

THE VOICE

SPRING 2022

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GET IN TOUCH...

CWU HQ – all enquiries
150 The Broadway,
Wimbledon, London
SW19 1RX T: 020 8971 7200

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

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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.

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CWU Legal Services: UNIONLINE
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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 4.1.11 Branches are advised that from the 1st October 2021 the CWU Death Benefit payment will be increased to £884.

Any enquiries regarding this should be addressed to the Senior Deputy General Secretary's Department on telephone number 020 8971 7237, or email address sdgs@cwu.org



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The latest from
Dave Ward,
your General
Secretary

The trade union movement in the UK is at a crossroads – workers everywhere are under pressure to work harder and faster and for less

Throughout the course of the Covid pandemic, CWU members have made huge personal sacrifices to keep services going for people and businesses across the UK, whilst also having to cope with the ever-changing nature of work.

Now, as we are plunged into the biggest cost-of-living crisis in decades, it's time for BT, RMG, Post Office Limited, VM02 and all the employers our members work for, to stop making excuses and come to the table with very substantial pay rises for all CWU members.

As I write this column, sadly those companies have yet to place any value on the efforts and loyalty of their respective workforces.

In BT, Openreach and EE, the CWU Telecoms and Financial Services Executive has just rejected an insulting flat-rate offer of £1,200. My message to our T&FS Executive is that we must now campaign and engage our members to win a YES vote in an industrial action ballot. It really is time to fight for our members and to reset the whole relationship the union has with BT.

In VM02, members have been offered a 5 per cent deal over two years. This is unacceptable and as we go to print a consultative ballot is underway and we know the members will back the union.

In Post Office Limited, senior management have outrageously hidden behind a government pay freeze and the response from our members has been fantastic. A 97 per cent YES vote for strike action on a 70 per cent turnout. This result will also be seen in wider circles as a vote of no confidence in the whole Post Office Board. You would have thought that after the company's shameful actions in the Horizon scandal, they would change direction – they haven't – so now we must force them to properly reward our members through our collective strength.

In the Royal Mail Group, time is running out for the company and we know our members will fight for the pay deal they deserve. Following the recent CWU policy forum, the union will continue to deal with workplace issues, shape the direction of the company and build on our *Pathway to Change* agreement. But on pay, the message is clear: this year our members deserve a no-strings and very substantial increase – be assured we will do whatever is necessary to deliver this.

From this column and throughout this edition of *The Voice*, you will see the union is fighting hard for our members on a number of fronts – but to continue to be successful it's crucial that we now see the value of trade unionism in its widest possible context.

Whatever way you turn at the moment, in and outside the workplace, life has become so challenging and complicated and millions of people, including many of our members and their families, are really struggling. The key question we all face is what are we going to do about it?

This is why the CWU has led the call for a New Deal for Workers and a new social settlement in the UK and we simply cannot sit around and wait for political change. This point was illustrated again recently with the disgraceful on-the-spot sacking, through Zoom, of 800 P&O ferry workers. These deplorable actions have shaken workers everywhere.

The truth is the trade union movement is at a crossroads and the only way we can tackle and win on the big issues that are affecting all workers is to build collectivism by campaigning and acting together. The TUC has called a New Deal rally on the 18th June and we must bring about the biggest mobilisation of working people in recent history.

This is not a one-off event, it's about developing a new social movement that can shift the balance of forces in the world of work, the economy and across society, back in favour of working people. We will share more detail in the coming weeks on the overall campaign and the rally.

Finally, let's all continue to stand with the people of Ukraine. CWU Humanitarian Aid and individual branches within the union have already taken part in convoys to the Polish border and let's hope and pray that peace and justice prevails across the world.

Dave Ward.

Dave Ward
GENERAL SECRETARY

WE WANT TO DELIVER A NEW DEAL FOR WORKERS

Voice welcomes our guest columnist Deputy Labour Party leader and Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Cornwall Angela Rayner...

Hello to all *Voice* readers, CWU members and their families! Thank you all for your support and for the opportunity to write in your magazine.

I remember how I felt when I first spoke to your annual conference back in 2016 and the extremely warm and kind reception your delegates gave me. It's wonderful to see the strength, unity and determination of your union and the many first-class achievements your union has delivered on pay, job security, working hours, pensions and equality in the workplace. I know how important the work you do is. You are the key workers that keep this country moving and you deserve better than what this Government offers working people.

The cost-of-living crisis created in Downing Street is raising inflation up to levels we have not seen for several decades. Your union is responding in the best possible way by pushing hard to negotiate for decent pay rises in Royal Mail, BT/Openreach and the Post Office.

Your union has also whole heartedly offered support and solidarity to hard-working seafarers outrageously sacked by P&O. This was disgusting behaviour by the leadership of an internationally recognised company. The whole of our movement is united in condemnation of this awful behaviour. This shameful episode highlights quite how much this Government has given the green light to bullying tactics from bad employers. The P&O scandal has also shown us that there is an urgent need for stronger employment rights for working people in this country.

Labour has the solution. Our *New Deal for Working People* will form the basis of Labour Party workplace policy and it will be a massively important part of our manifesto as we start to look ahead to the next general election. We have committed to see the policies enacted in the first 100 days of a Labour government.

And it's neither accident nor coincidence that we've given this document the title *New Deal for Working People* – taking inspiration from the CWU-inspired campaign that the TUC has been running for stronger employment rights. But it's not only the title which has been inspired by the trade union movement, this agenda has been shaped by the collective voice of workers through the work of the *Power in the Workplace Taskforce*, made



up of the Labour Party's affiliate trade unions, including of course the CWU.

It's a 16-page document, with clear policy set out on all aspects of employment and workplace issues, and here are some of its key points.

Freeing unions to empower workers

Labour is committed to repealing anti-trade union legislation which hinders the ability for workers to seek their rights, including the Trade Union Act 2016. We will also strengthen trade unions' right of entry to workplaces to organise, meet and represent members and potential members, and to contact remote workers. The process of union recognition needs to be made more straightforward too. And we will introduce a new statutory duty on employers to inform all new employees of their right to join a union.

Sectoral collective bargaining – negotiated agreements across the economy

Fair Pay Agreements will be negotiated through sectoral collective bargaining, in which workers' representatives and employer representatives in each sector will be brought together to negotiate binding minimum terms and conditions for that sector. These sectoral agreements will cover a wide range of issues including pay and pensions, working time and holidays, training, health and safety, and the deployment of new technologies. These will form a 'floor' across industries and prevent undercutting.

Rights at work from Day One

UK law currently allocates workers into three different categories, 'worker', 'employee', and 'self-employed', each with separate legal definitions and rights. Workers often do not know their legal rights and employers are able to exploit the complexity by falsely putting workers in a category with fewer rights – as, for example, some companies operating in the gig-economy falsely categorise some of their regular workers as 'self-employed'. Labour will create a single status of 'worker' for all but the genuinely self-employed and all workers will be afforded the same basic rights and protections including protection from unfair dismissal, sick pay, and parental leave.

Ban zero hours – ban 'fire & rehire'

Labour will ban zero hours contracts and ensure contracts have a minimum number of guaranteed hours. We will also ensure a regular contract for anyone working regular hours for 12 weeks or more to reflect those hours normally worked.

We will also ensure all workers get reasonable notice of any change in shifts or working time, with wages for any shifts cancelled without appropriate notice being paid to workers in full. And 'fire and rehire' will be outlawed to stop the bullying of hard-working staff by unscrupulous employers.

Public procurement to support good work

Labour will end the presumption in favour of outsourcing and oversee the biggest wave of insourcing of public services for a generation. Labour will use public procurement to promote high standards. We will choose to do business with companies that treat their workers well, recognise trade unions and have provision for collective bargaining arrangements. Labour will make, buy, and sell more in Britain, awarding public contracts to British businesses and bringing the jobs of the future to the UK.

Labour offers a real plan that will see the working people of this country afforded the security, prosperity and respect they deserve.

Angela Rayner

Angela Rayner
Deputy Leader of the Labour Party

Driving forward our agenda – getting you what you deserve

It is easy to forget that at the beginning of 2021 we were still involved in a long-running dispute with Royal Mail Group. Due to the support of our members, we were able to conclude the *Pathway to Change* agreement that provided a vision for the future based on growth and a movement to a 24/7 operation, whilst completely altering the shrink-to-success ideology of the previous management.

Throughout the pandemic, postal workers have demonstrated the benefit of protecting this great public service and ensured that every address in the country has remained connected. This has meant that Royal Mail Group is now well positioned for the future and, despite Covid, the past 12 months have also seen agreed change being implemented on a far wider scale than for many years. This progress is not only unprecedented but all the more amazing when one considers the Covid effect on absence and operational adjustments, the recruitment and lack-of-vans debacle and managerial changes.



As a union we have ensured that in the 10 years since privatisation, the business has remained together and not fragmented, as has been the case with previous selloffs of this type. We cannot, however, stand still and it is now vital that momentum is maintained, and we continue to pursue our agenda. The business is changing and the union must have the courage to put forward our vision for the future in order to help shape Royal Mail Group for the next generation of postal workers whilst maintaining employment, standard-of-living and retirement security.

Against that backdrop, the recent policy forum in Liverpool – called to discuss the *Pathway to Change Ongoing Policy Document*

2022 and Beyond – represented the first time that CWU postal activists had had the chance to come together in a face-to-face forum, on a national basis, since Annual Conference in April 2019.

The policy forum was never about placing an already signed and sealed position in front of branches and representatives but providing the opportunity for genuine debate regarding the future of Royal Mail Group, whilst developing a bold policy to address both the immediate and longer-term challenges. This allowed us, as a trade union, to get in front of the debate and drive a forward-thinking agenda based on aggressive pragmatism.

Following wide-ranging debate, we are now able to take forward agreed policies that relate to the future strategy and direction of Royal Mail Group, productivity and efficiency, improving culture, the pipeline, the future of delivery, collections, processing, network, distribution, Parcelforce, Fleet, Engineering, other business units and policies such as the attendance procedure and conduct code.

Further policy has also been adopted in relation to our members in RM Property, Facilities and Solutions. We cannot allow the business to step away from the progressive commitments in the *Pathway to Change* agreement and must continue to forward our agenda.

‘There is a debt of honour owed by the business to its employees for the role they have played as key workers.’



In respect of this year’s pay award [which is not covered by the *Pathway to Change* agreement and is therefore a separate negotiation] our members are now facing a real cost-of-living crisis, the likes of which has not been seen for years. There is a debt of honour owed by the business to its employees for the role they have played as key workers and enhancing the performance and profile of Royal Mail Group. This is not about affordability; it is about honour and readjustment of the business’s budget to put its employees first. We will insist upon an inflation-based, cost-of-living-security pay increase.

The effort from all CWU branches and representatives in helping to shape our ongoing policy has been second to none and is what makes us the leading industrial trade union in the country. With your continued support, we can now drive forward our progressive agenda and ensure that you receive the pay rise you deserve.

Terry Pullinger
DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY
(POSTAL)

SETTING THE AGENDA IN THE UK POSTAL SECTOR

***Voice* reflects on the union’s two-day policy forum held at the very end of last month and asks for the thoughts of CWU Postal national officers Mark Baulch and Davie Robertson as we all look ahead to Annual Conference in Bournemouth...**



Hundreds of delegates came from all corners of the UK to the city of Liverpool, where our general secretary Dave Ward opened proceedings with an important speech that touched upon all of the major issues facing the CWU at this time.

He spoke about the challenging situations facing all sections and how crucial it is that we maintain our unity and our best traditions of solidarity.

Dave also took the opportunity to speak to a wider agenda as well, referencing other disputes erupting in this period, in the context of a raging cost-of-living crisis, and making the key point that “our New Deal for Workers campaign has to properly take off this year.”

DGSP Terry Pullinger thanked Dave for his address and introduced the Postal Executive’s comprehensive policy document *Pathway to Change – 2022 And Beyond*.

As Terry made clear, the *Pathway to Change* national agreement, as well as its *Four Pillars* predecessor “established the jointly agreed key principles to be honoured as we redesign Royal Mail Group in a mutual-interest way.” Both agreements stand for a “more progressive and proactive” process of change, rather than something imposed, and a “long view” is important.

With detailed strategy and policy covering the Royal Mail Group functions and operations, and an ongoing commitment to work with and continue in talks on change, pay for 2022 should be straightforward and uncomplicated.

And our DGSP restated the union’s policy here, saying: “Where we are on pay is that we want a straight, no-strings, one-year pay deal.”

After a day of debating, amending, and collectively working through subjects including *Strategy & Direction, Pay & Reward, and Culture*, Day Two was dominated by sections of the overall document related to delivery and to the processing, distribution and network/logistics functions.

And outdoor secretary Mark Baulch told *The Voice* afterwards that “the forum went really well, we’ve got strong and robust strategic direction on all the key areas of delivery.”

“On defending the principle that all offices continue to deliver parcels, on the renewed drive for a 35-hour week, and addressing the 24/7 challenge, we’re in a good place,” he said.

“And on the subject of revisions, we’ve learnt the lessons from the experience of last year and set ourselves some guide points for the future – don’t deploy after September, don’t deploy when we’re carrying vacancies and make sure there’s adequate and effective training for the reps leading the revision.”

“But, let’s also not forget the positives that came out of the last wave of revisions – the most important of which were that the process triggered the extra hour off the working week, and it brought over 2,000 part-time members up to full-time contracts.”

Mark describes himself as “optimistic” about the future of Royal Mail, but makes

the point that “this depends on the business continuing to have ambition to grow – and also on us all embracing the need for change and embracing that change.”

“Of course, we continue to point out the shortcomings of new systems, equipment and methods – and if the whole idea is wrong we’ll say that too – but where the underlying concept is the right one, we need to be constructive in our criticisms and seek to make the trials work.”

“A good example is the team-drop parcel delivery trial we’ve recently completed in Manchester [see report Pages Eight and Nine]. Shortcomings and operational problems? Yes. But is there also a sound and sensible underlying concept here? Yes again.”

Davie Robertson, our national officer for processing, distribution, network/logistics and Parcelforce, was equally positive about the Liverpool event, judging it to have been “a big success.”

“I think the key policies we’ve now got in place in processing, distribution and the national network are really re-setting the agenda, in terms of supporting our members through the pipeline changes that are coming. We’re seeing the opening of the two new hubs – in Warrington and Crick – and the increased drive for automation.”

“And that means that establishing robust policies that protect our members within these functions was absolutely the right thing to do and I think the document – with the amendments that were carried – really has strengthened our hand in that regard,” he explained.

“With regards to Parcelforce, it’s about ensuring that the business is fighting fit and in a position to deliver premium-quality service and grow the business – the issue here was about re-establishing the CWU position on the resourcing mix going forward. [See *PFW article Page 15*].”

“So, there were quite a lot of big-ticket policies.”

As well as all the postal industry discussion, there were also guest speakers from the RMT and Nautilus trade unions, who received enthusiastic standing ovations after they spoke of their outrageous treatment at the hands of the P&O company.

And delegates also rose in support of our own Post Office members, whose 97.3 per cent YES vote for strike action had been announced only days earlier.

Cost-of-living crisis will Spring us into a Summer of Discontent

Many of our members in the telecoms sector, alongside all workers, are facing a cost-of-living crisis as prices rise in fuel, energy and everyday goods. Thousands have already been hit by a cut to universal credit and will be hit this spring by the national insurance hike and the raised energy price cap.

This comes at a time when many have already had a reduction in their pay packets in 2020/21 due to the pandemic, accepting job security over pay. This will put further financial stress on working families as well as continue to damage living standards across the UK.

I have been around long enough to remember the winter of discontent in the late 1970s and it's worrying that we could be heading the same way as we are seeing the biggest fall in living standards since 1956. The ball is not only in the court of the Government to ensure that thousands of families don't fall into the poverty trap – it's also at the hands of hugely profitable corporations who are able to make the choice to prioritise their people over their profits and shareholders.

As I write, our members in VM02 are currently being consulted on whether they want the union to hold a statutory industrial action ballot, following the company imposing just a 3 per cent pay rise, at a time when RPI is running at 8.2 per cent. This corporation on the one hand elevates its millions of profits and growth to the markets, anticipating a £1.6 billion cash distribution to shareholders next year, yet is unable to find the funds for a cost-of-living pay rise for its workers.

'Our telecoms sector members deserve and need a real pay rise that rewards them for their dedication and hard work, keeps real wage growth across the economy and keeps our society functioning.'

Likewise, our members working for BT, another billion-pound profitable corporation, face a below-inflation pay rise, at a time when BT proposes a dividend to shareholders in 2022 costing £761 million. Both of these groups of workers have put their lives on the line during the pandemic to ensure the company delivers on big infrastructure projects and keeps the country connected.



Wage stagnation has been happening for several years across the UK. Real wage growth needs to transform if we are to get the economy going. Key workers, who have gone above and beyond to keep the country going are exhausted and demoralised. Corporations have a choice, they can look after their profits and their shareholders or they can look after their people.

Our members in the telecoms sector deserve and need a real pay rise that rewards them for their dedication and hard work, keeps real wage growth across the economy and keeps our society functioning. Without this we are heading for a summer of discontent.

Andy Kerr

Andy Kerr

**DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY
(T&FS)**



Ready to ballot - prepare for action - get organised to strike

Grassroots pressure from members and branches forces the 10 per cent pay claim onto the agenda. CWU's T&FS leadership adopts the 'perfectly justifiable' policy but warns: 'It won't be won without a hard fight'...

With a flat-rate £1,200 pay offer from BT/Openreach rejected by the union at the end of last month, and little sign of the business meeting the union's pay demand, momentum towards a national strike ballot increased and deputy general secretary Andy Kerr advised all branches and members to get prepared.

In percentage terms, the company's opening offer ranges from less than 3 per cent for the highest grades (2.67 for TMD1s), to just over 6 per cent for the lowest (TMCCV1, 6.31) with mid-point grades TMB2 and TMNE2 at 3.8 and 4.66 respectively.

"We were absolutely right to reject the offer," says Andy Kerr. "At almost every equivalent percentage level, the BT/Openreach position is still below the March 2022 CPI figure of 6.2 per cent – meaning that this offer represents a real-terms pay cut for almost all members – and it's some considerable distance further below the March 2022 RPI of 8.2 per cent.

"This is why the grassroots demand for a 10 per cent pay rise – a call which emerged from word-of-mouth conversations between engineers, desk-based and customer-contact centre workers and other functions and grades right across the company – is a perfectly fair one and it was absolutely right that the T&FS executive endorsed that demand and put it forward to the company as our pay claim."

As well as a natural economic response to the highest inflation for 30 years, the 10 per cent claim also emerged from the anger and frustration felt by members at their treatment

by the business over the past two years. There was no consolidated wage rise in 2021 and an increase of only 1.5 per cent the year before.

And it is this anger – coming on top of the clumsy, insensitive and, in many members' opinions, downright hostile approach that the business took towards the implementation of its workplace reorganisation programme over the same period – that has hardened attitudes among the workforce and built the determination from the ground up to win.

At a national CWU T&FS forum last month, delegates gave a rousing reception to opening speeches from Andy and our general

secretary Dave Ward, followed by branch-by-branch reports indicating how deep, strong and solid the strength of feeling among members is at this time.



secretary Dave Ward, followed by branch-by-branch reports indicating how deep, strong and solid the strength of feeling among members is at this time.

"It's 10 per cent no less" and "our members are ready for action" were phrases heard constantly as a spokesperson for each branch got up, in turn, and told the meeting of the results of member consultations held within their respective areas.

Other contributions referred to the on-the-ground reality that "this pay campaign has

already started" and that "members themselves have kicked it off" in reference to the widely shared and supported 10 per cent demand, something which, according to branch reports, has "been trending on Openreach Workplace."

Another big point that was made several times was the large profits being made by BT Group, particularly over the course of the pandemic – profits generated, of course, by the hard work, the dedication and professionalism of the company's workforce. A large proportion of these workers were out and about throughout the worst of the crisis, still visiting homes and essential businesses and playing a major role in keeping our nation going through that traumatic period.

"That branch forum was, for me, very different to others we've had in the past," reflected Andy Kerr afterwards. "The absolute focus on winning a fair deal on pay, the sheer strength of feeling and the unity of purpose were quite striking.

"And something else that was different was the completely united tone from the various branches.

Branches where there has not previously been a tradition of pushing for action reported just as much determination from their members to fight and win on pay as branches with more 'militant' reputations.

"I really do think the business has miscalculated and has completely misjudged the mood of the workforce," Andy said.

"Be in no doubt, we are deadly serious about our 10 per cent pay claim. We're ready to ballot, we're preparing for action and we're organising to strike."

MOBILE TEAM DROPS – IS THIS THE FUTURE FOR URBAN PARCELS DELIVERY?

In response to the ever-increasing local authority restrictions on vehicles within inner-city areas, Manchester Central Delivery Office has been trialling a foot-based parcel delivery method, generating a mixed bag of feedback...



For four weeks in March, a small group from within Manchester CDO have been seconded to the *Ford Mobility Trial* – named for the company whose data system is being used to run this method.

CWU outdoor secretary Mark Baulch asked *The Voice* to come and see the trial in operation and speak to some of the participants, along with area delivery rep Kieran Regan and North Wales North West divisional rep Paul Dugdale.

“We do need to be looking ahead, particularly the way things are going with

cities bringing in emissions charges and clean-air zones,” says Mark. “And although electric vehicles are a part of the answer, there could well be, in the future, blanket restrictions on all forms of vehicles in dense urban spaces for congestion reasons – and the concept here aims to reduce overall vehicle numbers.

“So that’s the reason for this trial, which uses technology developed by Ford Mobility – a subsidiary of Ford Motors – and they approached Royal Mail, who, in turn, asked us to carry out this proof-of-concept trial.”

Manchester CDO serves the M1 to M4 postcodes and there are 140 staff in total here – with this trial taking place in the M4 area and either six or seven delivery workers working on it each day – two driving the vans and the other four or five delivering on foot.

The drivers drop off their on-foot colleagues, unload and unfold their new flat-bed trolleys and load them with the ‘sorting cubes’ that contain their customers’ parcels. And then they head off on their rounds.

(*Voice* readers who were involved in ‘Starburst’ urban delivery projects of 10 to

15 years ago may recognise a similarity in this aspect of the Manchester trial method, although Starburst involved letters as well, was more a group-working based concept and was not technology-driven.)

Each trolley holds two cubes-full of parcels and, as they get their deliveries done, the data system enables them to alert their driver to come out and replenish their trolleys.

Out and about with one of the teams, *The Voice* spoke with driver Richard Sutton and on-foot delivery workers Ahmed Judge and Mel Dodgson – who was also joined out on delivery by Paul Dugdale – to get some direct involvement with them.

All of them told us that they agreed with the overall aspiration and that they appreciated the need to find non-vehicular delivery methods for inner-city areas. But concerns were voiced on the effect on productivity and some frustrations with the routing given to them by the technology.

“By van, we can deliver 250/300 per day, but on this system it’s more like 50/60,” says Judge, “it can work, but we need the system to allow us to adjust the route. You can’t beat local knowledge.” Mel comments: “I like the concept, but the tech needs massive improvement. The option to design our own routes would be better” and Richard makes the point that, during the trial, in order to complete, workers are having to put in extra hours on a daily basis.

Mark says that “if we separate the outdoor and the indoor parts of the trial – it’s fair to say that the efficiency and productivity problems we’ve seen out on delivery are not insurmountable – although the routing needs improvement – and we can see some positives too. The fall in vehicle use within the city centre – approximately a 30 per cent mileage reduction – is a good thing in terms of improving urban air quality, as well as a potentially significant cost-saving – and a safeguarding against current and future local authority restrictions.

“There’s also the argument that efficiency will naturally rise as parcel volumes increase and parcel-only delivery rounds become more dense – more items per street.”

Speaking with the CWU unit rep here, Mark White, he tells us that on-foot delivery is “OK on flat streets and routes, but it

becomes very difficult when you have to go up and down stairs.”

Earlier in the day, we spoke with some members of staff as they sorted and prepped the parcel rounds, as well as with Royal Mail

that is not included within the barcode.

The sorting split between individual and bulk makes double scanning necessary. While individual parcel deliveries are prepped for on-foot delivery, bulk parcel deliveries are still delivered by van and this stage – splitting the parcel sort – is the biggest factor in increasing the indoor time.

ADR Kieran Regan tells *The Voice*: “It’s the indoor that’s the problem here, no doubt about it. We all know we need to make this work – but we need to get the indoor sorting time under control.

“We’re undergoing a structural revision at Manchester CDO and so the feedback and the results from this trial will be helpful in making sure we get our revision right in terms of how we structure our DPR duties here and whether or not we go forward with foot-based urban parcel delivery.”

And divisional rep Paul Dugdale adds: “There’s mixed feedback from members here – on the one hand, they totally understand the concept and the method, but they feel that local knowledge and local solutions should be heard and listened to more.

“The main frustration is concerning the application of the Ford Mobility software on the indoor sort and prep of the parcels. The indoor process does seem to be quite time-consuming, meaning that they’re getting out later than scheduled.

“To reinforce my previous point about local input and knowledge, last week when the data system crashed, our members performed the sort and prep of the parcels using nothing but local knowledge, which enabled them to get out on delivery earlier than scheduled, and on the busiest day of the week.”

Summing up, Mark Baulch said: “I want to thank our members at Manchester CDO for taking part in this project and for all their feedback – we’ll certainly be taking this all on board and we’ll keep on trying with this. The underlying issues driving this trial won’t be going away, they’ll become more acute and we need to make sure we get this right.

“The key is to allow the frontline delivery workers to have flexibility in the routing and also to value the local knowledge – and ensure that, ultimately, this is the determinant and not technology. As for technology, it’s there to help us get better results, not to make the work more difficult and that’s got to be the way we approach it.”



project manager Matthew Lawlor and office manager Lee Humphries.

It is the indoor part of the day where there are greater frustrations, for several reasons. The trial system requires full address-information capture for all parcels and therefore, manual data entry is needed if

CELEBRATING PTT VICTORY, GETTING ORGANISED & GEARING UP FOR BIG PUSH FORWARD ON PAY

Visiting several regions, The Voice talked to Openreach members about the challenges they face on the job, their concerns and their aspirations...

Many were happy with the Personal Travel Time victory. However, there are still key issues of concern, such as job security and the retention of decent terms and conditions, while everyone thought a decent pay rise was an absolute priority.

Openreach members have worked through the pandemic and battled storms while delivering large-scale engineering projects such as the final phase of the fibre build in the hardest to reach areas. Copper recovery and exchange decommissioning are also huge engineering efforts, with more intensive work to come. Whilst our members are up for the challenge, they are looking to be properly rewarded for their efforts.

NORTH WALES & CHESTER

We met Will le Cras, North Wales & Chester Branch chair, when *The Voice* visited in February, as he led his branch's activity marking the union's personal travel time (PTT) victory.

"It's good to celebrate our PTT victory and also to look ahead to the big issues coming up," he said, as he held open-day events with members at Rhyl Telephone Exchange and at the engineering yards at Chester and at Llandygai, near Bangor, handing out special 'PTT Victory Cupcakes' to them as they arrived to pick up their vehicles, equipment and stores.

"What has come over loud and clear from our members in the conversations we had and in feedback we've received since then is that they were all very pleased with the union's victory on PTT," said Will. "The mood has been very upbeat among members, whether they were affected by PTT or not, they're all saying it's a welcome bit of good news.

"And members also raised other concerns with us, including training, promotion opportunities and the impact of the network transition – all of which we're working on as well," Will added, making the point that these open-day events are something that he aims to organise regularly.

"It's really important to keep up this continual face-to-face engagement with our members. It keeps us in touch with everything and members know where and when they can speak direct to their branch reps."

Tom Peel, one of the new branch USRs, agrees and adds: "It was a great win on PTT and members are really pleased about it." Will and Tom estimate that around half of the approximately 700 Openreach engineers in the branch benefit directly from this and Tom makes the point that, for him personally, "as someone who was recruited on the *Workforce 20:20* contract, this achievement by the union makes a massive difference to me, as well as for lots of my colleagues."

Turning to the issue of pay, Tom said: "We're 18 months behind in real terms and we need maximum determination and unity to win on pay."

Will says that "our engineers are clear that we deserve a 10 per cent rise with no caveats and no strings," and explains that the branch feels that this would be a fair settlement on account of the high rate of inflation and the failure of the business to offer a consolidated pay award last year.

"This is a reasonable aim and it's what our members feel we are worth," he added.

National Officer Davie Bowman says:

Pay is one of the biggest current issues among our Openreach members and it's the one that the executive is giving top priority to. It's no surprise our Openreach members have been infuriated by the company's pay offers, or lack off, over this past period and the rising rate of inflation, plus the company's profitable financial situation makes the demand outlined by Will's branch here – and echoed by branches and members around the country – a perfectly justifiable demand. I'm glad there was such a positive response to the PTT success, and we need to follow this up with success on pay as well. Yes, our members do deserve this, but we're going to have to fight for it.



'We're not going to accept a wholesale lowering of overall pay rates and this is an issue we're pursuing with the business at all levels.'

GLASGOW

Glasgow & Motherwell Branch secretary Anton Begley tells *The Voice* that, with one of the company's largest desk-based operations being located in Glasgow, imposition of unagreed gradings is a big issue being taken up by him and the branch.

As longer-serving staff have retired, or taken early voluntary severance packages, and while the union at national level continues to negotiate with the business to ensure a fair deal for existing desk-based teams, a serious new problem is being created by management in their recruitment of new, replacement employees at lower rates of pay.



We visited Glasgow last month and met Anton as he popped in to see members at Dial House on Pitt Street during what was their first week back in the office since the Covid crisis began.

"Up here in Scotland, the return to office working has been much slower than down in England," he said, in reference to the different regulations being applied by the devolved Scottish authorities. "We still have mask wearing in shops, food premises, public transport and at most indoor situations."

And we see that workplace rules are still in operation north of the border as well – employees wearing masks while moving around the office and only taking them off when at their own work stations.

"The gradings issue is the big difficulty here. They've brought in around 200 new workers on these unagreed grades over the past year or so and, because of the Covid restrictions and the working from home, a lot of the basic union organising has been difficult. "But, over the past couple of months or so, we've managed to recruit around 80 of the new starters into the CWU – and this is part of what I'm here for today as well.

"We need to recruit them into the union and we're also pushing hard for an agreed approach to gradings now and going forward. Our view, as a union, is that they're not getting a fair deal."

In the office, it seems that management have created a divide between longer-serving staff and the newer recruits. And this is something which Anton is determined to overcome.

"Because they're new here, it's as if management are taking a stricter approach towards them, and what we need to do as a union is build their confidence as we push for their gradings to be resolved properly."

A big issue locally is the state of Dial House, a 1930s-built premises which Anton says has been "described as not fit for purpose."

"The official plan is for all our desk-based work to be relocated to BT's Alex Graham House by the river – there's going to be about 1,000 workers there altogether across the different business groups – so a lot of us are asking why they brought people back to this old building, instead of getting the new premises ready and going straight there.

"Another instance of the company making a decision that doesn't make sense to us."

Anton says that the personal travel time (PTT) victory was well received here, and that "it makes a huge and positive difference to many of our field engineers and PTT was something that had been a real bugbear for a considerable time."

On pay, he says that the 10 per cent demand is widely heard among his members as well and that there has been talk in his branch about the potential need for industrial action on pay.

National Officer Davie Bowman says:

This has also been happening at BT/Openreach sites in Belfast, and Cardiff. They're calling these sites 'flex-centres' and it's a part of their location strategy, but these pay rates and grades are unagreed as far as the CWU is concerned and also downright wrong.

We don't accept and we're not going to accept a wholesale lowering of overall pay rates and this is an issue we're pursuing with the business at all levels. Anton is absolutely right in pressing the company on this and is also doing a great job in recruiting the new starters into the CWU.

HIGHLANDS

“Altogether, I’ve worked for Openreach, BT and Post Office Telephones for 47 years and this is my last month before retirement,” says Scotland No.1 Branch Highlands Area chair Colin MacDougall.

The Voice met Colin at the Inverness TEC last month and joined him on his field duties as he toured his patch catching up with members and new starters.

“I try to get out and about regularly, but it’s been difficult with the Covid restrictions, which have carried on longer up here,” he says, adding: “I think this is probably my last time out and about seeing our field members.”

Colin explains that the Highlands Area of the branch includes the Western Isles, plus Orkney and Shetland to the north, goes as far east as Elgin and south to the Fort William area.

“It’s a big, big area – huge,” he comments, adding that, when he first joined the union, there was a separate Highlands & Islands Branch and he adds that “Davie Bowman used to be branch secretary here.”

Up in the hills just outside Inverness, we speak with Kevin Maclean, clerk of works for the area, who tells us about his job and the responsibility it entails regarding the communications infrastructure, location and state of repair of primary connection points and distribution points across the patch.

Then Colin heads north towards Dingwall and Invergordon to catch up with some of the new field engineers the company has taken on over the past months and we stop for chats with Julia Douglas and Drew Mackenzie about CWU membership.

Englishwoman Julia tells us how she moved up here from Slough, Berkshire, while Drew, trying to locate what seems to be “a battery fault between the cab and the customer” is a local man who has switched to this job from a previous career in local government.

“The business has employed about 50 or so new engineers in this section over the past year and we’re catching up now in terms of bringing them into the CWU,” explains Colin.

“It’s a mix of face-to-face when I can, but also email and phone. We tell them what the union has done and can do for them. The PTT win was a good boost for the union and right now a lot of issues of course around the cost of living and so pay.”

David Karikas is working by the bank of the Cromarty Forth, at a junction box that appears to have been damaged by a vehicle – “the box has collapsed and there’s damage to the joints and cables inside,” he tells us, his accent revealing another non-Scot – but from quite a bit further away than Slough, David having moved here from Toronto in Canada.

Matt Renard and Katie Parr have just returned from a job in a nearby rural area where, Kate says: “We were traipsing across hills and fields and the phone signal was quite bad in some places.”



Having been with the business 14 years, Kate was not personally affected by the PTT system, but she describes the resolution to this achieved by the union as “a great result,” particularly for colleagues such as Matt, who was employed on the 20:20 contract.

“It was a really nice surprise and getting it sorted is grand,” Matt says, adding: “Because of the large area I cover, it often meant I had to do extra travelling.”

National Officer Davie Bowman says:

Colin has been a faithful and loyal member and representative of this union for many years, going back to the days when I was the Inverness branch secretary, as well as being a personal friend and comrade of mine. Although of course we’re sorry to see him go, we also all wish him a very happy and peaceful retirement. And how typical of Colin that he should spend his last month going out and about around the area building the union for the future, recruiting new starters and helping members as he’s always done.



Tracey Fussey
CWU assistant secretary



INDUSTRIAL ACTION BALLOT ON PAY ‘LOOKING LIKELY’ IN TELEFONICA/VM02

Imposition of a sub-inflation pay deal by the telecoms company has brought thousands of angry workers to the brink of a full-on industrial action ballot...

“To say we’re deeply disappointed at the actions and attitude of the business is a massive understatement,” CWU assistant secretary Tracey Fussey told *The Voice* as a nationwide consultative pay ballot increased the pressure for a fair pay deal at the company.

“We asked our members in the company to vote YES if they agreed with the statement that the business is profitable, can afford more, should pay more, and must return to negotiations. And that, if the company refuses to negotiate, the CWU should move to a statutory industrial action ballot.”

Explaining some of the background to the dispute, Tracey said: “What’s happened here is that this hugely profitable company has imposed a pay settlement of 3 per cent on staff, while at the same time raising its prices

to customers by 11 per cent.

“At a time when inflation is the highest it’s been for decades – 8.2 per cent RPI and 6.2 per cent CPI – Telefonica/VM02 workers are expected to settle for a pay deal of less than half the cost of living.

“Our hard-working members have served the public throughout the pandemic, have regularly gone the extra mile to ensure customer needs are met, have put in extra hours and shifts to make sure the nation has remained connected. And in return for all this, they have been, quite frankly, insulted by their employer here.”

As well as imposing the sub-inflation pay rates for 2022, Telefonica/VM02 chiefs have also indicated that they will impose an even lower settlement for 2023, of 2 per cent.

The calling of a consultative ballot was aimed at proving to the company the sheer

strength of feeling on the issue of pay, and provide clear proof that the workforce rejects the way that the business is treating them.

It is hoped that the result of this poll will persuade Telefonica/VM02 bosses to re-open pay negotiations and put together an improved and more acceptable pay proposal.

But equally, this could lead to a full, statutory industrial action ballot in accordance with the law – if the company still refuses to budge.

“I want to thank every member who voted in this poll – which I think shows the strength of feeling among the Telefonica/VM02 workforce around the country.

“The big test for the people running this company is whether they will stop and listen to their workers, re-open pay negotiations and work with us to reach a fair settlement.

“Over to you VM02.”

TUPE talks deliver important safeguards for Supply Chain members

Negotiations with BT Supply Chain and logistics giant GXO – that were triggered by BT’s decision to outsource warehousing and transport operations – have delivered a raft of safeguards and reassurances for those impacted.

Despite the CWU’s in-principle disagreement with the outsourcing, the union has been focussing on defending the interests of members going forward. These include not just the 288 Supply Chain staff who are now set to transfer to GXO on 1st May but also the 322 employees who will remain in BT Supply Chain.

Particular clarity is urgently being sought over the future of around 60 employees carrying out staging and configuration work at Magna Park, Staines, Leicester and Thatcham. With those staff apparently not in scope for TUPE to GXO, but without any real clarity of their future in BT either, CWU assistant secretary

Tracey Fussey tells *The Voice*: “The lack of certainty over the future of this operation is unacceptable. We’re committed to seeking an in-house solution and we’ll continue to make representations to the company accordingly.”

Business-like discussions with GXO over the TUPE transfer, which have now concluded, have delivered a raft of assurances which indicate that the company is committed to work with the union to ensure the full range of TUPE protections for transferring staff are implemented in full.

These include a commitment to honour to the 2022 BT pay review and any October increments, as well as to grant the CWU full recognition rights that will allow the union to negotiate on behalf of members in future pay rounds.

Working hours, bonus payment percentages, notice periods and annual leave entitlements remain unchanged

– and assurances on the continuity of pension provision have also been given as a result of the union’s representations.

Tracey explains: “Although pensions are not covered under TUPE regulations, members currently have elements of pension arrangements which were negotiated by the CWU and are therefore considered to be under a collective agreement, which provides contractual protection.

“This refers specifically to the employer contribution rate of 10 per cent and any additional transition arrangements. GXO has agreed to replicate the current employer contribution rates.”

The CWU has also received assurances that BT will seek to conclude the *Driving Allowance* review that it agreed to conduct prior to the TUPE transfer, and that GXO will complete the review if it has not been concluded by 1st May.

Clock is ticking towards Post Office strike action

Despite attempts to get meaningful negotiations under way, senior management have not yet tabled an acceptable pay offer...



Post Office bosses have had plenty of time to put together a sensible and serious pay proposal since the announcement of our strike ballot result, but they seem to be just going through the motions here," said CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey when *The Voice* spoke with him recently.

"They're heading for a big shock if they don't start to get real and sort this out," he continued, adding that "if we are forced to strike, the action will be sharp and effective and will be supported by the whole of the CWU."

The enormous 97.3 per cent YES vote on a relatively high 70 per cent turnout was indicative of the anger felt by Post Office counter staff and their admin and supply chain colleagues at the attitude that their employer has shown towards them.

"It's worth reminding ourselves that this is a dispute over 2021 pay, but we need to address 2022 as well," says Andy. "There was no pay

award last year and this is what makes our members so angry – it's the couldn't-care-less approach that senior management are taking towards them.

"And as we all know, the cost of living is up and away rising month on month, making it more and more difficult to afford the regular household budget."

Last month's national postal policy forum gave a rousing standing ovation to our Post Office members and pledged unanimous support for them in their struggle, in a show of solidarity which, Andy says, "was a big morale booster for our members.

"If, or as is looking more and more likely, when we take action, it'll be good to know we have all the members of this great union standing with us shoulder to shoulder."

While the dispute, and the question on the ballot paper, focusses entirely on pay, there are other issues that the union wants to make progress on with the employer and, if meaningful negotiations do commence, the

ongoing future of the Crown network will be a key issue.

"We're not diverting away from the pressing matter of pay – that's the formal trade dispute we have with the employer. However, our members' job security and the protection and preservation of the remaining Crown network is of utmost importance to us and we will be wanting a serious conversation on that.

"Closures and franchising have got to stop and we need a reversal of the 'managed decline' that a succession of Post Office bosses have operated over the past couple of decades."

Andy tells *The Voice* that, for the people at the top, "the choice is 100 per cent theirs.

"Continue to choose conflict and strife – and you'll get conflict and strife, we promise you. This union knows how to fight.

"But choose co-operation and positivity instead and this union will work with you for the benefit of our members and our network – surely that is the better option."

PARCELFORCE REFORMS BOOST QUALITY OF SERVICE, BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN

Visits to depots in Edinburgh and Manchester reveal a positive picture of increased driver-route control improving productivity, in line with an overall positive national trend, although issues around training and safety need to be tackled...

At last year's national Parcelforce reps' national briefing, I remember saying: 'Watch this space' after we concluded our discussions with our regional and depot reps about how we could work together to address operational and other issues," says CWU assistant secretary Davie Robertson.

Quality of service problems, disappointing ETA stats, workplace relationship issues and rigid tech-dictated routes were combining to cause serious grounds for concern.

"We wanted to work together to turn this around and, after a series of depot visits around the UK with senior managers from PFW and RMG – including Group CEO Simon Thompson and our DGSP Terry Pullinger – we called that national briefing to actively involve our members and reps as much as possible," recalls Davie.

Systems problems, computerised routing that seemed to operate illogically and managers either unable or unwilling to apply flexible approaches to problems being created were major themes coming from the delegates at the time – including anecdotes of depot arguments and rows, drivers being blamed for system failures and stories of vehicles being routed back and forth across the same town and even back to the same street more than once.

"It was clear from that feedback, from what we discovered on our own operational visits last year and on the basis of the written

submissions received from our reps that there was an urgent need to put the driver back in control of the delivery and of the routing and, following detailed discussions at national level, the new policy of giving the driver the choice of whether to follow the automated routing or to design his or her own route has been introduced."

At the Edinburgh and Manchester Parcelforce depots, which *The Voice* visited with Davie last month, a hybrid of the two is in place. Some drivers continue to use the Auto or Optimised Route Excellence or 'REX' routing system, while others design their own delivery route – a practice referred to within the business as 'drawing the line'.

"About 50 per cent of the delivery here is done on a *draw-the-line* basis," says Manchester depot CWU rep Darren Hulston, who adds that "we get more done when we do this. On Auto REX it seems that you get less done."

Darren explains that although it is a matter of choice for the driver, some of the newer recruits have not yet received their route design training and that this is something he is pursuing to ensure everyone has that opportunity.

There are approximately 160 staff in post here, about evenly split between drivers and loaders and, although the overall impression is a positive one, and relations between the rep and the depot management appear business-like and mutually respectful, the rep has concerns over driver safety – specifically personal security and the threat of criminal attacks.

Darren introduces us to a driver whose parcel delivery route regularly takes him to parts of Manchester that are notoriously high-crime areas and where he tries to time his deliveries there for the earliest parts of the day.

Davie tells him: "You should not be putting yourself in danger" and advises him and the rep of specific driver safety procedures and protocols. There is clearly a concern here for the union that existing safeguards may either not be widely known or applied or are perhaps not adequate.

The shorter working week is fully in place here and is applied at the start of each daily shift, while *items-per* statistics are in line with national agreements and overtime is regularly available.

Up in Edinburgh, when unit rep Danny Matthews tells us that traffic is down on last year, we wonder just how this depot would have operated last year, as it appears to be about as full up as it could be when we visit.

Danny says that there are 125 staff in post here and that it is Scotland's largest PFW unit – bigger than Glasgow apparently.

Fewer drivers choose to design their own routes here – approximately 20 per cent of them according to the rep – but there is training available for those who want to do this.

When asked if the daily working operation and workplace relationships have improved since last year, Danny answers: "Yes, they have, because the drivers have autonomy now to do things as they wish to do them. They have the freedom to do that."

He goes on to explain that the changes have turned the driver role back into a more professional one, not as someone being told exactly how to do the job.

Again, the depot is by no means problem free, but as at Manchester, there is a sense of working together to resolve issues and a focus on getting the parcels to the customers without compromising on quality or our members' welfare.

Summarising the national trends, Davie says that, since last autumn, "quality of service figures jumped up markedly – above 95 per cent all through peak – while on-time arrival is up as well, varying between the high 80s and low 90s.

"Introducing the choice for drivers to draw the line and everything else that was done as a result of last autumn's briefing and the nationwide depots consultation all seems to have worked really well," he said. "This proves to me that our reps really know the job, have good ideas of how to resolve problems and are collectively responsible for the all-round improvements we've seen over this recent period."

Could a strike ballot be on the way in Capita TVL?

TV licensing service provider offers pay deal at half the rate of inflation, sparking a complete rejection by the union...

Hundreds of members working for Capita TVL may be receiving voting papers on their doorsteps over the coming weeks unless a below-inflation pay offer is increased.

"It seems to be a recurring theme with companies and with senior management at the moment that they just don't appear to understand basic economics," said Andy Furey. "When prices go up, people need more money to make ends meet."

Capita TVL reps met with Andy to discuss the pay offer just days before the key

Postal Executive meeting where the decision to formally reject was taken.

"Our reps were in no doubt about the inadequacy of the pay offer and they made it clear in no uncertain terms that they were absolutely not prepared to accept it," he tells us, adding: "We would not be doing our job properly as a trade union if we were to accept a real-terms pay cut of this magnitude. And many of our Capita TVL members are not highly paid – they are losing our financially at this time.

"Our reps were unanimous in their

rejection of this proposal and it was their view that I take that position into the Postal Executive meeting – which did formally reject the company's proposal.

"In that reps' meeting, we also discussed the possibility of moving towards a formal industrial action ballot in accordance with the law and, unless we can see some significant movement on pay from the company, then this potentially will be the next step that we have to take.

"A full-on national strike ballot could be on the way in Capita TVL."



ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2022

– IT'S GREAT TO BE BACK

Later this month, hundreds of delegates from CWU branches across the UK will head to Bournemouth for our first Annual Conference since 2019. *Voice* looks ahead to the six-day event...

Firstly, it'll be brilliant just to see everyone back together again – and to once again be able to engage in direct, face-to-face discussion and debate," said our general secretary Dave Ward when we caught up with him a couple of weeks ago.

"And of course, we've got a lot of business to get through. We've already started to meet again in person and there have been several national gatherings and activities since 2022 started – but Annual Conference is of course the really big CWU event of each year and there are important decisions to make as we collectively chart our way forward."

Not only is this the main CWU gathering of the year, it's also longer than in previous years, with three days of 'general' conference business – issues for the whole of the union – and three 'industrial' days, when our Postal and our T&FS delegates will meet separately. The new CWU Affiliate App has proven to be a huge success and a motion

scheduled for the first session of conference introduces a discussion on how we can develop this new initiative further. Other propositions on the opening day focus on the legal services we provide to members, our ongoing strategies and plans to grow the union's membership and the important question of the union's finances.

'We're looking forward to Conference – it'll be brilliant to see everyone back together again – and once again engage in direct, face-to-face discussion and debate.'

"This part of conference is all about how we organise and make sure we're getting ourselves into shape – and keeping in shape – for the struggles ahead," explains Dave, adding: "There's been significant restructuring over the past few years and we keep this under constant review, put things right where necessary and build on the many successes and most of all keep the improvements going."

"The better organised we are, the better able we will be to respond quickly and effectively to events and to engage with and involve all our members."

Other, wider issues are on the agenda for Day One as well, including the climate situation and our living environment, models of public ownership and democratic control, and key social issues such as mental health, tackling domestic violence and supporting its victims, and caring for our nation's elderly and vulnerable.

"As well as all the fantastic work our union carries out in workplaces all around the UK, our members and activists are often active citizens in their communities as well," our general secretary explains, "and so these broader social issues are of key importance and these debates will no doubt spark some thoughtful and informative discussion."

Day Two is Equality Day. This will be the first time that we have done this at our Annual Conference and it puts into practice one of the major reforms decided upon during our Redesign process.

when we ended the former practice of holding separate 'Equality Strand' conferences at different times of the year.

CWU head of equality, education & development Kate Hudson told *The Voice* that she is "really looking forward to this. It's so important that all the equality strands combine and also that this is held right in the midst of Annual Conference, so that all delegates get the opportunity to discuss, debate issues and create policy."

'On Equality Day there'll be a lot going on and it'll be a varied and different day of conference – we're hoping it will be a real success.'

"This is in line with our main strategic aim of bringing all of our equality strands into the mainstream of our union's work and making equality part of everything we do – and we were scheduled to do this at our 2020 Annual Conference, but of course it was delayed by the Covid crisis."

There are 13 motions on the agenda for the day – covering subjects such as LGBT+ rights, the gender pay gap, men's health, the campaign of the WASPI Women against pensions injustice, fighting against so-called 'conversion therapy', and highlighting the issues around sexual harassment of women and the need for support and training to better tackle this problem.



"We're hoping Equality Day will be a real success," says Kate, adding: "There are also several motions looking at how we can improve our own internal approach to equality – both in terms of the education, training and development we can offer and also with regard to workplace representation."

It will certainly be a busy day, with conference welcoming Adam Pearson (actor and disability rights campaigner); Rapper J, (an ADHD awareness advocate) and TUC head of equality Kudsia Batool as guest speakers.

"And we're also holding a lunchtime fringe meeting on mental health – so there will be a lot going on and it'll be a varied and different day of conference," Kate predicts "and we're all really looking forward to it."

Day Three continues the political agenda with propositions looking at the way we elect our Parliament and whether the CWU should support moving away from our current 'first-past-the-post' system and towards the 'proportional representation' method that many other countries use.

"There are strong arguments for reform and campaigns such as Make Votes Matter, for example, argue that many people's votes are effectively wasted under our current system."

On the other hand, some people will counter-argue, equally strongly, that the present system delivers clear results and is easier to understand. I'm expecting this to be an extremely interesting debate and it's one that I'm looking forward to," says Dave.

The CWU held the first residential training weekend of our Working Class Candidates Programme last month [see report on P24/25] and another motion on the Day Three agenda pad seeks to build on this success with a number of ambitious targets for developing this programme further.

Also up for debate will be propositions on building the fight against child poverty, defending state pensions and resisting any moves to raise the age of entitlement, campaigning for better rights to legal representation and justice, as well as a range of motions focusing on our internal provision of education and training.

"It's a packed agenda and there's a lot of business to get through – and we've also got a keynote guest speaker in the afternoon too. So, it's going to be a busy few days of General Conference before delegates break into their respective industrial constituencies for the three-day Postal and T&FS conferences respectively.

"There's a lot going on with both of our major employers at this time. National negotiations with both Royal Mail and BT/Openreach over pay and a whole range of other issues, as well as with our smaller companies too.

"And the whole CWU is 100 per cent united in the fight for the best possible pay, terms and conditions for all of our members. So, we're Looking forward to Annual Conference 2022 and to the successful struggles ahead.

"It's great to be back."

'The whole CWU is 100 per cent united in the fight for the best possible pay, terms and conditions for all of our members.'



CALLING T&FS WOMEN: EVER CONSIDERED BECOMING A UNION SAFETY REP?

A major push is underway across the Telecoms & Financial Services constituency to increase the number of women coming forward as union safety reps as part of the CWU's ongoing proportionality agenda. *The Voice* spoke to some of those who have already stepped up to the challenge about the rewards associated with a uniquely satisfying role...

A lot of the cases affect you personally, they really do," says West Yorkshire Branch officer for VM02 Liza Midgley, who took on union safety rep (USR) responsibilities for her branch's Telefonica O2 membership after the mass transfer of that company's contact centre operation, including the previous Telefonica USR, to Capita in 2014.



Liza Midgley

"We've had some great wins," she continues, recalling a case involving a young woman who suffered a serious facial cut just months before her wedding, after a precariously positioned promotional sign fell on her while she was working in a North East O2 store.

"The company quickly admitted liability and settled out of court," Liza explains. "Taking into account not just the injury itself – but also the mental anguish it had caused in the run-up to our member's marriage – the company offered a fair settlement, which the couple put towards their honeymoon.

"It gives great satisfaction to get a great result like that," she continues, "and we had another very positive outcome in a different store where staff had reported a sewage leak which hadn't been acted upon for months.

"When I got there, I found sewage literally trickling down a wall and collecting in the

basement, which members needed to access to use the toilet. By that stage, a couple of members had developed coughs, so we involved the Health and Safety Executive so that tests could be carried out for airborne bacteria that can affect people's lungs.

"Although no such bacteria were found, the matter was quickly resolved because the CWU's intervention forced a third-party landlord to resolve the problem."

Equally important elements of the USR role involves routine H&S assessments of workplaces to identify slip, trip and staircase hazards, potential impairments to fire escapes, the provision of fire extinguishers and the compliance and positioning of electrical equipment.

Throughout the ongoing Covid pandemic USRs have taken on a vital additional role, ensuring that every possible protection has been afforded to those whose who have worked as normal throughout the pandemic.

"Our routine H&S meetings with management increased from quarterly to monthly, with the opportunity for more in the interim. We listened closely to members to ensure they were getting the help and support they needed and I can wholeheartedly say that Telefonica looked after its employees exceptionally well on that front," Liza stresses.



Hayley Stringer

Openreach USR for the West of Cornwall, Hayley Stringer, is similarly upbeat about the contribution she has been able to make to her colleagues' wellbeing since she took on the role in 2003.

"As a woman USR I genuinely feel it's a great opportunity to shine," she enthuses.

"Sometimes you feel you're fighting, but the experience is great and you're learning all the time. The role certainly keeps me on my toes... and others on theirs as well!"

Fellow Openreach USR, Jenny Hutchinson of Northern Ireland Telecoms Branch, is equally enthusiastic. "I volunteered because I felt I could contribute something that would help others," she explained.

"Much is down to encouraging a change in culture from getting stuck into a job to one where you achieve the same result safely.

"With more women now being employed as field engineers I believe our input can give an additional insight. On safety issues, I think women can be more cautious and willing to challenge things we don't feel are right."

• Find out more about becoming a USR by approaching your local branch office or by emailing national officer Dave Jukes djukes@cwu.org

'Throughout the ongoing Covid pandemic USRs have taken on a vital additional role, ensuring that every possible protection has been afforded to those whose who have worked as normal throughout the pandemic.'



'Don't think that health and safety is boring! It's not, but more than that it's so very important to everyone in the workplace. We should all have a safe environment to work in, and women have a key role in bringing their unique life experiences to make work a better place for everyone.'

Tracy Buckley, T&FS Executive member and acting national officer



'Women need to know that reasonable adjustments can be made to assist with women's life events – such as pregnancy, maternity, gynaecological issues and menopause to name but a few. The more women share and understand the problems we have to negotiate as working women the easier our lives will be.'

Cathy Rhodes, T&FS Executive member for Capita



'I'd really encourage any woman who's interested in finding out more about becoming a USR to act without delay – not just because it's a highly rewarding and worthwhile role but because they'll be able to bring to the table their understanding of issues that predominantly affect women.'

Zoe Walmsley, T&FS Executive member for VM02

CWU tenacity delivers cash windfall for 72 members in SME Sales

Scores of Enterprise members working in Small & Medium Enterprise Sales have received thousands of pounds in ex-gratia payments from BT, thanks to an eagle-eyed CWU national team member and the union's successful challenging of a decade-old bonus miscalculation...

Under a settlement brokered by the union to right a historic wrong which has seen the 35 per cent on-target bonus (OTB) – which is stipulated in contracts of employment – underpaid since 2010, more than 50 who joined SME Desk in or before 2011 received compensatory payments of £10,000 each.

A further 20 received payouts of £8,000, £6,000 or £4,000 – depending on whether they began with the team in 2012, 2013 or 2014 respectively. And two employees, who started in 2015 and 2016, got £2,000 each.

Astonishingly, the mistake only came to light in the summer of 2020 when the correct 35 per cent OTB payment was accidentally paid in what management described as an 'error' by the Hungary-based payments team!

Subsequent moves by the business to reclaim the alleged 'overpayment' shone a spotlight on the decade-old howler. Initially flagged up to CWU

headquarters by branches on account of the repayment demand, the profound implications of management's contractual misunderstanding was immediately spotted by CWU Enterprise national team member James Samuels.

"The company's defence – that they had altered people's pay by verbal agreement in 2010 – was unprecedented and highly irregular, and to have done that without consulting the union is outrageous in itself," says James.

"But regardless of whether or not any such conversation ever occurred – and we do not believe it did – for years afterwards, Enterprise continued to issue contracts to SME Desk recruits that specifically refer to a 35 per cent OTB entitlement. As such, they really didn't have a leg to stand on!"

CWU national officer for BT Enterprise Allan Eldred says: "For much of last year management were in denial that anything had been done wrong. It was only when they

realised they could end up in court with an even larger bill that things started to move.

"Although it's taken longer than we'd wanted for these payments to finally be made, the substantial sums involved are a complete vindication of the CWU's determination to right a historic wrong."

James Samuels
CWU Enterprise
national team member

CWU WINS ON CLEANERS' PAY AND REPRESENTATION – NEXT UP, PENSIONS

It's great to get the Real Living Wage in for all our cleaners, and now we want Royal Mail pensions for everyone," says CWU national cleaning rep Eleanor Hipson.

In post since February, Eleanor's role is a full-time one and is part of a new IR agreement between the union and RMPFS (Royal Mail Property & Facilities Services).

Formerly 'Romec', (and between 2002 and 2016, part-owned by Royal Mail and construction company Balfour Beatty) the operation was brought fully back in-house six years ago, following a campaign by the CWU. Since then, the union has pushed hard for the harmonisation of pay, terms and conditions and, although there have been successes, the pensions issue remains as yet unresolved.

Among the successes are the uplift on pay and the agreed representative structure, with three regional reps also on CWU release.

"I'm from Glasgow and based at Glasgow Mail Centre, but my CWU role covers the whole UK," she explained, adding: "Our three regional reps are Nicky Booth, Chris Imms and Cathy Chilcott and they do a brilliant job, despite the fact each of them have very large areas of the UK to cover."



When asked if the agreement recently struck on the Real Living Wage will make a big difference to cleaners, Eleanor replies: "Oh aye, it takes the minimum hourly rate up from £9.35 to £9.90, which will mean about an extra £20 per week on a full-time basis."

Inner London RMPFS cleaners' rates are already above the RLW London rate, but there is an uplift in the minimum from £10.84 to £11.05 for our 'Outer London' cleaners. These adjustments are with-effect from 1st April 2022.

Other key principles agreed between the CWU and RMPFS are that these RLW up-lifts are introduced – this year and in subsequent years – outside of and without prejudice to formal pay negotiations.

As national representative, Eleanor was involved in these talks along with CWU outdoor secretary Mark Baulch and PEC

member Mick Kavanagh and, looking ahead to the formal 2022 pay, terms and conditions negotiations, she says that, as well as a fair, regular pay rise for members, a solution to the pension issue is a major priority.

"Although I couldn't get to the March policy forum for personal reasons, Cathy Chilcott messaged me to tell me that the delegates had backed a policy of getting us all full Royal Mail pensions rights and I was pleased to hear it," she says, adding that this has long been an aspiration. "I would say this is a priority for us, that's what everybody's interested in, because the NEST pension most of us have is not as good," Eleanor explains.

Members also deserve a fair regular pay rise across the board in recognition of their hard work and, in particular, the extra efforts that have been demanded of them during the Covid crisis, which has been "really hard on our members – and it still is now, because cleaners are still having to pick up the Covid-cleans on top of their regular work.

"I'm hoping we can get a good deal in the 2022 negotiations on pay and on pensions especially – and we'll definitely try our very best for our great members."

Equality – an industrial struggle a fight for every CWU member

Continuing with our series of *Voice* interviews with our NEC equality leads, on this page we catch up with one of our national disabilities leads and our two national women's leads, while on the next page we speak with one of our black, Asian and minority ethnic leads...



Jonathan Bellshaw works for BT Consumer at its Lincoln site and is the assistant branch secretary for Lincolnshire & South Yorkshire Branch, as well as serving on the NEC representing T&FS members with disabilities.

"For me, the biggest industrial issues are dignity at work and reasonable adjustments," he begins.

"Reasonable adjustments should be made where necessary, should just be done. It shouldn't have to be a long and tiresome fight every single time. We'll have that fight every time if we need to – but my point is it shouldn't always be this way."

Jonathan says that he wants to get out to more workplaces and visit more branches in his NEC disabilities lead role and tells us that "I'm liaising with Dave Jukes and his team in particular – as Dave has the CWU health and safety role for BT Group.

"And equally, we've also got several non-BT Group companies and so in that respect, I've got good working relationships with the relevant officers who cover members at those employers.

"As a union, I think we're getting there. We're certainly getting better in how we facilitate involvement of people with disabilities.

"There's always more we can do. But it's definitely a good thing that we're having Equality Day at Annual Conference, because equality is something that impacts everybody.

"I think that doing it this way – in contrast to the separate conferences we used to have – will have more of an impact. I think this is the right move, to bring the whole equality agenda forward and to put equalities more front and centre in the work of our union.

"There are some great props on the pad – particularly on mental health and wellbeing and also on BSL, which is very important.

"I'm really looking forward to it."



Angela Whitter has been the NEC lead for women members from the postal constituency of the union since last October. She works at Croydon Delivery Office and has been secretary of the Croydon & Sutton Amal Branch for the past five years.

When *The Voice* spoke with Angela, she was preparing for a meeting with the CWU regional women's leads to give them advice and guidance on what they are working on currently, which is menopause and sexual/domestic abuse within the workplace.

And she told us of her aims in terms of the regional work that she wants to accomplish, saying: "What I want to do, as NEC women's lead for the postal side of the union, is to go round each region, visit their offices and help to get more women into CWU positions – not just the women's officer position, but general workplace IR roles and the branch officers' roles," she tells us.

"I want to speak to the women, the younger women especially, and let them know that they can become a rep and training will be given if they decide to do it."

When we ask if she feels whether women in the CWU are coming forward, proportionately, for representative roles and, if not, why this could be, Angela replies with an example of a woman who got in touch with her recently.

"I had a young lady get in touch with me and say that she feels she's not getting the representation she should from the local rep and even the area rep.

"So," Angela continues, "I'm going to try to help her and hopefully talk her into becoming a rep herself so she can help the females and even the males in her branch to show it can be done.

"I want to go around as many offices as I can and speak to the women and boost their morale to show them women are there to support them within the CWU."



Jean Sharrocks is now the NEC lead for our T&FS women, but when she and other NEC equality leads were first elected a few years ago, they represented members from that specific strand right across the union.

And so, she warmly welcomed the decision last year to move from one to two NEC women's leads and tells us: "It's brilliant to have Angela looking after the Royal Mail and postal members now – it's a massive help having two of us. It really strengthens what we're trying to do in fighting to bring women forward in this union."

Jean is from our North East Branch and was one of the first women in her region to become a telecom engineer when she first started working in the industry.

"There are more women coming through as engineers nowadays, which is really nice to see," she says. "I've been doing a lot of recruiting and we've just signed a cabler up this week for example, which is absolutely brilliant – a young lass who's going to be pulling the cables in."

In terms of the CWU and our success or otherwise in encouraging women forward, she says that, although there has been a lot of progress and some strong focus on this, "sometimes obstacles are put in the way of women.

"Sometimes it feels as if there's some hostility, perhaps a bit of a boozy and laddish culture – and we've seen a male bullying culture out there at times unfortunately."

Wider issues that she and Angela and the regional women's leads are currently working on are helping women going through the menopause, as well as the problem of endometriosis.

"And we're continuing our work on period poverty – but also campaigning against violence against women and harassment," Jean concludes.

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Making progress advancing BAME inclusion in CWU

Voice speaks with Ali Moosa, NEC representative for black, Asian and minority ethnic T&FS members about his work, his plans and his views...

As well as his NEC roles, Ali is also secretary of Midland No1 Branch and first started work as a BT engineer back in 1987.

“When I took on this particular NEC role in 2019, one of my objectives was to start encouraging and getting more BAME people to become more active,” Ali says. “And, over the last two years, I’ve been talking to regions, to their BAME leads, and branches as well, and I’ve been asking what they want out of their union from a BAME point of view.”

Working alongside his newly elected NEC counterpart Amarjite Singh – who represents black, Asian and minority ethnic Postal members – and with the CWU equality department, “we’ve now come up with some recommendations, a BAME toolkit, a structure and a way forward,” he reports.

“So now, there’s actually going to be a structure and a policy of the support and guidance that new BAME reps will have.”

Ali tells us that he was very pleased when last year’s Rules Revision Conference doubled the number of equality leads on the



NEC, enabling our Postal members to elect Amarjite into the role, who has, he says, “been brilliant over the last few months.

“It was a very heavy workload representing BAME members in both constituencies, but this change has helped us make more progress I think.”

Ali says that he thinks there are not enough women from Asian backgrounds becoming active within the union and taking up representative roles and he disagrees with any suggestions that this might be a cultural issue – by reminding us of the fact that India actually had a woman prime minister before

the UK did – Indira Gandhi taking office way back in 1966 – and also the premiership of Benazir Bhutto in 1988 as evidence of the active role that Asian women take in politics and society.

“So, it isn’t a ‘cultural issue,’” Ali points out, “because women are quite active in these countries. They play a major role in politics and everything else.

“But we certainly need to find out why this is not happening in the CWU.” With the ‘BAME’ acronym coming under discussion recently, we ask Ali for his thoughts on the matter and his view is that it should remain.

“I can’t see any other name being more inclusive to be honest,” he says.

Noting that the first letter of the acronym indicated the word ‘black’ Ali makes the point that, “for me, from the work I do and the people I talk to, the majority see the word ‘black’ as a political statement, not as the identity of a race of people.

“And I quite agree with that as well myself.”



CWU members say NO to racism!
CWU members joined lively demonstrations in London, Glasgow and other locations in the UK last month, marking the annual United Nations Anti-Racism Day on 19th March. A great day, which sent a powerful message – and it was great to see our former outdoor secretary Bob Gibson at the London demo!

Working people need a New Deal and we need it NOW!

Shipping giant P&O caused an explosion of anger and disgust last month, when the company summarily fired 800 seafarers and replaced them with casualised labour. Our senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns argues that this outrage proves beyond doubt that UK workers need a New Deal...



‘Are you in this mess because you don’t know what you are doing, or are you just a shameless criminal?’ was the question posed by Labour MP Darren Jones (Bristol North West) to P&O Ferries chief executive Peter Hebblethwaite when he appeared before a hastily convened Parliamentary Inquiry at the end of March.

Backbenchers from both the Transport and the BEIS (Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy) Committees held a Joint Session to question and hear evidence from company bosses, leaders of the two unions involved – RMT and Nautilus questioned company bosses – and other key industry stakeholders.

It was an uncomfortable day for Mr Hebblethwaite, as angry MPs from all sides of the political divide, including Conservative MPs, united to condemn him and the action taken by his company.

After the P&O boss openly admitted to breaking the law in the way he carried out the sackings, Conservative MP Huw Merriman (Bexhill & Battle) called for his resignation, adding that it was “untenable to come to Parliament to say you have decided to break the law, you have no regrets.”

Speaking to *The Voice* recently, SDGS Tony Kearns said: “Whilst it was remarkable to see such cross-party condemnation over this issue with not even Tories speaking up for the employer, it’s important to understand how we’ve arrived at this point”

“This is the legacy of decades-long anti-worker, anti-trade union rhetoric that has dominated the political narrative in this country. This is what you get when you have, as Tony Blair boasted, the most restrictive trade union laws in Europe.”

Tony added that “Despite the robust Joint Select Committee session, and the subsequent talk of emergency legislation being brought to Parliament, Mr Hebblethwaite has neither resigned nor been sacked and the hundreds of seafarers have not been reinstated.” This is evidence, Tony argues, of how ultimately weak the political response has actually been. “Almost 800 decent hardworking employees are sacked, summarily, but the boss still remains – there’s the real balance of power.”



The movement needs to respond

“On the very day these sackings were announced, our general secretary Dave Ward pledged the CWU’s full solidarity to the RMT and Nautilus, as did the TUC and all the other UK trade unions.

“And in London, Liverpool, Hull and Dover, as well as the port of Larne in Northern Ireland, CWU members joined next-day rallies, marches and protests demanding justice for the seafarers – protests that continued and grew.

“It’s significant that the two MPs, Huw Merriman and Darren Jones, who made such strong denunciations of P&O’s actions are the two chairs of the Transport and BEIS Select Committees respectively, and that therefore their opinions carry serious weight. It’s also significant that both represent Constituencies which are either major ports or are very close to major ports.

“Their inboxes will have been full of angry letters from Constituents either directly or indirectly affected by this scandal, or simply infuriated by it, and it’s been the furious response by workers, by their unions and by the rest of the trade union and labour movement which has articulated, expressed and focussed this public anger and pushed our Parliamentarians to act,” he pointed out.

But while new employment protections are most welcome, as is this apparent new political consensus, it would be a mistake for our movement to relax and to feel that we have achieved our aims, Tony cautions.

“At the time of writing, these 800 seafarers have still not achieved justice and until the RMT and Nautilus unions tell us they have settled, this union remains in full solidarity with their struggle and with their dispute.

“And in terms of the wider context, while it’s good to have so-called ‘loopholes’ firmly closed in law, there are still far too many restrictions on basic trade union organising, still not enough protections for people at work, and it’s still far too easy for unscrupulous employers to sack workers, cut their pay, attack their rights and worsen their terms and conditions.

“And so, while it’s great to see, for example, Labour’s new Employment Rights Green Paper – and even better to see they’ve borrowed our campaign heading and named it *New Deal For Working People* – the fight for a real New Deal cannot wait for the next election.

“We need to make this a watershed moment, to keep on campaigning, alongside our RMT and Nautilus brothers and sisters here and now, as well as alongside the rest of our trade union movement going forward.

“In fighting to defeat the outrageous actions of P&O, we will win not only for the seafarers, but for ourselves too, and for every other group of workers fighting for a fair deal, fighting for a decent pay rise, or to protect jobs, or pensions, or terms and conditions.

“We need that New Deal – and we need it NOW!”

WORKING-CLASS CANDIDATES - ORGANISING AND WINNING FOR WORKING-CLASS COMMUNITIES

Activists hoping to get elected as local councillors gathered in Manchester last month for the union's first CWU Candidate Programme Training Weekend. Part of the union's campaign to get more working-class politicians into office and to bring our Labour Party back in touch with its roots, the event covered a range of current issues and provided important advice and information to participants.

'Keep your faith, keep your morals, keep to what you believe'

Special guests Salford City Mayor Paul Dennett, Preston Council leader Matt Brown and Liverpool West Derby MP Ian Byrne addressed the opening session – aptly entitled *Against The Odds – Getting Selected And Elected*.

Paul Dennett began by saying: "I'm absolutely convinced that it's better for working class people and trade unionists to change Labour. It came from the movement – it's actually your party."

"Don't get me wrong, I understand how difficult things are, but we need to rebuild Labour to ensure it speaks to working class people, with trade unions embedded in the operation of the party."

On the core questions trade unionists should be fighting over electorally, Paul said the Tories were "drunk on the Kool Aid of regressive taxation", and that throughout this ongoing cost of living crisis, socialists must hammer home the point that "the economy doesn't work for workers."

He pointed to Salford Council – which has acted to top up the wages of care workers from companies who refuse to pay them properly – and referenced Matt Brown's work in Preston, as good examples.

Matt spoke next and said that politicians "must recognise that there's real pain in working class communities."

"That's what we should fight over. If we just put on suits and appeal to 'respectable' die-hard Conservative voters, we won't do anything positive in our areas."

"You'll face resistance if you're independently minded. You can still change things but be aware that you need to be ready to fight."

In his contribution, Ian Byrne said that "in working class communities, you can feel the hopelessness, you can feel the poverty."

Trade unionists in Labour have, he continued, "got to inspire people to take back control of their lives", adding that "Labour without socialists in it is like Anfield without the Kop."

Ian finished the session by reminding candidates that "what's going on this country is not normal, right or morally just".

His main advice for future working-class politicians was: "Know who you are and what your beliefs are."

"What's the point of gaining that power if you aren't going to utilise it for your class?"

"Keep your faith, keep your morals, keep to what you believe in – and good luck."

The afternoon session was focussed on some of the practicalities of organising and running local political campaigns and the audience heard some first-class tips and suggestions from Rachel Godfrey Wood and Laura Lunn Bates.

Rachel and Laura are experienced campaigners from the Labour Party's *Momentum* group – to which the CWU is also affiliated – and which was instrumental in helping to achieve the enormous membership growth which our party experienced between 2015 and 2019.

Highlighting Injustice – defeating prejudice

Day Two opened with *Life in the Chambers* which, as the title indicates, focussed on what can be done by councils and councillors to improve people's lives and featured a fascinating discussion between Crewe Labour councillor – and former Crewe MP – Laura Smith and Liverpool Labour councillor Sarah Doyle.

Laura talked of how she had gone from organising local anti-cuts protests in her area to winning back the Constituency for Labour in the 2017 General Election.

Discussing parliamentary etiquette and protocol, she said: "It's not designed for workers," and added that the Westminster bubble is "far-reaching" and can "suffocate political will and creative desire." Politics is, she insisted "about community activism, organising in your area and in your union."

"If a food bank is set up, it should be a campaign against the existence of food banks – its our role to highlight the injustices of

food banks, not let Tories look like Father Christmas when they turn up to help at them."

Sarah Doyle told the audience how she fell into political activity after Jeremy Corbyn became Labour leader, being selected as a councillor in Liverpool and recently becoming a cabinet member. Sarah went on to explain and outline the programme of positive measures that the council is planning to take in the period ahead across the full range of local authority areas of responsibility.

Fighting Prejudice in Our Communities was up next, and we welcomed three Labour MPs – Apsana Begum (Poplar & Limehouse), Rebecca Long-Bailey (Salford & Eccles) and Navendu Mishra (Stockport) – to this session, as well as North West Labour Party regional chair Leigh Drennan and Ellen Morrison, who represents Disabled members on Labour's National Executive Committee.

Navendu Mishra spoke about how our movement needs to think more seriously about building and sustaining structures that encourage the active involvement of more people from ethnic minority groups.

Urging delegates to get involved with Labour, he said: "We need people like you – shop stewards, who understand the workplace and modern life, in the future of the party."

Leigh Drennan discussed his experience of homophobia in workplace and social settings, saying that "we mustn't ever for one moment be lenient in the fight against prejudice" and Apsana Begum was warmly applauded for saying how "fighting racism must be central to our political programme" and pointing out: "None of us are free until all of us are free – and fighting prejudice has to be central to everything we do."

Speaking after her was Rebecca Long-Bailey, who pointed out that 74 per cent of part-time workers are women, and 57 per cent of voluntary workers are women and that "the poorest and the most deprived have been hit the worst by the pandemic".

Rebecca added the point that those at the top are "foisting stinging inequality" on those at the bottom with cuts, and it is something that the labour movement can not ignore.

Finishing the session, Ellen Morrison pointed out that while between a fifth and a quarter of the population are disabled and are generally disengaged from politics, there is a strong disabled presence in the British trade union movement.

"It's on all of us to challenge the low value of disabled people," she urged. "If you understand that disablement lies within the boundaries that society has created, you realise that these are political choices made, and we can overcome them."

The weekend ended with an inspiring talk from the *Journey to Justice* group, which led the last section of the event – *Anti-Racism, Solidarity and the Community*. This was an opportunity to bring together many of the themes that had been discussed earlier and, with the UN Anti-Racism Day coming up the following weekend, this was a chance for people to discuss and think about the importance of mobilising for this.

Speaking afterwards, our general secretary Dave Ward told *The Voice*: "Many thanks to all our guests, to all the members who came along

and also to the organisers of this successful weekend. This is exactly the type of training and motivational event that will be of great value to our activists who have a political interest.

"We wish the very best of luck to all CWU members who are standing for election in next month's locals – and if you have a local CWU candidate in your area, please contact them and offer your help and support."

"Let's win our party for the working class – and let's win for workers and communities."

Ryan O'Gorman, North Wales & Chester Branch

'I'm standing as a candidate for Flintshire County Council in the Connah's Quay Ward where I live. The speakers at this event were really inspirational and the CWU Candidate Programme training weekend has helped me learn more around campaign techniques and how to engage more with my community. Now I want to take what I have learnt and use this in my doorstep campaigning – as part of a team that can deliver real change in our communities, making policies that help working-class families.'



Julie Gibson, North Lancs & Cumbria Branch

'I'm a serving councillor representing Skelmersdale West on Lancashire County Council and I'd like to be selected as a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate. It was great to meet so many other CWU people from right across the communications industry, to swap stories and experiences and learn from each other. It was also fantastic to hear inspiring speakers, including councillors and MPs, and what I learned was massively helpful. It's always great to learn new ways to do things and to re-affirm my commitment as to why I stood and what I want to do in my councillor role – and hopefully if I can become an MP – to help improve the lives of my community.'



Dan Hermitage, Southdowns, Weald & Rother Branch

'I'm standing as a candidate for Selden Ward in the upcoming Worthing Borough Council elections. The CWU Candidate Programme training weekend was an excellently organised and inspiring event. I particularly enjoyed the panel with Rebecca Long-Bailey and also the Journey for Justice session. The advice we received, workshops we discussed at and the experiences we shared have all been invigorating ahead of the next period of campaigning. I can't wait to continue the programme further – hopefully as a councillor by then.'



Arun Chakal, London South East Postal & Counters Branch

'This CWU Candidate Programme training weekend left me feeling inspired and considering stepping up to become a local council candidate. I thought the presentations, the guest speakers and the different sessions were all extremely interesting and informative and, also, it was great to meet and hear from some of our other CWU activists who are already in these roles or standing for election. Trade unions have always played an important role in local communities and now more than ever it's essential that we get trade unionists back into them.'



WE'RE HELPING TO CARE FOR REFUGEES - FROM ALL COUNTRIES

Military conflict in Ukraine has sparked a new refugee crisis, adding to the already existing numbers of refugees from many other parts of the world. *Voice* visited one of the UK distribution hubs of charity Care4Calais and also spoke with CWUHA volunteers before they set out for Poland with vehicles laden with aid for displaced Ukrainians...

Over the past couple of years, we've helped around 600 refugees here at this hub," says Doctor Seema Khan, lead regional volunteer for the charity at its south west London hub.

"Refugees come from countries all over Europe and all over the world," she tells *The Voice*, adding that the reasons people have to leave their homelands varies widely.

As well as its ongoing work helping people in Calais, the charity also assists refugees in hubs like this all around the UK.

"People have come here from countries

such as Sudan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Albania and recently a large number have arrived from south and central America and what we do here at this facility is distribute mostly donated food, clothing that has come from members of the public and all sorts of other items needed by them.

"They're all escaping either oppression and conflict, or in many cases from serious organised crime and threats to their lives – and while their cases for residency are being decided by the Home Office, they are put up in basic catered accommodation, are not allowed

to work and are given just £8 per day to live on."

As well as liaising with local authorities and other agencies to help support the refugees, Dr Khan cites Dons Local Action and Sutton Community Farm as two organisations which provide "amazing amounts of help" to the refugee hub.

"We are entirely 100 per cent reliant on donations for the work we can do," she explains, "and Dons Local Action volunteers make up food parcels for the needy from stalls they set up outside supermarkets asking

shoppers to donate, while Sutton Community Farm donate fresh produce that we can distribute to refugees.

"Other donations – such as clothing, books and toys for children – come from individual members of the public who bring them to us."

Dr Khan has a PHD in Sports Science from Roehampton University and has been volunteering full time for the past two years. "I started out volunteering in my spare time, but after I went with others on an aid visit to refugees in Calais and saw how desperate people were there, I wanted to do more to try to help them," she explains.

CWU NEC member Steve Jones – who has been to the Calais refugee encampment and also spent two days with refugees in Bodrum in Turkey – accompanied *The Voice* on this visit to the local hub.

"It's so important that people know about the vital work being done here and at similar places to help desperate people who have

been forced, through all kinds of different circumstances, to leave their countries of origin and try to make a new life here in the UK," says Steve.



On the morning of our visit, the volunteers were setting up food and clothing stalls while refugee families arrived to collect what they needed and we spoke with some of them about

their situations and the reasons for their current circumstances.

Dr Khan explained to us that, while some were happy to talk, relieved to be in the UK; the reticence and withdrawn nature of others was due to the traumas and terrible experiences that they had escaped from and a continuing fear of being returned to it.

The charity wants to be able to do more in terms of being able to offer counselling and mental health support, she continued, but that limits

on resources mean that the primary focus is on purely practical assistance at this time. And will be for the foreseeable future.

"And if people can help with donations or volunteer their time, that's great. The more that people are able to donate, the more that we are able to help people."

"CWU members have a long tradition of helping good causes, particularly through the fantastic CWUHA charity, and at a time when conflict and refugees are, very sadly, at the top of the news agenda, our members have been quick to offer to help in all sorts of ways."

MERCY MISSION TO POLAND – HELPING DISPLACED UKRAINIANS IN DIRE NEED

As well as continuing to support Care4Calais, the CWU responded quickly to the acute crisis in Ukraine, from where an estimated 3.5 million people fled when military hostilities broke out at the end of February.

Many *Voice* readers will, no doubt, have been following online the progress of the CWUHA mercy mission to Poland – a special delivery of much-needed medical supplies, non-perishables, sanitary products, warm coats, blankets, babies' nappies and other desperately needed items for displaced Ukrainians. The majority of these items were donated by Pastor John Williams and the community group NMCC Neath.

Branches and members gave generously to the CWUHA appeal, raising thousands of pounds-worth of goods, plus cash to fund more. Royal Mail donated the use of an articulated lorry and trailer, as well as a boxer van, and the two vehicles journeyed more than 1,300-miles to a refugee distribution centre in Poznan, Poland.

According to the UN, over two million Ukrainians – some two thirds of the total - who have left Ukraine have gone to Poland, while around half a million have arrived in Romania. Those fleeing to Moldova and Hungary have numbered some 370,000 and 320,000 respectively, while just over a 250,000 have arrived in Slovakia.

"We decided that the main refugee hub in Poland was the best place to head for – which is why we routed our CWUHA mercy mission there," explains Carl Webb, CWUHA chair and the union's North West Region secretary.

"But we've also done what we can to help Ukrainians taking refuge in Moldova as well," he added. "As people know, the CWUHA has regularly run mercy missions to the Phoenix Centre in Riscani, Moldova, and we've been strongly supporting the efforts of Victoria Dunford and MADaid, they've managed to make the facilities there available to Ukrainian refugees."



Princess Royal Distribution Centre driver Sonya Michael and Birmingham Mail Centre driver Keith Archbold volunteered to drive the artic on the continental trek and, speaking

to *The Voice* before leaving, Sonya told us why she had asked to go.

"It just touched me watching on the news a nine-year-old girl who'd lost her whole family and I just thought that whatever we can do, we all have to do what we can – and I can drive an artic, so why not me?" she said.



Her co-driver Keith has been on several previous CWUHA missions, and he said that the prospect of the long-haul ahead did not bother him at all. "It's what I do for a living,"

he pointed out, adding: "It's just really nice to be able to help by doing something that I'm good at."

CWU Eastern Region secretary Paul Moffatt and North Lincs & Cumbria Branch member Chris Webb opted to co-drive the Royal Mail boxer van, with Paul speaking for the whole group by giving a hearty vote of thanks to CWU branches for their "fantastic response" to the appeal and Chris adding a reminder that "people can carry on donating. "And please do, because this crisis continues for these poor people out there."



REBELLIOUS LEADERS IN HISTORY – BIG JIM LARKIN

We hope that this article will be the first in a series about standout individuals from history who led popular uprisings of the people, we begin with early 20th-century trade unionist James Larkin, affectionately known as ‘Big Jim’

Of all the great figures of working class radicalism, James Larkin stands high. Known as ‘Big Jim’ to many of the workers he had led, Larkin was one of the major instigators of the workers’ movement in the last century, a ceaseless militant who inspired thousands and fought to improve the fortunes of some of the most exploited workers of his day.

Born in January 1873 to Irish immigrants on the Scotland Road in Liverpool, Larkin was born into profound poverty, and began work at the age of seven to support his family. After gaining an apprenticeship in the factory his father was employed in, he was sacked after two years when his father died. Following this, he walked to Cardiff and London to find work. However, he was unsuccessful, and returned to a life on Liverpool docks.

By the time he was 29, Larkin had managed to become a docks foreman. But the life of rising through the ranks wasn’t for him; throughout his working life, he had been committed to the socialist politics of the Independent Labour Party and was a steadfast union man. In 1905, he respected a strike on his site by worse-off workers, losing his foreman’s role as a result.

After losing his position due to his militant stance, Larkin became a full-time organiser in the National Union of Dock Labourers – a role which would define the rest of his life. There, he organised dockers from Lancashire to Leith, pushing for improvements in the living standards of docklands people.

It was through the NUDL that in 1907, he was sent to Belfast to organise the mighty docks strike of that year. Throughout that tumultuous spring and summer, both Protestant and Catholic dock workers united to support union recognition, with the serious support of that city’s working class – they stand they took was so respected that even the local police mutinied when they were ordered to protect scabbing workers.

Though the strike was ultimately unsuccessful, it established Larkin in the labour movement as a powerful orator and unique organiser. He soon became a popular figure particularly among the workers of Dublin, where he was briefly elected to the council (it was revealed he had a criminal record from a previous strike and was removed).



This popularity rose to legend status during the 1913 Dublin Lockout, where Larkin was a key leader in the fight of Dublin’s workers. The strike, which began in summer 1913, was also about the right to unionise – particularly against the industrialist William Martin Murphy’s commitment to ensuring workers in the city sign pledges that they would not join the union.

The strike saw some of the greatest violence ever meted out against Dubliners by the police, who injured hundreds of people. Alongside James Connolly, Larkin founded the Irish Citizens Army, a militia to protect workers from police assaults. Larkin’s international connections meant huge amounts of material support was offered from across the world, particularly from London and northern England, where workers sent huge amounts of food to striking Dubliners.

Unfortunately, the lack of wider solidarity saw Dubliners starved back to work in January 1914. After this, a devastated Larkin was sent on a speaking tour of America, where he was when World War One began. Agitating against the slaughter of the trenches and organising strikes, he was jailed as a revolutionary instigator at the infamous Sing Sing prison; while a political prisoner, he was elected as a member of the Moscow Soviet by local clothing workers who wanted to show solidarity with him.

After being released and returned to Ireland in April 1923, Larkin took up his role in the labour movement once again. He spent a period of time as a member of the Dail, the Irish Parliament, but struggled to keep up with changed times in a post-revolutionary Ireland and never returned to his past greatness. But in late 1946, he fell through the stairs in a freak accident during a renovation at a trade union hall. Though he survived his fall, he never recovered from his injuries, dying in January 1947.

Despite his life being cut so significantly short, ‘Big Jim’ had lived a full life. His track record of inspiring workers to stand up for themselves and demand better in incredibly difficult circumstances should stick with us today – as should his philosophy of his own life, which he once said was to have been to “preach the gospel of divine discontent” among workers across the world.

Thanks for all your caption entries for the photo of our very own general secretary Dave Ward.

A few of you went with a Michael Caine/Italian Job theme, while others likened the photo to the iconic Lord Kitchener WWI recruitment poster! But we felt that, with the various industrial disputes breaking out, the winner should be the straightforward: “Tell the lads we ain’t ‘avin’ it” by London member Jeffrey Till.

It was great to see people from our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities represented at last month’s big anti-

racism march in central London. And it’s a big step forward that the prejudice and discrimination that these communities face is at last being recognised as the racism that it is and is being challenged more than in the past. John here and his horse Roma were at the head of the demonstration and amid the noise of the day, Roma became a little bit lively once or twice.

What do you think John is saying to his horse here? Please send your suggested caption to voicecompetition@cwu.org



CAPTION COMPETITION

WARD SEARCH

Congratulations to the Wardsearch ‘Goodie Bag’ Winners. The first 10 correct solutions – with the correct answer to the bonus question – were received from...

- Jeanette Moffatt, Bristol
- Roger Breeze, Shropshire
- Tina Holmes, Leicestershire
- Paul Merrick Birmingham
- Viktoras Smeizys, South Lanarkshire
- Howard Hudson, Manchester
- Gabriel Hagan, Northern Ireland
- Peter Butler, Solihull
- Lindsay Matthews, Essex
- Mark Fisher, Milton Keynes

...and the answer to the bonus question was The Matchgirls Strike

Could you be a Wardsearch winner this time? We’ve chosen an optimistic seasonal theme this time, so can you find these 12 springtime-related words in the grid – and Dave’s bonus word.

Take a photo of your solution, send to voicecompetition@cwu.org and the first 10 correct solutions, with the correct bonus word, that we receive will win the GoodieBag!

Best of luck folks!

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

- Lambs
- Easter
- Maypole
- Whitsun
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