

No.155/24

10th May 2024

TO: ALL TFS BRANCHES

Dear Colleagues,

YOUR VOICE IN THE WORKPLACE – MAY BULLETIN

Please find attached and in the link below, the workplace bulletin for members in the TFS constituency of the CWU.

As always, we ask that branches cascade by printing and distributing in the workplace where possible and via email for members who have no designated workplace.

<https://www.cwu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/08102-your-voice-BTG-05-2up.pdf>

Yours sincerely,

Karen Rose
Deputy General Secretary (TFS)

Chris Webb
Head of Communications



YOUR VOICE IN THE WORKPLACE



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

ISSUE FIVE, MAY 2024

OUR AIM – A REP IN EVERY WORKPLACE

'What's the union going to do about this?' Is the question our new DGS Karen Rose recalls asking her branch secretary "way back in the early 1990s" when she was working in BT's Newport Customer Contact Centre...



Karen explains: "An issue had come up with our management that so infuriated us and I'd marched up to the union office and banged on the door asking him what he was going to do. I'll never forget his reply, which was pretty much my question directed back at me: *"You are the union – what are you going to do about it?"*

"It was that conversation in particular that first sparked my interest in becoming a union rep. It put the issue back to me and my colleagues. With the support and leadership of our branch secretary – who was a great guy – we did manage to challenge on that particular issue and eventually get a fair resolution."

We caught up with the new T&FS deputy general secretary in the week following what she described as "a really successful Conference," where as well as working through a full agenda pad, delegates also heard a detailed strategy presentation which set out the campaigning, organising and recruitment priorities for the period ahead.

OUR STRENGTH IS IN OUR NUMBERS

Karen makes the point that "we need to keep up our membership levels in all companies where we have members. One thing we want to ask every member is to ask their colleagues if they're in the CWU and if not, explain how to join. Sometimes it literally is just a conversation like that is needed

– 'this is the CWU and this is how you can join' – while in other situations, if a colleague asks for more details of what the union is for and what it does, introduce this person to the workplace rep.

"Or ask the person to scan the QR code on here..."



...it takes them direct to the CWU's online joining page. Our strength is in our numbers. The more members we have in each company, the stronger the collective voice of the workforce and the better case we can make with the employer in negotiations over pay, terms and conditions.

"If you're already a member, and if you want to get more involved, if perhaps you don't have a CWU rep for your own workplace or patch, why not consider stepping forward yourself and volunteering for the role? Contact your branch and they'll be more than happy to advise and assist – and remember, there's plenty of training available through the union."

WHAT'S IT LIKE BEING A CWU REP?

Karen continues: "If you're wondering what the role is like, or what kind of person takes this on, have a read inside this Edition. Caitlin, James and Deji – who were all at the T&FS Conference for the first time this year – are all CWU reps and they

talk about what they do, why they do it and give their own advice to anyone considering stepping forward into a representative position.

"What we want, as a union, is to have a rep in every workplace – the more workplaces that have a representative, the stronger the voice of our members.

"As I learned myself back in the day, when we ask: 'What's the union going to do about it' we can find the answer within ourselves."

IT ISN'T ONLY BT GROUP

While the vast majority of CWU members work within BT Group, a significant proportion are employed by other companies and an increasing number are working in the fast-growing tech sector, often in very new, start-up businesses. Karen makes the point that, as this part of the UK economy continues to develop, there is likely to be a degree of convergence between telecommunications and technology.

"The tech sector is one where the CWU has seen membership growing and it's important that we continue with this," she says, adding: "It's important we try to make sure workers in tech have the best possible terms and conditions, work-life balance and other benefits of trade unionism. The CWU needs to make sure, as a union, that we're as relevant to a tech worker in a small start-up as we are to an engineer in Openreach for example.

"So, these are the challenges coming down the line for our union – and we're fully united right across the T&FS Constituency in how we're going to meet these challenges together.

"That's what we, the union, are going to do about it."

INSIDE:
FOCUS ON
FRONTLINE REPS

BACK COVER:
NEW REPS' POLO SHIRTS
& BOOK COMPETITION

FOCUS ON FRONTLINE REPS



REPS: THE BACKBONE OF THE CWU

Your Voice met several reps at their first T&FS Conference this year, James, Caitlin and Deji agreed to be interviewed about their work as CWU reps...

Each of them work in completely different environments. While James and Caitlin both work within BT Group, James is an Openreach engineer and Caitlin is an emergency call worker.

So both of them face daily pressures – as do their colleagues – but which vary greatly.

And Deji works for a small independent tech company, representing and supporting members from a range of similar companies and who mostly do not have the set of longstanding collective agreements that exist across BT Group.

But they all became CWU reps recently and for similar reasons – they all wanted to help and support their fellow workers.

JAMES MASON, SOUTH LONDON, SURREY & NORTH HAMPSHIRE BRANCH

James Mason has been the young workers representative for the South London, Surrey & North Hampshire Branch since April of last year and says that it was the 2022 national dispute that sparked his interest...

"When I was on the picket lines, I got talking to some of our branch reps and got to know them," he says. "After the dispute one of them told me the branch young workers rep was moving on and did I fancy having a go. I thought: 'Sounds like a good idea', so I got involved."

An Openreach engineer, James has been with the company for five years and works around the outer west London suburban area. "I really like the job," he tells us. "The best thing about it is being out and about and working outside in the warm weather – but the worst thing is working out in the rain!"

While he focuses mostly on working with younger members in the branch, James's role covers all ages. "I speak to a lot of members and also spend time trying to recruit non-members into the union," he says, adding: "A lot of people a similar age to me often haven't encountered unions before, so as well as trying to recruit them, I need to explain what

a union does and what we're here for. The branch also recently gave me my first individual representation case supporting a member.

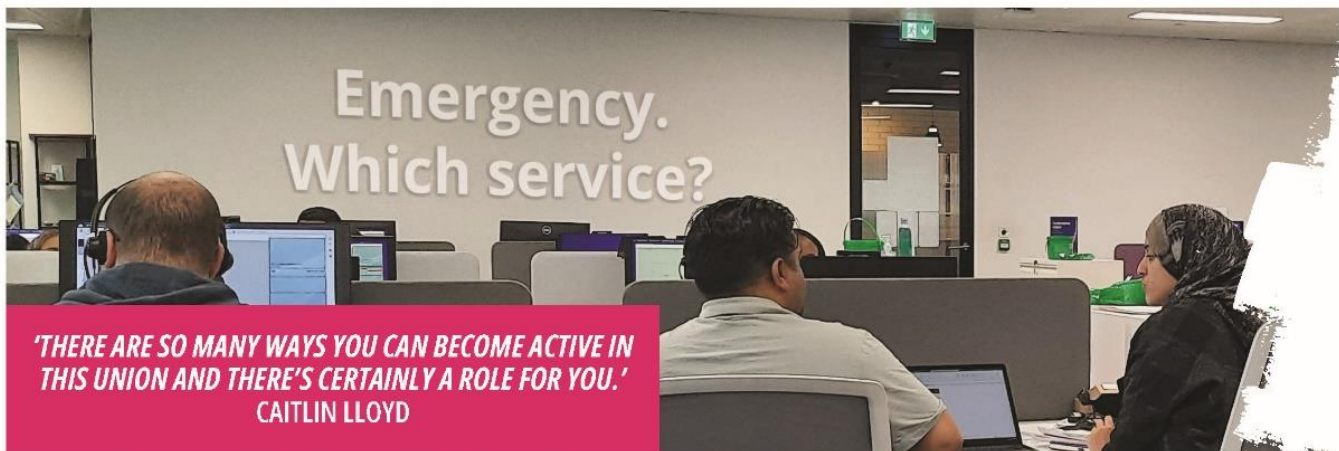
"When I'm in the field, I meet a lot of people, of all ages, and I promote what the union's doing and take on board their feedback as well. It was good that the idea of inward-facing cameras didn't happen and I'd say the biggest issues facing engineers at this time are the management's persistence on stats and micro-management and variable working hours at different times of the year."

James says: "If any member in our branch asks me about becoming a rep I always encourage them – there's something for everyone to contribute. They can reach out to me directly or to other reps in the branch and the support is there for them. One good way to find out more about the union is to come along to a branch meeting. I felt totally at ease when I went to my first one. Our branch meetings rotate around the area, so if one month's meeting is too far away, the next one will be closer.

"In our branch, we have some food and a drink afterwards – they're a really friendly bunch."

SCAN ME!
Join the
union





CAITLIN LLOYD

CAITLIN LLOYD, NORTH WALES & CHESTER BRANCH

'The union helped me when I needed them and so I wanted to help and support colleagues when they're in difficulties,' says Caitlin Lloyd, a rep from the CWU's North Wales & Chester Branch.

"I've worked on the BT Voice Services 999 team for seven years now, but back when I was fairly new, I needed CWU representation over a workplace issue and the branch and in particular the branch secretary were a massive help. They got the situation resolved fairly and I was really impressed by the efforts they made on my behalf. It was that situation that made me want to volunteer to become more involved with my branch and to be a rep," she explains.

"I was elected as the branch's LGBT+ officer about four years ago, but as well as that role I also support and assist members here at my workplace – there are around 150 of us working here. I also do my best to try to recruit new colleagues into the union. I have 'Join CWU' notices up around, letting them know to contact me so I can sign them up.

"Often, it's just starting a conversation when I introduce myself to a new person, saying: 'This is me and this is what I do' and taking it from there. There are all different ways of broaching the subject."

As well as the usual list of issues that always come up from time to time in any company, working 999 calls presents extra challenges as well – as featured in our online 'Your Voice' article about this group of workers a few months ago – and Caitlin does her best to support fellow workers who may have been upset by a call from a person in great distress.



"The calls we take can be very difficult and can take a toll," she says, adding: "Our people can become distressed – particularly newer ones – and there is help and support available, so I try to help there if necessary and either talk to the person or if appropriate, direct them to that support."

Her message to CWU members considering taking a more active role in the union is: "There are so many ways you can become more active in this union and there's certainly a role for you. We always welcome new people stepping up and we want to hear your voices."

DEJI OLAYINKA, UTAW NATIONAL BRANCH

Outside of BT Group altogether, Deji is one of the reps for members of the CWU's national tech sector branch...

In 2020, when the CWU first met with the United Tech & Allied Workers (UTAW), it was an already existing small organisation campaigning on behalf of workers employed in this growing sector of the UK economy.

Since taking the collective decision to join the CWU, tech sector membership has grown further and UTAW is a national CWU branch, which is now a part of the union's Telecoms & Financial Services (T&FS) constituency.

Deji, originally from Manchester but currently based in the Greater London area, works for a company which provides digital services to customers in the property conveyancing market.

"One of my roles in the union branch is a lot of outreach work, trying to help organise and recruit other tech workers. Nearly all our members work for smaller companies – often fairly new start-up companies – and so there isn't the long-established union procedures and national agreements etc that other CWU members who work for BT Group or RM Group have," he tells us.

"So, I'm often talking with people who might not even have heard of trade unions before and it's part of our conversation, telling them all about what the CWU can do to help them and what it brings to them in terms of help and support available. We cover so many different workplaces as a branch and we spend a lot of time helping people deal with issues at work."

Deji says that he has undergone training with the CWU. "I've done the CWU Disciplinary & Grievance training course – I did it online – and our branch also organises some online rep training courses as well," he explains, adding: "I've represented members in formal situations, attending with them, giving advice and trying to assist them."

"Being a rep is hard work, but it does feel rewarding at times. It's such a nice feeling if you're able to actually improve something for a member, to have helped them get a better outcome and improve their overall work life in some way."

Deji concludes: "We need more reps – so if you want to become more involved, let us know, step up and tell us. You'll get training and support and be part of what we're all trying to do for workers."





REPS' POLO SHIRTS

If you are a CWU rep, get yourself a CWU rep's polo shirt.

Great QR code on the sleeve for recruitment.

Recruit, build the union and look great.

Contact your branch now, who are taking orders.

FOOTBALL – OUR GAME OR THEIRS?

Has the chasm between football's rulers and ruled always existed? Mickael Correia's A People's History of Football attempts to answer this and other questions...

Correia's book must be one of the broadest ever written about football's impact on ordinary people's lives. Based around his experiences in over 15 countries, the author writes with a fan's enthusiasm about scores of fan cultures, with studies of teams, fan groups, and confrontations inside football institutions.

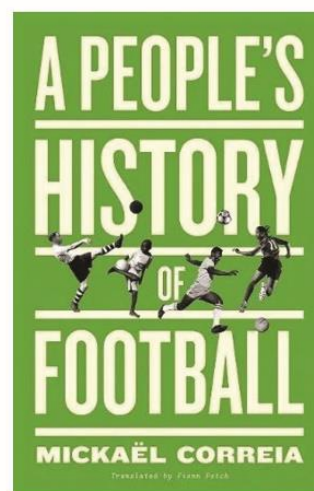
He discusses everything from how jailed militants of the African National Congress (ANC) formed football clubs in apartheid prison to footballers across Europe (including Germany) who fought against Nazism. And he also writes about the growth of women's football across the world – particularly its defiant stance against the football establishment in France.

These colourful stories illustrate a core idea of Correia's book, that of there being two 'spirits' in the world of football: the football of the market economy that the rich feel in their wallets, and the football normal people feel in their hearts. To Correia, this 'other football' has been a 'crucible of resistance' in the fights against dictatorships, colonialists and capitalists across the world.

Correia has created a fascinating and enjoyable work – football fans will get a great kick out of it.

• *A People's History of Football by Mickael Correia is published by Pluto Press, (ISBN:978 0 7453 4686 1)*

• *Win a copy of Correia's book (see below)*



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COULD YOU BE A MAY WORDSEARCH WINNER?

Can you find these May flowers in the grid:

Iris
Orchid
Forget me not
Lilac
Peony
Lilly of the valley

And these regular May events:

Whitsun
FA Cup Final
Morris Dancing

Take a photo of your solution, send to info@cwu.org with your bonus word answer. And the first five correct solutions – with the bonus word – that we receive will win a copy of Mickael Correia's *A People's History of Football*.

Best of luck!

BONUS WORD

“
WHAT WAS THE
BIGGEST MAY
EVENT IN THE
UK IN 1926?”