

No. 080/24

26th February 2024

To: All T&FS Branches

Dear Colleagues

T&FS CWU WORKPLACE BULLETIN – ISSUE TWO

Please find attached and in the links below, Issue Two of the CWU workplace bulletin – Your Voice in the Workplace.

We ask TFS Branches to arrange printing and onward distribution into every workplace. We understand that some Branches do not have printing facilities. If that is the case, then please contact Marcia Murray mmurray@cwu.org and we can discuss the options available for printing them and dispatching to Branches.

We also fully understand that some TFS members do not have designated workplaces and Branches will contact these members via email.

Thank you in advance for your support in distributing this communication.

<https://www.cwu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/08050-your-voice-BTG-02.pdf>

Yours sincerely,

Dave Ward
General Secretary

Andy Kerr
Deputy General Secretary (T&FS)

Chris Webb
Head of Communications



YOUR VOICE IN THE WORKPLACE



FOR CWU MEMBERS WORKING IN BT GROUP AND THE WIDER T&FS SECTOR...

ISSUE TWO, MARCH 2024

ENGINEERS SAY NO TO 'BIG BROTHER' OPENREACH

Campaign launched against inward-facing cameras in vehicles...

Speaking to *Your Voice (YV)* last week, acting CWU National Officer Fiona Curtis said: "Following on from the motion on this subject adopted at Young Workers Conference a few weeks ago, there's no doubt this has rapidly become the Number One current issue of concern to our Field Engineers of all ages."

"While we continue to seek a solution in talks with the business, we've also had to be mindful of the sheer strength of feeling among our members and the CWU Openreach National Team has taken the decision to launch a national campaign, which we're urging all Field Engineers to join."

And judging from the conversations YV has had with some of our CWU Openreach representatives and members, it's clear this campaign is going to be strongly backed by members all across the country.

Tony Pollard, the union's North West Co-ordinator for Openreach members, said: "People are not happy about the idea of inward-facing cameras, they're calling it an invasion of privacy. My own branch is putting in a motion to Annual Conference on this and I've also been hearing from several of our Field reps around the Region telling me that members are totally against it."

"Here are just a couple of examples of the strength of feeling," he continued: "One of our Field reps, Rick Farnworth, said to me: *'Driver-facing cameras suggest a complete lack of respect for the privacy of the engineers and will create an air of paranoia and resentment. They certainly aren't conducive to getting a happy workforce and our engineers don't like the idea at all.'*

"And another one of our Field reps, Robert Sutton, told me: *'Our members are concerned at this excessive monitoring, and some have expressed concern about feeling anxious that they're going to be watched whilst driving which is going to impact on their driving ability due to the stress.'*"

Tony's Midlands counterpart Hardeep Sagoo told YV: "I've been receiving calls from members on this, asking me: 'Is this true?' and the answer is we don't know if it will definitely come in, but we do know it's being considered by the company."

Hardeep made the point that, with the reduction in rest facilities for Field engineers, the van has become that facility for many of them and that members are worried that this break-time will now be intruded into.

"A lot of people see it as an invasion of privacy," he said, adding that "our members would agree with outward-facing dashcams, but nobody at all is in favour of inward-facing cameras."

"When it comes to Annual Conference in April, I'm sure our branch delegations will support motions opposing this."

From up in the North East, Regional Co-ordinator Ian Bell said: "Inward-facing cameras are certainly not about workers' safety – they're about Big Brother watching at all times."

"Our members would be in favour of outward-facing dashcams – front and rear – which would be beneficial to safety, but inward-facing cameras are an absolute no as far as our members are concerned."

"One of our Young Workers, Nicole Moon, made a good point when she said: *'The front of my van is my private space'*."

'For years we've been asking to be able to use forward-facing dash cams to protect us from RTCs and accusations, but we were always told "no", due to "customer privacy." Yet now it is deemed acceptable to bring out driver facing cameras to "protect us" But it feels like a huge invasion of our privacy.'

Ian added: "As well as the privacy issue, inward-facing cameras could take focus off driving as the engineer would be too worried about the constant monitoring, it could impact mental health."

"I expect that if this hasn't been resolved by the time of our Annual Conference, there'll be several motions on this and it'll be the big issue of Conference."

*Join the campaign,
join CWU*



OUR VIEW



"IT'S A HUGE INVASION OF OUR PRIVACY."
Nicole Moon, North East



"IT SUGGESTS A COMPLETE LACK OF RESPECT AND OUR ENGINEERS DON'T LIKE THE IDEA AT ALL."
Rick Farnworth, North West



"NOBODY AT ALL IS IN FAVOUR OF INWARD-FACING CAMERAS."
Hardeep Sagoo, Midlands

FOCUS ON BTG/EE



Gemma Hughes speaking with members at Merthyr

IT'S GOOD TO HAVE A UNION – THE CWU HAS GOT OUR BACK

Your Voice reports from a recent visit to two of the largest BT Group workplaces in South Wales Branch, Merthyr and Cardiff...

Gemma Hughes – CWU rep at Merthyr's BT Group 'EE' site – is at a recruitment stall in the building's entrance area along with the branch's Valleys Section secretary Paul Llewellyn and Valleys Section chair Dai Jenkins when we arrive, just in time to speak briefly with two new members.

Jack McGonnigle and Jack Barry are on their way to hand in their completed membership forms and tell us that they have only recently begun with the company and today was their first chance to join the CWU – "I like that they have our back" and "I agree; it's reassuring for us" they say.

Gemma explains: "We're currently holding this stall here as regularly as we can. The company is on a recruitment drive and so are we. There are around 800 people working here and, as some of the older members of staff retire, there's a new generation of workers coming in."

She has been in this role since 2018, also serving on the union's national team since 2019, and tells us that she is from the nearby village of Fochriw – "be careful how you say that by the way!" – which, like Merthyr itself and much of the surrounding area, has a rich industrial and trade union history and legacy.

From Gemma and her colleagues Paul and Dai, we hear about the damaging effect on the area of the decline of those industries of the past and we ask whether it is more difficult today to explain about trade unionism to younger people. Paul makes the point that, for many of the new intake, this will be their first introduction to a union, but adds that "once we make it clear what



New recruits Jack McGonnigle and Jack Barry

we're all about and what we're here for, everyone gets it" and Dai agrees, saying: "Everyone gets basic economics – a decent wage and fair terms and conditions are things all ages need."

Gemma says that "the response from new starters is really positive – people like the fact that we're here, visible and approachable. And the 4 per cent pay rise that the union negotiated, as well as the negotiated new entrant rate, are further positive reasons to be in the CWU."

Leaving Dai in charge of the CWU stall, the other two walk the office floor speaking with members and updating people on the union's latest news.

Rhian Barnes – one of the longer-serving members of staff here, having been with the company since 2007 – tells us: "I do like my job, although this place could do with a refurb," while Alex Urmston talks about how Gemma and the

CWU have "helped me several times with various issues" and that "the union is here for me and for all of us" and relative 'newbie' Tom Monks – here for just over a year – explains the training workers receive on how to handle customers and their complaints.



Gemma with Alex Urmston



Kate Webster with Jo Hayes at Cardiff



Chris Fitzpatrick and Joanne Masterson

SCAN ME!
Join the
union



Meanwhile, site concierge Hayley Journeaux and Tyler Mazoni are taking the trolley round the floor selling snacks, while also giving colleagues the opportunity to donate to one of the office's nominated charities – Hope Rescue, Merthyr/ Cynnon food bank and children's charity Sern Y Dyfodol.

"I'd say we have quite a good relationship with the management here at Merthyr," says Gemma, "and it's good that the union, supported by our branch, can have a strong and visible presence at the site. We can help and support our members and this helps us recruit new people too."

While the Merthyr site has always been an 'EE' premises, colleagues at Cardiff were previously part of 'BT Consumer' – a brand that BT Group is no longer using, having decided, post-takeover, to bring all of its customer service, tech support, billing and sales activity together under the 'EE' trademark.

What's in a name? One might ask, but for some of the staff at Cardiff, the rebrand has brought a degree of confusion in terms of company policy in some areas – particularly the 'WFH' issue – as we discover when we visit their new Capital Quarter premises and meet CWU site rep Kate Webster, the branch's South East Section secretary Ieuan Davies and South Wales Branch Women's officer Jan James. Staff here like the new

building, but an issue regularly raised by members is a feeling that the *'three together/two wherever'* principle should now apply across all sites, rather than the percentage system that was used by EE before the takeover.

Dave Tee, chair of the CWU's EE/Consumer national team says: "Working from home or *'Smart Working'* has been a major issue for our members and we have been pursuing this with the company to ensure more options are available and greater flexibility."

Chris Fitzpatrick, for example, says that he has been with the company for 21 years – and in Cardiff for the past eight years – and tells us that when he made an enquiry about this issue to BT Group HR he was given the impression that the *'three together/two wherever'* was a company-wide policy, but that local management took a different line. "It's frustrating," he said, adding that in his view it should be applicable to all. His colleague Joanne Masterson (20 years in the business) agreed, saying that although the new premises was "a lovely building" there needed to be "more opportunities" for staff, while Jo Hayes tried to explain the 'EE' percentage system and the complexities involved in calculating it.

Jo also said that she liked the new office, but that the move from the old Cardiff site had increased her journey time – "I come in from Newport and I used to work for BT there" – and that she does not look forward to the walk to the station after a late shift.

The reps explain that there are approximately 450 'EE'/Consumer staff working from here on the company's customer service, tech and connections operations – while some 350 Openreach-desk workers are based at this site too, working in control, flex centre and planning roles.

Kate says that "business is growing. The majority of work that was previously outsourced abroad has now been or is being brought back to the UK over the past four or five years in response to customer demand and also the connections teams are increasing too, so the work's expanded

and the company is recruiting – although there's also a relatively high attrition rate."

CWU recruitment is a top priority of course and the first contact with new starters usually takes place at employee inductions – "that's where we sign up a lot of new members," says Ieuan, who adds that reps here are also onsite as regularly as they can, catching up with members either at their desks where possible or during scheduled breaks. Ieuan, Kate and Jan make the point that the time pressures on members can sometimes make it difficult to have these conversations, but that they take a flexible approach to how and when they can engage with the workforce.

"Of course, the pay rise and other terms and conditions the union has negotiated are always a big plus point in these conversations," says Ieuan, and Kate agrees, saying: "We explain that these benefits were only achieved by CWU negotiations and through the action members took during 2022."

CWU national officer Stephen Albon says: "It's great to hear from our members on the progress we've made since we gained recognition in 2019, especially around pay and giving members a voice. The work and support our reps provide across all sites in the UK is invaluable, it is vital that we continue to build on what you've achieved so far."

"As Ieuan says, recruitment is a priority and we absolutely agree the more members, the louder the voice.

"But of course it's not all positive news for our EE/BT Consumer members," Stephen continued: "I've also been meeting members over in Northern Ireland with our DGS-elect Karen Rose in response to the bad news about a potential site closure in Enniskillen."

"As a union, both locally and at national level, we're doing everything we can to save jobs in the town and also making every effort on behalf of our members affected by recent announcements in Scotland and on Merseyside."

DGS ANDY KERR

WORKPLACE TECHNOLOGY – SAFEGUARDS ARE VITAL

Adoption of AI can result in increased productivity, reduced operational costs, and improved decision-making in industry. However, this progress is not occurring without concerns and challenges for workers.

Openreach is proposing to install inward-facing dashcams in its vehicles which provide real-time 'nudges' to employees when the system spots anything it deems as untoward.

Despite being promoted as a health and safety enhancement, the CWU has received reports of major concerns for this intrusive surveillance from reps and members, as well as a motion from our National Young Workers Conference – and motions from Branches are currently being considered.

It's imperative we work in a collaborative way with businesses to address the challenges that AI and generative AI technologies bring. When businesses gain from technology there have to be safeguards and benefits for the workforce.

This requires governance with all companies to ensure that AI systems are free from bias and harms and ultimately there is a right of redress for workers.



Meanwhile, our reps are also doing a superb job on behalf of our members in EE/ex-BT Consumer – and it's great to hear about some of the innovative methods of regular engagement onsite. There has been worrying news, however, for members at Enniskillen in Northern Ireland and also at sites on Merseyside and in Scotland, where our reps and officers are working extremely hard to try to protect jobs and opportunities for those affected.

As always, the stronger our numbers, the better we can represent, help and assist people at work, and so please encourage new colleagues – and any other colleagues who are not yet members – to join the CWU.

Andy Kerr

YOUR UNION, YOUR VOICE

Let us know what you think of this Edition, what do you think of the subjects covered?
Comments to: Publications editor, kstewart@cwu.org

1ST CLASS CREDIT UNION – FOR T&FS WORKERS

An update from 1st CCU head of member services Luke McGilvray...

Life has been tough for everyone over the past few years, particularly where money is involved. The Cost-of-Living Crisis, fuel crisis, inflation, and much more have placed a massive strain on every household budget across the country.

With credit union members in the telecoms and financial services sector facing similar difficulties we had to make some changes. We offered flexible payment holidays, out of policy withdrawals from savings to support our members, revamped our lending policy to ensure members could afford the loan approved for them, encouraged members to save regularly while offering members to pause their savings commitments if they were struggling, and much more.

We are a collective at 1st Class, that means helping each member as much as possible. Where help cannot be provided in house we always signpost to the best next step.

ASK YOURSELF THE QUESTIONS BELOW

Do I save regularly? If not, what happens when a life emergency happens? Could I start saving regularly? Do I want to be part of a co-operative that benefits not only myself and my family but also my fellow colleagues? If so, join our credit union today.

Would I borrow from a business who cares? Would I borrow from someone who answers the phone when I call them? Would I like a human decision on a loan? Is it important to me that I know what the business stands for when I borrow from them?

If so, join our credit union today by scanning our QR Code or visiting our website.



WORKING TOGETHER

We are delighted to say our relationship with the CWU Trade Union has lasted for over a decade. Our staff are now proud CWU trade union members and many of our board have served as reps for numerous years. Thank you for your continued support of the trade union and its affiliated credit union. CWU's members are our members.

We'd love to visit your workplace to spread the word about the credit union. To help us organise please contact Gurmeet@1stclasscu.co.uk.