



The communications union

South East Central

2022 Annual Report



In Confidence for South East Central CWU members

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Front cover

Memories of 2022!

The CWU Telecoms picket outside
Withdean Grange Exchange.

The views expressed in this annual report are personal to the author concerned and may not be the view of the branch. This report is "in confidence" and is meant for CWU South East Central members only.

Chairs Report - Dave Kauffman



Hello everyone. I, as the Chairperson of South East Central Branch, would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have participated with and supported the Branch during the year of 2022, it has been a challenging year with Industrial action taking place. The support that members gave me and the

other officers in running the picket lines was fantastic and I want to go on record to say thank you to each and every one of you.

I would like to thank the Branch Secretary for the hard work that he puts in driving the branch forward, anyone who has worked within any organisation will know these things do not just happen

As for my role this year in the Branch, I have the lead role on most things in Openreach within the industrial remit as well as taking on the regional coordinator role for Openreach in the South East Region. This not only supports our branch, but also the branch's adjoining us, by holding meetings with your senior managers.

I also have represented members at grievances and disciplines in which they may find themselves involved in. As the chair of the branch I try and have an overview of the activity in the Branch and to make sure that all the other officers have the ability to represent, you our members, in all aspects of the company's discipline & grievance process.

I'm not sure how we can mention 2022, from a work perspective, without talking about the Industrial action. As a branch, we ran a number of picket lines and they were well supported. It was the first time industrial action had been called, by the Telecoms constituency, for over 35 years. In many ways this was a new experience for



many. I would like to thank those who came to support the pickets from the retired members within the branch, your support was always welcome.

I have to tell the Branch I have through 2022 tried to push the issue of the desk based staff in Openreach and with the help of the officers within the Branch, Una McMahon and Steve Taylor, we persuaded the business to give those that wanted it an experience day at an Openreach training centre at Crawley. This came with the possibility of an external job role, on Pay and Pension protection, as an alternative to compulsory redundancy.

As far as Field staff are concerned in Openreach, there have been a number of issues, some of which are fully on my Agenda within service delivery. Management are looking

to down size Frames, as it is perceived the volumes are falling. FTTP (Fibre To The Premises) is growing as Openreach are pushing "Lead to Cash", selling full fibre through the Communication Providers and on to end users. Dealing with the FTTP management can be challenging at times. There are still a number of unagreed pay points and as part of the agreement on finishing the industrial action, we and Openreach are committed to sorting these issues out.

For service delivery, we have a few issues that have been bubbling away. I think the issues of performance management and Saturday working will be ongoing, as well as the issue of Compulsory Overtime (COT) that the CWU never agree to, but instead are only notified of.

I also understand there has been issues in Chief engineers, and the civils and Poling teams. If you want the branch to look at any issues in your team, then contact the branch and if we can we will take on the challenge of solving it.

I would like to finish by thanking all branch members for your support but, remember we are here to challenge the company on issues you raise. We have a Branch Committee that meet in the evening, once a quarter, at the Uckfield Civic Centre. It's a 2 hour meeting which finishes by 21:30 and refreshments are provided.

If you would like to become more active in the branch, why not think about contacting me to join the Branch Committee. You might make all the difference.

Obituary

This section of this report is where we celebrate the life of certain members, but mourn their passing during the last year.

The branch sends its condolences to their family members.

William (Bill) Sommerford

Nicholas (Nick) Jeffery

Brian Padgham

John Foster

Paul Meszaros

IN
Memory

Assist Sec Report - Una McMahon



I had no idea that at the beginning of the year, how my career path would again be under threat and force me to leave my status as full time CWU officer.

I started the year with so much enthusiasm, with a new campaign that fell under the recruitment banner. The aim was to visit every single exchange within our branch geographical area. We wanted to connect with our members that are in the rural and small population areas. I recognised that we naturally visited the centres of excellence, the larger stores hubs and the larger exchanges, as this makes sense as we could connect with high numbers of our members. We were successful in doing this through January and February. We had great feedback from members, that had never even owned one of

our famous “branch pens”.

Early in the year there was a national campaign the branch got behind, myself leading, this was the GROW campaign. The GROW campaign was aimed to increase recruitment nationally, as membership had dwindled in places due to the better workplace initiative. On that note, I cant believe we have said goodbye to Sevenoaks, and will be saying the same to other buildings in the South East soon.

I think we all have a heavy heart on this subject. We champion anyone who is ready to leave, and leaves with a pocket full of money, but the sadness and defeat we have felt as reps, trying to scrape jobs for anyone who wants to stay in the business, there are not words for.

Which led to crazy antics, as these photos show. Anyone who knows me, knows how much I respect our engineers and how difficult their job is. Well after donning a harness, and realising I have no natural carabina ability, I decided I couldn't cut it in the sunshine, let alone the cruel elements our Openreach engineers deal with daily. So I hung up my hard hat and applied for an office

job in London @ One Bra-hams, lets hope they don't close that next!!!



I was lucky enough to attend a residential Advanced skills union course on employment campaigns and passed, so I am not useless.

I attended the CWU's general conference last year and I would recommend that any union member to go along to the CWU conference as an observer. One - Bournemouth isn't too shabby. Two - I think you will see what your membership entails and be totally blown away with the organisation passion and skills your union has. All you need to attend as an observer is your membership card.

Other things I got up to as Assistant Secretary of the

FINANCES

Branch.

Got a £500 donation sent to the Ukrainian refugees.

Delivered sanitary products to our higher footfall exchanges.

Led our Facebook updates

Led on the GROW campaign as mentioned, and branch recruitment.

Led on the Regional events and meetings.

Led the Picket Line at Sevenoaks Workstyle building.

Represented members with cases and Individual Consultation meetings on redundancy.

Arranged reps to attend the Yarnfield training days, which sadly is due to close in a few months.



My swan song and proudest achievement is hounding Openreach HR to create field opportunity's for any Sevenoaks people who wanted them. The system I suggested was implemented and has now been adopted nationally, by Openreach,

within the national Better Workplace program. Hopefully saving people from being forced to leave before their time and giving them the opportunity to re-train into field engineering roles.

Branch Finances

The branch finances have stayed in a healthy position, perhaps too healthy. With the loss of so many members recently, it brings the point at which sequestration even closer. So not only do we lose members, head quarters may restrict our funds.

The committee allotted

£2,000 to the welfare fund, in order to assist member who struggled severely in the strike, but there has been no requests upon this fund. So anyone who said they can't afford to strike, never talked to the branch.

A full report will be given at the AGM, but please

note we need a couple of people to audit the accounts.



Women's Report - Una McMahon



I have been made to feel so proud of our WSEC (Women of South East Central) members. I have met lots more engineers, old and new to the business, in my travels through the year.

I hope that female strength and networking continues to grow in my absence. The voting and strike action overwhelmed most other subjects last year.

The WSEC crew stood strong and voted and acted in their support, 100% behind their unions campaign.

There is a WSEC WhatsApp group, created by the branch, but now handed to the workforce for female engineers. If anyone wants to join, let

your local rep know and they will arrange for you to be added.

So this is a call out to all our WSEC members, to continue growing your section of the Branch. We have only two other female committee members, so if you want to lead change, please speak to one of our officers to arrange an observers seat at a meeting.

If you don't want to get involved majorly, please link into your officers to let them know what is going on in the field from your WSEC perspective, this will be really helpful for us to continue in our quest for equality and respect in the workplace. I would like thank the Branch Secretary, Chris Power, for giving me the

time, trust and support to invent and develop an identity within branch for our women.

Personally I have loved my role as CWU officer, and hope to return one day. I am passionate about improving conditions for all of our members in the workplace, not just Women (but do tend to see their point of view, being one myself).

I stand against any form of prejudice, bullying and harassment. I am naturally outspoken and have had the privilege to speak up for those who may feel awkward doing so.

So all that's left is for me to say, keep up the fight for better!

Thank you.



Political Report - Dianne Hill



Well, it doesn't appear to be getting any better on the political front here or around the World. Ukraine!! Putin must somehow be held accountable for this atrocity. Johnson did step up with help to the people of Ukraine but what a shambolic situation for the ones trying to get to the UK. They were sent from Country to Country to seek the right to come to here, given a mars bar and a bottle of water! We still have Afghans in holding hotels waiting for paperwork to get sorted. We have thousands of migrants in over 90 hotels costing millions of pounds. Cuts to the Border Control and giving private companies contracts, this is what happens.

Russian Oligarchs - how many yachts do they want?

How many multi-million-pound mansions do they want? Disgusting. Labour have raised issues around their wealth many times and their links to Putin, oh and the Tory party!

We have around the South East welcomed many Ukrainian families credit to all those host families who came forward. Some are now working and found private places to rent but many are struggling to come to terms with the destruction of their homes. Here in Tunbridge Wells we have Community Larders and we are seeing many Ukrainian families using these as they receive very little money from the Government. Some are struggling with the language, so grateful to be somewhere safe, mainly women and children as their men are fighting for their Country.

Well, we thought Johnson was bad but Truss, well that was something else. In under a month along with her Chancellor they caused havoc to our economy. What a mess, interest rates went up, the Bank of England had to buy up Government Bonds to stop the pension (our pension) funds collapsing and the Prime Minister went

AWOL. Good job she only lasted 50 days!

Twelve years of austerity brought about by the Tory/Libdem coalition and continued by the Tories with no let up, has brought our Country to its knees. As the cost-of-living crisis deepens many people are struggling to pay the bills and rising rent increases, while housing benefit is frozen. More people facing the prospect of being homeless or sleeping rough on our streets. In 2021, two people died every day without a safe place to live. We are seeing unprecedented cuts across all our public services. More referrals to food banks, Community Larders and pantries struggling to meet demand, many families can't afford to put the heating on. We have children going cold and hungry, it's like something



from a Dickens novel, it's outrageous, when the richest 1% hold nearly twice as much as the rest of the World put together!!!!

Strikes in almost all areas of our community and this government blame the workers. Pushing through a bill to make strikers provide a minimum level of service, which they are already providing. Just trying to turn the public against the Unions. Paul Novak the new TUC General secretary said that this proposed legislation on the right to strike would make it harder for disputes to be resolved. He said:

“This is an attack on the right to strike. It’s an attack on working people, and it’s an attack on one of our longstanding British liberties”

Strikes in the NHS were unheard of, nurses don't want to be on strike, they have dedicated their lives to saving others. They are taking this action not just for more pay, but because of the real danger the underfunding of the NHS and the devastating staff shortages are having. This is the situation across all our public services.

“Critical incidents” have been reported regularly by the Ambulance service on non-strike days, because



the normal service is chronically overwhelmed. The Government needs to get a grip and talk to the unions. When we have 1 in 4 hospitals providing food banks for their staff, there is something very wrong if working people cannot afford food.

Ray Moon was elected to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in May representing Paddock Wood West, we now have 7 Labour Councillors, two of which are CWU members. Ray and myself attended the Openreach picket line to support all you amazing people who keep our Phones, broadband, etc. alive. Well done to the CWU for reaching an agreement, for now. This is not the case with our Postal colleagues who have a CEO serving the shareholders not the public or the workers, 124 Reps and members suspended during the dispute by Royal Mail.

This Tory Government is

spending £5.6 m during a cost-of-living crisis to tell people about their new voter I.D. rules. Creating a problem around an issue that really doesn't exist. In 2019, 58m votes were cast and there were only 33 allegations of fraud! Election Act 2022 which went through parliament in May will have major implications on the way we vote. We will still receive a voting card, but no photo I.D., no vote. Passport, bus pass, photo driving licence, blue badge, etc. it is the young and the ethnic minorities that will be disenfranchised, 10.2% of the population do not have passports. Local Authorities are waiting to hear how they can provide “Voter Authority Certificate”. This will come in for the May elections.

In 7 weeks, we had 3 Prime Ministers. Couldn't make that one up, could you?

Broken Britain. We need a General Election.

Assist Sec Report - Steve Taylor



The beginning of the year started off quite sedately, then with the possibility of strike action and then my life suddenly got more complex.

The strike was called! I had been working within BT for over 30 years (15 years as a union rep) and not had a single days strike.

Once the strike was organised, I was told I was being made compulsory redundant; my step mother and uncle died; my dad has rapidly deteriorating dementia; I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. It was a lot to take on in such a short time.

The Hastings Hoodlums, as I affectionally call the regular pickets at Hastings, were fantastic bunch, which I am proud to say that I stood beside them!

We were also supported by the local Hastings and District Trades Council members. Although our battle is over, they continue to support local unions who are striking, of which there are still many.

Although I say the strike is over, I really mean, we

have been placated for the time being. We wait until the pay talks in September, to see if we need to growl once more.

The Hastings Hoodlums turned out in force on a summers day and by day two a barbecue was fired up, which seemed to be copied elsewhere afterwards. By the last days of the strike, winter had set in and the rain came down. My car boot, which held the teas and coffees, still smells of stagnant water!

I attended a couple of Hastings and District Trades Council meetings (check them out on Facebook) and also attended an “Enough is Enough” rally outside Hastings railway station. Socialism and care for your fellow worker is alive and well in Hastings, Robert Tressell would be pleased, if he was still alive.

I have attended several disciplines this year and had a few good results. But as the threat of Industrial Action loomed, they seemed to get a bit less. Well they seem to be back with a vengeance, mostly it seems regarding Social Media. Be careful out there, they are watching!



The branch decided to collect donations from the picket lines to give to the local foodbanks, and also but food of a value of up to £50. We dropped off the food that they requested to the grateful helpers (see the photo on page 21), at the food bank at the Hastings Centre, The Ridge near the Conquest Hospital. If you want to donate or help out check their website at hastings.foodbank.org.uk

The Better Workplace Program, which just removes all office workers from the South East, gathered pace. BT Enterprise was the first to leave Sevenoaks a couple of years ago, and now Sevenoaks Workstyle is completely shut as of December 31st. Brighton Withead is shortly to follow on January 31st. People were/are being exited out of the company by nothing less than their postcode, and the travesty of this all is that it is totally legal.

Back in the dim distant past of the “Count Me In”

campaign, Clive Selley, the CEO of Openreach rang me and promised there would be jobs for everyone and no one would be made compulsory redundant. The jobs promised where in the engineering field and when I pointed it out, that some office workers would not be able to do an engineering role (I used the example of a one legged man), he said that no one had been made compulsory redundant yet.

To this day, I believe his statement is factually correct. Some (including myself) have opted for an engineering role, but the others have taken a voluntary leavers package, which pays much more than compulsory redundancy. This branch has been at the forefront of ensuring those who want to stay, can get a field role.

To deviate away from industrial relations and to stray into health and safety, I am talking now directly to those men of UIN’s of the 802 & 803 variety.

Those aged 50 and over. I mentioned I was diagnosed with Prostate Cancer earlier, which was something I which I have had an education crash course in. One in Eight men will get prostate cancer in their lifetime, and it normally effects men over 50 (lower if you have a family history).

Sometimes you will not get any warning about it, and that’s why it is called the “silent killer of men”. BBC reported Bill Turnbull got it, but unfortunately he got diagnosed too late. Ask your doctor about a prostate check, which will normally consists of a blood test and an examination (its quick). My examination didn’t show anything, but my blood tests showed a high PSA level and my treatment quickly started afterwards.

So guys, don’t bury your head in the sands and leave it too late, speak to your doctor. If you want to talk to me about it, then my number is at the back of this report.



Secretary Report - Chris Power



First national telecoms strike in 39 Years

Striking is hard. Some of us attended and struck on every one of the 8 STRIKE days, most stayed home on strike. Predominantly it was a very well supported strike.

Quite a lot of members came to support the picket lines, although these were usually visiting rather than for the full 5-hour stints, still welcomed. Thank you to everyone that attended a picket line, your support was so well received, and it felt like a big family and full of camaraderie. We decided the strike together, and predominantly we stuck together. We certainly weren't beaten.

Lots of members have asked me if the strike over pay a success was. Did we

win? I have 2 ways of answering. In one way a very strong yes is the answer. We achieved a settlement that was better than the first one offered. The vast majority of members took part in the strike in some form or other. We stuck together, we didn't break, and showed the Employer that we will fight. A real success.

Secondly, and in my opinion, the pay settlement wasn't a massive victory financially, when inflation was running 11%, the agreed settlement was between 3% and 11%. The flat rate increase of £1,500 for everyone (Twice in a year) favoured the lower paid, quite rightly in my opinion, but everyone got a consolidated pay rise.

We live to fight another day, and we may have to. The Company realises now

that we will fight.

At the Brighton picket line, where I was based, we had around 6-10 picketers every strike day, maxing out at over 20 sometimes. The public support from pedestrians and cars was brilliant. Both Lloyd Russel Moyle (Kemptown MP) and Caroline Lucas (Pavilion MP) attended the lines to support. We also were one of the few picket lines in the country where both Dave Ward (GS) and Andy Kerr (DGS Telecoms) attended for an hour or so, with TV entourage in tow. About 25 picketers turned up that day. Also, we were covered in the local newspaper a couple of times.

In Hove, Committee members Steve Delacour and Tom Humphries led the line really well and were well supported. In addition,



CWU Dave Ward, General Secretary & Andy Ward, Deputy General Secretary visiting Withdean Picket

Una led the line at Sevenoaks, Dave Kauffman at Tunbridge Wells, and Steve Taylor at Hastings, were well supported pickets too.

It is a shame that there are members that avoid my gaze when I visit sites nowadays, where, guessing these members broke the strike, your conscience I hope guides you as to whether you made the right decision. Industrial disputes can only be won if everyone sticks together. **United we stand** and everyone who took part in the strike can be rightly proud of themselves

GENERALLY

It was announced mid year that Brighton Withdean,

and BT Sevenoaks Workstyle desk based members roles were to be ceased by the employer at these locations. A lot of these desk-based members did not want to take the offer of being placed into field engineering at their existing pay, and many decided to leave the business through redundancy. It was good to see the agreed pay rise increased their redundancy packages, that wouldn't have been increased if we hadn't struck. There were a fair percentage of disgruntled members on how the strike ended in relation to this issue, and also pay levels that were accepted by the mass membership. Please remember it is the Employer that decided to close the Centres of Excellence and desk based

working posts down, the CWU fought hard to retain the right to be directed to placements in the Field with the (Higher) pay levels retained. Not a great scenario, but better than nothing, but most chose to take the redundancy, as said.

This situation has also affected Union officials of the Branch. Long serving Women's officer Una McMahon was obliged to take a role up within the Reward framework pay structure (a management grade). I know she really didn't want to leave the CWU, and her enthusiasm and work rate for Women's issues and recruiting new members will be sorely missed. Steve Taylor, Financial Secretary, has also been identified under the Better Workplace programme as redundant, but is pursuing the opportunity to assume a field role, which will also mean losing him as a Union representative for a period of time.

MEMBERSHIP AND RECRUITMENT

This all means that membership is down, meaning income and time allocated for Union Reps is down, and also, we will have lost two fully experienced Union Reps very recently.



SECRETARY

This transpires that the Branch will have to change its model for the future and move from a proactive to a more reactive Branch model. Less boots on the ground, means less visibility of Union reps around the workplaces, something we have been proud to do over the last 5 years.

As previously mentioned, the closure of desk-based operations in our Branch area has had a massive affect over our membership figures. Early 2023 we stand at around 930 members (and dropping) where last year we were around 1040. Around 100 plus members have left, and that figure could transpire into a loss of around 200 in total by the end of the first quarter of 2023.

Recruitment plans are being put in place, but with only the Field area to recruit from it will prove

very difficult to get above 1000 again. The Civils area of work is one that is growing, and the Union nationally continue to pursue a more appropriate pay banding for these workers.

UNION MEETINGS

2022 saw the continuance of some General meetings over a video platform, but we also restarted General meetings in person. In person meetings, whilst meaning members have to travel, is really the best way to question and answer Reps, and the best way for Reps to address the membership en masse. There will be details within this Annual report of meetings coming up for the coming year

We are short of Committee members from all geographical areas, but especially Women, members of a BAME heritage, and

Youth (Under 28 years old). Please contact me on 07850 840581 if you would like a chat about what being a senior Branch rep is about.

CONCLUSION

We have more battles to come methinks, over pay terms and conditions, redundancies both compulsory and voluntary, and also contract and agency staff, which is the type of employment base that the employer prefers to engage. Contractors and agency erode the terms and conditions of our employed members, and contractors on a long-term basis should be discouraged.

The Annual General meeting on Wednesday 15th February starting 7:30, is where members can join the Branch Committee

Not all superheroes wear capes....



#Thank You

Safety Report - Rick Cobern



As we begin a new year, looking back at 2022, we encouraged members to engage with CBRE & ISS by reporting any building faults and defects and I'm happy to say you listened.

The reporting by members has increased to a level where it has been mentioned during the meetings I have attended; this reinforces my debates and demonstrates you actually care about the deterioration of our estates and work places. Every report you do, adds weight to my arguments and raises the volume of those arguments so they are heard loud and clear. Thank you so much, no longer am I hearing "nobody cares", I cannot relay to you how important your input is, as its simply immeasurable. A huge Thank you from us all on the SEC safety Team.

As a Union, and especially where health & safety is concerned, a unified and repeated message to the company means we have the grounds to push for more money to be spent on the safety of our workplaces, renovation of our welfare facilities has gone ahead with project "spruce" only because of the pressure from our membership, you have spoken loudly and with solidarity forcing the company to act so well done.

2023 will see the ongoing fight against estate deterioration continue, and this is where I must be bold and ask for your help again. Many of our exchanges and buildings still have leaking roofs some are quite serious, others not so much, but will be with continual lack of attention.

If you enter a building and there is evidence of unrepaired leaks, please report them to 0800 223388 making sure to follow your personal risk assessment. If you feel doing the job you have



been tasked with may put you at unnecessary risk, send an email to your manager letting him know the situation and CC us in, as walking around in puddles of water inside our buildings is simply not acceptable. If you do report things, send the works order to us when you receive It please at email safety@cwusec.org.uk this makes us aware of the



Water Leak Sorted!



situation long before we would normally find out about it.

So, hands up who's got a new company electric vehicle (EV)? Did you get any Training? As the company continues to roll out its EV fleet, many people are unaware that these vehicles are significantly different enough to require extra training. I would be interested to know your thoughts on these new vehicles, so drop me an email giving me your experiences both the positive and the negative, its only with your feedback we can build a proper picture of what's going on and that goes for any new kit or tools you get.

For those who took the time to contact me over the past year, I hope I was able to answer your questions or satisfactorily resolve any issues you may

have had and thank you for taking the time out of your busy day, it really helps. For those that just thought about it, I hope to hear from you soon. For those who never even considered it, tell me what I

can do to change your mind I'm all ears.

Lastly, thank you to all those who have sent me pictures of contractors/partners working in our network in ways that concern you, remember try and get the Vehicle registration number and any company details in the picture, locations are always a bonus, finding white vans without those is almost impossible but I do try, so keep them coming.

Be Safe, Be Smart & Be a part of the solution.

Rick (07498923159) - SEC Safety team

Health & Safety

You're Doing it WRONG

Photo Source: Unknown

A graphic with a black background. At the top left is a yellow warning triangle with a black exclamation mark. To its right, the words 'Health & Safety' are written in large, bold, yellow font. Below this is a photograph of a worker on a ladder, leaning over a window frame. At the bottom, the text 'You're Doing it WRONG' is written in large, bold, white font. A small vertical text 'Photo Source: Unknown' is on the right side of the photo.

Retired Members - Dave Lomakin



The Retired Members Conference for 2022 was held in the CWU Headquarters in Wimbledon. There were many lively debates, aiming to give more representation and influence with our National Executive Council from retired members and to increase the time allowed to promote our concerns, at the Annual General Conference.

by Keir Starmer, was a disappointment only allowing him a brief appearance on the last day.

Become a member when you retire!

To join our Branch Retired Community when you are leaving BT employment, either contact the Branch or visit the CWU members web site. Retired members are able to receive all CWU benefits, legal services and are entitled to receive the Union death benefit for your nominated next of kin.

This past year has gradually seen the opening up of CWU support for Retired Members. The Zoom meetings between members and committees have decreased and more open conversations and debate can resume.

During the recent BT Engineers strike days many Retired members showed their support by attending Official picket lines. Reminiscing of the last BT Engineers strike of January/ February 1987 which lasted 3 to 4 weeks.

On behalf of the Branch, I have continued my association with the CWU's National retired members committees, as a CWU representative at the Trades Union Congress Retirement Forums and keeping a vested interest for the CWU with the National Pensions Convention.

I was invited to attend the TUC Conference in Brighton during October, as a CWU representative from the TUC Retired Members committee meeting and engaging with many prominent Labour Party and Union Officials all taking an interest with retirement and pensions. The much-publicised visit



Committee Member - Steve Ottaway



My experience on the picket line.

For many people, standing on a picket line last year, was a new experience. For me, well, I had stood on a picket line back in the 1970s in Lewes High Street, when I had only recently completed my apprenticeship as a compositor in the print industry and become a fully-fledged journeyman. So a gap of 40 odd years brought back some old memories.

I had only recently left Openreach and turned 65, but I wanted to support my old work colleagues, in their dispute with BT and Openreach. So I joined the union picket line at Withdean Grange exchange, in London Road, Brighton.

I found the experience very positive with everyone in good humour and it was nice to chat to old friends and work colleagues. The response from the general public was magnificent, with hundreds of cars, buses, lorries, taxis, cyclists, and one lone police car, tooting their horns and bells, and waving to us as they went past; to which we always responded by doing the picket line version of a Mexican Wave, whilst holding our banners and placards aloft. We occasionally, and it was very occasionally, got a negative response from someone passing, but we kept our thoughts to ourselves and smiled politely.

Occasionally I brought my dog, Archie, along to stand in the picket line and he enjoyed it greatly, wagging his tail as people tooted and cheered going past. The weather for the most part was good, but I do remember one day when the rain came tipping down and we had a visit from the CWU leadership who were in town for the TUC conference – Dave Ward gave a good speech, while we stood under our umbrellas.

On a few occasions, we had other visitors to the

picket line – people from other unions and organisations who came to show their support; Lloyd Russell-Moyle the Labour MP for Brighton Kemptown stood with us on a few occasions and the Green MP for Brighton Pavilion Caroline Lucas paid a visit too.



Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP

I was disappointed that the Labour Party leadership did not show their unequivocal support to the various unions, including the CWU, who were striking at the time and still are. I believe the vast majority of the people in this country are behind the various strike actions that started last year and continue across many industries. These are driven by the cost of living crisis, the twelve years of Tory austerity, and the hollowing out of this nation's industries and organisations such as the NHS and the GPO.

The Tory government don't like dissent and are now trying to bring in anti-union, anti-strike and anti-demonstration legislation that they hope will make it more difficult for the working class and ordinary people, to show their disapproval of what is happening to them. They have already brought in the requirement for voter ID to be shown when someone

goes to vote, and this will start with the council elections on the 4th May 2023. I hope that the experience of people who have stood on a picket line will make

them more politically aware and not afraid to stand up against the issues they know to be wrong, be it proactively or at the ballot box.



Your Working Environment

We all can see the gradual degradation of the exchange buildings we visit and it seems as if the buildings are almost falling apart.

Is it that BT and Openreach are content to put your safety at risk, when they don't deal with the problems we report?

Leaky roofs that let water run down over electric sockets; toilet areas left uncleaned; waste bins left overflowing for weeks; asbestos left untreated.

Is it because BT and Openreach are waiting to sell off a lot of the sites and therefore not investing in them?

We as a Union branch report these issues but we cant do it alone, we need

every engineer who sees an issue to report it. This is the only way we can escalate the issues.

The business are rolling out operation "spruce" which improves some of the facilities to a better standard. But, kitchen and welfare areas are not meeting rooms. If a manager is having a meeting in a welfare room and wont let you take your break in there, escalate the issue.

The business may think its alright to mothball buildings, but the company also has a responsibility to provide meeting venues for field teams and to conduct private meetings i.e. disciplines and grievances. If they can't do this in their own buildings then we need to push BT/Openreach to make sure

managers have a budget to enable them to hire rooms privately.

Telling anyone in the South East that they should have a meeting in 1 Braham Street, in London, is by definition discriminatory, as it discriminates against those who can't travel.

Every one is entitled to look there manager in the eyes and Teams is not the answer, where many managers don't even turn on their cameras.

So lets make sure we report the issues. Lets make sure we keep our welfare areas for the purpose of which they were designed, to wash our hands, to be dry for that lunch break before we tackle those afternoon jobs.

Equality Report - Steve Rhodes



Equalities meetings and events have been scarce this year, due to the time constraints on branches, the sporadic nature of Covid, the extra sickness amongst officers and of course our focus on industrial action. This has meant nearly all have been called off until things get back to normal. Although this has been the case, as a branch

we have managed to achieve some success.

On the 23rd July, our branch attended Eastbourne pride, there were some of our branch officers, their families and reps from other branches from the post office side, it was nice to see Sheila Dale from South Downs Weald & Rother and Jason Reynolds the national executive Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans (LGBT+) lead who also came in support.

The day was a success and great fun, we paraded from the pier along the front to Princes Park, where the festivities continued with live music and speeches from prominent activists from the LGBT+ community. There are pictures of the day on our website.

As it was our first Pride attendance, we were unsure what to expect, but found it to be a very inclusive and friendly atmosphere. If we attend again, I hope we can get more members to come along, it is a nice day out if nothing else.

National Centre for Domestic Violence.

The CWU have affiliated to this organisation this year and it has been one of the biggest campaigns we have got behind.

The NCDV are an organisation whose aim is to help people identify the early signs of domestic abuse, make decisions for a better life and to make domestic abuse socially unacceptable.



At conference this year the CWU agreed to endorse their work. Over the last few months as a branch we have completed a sticker campaign that was conceived by the NCDV. Instead of having posters up in communal areas in our buildings where someone may not want to openly read or make note of the info on the poster, due to the personal nature of domestic violence. We have put a sticker with their

contact info on it on the inside of all toilet cubicle doors. This way if a person decides they would like help, they can take the information without anyone knowing there situation.

If you or anyone you know may benefit from the NCDV's support please go to their website <https://www.ncdv.org.uk/>



Safety Officer duties:

My role as safety officer has escalated this year and since April I have been full time. This has meant I have been able to assist Rick with more of the work load. I have focused on the Accident Investigations as well as the usual work place inspections. I would say that there has been a rise in the number of “near miss” reports and it seems most people realise the importance of rais-

ing concerns when they come across them. We have highlighted some hazards that we have been able to feed back to the company and this has either altered policy and best practice or, in some cases, had new policy or best practice implemented. All this helps to create a safer workplace for our members and I look forward to being able to continue this in the future. Please continue to support your branch and your colleagues, by reporting hazards or unsafe situations in the buildings we work in and even when you see other companies working in our network.

Strike days:

I was involved with all strike days and attended picket lines along with my fellow officers and our members. The support from the public was nearly all positive and although there were some wet days, it was over all a positive experience and showed the company we needed a resolution.

As a branch during these months we supported multiple food banks in the Tunbridge Wells, Brighton and Hastings areas, with donations collected at our picket lines, by our members.



Hastings Foodbank - receiving our donation

Meeting Dates 2020-21

Members of the South East Central, CWU Branch, are advised that the following meetings are open to all members:

General Meeting	Wednesday 7th June	2023	Venue TBC
General Meeting	Wednesday 6th September	2023	Venue TBC
AGM	Wednesday, 14th Feb	2024	Venue TBC

Meeting venues will be advised closer to the time. Special Meetings may be called to address urgent issues and notified to you via the email address we have for you.

Committee members are advised that the following meetings are open to committee members

Committee Meeting	Tuesday, 4th Apr	2023	Uckfield
Committee Meeting	Tuesday, 4th July	2023	Uckfield
Committee Meeting	Tuesday, 3rd Oct	2023	Uckfield
Committee Meeting	Tuesday, 9th Jan	2024	Uckfield

Dates of all meetings are advertised on the website www.cwusec.org.uk

Think you could help? Think you could do better? Make yourself known to the branch and join our committee. Ring any of the officers on the contact list for more details.



UnionLine is wholly owned by the CWU & GMB and provides a full range of legal services which includes, personal injury and employment law claims, free simple wills, preferred rates for probate & Powers of Attorney, fixed rate conveyancing, motor legal service, a criminal and regulatory service, family law service as well as an advice line that covers any legal matter.

South East Central CWU

Current Points of Contact

		<u>Telephone No</u>	<u>Mobile No</u>
Branch Secretary:	Chris Power cwu.sec.br@btinternet.com	01273 565771	07850 840581
Branch Chair:	Dave Kauffman chair.sec.tw@btinternet.com	01892 522948	07850 815644
Financial Secretary:	Steve Taylor (& Assist Sec) cwu.sec.finsec@btinternet.com	01892 522948	07377 880526
Assistant Secretary	Vacant		
Safety Co-ordinator	Rick Cobern (& Vice Chair) safety@cwusec.org.uk		07498 923159
Political Officer:	Di Hill dianne.hill1@btinternet.com		07747 193133
Women's Officer:	Vacant		
Equality Rep	Steve Rhodes (& Assist Safety) secwuusr@cwusec.org.uk		07764 338836
Retired Members	Dave Lomakin via cwu.sec.tw@btinternet.com	01892 522948	
Youth Officer	Vacant		
BAME Officer	Vacant		



South East Central Branch
Annual General Meeting

Royal Wells Hotel

Tunbridge Wells

59 Mount Ephraim, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 8BE

Wednesday 15th February

7.30pm

The agenda will include the submission of the Annual report, Elections, branch officers and committee vacant posts and any proposals pertinent to an AGM, i.e. changes to branch bye laws and any proposals for the forthcoming year, including financial proposals, delegation and proposals to the CWU Annual Conference

The meeting will conclude with any questions and current issues time permitting.

Refreshments will be available for members.

YOUR CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR SAY
PLEASE ATTEND