with the same kindness and respect as everyone else.

Coming out at work is often terrifying for trans people, even those who get on well with their colleagues. The Sex Discrimination Act was amended in 1999 to make it illegal to sack workers for their gender identity, although it cannot stop employers passing over people for being trans at the interview stage, nor can it prevent staff from making workplaces inhospitable. Since then, with the right to hormones and surgery – but not facial hair removal for trans women – on the NHS already secured, but with long waiting lists

that got worse after a decade of rising trans visibility coupled with NHS funding cuts, there have been two major legal changes.

One was the Gender Recognition Act 2004, which allowed legal gender recognition for transsexual people – who transitioned from male to female, or vice versa – but only with the approval of two GPs and a panel, and, if married, a spouse.

The other was the Equality Act 2010, which included gender identity as a protected characteristic but let women-only spaces exclude trans people if they felt the safety of those spaces might be compromised.

Efforts to reform these laws, so that trans people can define their own identities – as in Ireland, Belgium, Portugal and Argentina, to name just a few – and feel confident in being able to access services for survivors of domestic abuse or sexual violence, have met with huge resistance from our UK Government and the media. These issues are important, as self-identification would make it easier for individuals to apply for documents in their chosen genders, and to get married to their partners, but for most trans people,

changes to the workplace would make much more of a difference to their daily lives.

I came out as a transsexual woman in 2009, working for an NHS Trust in Brighton & Hove. I spoke first to the HR manager and the equality and diversity lead, who assured me they would handle any negative reactions to my announcement – an advantage of working for a big public-sector organisation in a city with a large LGBT+ community.

Then I emailed my colleagues to tell them I would soon be working as Juliet, and my pronouns would be she/her. I assured them that the world would not end if they ever got my name or pronouns wrong – they were often terrified of slipping up and being seen as a bad person, but I could tell when someone was well-meaning and when the person was not, and I trusted them to handle things with dignity. I was lucky, my colleagues soon adapted and, in some cases, were much friendlier – feeling like I had opened up to them and doing the same in return. Telephone conversations with people at other trusts, who didn't know me, were hardest and I sought out NHS voice therapy to help with that.

Lucy Surti:
'I'm a lot happier now.'



This kind of support in the workplace is crucial, especially for those who have just come out, says Lucy Surti, who works in collections for the Royal Mail transport office in Leicester and is the LGBT+ officer for the East Midlands Branch of the CWU.

She came out in January 2018 and says she's "a lot happier now," having managed both her transition and the changes it brought to her personal life. Although HR and the union provided support, and her colleagues have been broadly accepting, Lucy remembered "that first day" as "really scary," recalling: "You feel like a freak and worry everyone will stare at you or make fun of you."

An explicit statement that the employer and the union already have processes in place, so trans people know in advance that they will receive backing, would be good, as would branch LGBT+ leads – who could liaise with the regional ones – and an offer of subsidised counselling or even just a weekly check-in from someone to help people deal with the challenges of coming out. (I had affordable therapy in Brighton via a local trans support group, and it helped enormously with coming out in my NHS job.)

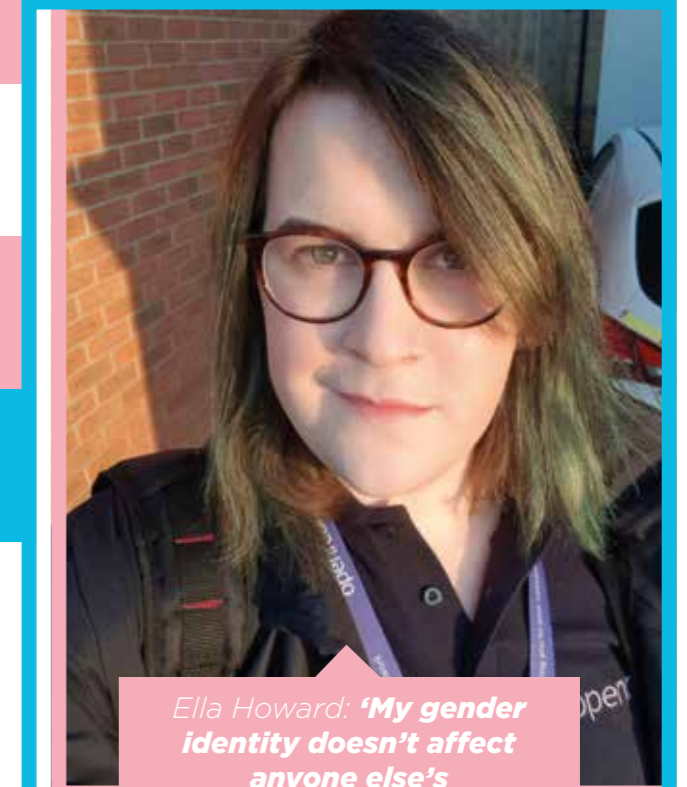
Ella Howard, a BT/Openreach engineer from Shrewsbury, began her transition three years ago, getting a referral to the Gender Identity Clinic. She came out at work in February 2019 in a meeting with colleagues, saying: "I'm still the same person, but if there's anything you want to know, just ask."

Most people said they were fine with this and got on with things and she told the one person who hassled her that she would raise a grievance with HR if this continued. "If there was blatant transphobic stuff, I stamped it out pretty quickly," she said. There was not much of that though, more often, people sometimes asked inappropriate questions about her personal life, but if she declined to answer, they stopped. "It's a question of education, and making people understand that my gender identity won't affect anyone else's day-to-day life," says Ella, who did some reverse mentoring of senior staff who felt they were struggling to grasp the issues – this helped to break through some of the stereotypes and scare stories in the news.

Ella became a young workers' officer for Mid-Wales, The Marches & North Staffs Branch and, after being selected as a delegate to the union's general conference, met another trans member and saw something of the CWU's approach. There were policies in place to prevent discrimination against LGBT+ people but not much specifically for trans people, and she says that she sensed a generational difference within the union, feeling that some older members took her less seriously after she came out.

Again, gentle inter-personal contact can start to fix this – the matter really is not as complicated, or as difficult, as some people might have you believe. ■ ■

• Juliet Jacques has written three books, the most recent being *Variations*, a collection of short stories about British trans and non-binary people to be published by Influx Press in June 2021.



Ella Howard: *'My gender identity doesn't affect anyone else's day-to-day life.'*

KEEPING WORKPLACES CLEAN AND SAFE FOR OUR COLLEAGUES

Cleaners are the unsung heroes of the pandemic, Keeping workplace premises clean and virus free has meant increased workloads and more hours for those on the frontline. Voice spoke with two of their reps...

CWU rep Kelly Wynne is determined that her hard-working members' efforts are recognised and rewarded when pay negotiations open in a couple of months.

Kelly represents around 1,000 housekeeping workers servicing BT and Openreach premises and serves on the union's national team for the now outsourced facilities workers.

"I'd say the total amount of cleaning required increased enormously during the pandemic," she tells *The Voice*. "Every touch point has had to be cleaned during the day – every door handle, kettle, tap, for example.

"It's regularly audited by management and our housekeeping members have certainly been under increased pressure."

Exchanges, even those which are not routinely staffed, must also be kept clean because so many of them are used as rest facilities for field engineers, she explains, with all cleaning schedules having increased, in accordance with frequency of use.

And the buildings with the most intense work taking place are the 999 emergency call centres, where all touch-points must be cleaned every hour.

"This used to be a daily schedule before Covid," she explains.

"Our housekeeping members have had more to do every day – but they do a fantastic job and I'm really proud of them," says Kelly.

As well as representing members, Kelly also has to directly look after BT and Openreach premises within her own North Wales and Chester area.



Kelly Wynne

"Locally, for example, there are four of us in my area and each of us is responsible for dozens of sites – of various size.

"I'm on a daily 8am to 5pm Monday-to-Friday shift," she continues, adding that her working day can involve "quite a bit of travel.

"Today there was more than usual – I had to go to Kelsall first, then Wrexham and onto Prestatyn, and tomorrow I need to visit the 999 centre in Bangor."

'Our housekeeping members do a fantastic job and I'm really proud of them.'

Kelly lives in the north Wales town of Buckley and, in common with approximately one-third of the population, is a Welsh language speaker. She explains that Welsh tends to be more widely spoken in the north and west, whereas "in the south you don't hear it so much."

BT outsourced its facilities operation a couple of years ago and Kelly and her colleagues are currently employed by a third-party service provider, although they have retained full CWU negotiating rights.

"As well as me representing housekeeping workers on the national team, there are also two security-member representatives," she says, adding that Brendan O'Brien is the union's national officer for this group of members.

"We did ask the company for a bonus just after the first lockdown and they said wait until the end of Covid.

"We're going into pay negotiations in June, and we'll definitely be bringing that up again."

Brendan O'Brien confirms that he will "definitely raise the issue of a bonus and a fair pay rise for our fantastic housekeeping members.

"They do a superb job in 'normal' times, but these past months, they've stepped up and gone the extra mile in terms of all the increased duties and a great many thanks and deep respect to all of them.

"Along with the national team, I'll be doing everything I can to ensure this group of workers get the recognition and reward that they so clearly deserve for their sterling efforts."



Nicola Booth

Nicola Booth is one of the union's five area representatives for our members employed as cleaners in Royal Mail Property & Facilities Services (RMP&FS).

Nicola, who is based in Yorkshire, tells *The Voice* that the recent period has "been incredibly hard for our members."

In terms of estimating increased workload, she says: "If we said, for example, it was '100 per cent' before Covid, it's risen to about '150 per cent', if we use that as a comparison.

"Previously, we would've cleaned the touch-points as you came out of a room, on a daily basis, but now it's a lot more often.

"Our members are on extra hours now at a lot of the sites, and at other units they've been putting in a lot of extra hours on overtime," Nicola adds.

"They're all coping really well with what they've got to do, but at the same time, you get physically and mentally drained.

'Cleaners need to be recognised for the great work they all do.'

"They're keeping the workplace clean and safe for everybody else – when you think about it, they're the ones on the frontline, cleaning what could potentially be the Covid virus itself.

"They need to be recognised by the company for the great work they do."

Mick Kavanagh, who is the national lead for our RMP&FS cleaners on behalf of the outdoor department, told *Voice*: "Our RMP&FS cleaners have done a fantastic job in extremely difficult circumstances, keeping workplaces clean and safe for others – proving to everyone how key they are as key workers.

They're deservedly getting their 3.1 per cent pay rise in April and, going forward, we're getting into talks with the business to develop a new Royal Mail cleaning specification.

"This new 'spec' will recognise the critical importance of this function and recognise the critical importance of the frontline people who do the job every day."

'Covid lockdowns hit younger people hard – it was tough for us'

I don't think it's appreciated how much this past year has impacted on younger people," says CWU young workers national committee member Reece Scane, "there's all this pressure on us and it's sometimes felt like we've been blamed and accused of being selfish.

"But teenagers and younger adults have found this period really, really tough – we're at an age when we need to be out and about, hanging out with friends, dating, enjoying music together, socialising etc.

"Younger members I represent have said these things to me and how the rules have been confusing and hard to follow," adds Reece, who is also the young workers officer for his branch, South Central Postal.

"I know the restrictions have all been necessary of course and I know everyone's missed all these things – but sometimes it seems like middle-aged people forget how they felt when they were young themselves."

Along with others on the national young workers committee, Reece has been active in keeping in touch with members around the country and involved in organising online

activities, including podcasts, zoom events and live videos.

"I hope people have enjoyed some of these, and hopefully cheered them up a bit," he says, adding: "Personally, I'd say it's been good for me to have activities to do."

Reece was diagnosed with autism a couple of years ago and for him, the disruption of 'normal' routines and sudden changes can hit him hard.



"I can become very sensitive to last-minute change in particular, I can overthink things and if I get upset, it can go into distress and I can get physically as well as emotionally very tense," he explains, adding that his parents, family and friends and work

colleagues are "all really supportive and help me a lot.

"But what's been most sad for me has been not seeing my girlfriend Holly, who lives in Wales. We've been together four years and we're in contact all the time. We're getting each other through this – but we both can't wait for April, hopefully meet up at Easter, can't wait!"

"Activities and being busy with something are good for me, I get really into things – and as well as my union activity, I really love my music."

Reece plays drums and does backing vocals in a duo – *Reece Scane & Amelia Barnard* – and they are both looking forward to being able to play live.

"I'd say our music is 'acoustic-pop' and we've recorded an album called *Street Lights*," he continues, adding that his all-time drumming hero is Bev Bevan of 1970s rock band Electric Light Orchestra (ELO).

"Amelia and I are really looking forward to playing some live music – roll on the end of lockdown!"

Don't ignore symptoms of other conditions – especially prostate problems

Andy Moorey's 2020 began with his return to work after a prostate cancer operation, only to immediately find himself in the midst of a national Royal Mail ballot and then the pandemic.

As secretary of the CWU's South East No5 Branch, Andy got busy helping to organise the YES campaign during January and February, and then of course last March the pandemic struck.

"Covid's been an awful period for everyone as we all know," he says, "across our branch, as it was in the whole country.

"And just recently, when we were thinking the worst was over, seven workers at one of the delivery offices in my branch, tested positive for the virus and around a third of the workforce had to shield.

"Thankfully, the seven members have not had to be hospitalised and our shielding members are now returning – but it just goes to show that we all need to remain ever-vigilant."

One indirect effect of the pandemic has been its impact on the treatments of other illnesses and conditions – with evidence suggesting that people have become more

reluctant to seek attention for non-Covid-related symptoms.

Andy wants to encourage other men, particularly men over 50 with what he describes as "waterworks problems," to "see their doctors and get themselves checked.



"I know it's embarrassing, but these problems are not going away if you ignore them – if it is prostate cancer, it'll spread and become fatal and the earlier it can be detected, the better.

"I'd been ignoring these problems until I suddenly realised it was very serious," he recalls. "In 2019, I met up with some friends, drank a few more beers than I normally would, and then when I needed to 'go', I found I just couldn't.

"It was funny at first, but it got more and more painful."

In increasing pain, Andy was driven by a friend to Guildford's Royal Surrey Hospital, where doctors acted to relieve the immediate problem and arranged for further appointments and tests.

"A couple of months later, I got the diagnosis," continues Andy. "The doctor said: 'You've got cancer'."

After the initial shock, the conversation turned to the treatment options – which in his case, narrowed down to a choice between radiotherapy and prostate removal.

"I chose removal because I thought my chances would be better. I had the operation and I was in for 48 hours, had a catheter for about 10 days afterwards and then a gradual recovery.

"My follow-up appointments and PSA (blood) tests were encouraging, the old 'waterworks' are now in full working order and I'm currently all-clear," he reports.

"If you're reading this, if you're having these symptoms, I'd be the happiest man ever if this article persuades you to get tested."

CWU GROWING IN THE UK TECH SECTOR

At its launch towards the end of last year, the CWU's United Tech & Allied Workers National Branch sparked a huge amount of media interest, as well as a wave of new recruits eager to get stuck into organising a sector in which the British trade union movement has had little presence up until now.



And, in a very short space of time, its initial membership has grown rapidly. The branch now has several hundred members – a real breakthrough for trade unionism in the tech sector.

They are currently working on a major awareness project around the rise of employee surveillance. As branch rep Marcus Storm told The Voice, such technology can be used by employers for sinister means. For example, an online advertisement for a surveillance company that Marcus told us that he saw recently invited tech firms to hire them to monitor internal company communications and 'identify troublesome employees' who do not match the 'ethos' of the company.

This "slightly disturbing language" from this surveillance company, as Marcus puts it, is reflective of the intrusive behaviour that tech workers can face from their bosses – and many without realising. "They were promising a kind of automated hire and fire solution", he said, pointing out that many tech companies "analyse your e-mails, your instant messages, your videos, without you even knowing."

As a result of this, the branch is developing a tech workers' advice programme on the issue, which will include reading material, pamphlets and guidebooks. Since sales of surveillance software have risen by around 50-60 per cent throughout the pandemic, Marcus points out that there will be a wave of new union activists trained to give good guidance on what he calls an "egregious problem" in the sector.

Alongside this work, the branch is also focusing on building mass collective power within the technology industry, which, whilst accounting for around 9 per cent of the British workforce, currently sits at less than 3 per cent union density nationally.

CWU head of recruitment and organising Ray Ellis, who oversaw the formation of the tech workers' branch back in September, told The Voice that he has been "incredibly impressed with the engagement level and proactivity of the new members.

"When you combine their determination to create a strong union movement across the sector with the self-awareness of their value in the economy, you find tech workers in a uniquely powerful position.

"They've made it clear that they're not here to fight just for themselves and their own interests, but that they believe they also have a role to play in supporting other workers in struggle," Ray continues, adding: "There's some exciting potential here for a renewed approach to solidarity in the digital age."

Marcus says that many new members are "quite pleasantly surprised" that the branch is a "community first and foremost", with 99 per cent of members keeping in regular contact with each other and chatting through online channels, while 'drop-in calls' are a regular occurrence.

Alongside this, members are humming with discussion about ways to encourage as many tech workers as possible to join, with suggestions including a possible concessionary membership for those currently studying technology-related courses before they enter the world of work.

Marcus and his fellow members believe this can help develop the union in this sector into a significant force in unmasking unequal employment practice and improving working conditions, saying: "Now we have a union for tech workers – I hope we can be a part of revitalising the labour movement."

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A win for women – a campaign success

An example of the CWU's equality agenda in action has been our union's part in the fight against period poverty, a story of a female-driven campaign, male allyship and an industrial focus...

For several years now, the CWU has campaigned on the issue of period poverty. This is the term used for the situation women face when they can't access period products for no other reason than their financial circumstances.

While this issue may not have been taken seriously by mainstream politicians for very long, it is and has been a massive problem.

In Britain alone, it is estimated that around one in 10 women can't afford to get basic sanitary products while on their periods. An estimated 49 per cent of all schoolgirls have missed a day of school because of their periods, while around 14 per cent of girls have, at one stage, been forced to borrow period products from their friends.

The knock-on effects of such a situation on women – on their sense of self, their educational and work experiences, and their overall quality of life – is obvious. This is why, in recent years, campaign after campaign has been launched across the country over this issue.

Our union stepped up to the challenge, and members from every part of the CWU have been at the frontline of period poverty campaigning. As Mersey Branch rep Erin Brett tells The Voice: "This issue is so important for myself and other CWU members is because it affects so many.

"There could be kids in school going through their periods without having any products to help – and on the flip side, there will be women going to work without any supplies because they've given them to their daughter.

"Half the people on the planet could be potentially affected by this."

The CWU's track record of period poverty campaigning is significant and compares well to the work done on this by other, much bigger, unions.

Across the country, our members have been involved in period poverty collections and donation drives and, after an appeal from the national young workers committee, our 2019 annual conference in Bournemouth donated huge amounts to a local charity.

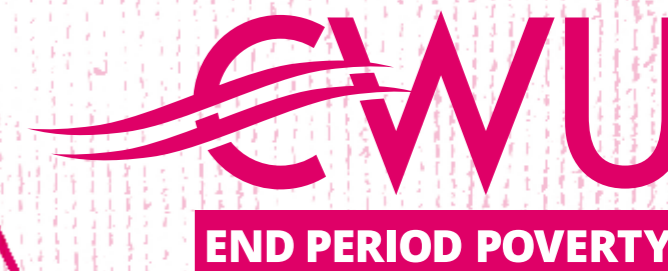
Members have also forced the subject onto our industrial agenda. Last year, for example, BT Group agreed to begin offering free sanitary products for their female employees. This result was down to an incredibly powerful fight by CWU members in BT, whose serious lobbying work made sure that the company is now an industry leader in eradicating period poverty.

This victory pre-empted last November's monumental fight, led by Labour MSP Monica Lennon, to make Scotland the first country in the world to offer universal access to period

products. This big win is something that Erin and many other CWU members would like to see replicated across Britain.

"There's still a lot of work that needs to be done still", Erin said. But given the victories that the CWU have already had on the issue, she echoes the sentiments of many members when she expresses confidence over the role that our union can continue to play in this fight.

She went on to say: "I think if we keep on hammering the campaigning, getting it out there in the media, and continue pushing to raise awareness in our branches, we could soon be on the path to wiping period poverty out everywhere in this country."



BRITISH GAS WORKERS STANDING SOLID RESISTING BOSSES' ATTACKS

Action could continue to mid-April in this deadlocked dispute," said GMB national officer Justin Bowden earlier this month, as he announced further strikes in the 'fire and hire' British Gas dispute.

Walkouts scheduled for mid-to-late March took the total number of industrial action days to 42, since the beginning of 2021.

Talks held through arbitration service ACAS failed to reach a resolution when company bosses refused to take their 'fire and hire' threat off the table – the union's central demand.

British Gas is wholly owned by Centrica, a 'PLC' which was created in 1997, when 'British Gas PLC' – which had been privatised a decade earlier – was demerged into three parts; Centrica, BG and Transco.

And the root of the dispute went back to June of last year, when Centrica CEO Chris O'Shea announced 4,000 redundancies, along with increases to working hours and other significant changes to terms and conditions and then, after just two meetings with the union, served a formal 'Section 188 Notice' on the union representatives.

Section 188 is from the 1992 Labour and Trade Union Relations (Consolidation) Act and its use by the business in this instance has

been described metaphorically by the union, to 'putting a gun to our heads' and 'poisoning the well' of the negotiation process.

A key demand by the company is for a three-hour increase in engineers' working week – which the union points out is a significant cut in hourly pay rates in itself and makes a mockery of Mr O'Shea's claims that he does not want to cut engineers' pay. Other proposals to impose an added half an hour at the start and end of daily shifts add further to this reduction on basic rights, which effectively cut some hourly rates by as much as £3.50 per hour.

With the company refusing to withdraw its controversial proposals or its 'fire and hire' threat, the GMB called a strike ballot and won an overwhelming 89 per cent majority for action – action which began in January and has continued in several phases through February and into March.

Both sides were asked to appear last month before the Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Select Committee of MPs, who asked Mr O'Shea why he had issued the Section 188 Notice and the reasoning behind his attacks on workers' terms and conditions.

The CEO claimed that the serving of the Section 188 Notice had been in accordance

with legal advice given to him and on the basis that he did not expect to reach a negotiated settlement – and that the additional working hours plan was aimed at making his workforce "competitive." Directly employed workers were, he told the Committee, "30 to 50 per cent more expensive than contractors."

If the increased working week and his other impositions were not applied, more directly employed workers would lose their jobs and the company would increase its use of contract labour, he said.

For the GMB, Justin Bowden pointed out to the MPs that the GMB had been representing British Gas workers "for about 130 years – since our union was first founded" and had always been prepared to negotiate with the employer to work through change, saying: "It's what we do as trade unions."

And in response to Mr O'Shea's insistence that this round of attacks on terms and conditions were necessary to the business, Justin revealed that this is not a struggling company, but a highly profitable one.

"In the first six months of 2020, the adjusted operating profit of the Centrica home business, this is where the engineers in dispute work, was £229 million – an increase of 27 per cent on the same period," he told the Committee.

SHOW YOUR SOLIDARITEA* WITH GMB BRITISH GAS STRIKERS

Last month, thousands of our own members tuned in to a special online event in support of our fellow trade unionists working for British Gas.

We were delighted to welcome GMB striker and local shop steward Paul Vowles to speak to us, telling the audience of the damaging effect of the company's demands to increase the working week, force him to work an extra half hour at the start and end of each shift and extra weekend working too.

And our members also heard from the union's Scotland Region organiser Hazel Nolan, who said how proud she was of Paul and all the other British Gas strikers.

Our general secretary Dave Ward described the company's actions as "deplorable" and compared the high wage of its CEO with the attacks being made on the frontline workers.

"It's never been more important to come together and stand together. To our members – get behind these guys," he urged.

And, making the point that this struggle and our own struggles further prove the need for joint solidarity in action, Dave added: "Let's also all get behind the fight for a *New Deal for Workers*."

*with every cuppa

At that event, the CWU launched our own 'Solidaritea' campaign – specially designed mugs expressing our full support for our striking GMB comrades.

Already, over a thousand have been sold at the bargain price of £4.12 each, with £2 from every sale going to the GMB British Gas strike fund.

To order one – or a bulk order for your branch, simply follow the link on the CWU website.



Thanks Voice readers for so many great 'Postie Spidey' captions – more entries than ever, making this one a tough call indeed!

Several of you gave us a chuckle comparing 'the post' to 'the web', and others reminded us, quite rightly, that all of you CWU members have been Superheroes during this awful pandemic.

Honourable mentions for John Keilty of Wembley, who had our superhero warning us all to wear our masks, while

Marion Mortimer of Coalsnaughton and Bristol member Paul Hudd gave us some memorable quotes from the classic Spiderman movies!

Our Voice judges eventually decided that the best three were "We posties are having to reach new heights," from **Mr Craig Foster** of Sunderland; Birmingham member **Ms Balbinder Kaur's** "With great post comes great responsibility"; and "Yes, I did 'go' before I put my suit on," suggested by **Derrick Cleverley** of Basingstoke.

So, it's a three-way tie this time folks – and the iconic 'CWU Goodie Bag' has been sent to Craig, Balbinder and Derrick with our congratulations.

And to all of you, thanks so much for the laughs and the smiles – proving once again that as well as being superheroes, CWU members also have the best sense of humour.

Why not have a go at this one! Please send your suggested caption to voicecompetition@cwu.org

CAPTION COMPETITION



WARD SEARCH

Congratulations too, to the Wardsearch 'Goodie Bag' Winners – the first 10 correct solutions were received from...

- Peter Butler, Solihull, West Midlands
- Anne Summerfield Northampton
- Glenn Hopley, Rochdale, Lancashire
- Shoukat Maka, Bolton
- Miss Ghazala Begum, Birmingham
- Andy Gibb, Glasgow
- Jackie Latham, Manchester
- Lee Wells, Kent
- Mrs Christine Moulding, Blaydon, Tyne & Wear
- Paula Hudson, Newcastle Under Lyne

...and the bonus word was 'embrace'

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

Could you be a Top-Ten winner this time? Try to find these 12 words in the grid – each word relates to the overall 'theme' of this edition.

Take a photo of your solution, send to voicecompetition@cwu.org and the first 10 correct entries received will win!

Best of luck folks!

- Respect
- Fairness
- Collective
- Identity
- Culture
- Ability
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Diverse
- Wellbeing
- Care
- Unlock

“ My bonus word tolled in January for a footballing legend



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2. Go to www.royalmailsp.co.uk
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4. Click on 'Register'
5. Enter the security code shown on the screen in the security code box
6. You will need to create a sign in name and password
7. Once you have completed this, you will be asked to create a security question and answer. Please also add in the following important information, your National Insurance number, a contact email address, phone number and your date of birth. We'll then email you a PIN number to complete your registration. And that's it, you're signed up!



We want to hear from you!

Your feedback will help us to meet your needs.

Let us know what you think about the communications we send to you. Your feedback can help direct our communications and to meet your needs where possible.

The survey will only take you 10 minutes to complete. Please tell us what you like, dislike and what you would like to see more of.

How do I take part?

The survey is open now and we invite you to have your say at:

www.royalmailsp.co.uk/yourfeedback

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Or you can write to us at:
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Darlington, DL1 9TX

**THIS HOUSE
SUPPORTS
A PROPER
PAY RISE
FOR NHS
WORKERS**

*Thank You
NHS!*

CWU
The communications union

INDUSTRIAL ACTION BALLOT

BT, OPENREACH AND EE

**STOP COMPULSORY
REDUNDANCIES,
HALT SITE CLOSURES,
DELIVER A FAIR
PAY DEAL.**

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