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**TO: All T&FS Branches**

Dear Colleagues

**Your Voice in the Workplace – September 2024**

Please find attached the September Workplace Bulletin.

We will be sending you out a limited print run (approx. 10 per cent of branch membership) of this Edition, which should reach you by the end of this week for distribution to your reps to take into workplaces.

You also have the link to print immediate copies and/or to print off more copies.

It is crucial that branches are distributing the monthly bulletin in every workplace. The purpose is to ensure members are receiving written content from the union directly into their workplaces, so your role in that process is integral.

Thank you for your support and please contact us with your feedback on the Bulletin.

<https://www.cwu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/08161-your-voice-BTG-issue-8-Sept-2up.pdf>

Yours sincerely,

**Karen Rose**  
**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 TT&FS SECTOR...

ISSUE EIGHT, SEPTEMBER 2024



## FACING TOUGH CHALLENGES TOGETHER

*Your DGS Karen Rose on key industrial current issues and some sad news that was announced last month...*

**I** write this column with a heavy heart, following the extremely sad news that my predecessor Andy Kerr passed away on 27th August following a serious illness.

Our general secretary Dave Ward and I have both written some words in memory of Andy, which I hope you'll take the time to read on the back page of this Edition.

The best way to respect his memory going forward is to continue to his strong belief in collective action and the power of the union to continue to tackle the challenges of today and the future.

The two outsourcing announcements are of particular concern for our members at this time. The first of which, as reported on the inside pages of this Edition, was the unilateral decision by Openreach – unagreed by this union – to move our poling crews to other duties and their highly skilled and safety-critical work taken on by third-party contractors.

The CWU is making every effort to support affected members and seek a reversal of this decision, which impacts polers directly and also potentially affects the operational and working situation of all engineers.

And the second instance – in this case an offshoring rather than an outsourcing as such – concerns our members working for Santander in Bootle, Carlton Park and Manchester.

Our understanding is that there are over 50 workers at these CWU-recognised sites 'at risk' of redundancy due to a decision by Santander to offshore an arm of its Financial Crime Division to Poland.

The CWU opposes offshoring and our focus remains on maximising jobs that are based in the UK and fulfilling careers for our members.

We're currently engaged in working to mitigate against compulsory redundancies in Santander – both through the active exploration of redeployment opportunities and the negotiation by the union of exceptional one-off lump sum payments in addition to redundancy payments for members who do not wish to consider the redeployment opportunities available.

Whether we're working to save jobs, support and advise members with individual issues, or pushing for better pay, terms and conditions, the more members we have, the stronger our organisation and the more we can do to make life better at work for you and your colleagues.

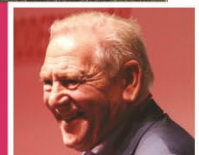
So, as always, I'm going to end with a reminder that when you meet a new colleague at work, speak to them about joining the CWU and ask them to use the 'scan me & join' QR code on this page.



**INSIDE:**  
UNION SEEKS REVERSAL OF POLING OUTSOURCING



**BACK:**  
YOUR GS AND  
DGS PAY TRIBUTE  
TO ANDY KERR



**SCAN ME & JOIN THE UNION**





## OPENREACH FOCUS ON POLING



# BRING BACK OUR POLING WORK

*Openreach management's unagreed decision to move poling crews onto other duties and give their work to third-party contractors has caused widespread discontent...*

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**WU acting national officer for Openreach members Fiona Curtis tells *Your Voice*:**

**"The company made this announcement to our members in mid-July on a unilateral and unagreed basis and it's something the union strongly disagrees with.**

"We've urged the business to think again, that poling is such a critical part of our infrastructure. We're continuing to push on this and our policy is that it should always be in-house wherever possible."

*Your Voice* visited poling crews in the south east and north west, asking them about the safety-critical work they do and for their feelings on this company decision.

### SOUTH EAST

We meet up with South East Central Branch chair Steve Taylor at the Tunbridge Wells engineering yard and we talk with some of the polers as they prepare to head out on their first job.

As we head to a work site in East Malling, Steve Taylor explains that field engineers oppose outsourcing too, "firstly it's the solidarity of course, but also they have potential safety concerns with poles installed by contractors rather than our own crews."

When we arrive at the site, a crew is busy transferring cabling from an old to a new pole and, while James Bozac is busy working at the DP from the cab of a hoist, we speak with his colleagues

Mark Pullen and Daniel Collen, asking them how this decision by the business has impacted them.

Mark says that he has applied for an FTTP role and tells us that "if I get that, I'll take it rather than going over to civils – but my preference would be to stay on poling.

"We're actually a fairly new crew and we've been smashing the work out – the union should keep fighting to keep this back in-house. It's better for members and better for the public as well."

Daniel may be moving to an FTTP position as well, saying: "I'm waiting to hear about it, but if I don't get it I'll be offered civils. Personally, I think it's fairer that poling should stay within and not given out to contractors. It's better for customer service as well in my opinion."

When James gets down from the hoist, he explains that the old pole had to be replaced because it was classified as defective – a 'D' pole – and that the new pole will be both safe and accessible.

"I've been on this job for two years – on civils before that. I'd prefer to stay on this job, but we'll see what happens," he says, adding: "They should keep this as direct labour. The quality of service won't be as good with contractors."

He and his colleagues talk some more about how the news was broken to them – that it had come as a complete surprise in the context of a teams call and that people had felt that their questions had not been properly addressed or answered.



Steve Park

We see Steve Park at another work site near Peshurst. This one is out in a rural area and the polers are discussing the difficulties of installing a new pole near a wooded area that's close to a small lake.

Recalling when the outsourcing announcement was made to staff a few weeks previously, he says: "We were told we had a secure job for the future and to be told in a Teams meeting that this was happening, we didn't see it coming.

"I might be moved to a hoist job, but if I don't get that, the only other option will be back to civils work," he continues, adding: "I want the union to take a strong stance on this."

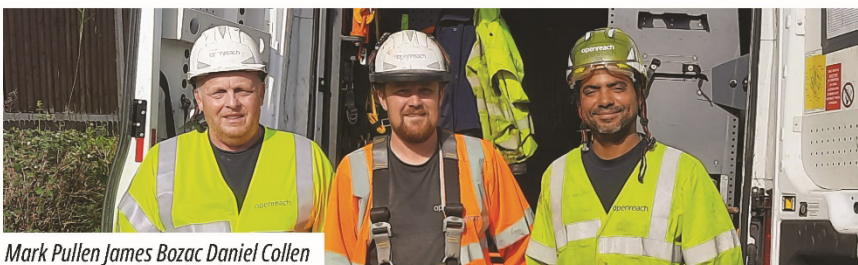
Most of the other crew members ask not to be interviewed or photographed, but make the point that they also strongly disagree with the company's outsourcing decision.

But one poler, Paul Clark, wants to tell us about how he enjoys the job and he criticises both the decision itself and the way the news was broken to workers.

"It came out of the blue, came out of nowhere," he says, adding that he and his colleagues had been expecting just a routine team meeting only to be told that their whole job was being given to outside contractors.

"There are people who can't go over to civils – what will happen to them?" asks Paul, who has been on poling for 24 years.

"This work should be done by us."



Mark Pullen James Bozac Daniel Collen





Paul Clark



### NORTH WEST

Up in the Chester area, we meet up with North Wales & Chester Branch chair Will LeCras, who takes us to meet a crew installing a pole inside an army barracks.

"This is a nine-metre carrier pole, which has to be placed in a hole 1.4m deep," he says, adding that poling crews typically spend 10 to 14 weeks in training, learning about the many different aspects of the job and the rules, regulations and standards that apply.

"There are no FTTP or HCR options in this area, so polers are all set to be shifted onto civils work as the only option on the table. As a branch, we're very much opposed to what the business has done and we want to reverse their decision."

When we speak to the crew during their break, their enjoyment and job satisfaction working in poling becomes clear – as does their disappointment at the prospect of it coming to an end.

Team leader Lisa Tidmarsh says: "Coming to this from a 12-year office job, I've loved every day of it and all the training we've done and it's a real shame what's happening. It's almost like a family how supportive people are of each other and I would've liked to have stayed on poling."

Nikita Chambers tells us: "I enjoy coming to work. It's different every day and much better than when I used to work at a factory.

"I came onto this because Lisa asked me if I wanted to apply – we were friends before," she adds.

Lydia Bowden and Jess Probert are of a similar opinion, saying how much they like the varied daily challenges of poling, work which is both physically and mentally demanding, but which gives a feeling of job satisfaction. They also express the team-working aspect of the job and of how colleagues are mutually supportive towards each other.

All of the crew say they would choose to stay on poling if they could.

As the team work to install the new pole, Will explains each step, starting with ensuring the hole is dug to the correct depth – in this instance 1.4m – and then working together in co-ordination to hoist and then place the pole into its location correctly, then carefully check that it is standing straight.

"Hundreds of engineers will be climbing this pole – so it's vital that all of this is done right, as these polers are doing," explains Will, adding that engineers have concerns that third-party

contractors might not work to the same quality and safety standards.

"They're paid per pole, on a piecework basis, so they'll tend to want to finish as quickly as possible."

"This pole could be here for 50 years or perhaps more," says Will, "because it's been installed right."

Will makes the point that the union disagrees strongly with the company's decision, calling it "much mistaken, unfair on workers – poling crews like this and engineers who have to climb the poles – and bad for the customer as well. A pole that becomes defective causes loss of service for a large number of customers and that's all compensation payouts that the business has to make.

"It's a wrong decision all round and we need to make the strongest possible representations to get it reversed."

**Commenting on the feedback from the poling frontline, Fiona Curtis tells YV: "The reactions from the Tunbridge Wells and Chester areas are typical of what we've been hearing from branches and from crews all over the country.**

Our poling members are upset and saddened by this sudden and abrupt change of company policy.

"And there's discontent among our field engineers too, who are in sympathy with their poling colleagues and also have growing concerns over future people safety.

"My message to the company, and the message from our National Team, from our branches, our reps and members is: "Think again – and bring poling back in-house."



Lydia Bowden Jess Probert Nikita Chambers Lisa Tidmarsh





## ANDY KERR – A TRUE FRIEND AND COMRADE

General secretary Dave Ward writes in memory of his longstanding friend and colleague Andy Kerr...



**L**ike all those present that day, I'll never forget the passionate speech Andy Kerr made to delegates at our Annual Conference earlier this year, talking with such feeling about his lifelong commitment to working class people as an active trade unionist and socialist.

### These words of his in particular...

*"I've been a socialist all my life and I'll be a socialist until the day I die"*

...will remain in my memory for a very long time – summing up as they did, a life dedicated to fighting for his fellow workers and for all of those values this union and our wider movement hold dear.

From the Ayrshire town of Ardrossan, Andy first began work as a Post Office Telecoms Engineer back in 1975 and joined what was then the Greenock Branch of the Post Office Engineering Union (POEU).

After having served in various local representative positions, Andy first came onto the union's T&FS executive in 1997, Andy took up the role of chair in 2000 and was elected as deputy general secretary (T&FS) in 2008.

Andy was always willing to speak at rallies and protests organised by the Postal side of this union and, in his role as our union's representative on Labour's NEC, he fought hard in support of our long campaign against Royal Mail privatisation. So, as well as heading the CWU's T&FS section, Andy was also a well-known and popular figure among our Postal members.

Andy had been actively involved in the NCU's 1987 industrial action, but it was not until 2022 that national action across BT Group happened again and he was very proud of how BT/Openreach members stood solid in that dispute.

We attended several BT/Openreach members' pickets together and it always struck me how pleased he was at the determination and enthusiasm of activists – the vast majority of them on strike for the first time in their lives.

He was a member of this union for 49 years and, in his words, *"some kind of rep for 47 of them."* An inspiration to so many, but yet talking about how he found new inspiration from the new generation of trade unionists and reps coming through.

And in that farewell speech to Annual Conference, when an emotional hall stood as one to applaud and cheer him, it was so characteristic of Andy that he thanked this union and said: *"It's been an honour to work for this union on behalf of our members."*

Andy, it was an honour to have worked with you, protested and picketed alongside you, laughed and joked with you, and to have been your friend. **Thank you from all of us.**



## INSPIRING LEADER WHO WILL BE SADLY MISSED

DGS Karen Rose's personal tribute to her predecessor Andy Kerr, who sadly passed away last month...

**A**ndy was an inspirational leader, having led the Telecoms and Financial Services members as DGS T&FS for 16 years. He will be particularly remembered for the fight over a number of challenging industrial issues; from major changes to the BT Pension scheme, full-scale employer reorganisations and leading various industrial campaigns.



His indomitable spirit meant that in the negotiating room he was renowned for pushing back hard with the employer and fighting for members – 'pulling the rabbit out of the hat' on a number of occasions to reach some groundbreaking deals.

But he would never take the personal credit for any of this, believing that collective action was what gave power to our union and its members.

He also sat on the Labour party NEC for many years where his sense of justice and socialist values prevailed. He was a key player in ensuring decent workers' rights were pushed through to party policy. Andy held the position of Global President for Uni Global ICTS sector for nine years where his dedication to workers continued on a global scale. His particular passions were tackling outsourcing and tackling the 'uberisation' of work. He was party to negotiating landmark global agreements in Teleperformance.

Andy was someone who was always looking to the future and was conscious of the impact technology would have on the new world of work and, therefore, the pressing need to get ahead on issues such as monitoring, surveillance and generative AI.

He was not only a great trade union leader, but he had the ability to connect with people from all walks of life, sharing his kindness and great sense of humour to find common ground with all wherever he went – this has meant he will truly be missed by so many of us across the movement.

His belief in the power of collective action to bring about change to working people is a legacy that I shall not only remember Andy Kerr for, but pledge to continue; fighting for justice together is the only way to ensure we continue to tackle the challenges facing workers.

**He was my dear friend and I will miss him immensely.**

**SCAN ME! JOIN THE UNION**

