



**General Conference 27th & 28th April
Postal Group Conference and the Telecom & Financial
Services Conference both 29th April to 1st May [2014]**

BIC Bournemouth



Health and Safety Issues

General Conference:

The conference safety section opened expressing concern that BT [and other employers] are not maintaining the standards of cleanliness and hygiene within their estate. This means that BT are treating members with complete disrespect expecting them to work in "dirty conditions" with facilities that are at times unhygienic. We have had reports of welfare and toilet facilities in disgraceful conditions, a lack of a thorough cleaning regime and the provision of drinking water not to the statutory standard. The NEC were instructed to seek feedback via a survey from Branches based upon safety inspections to identify those premises that appears to be failing acceptable standards, within three months of the close of conference, and to open discussions with BT to agree and instigate action to remedy those shortcomings in standards within six months of the close of conference.

An excellent prop from the NW noted that any light vehicle used on UK roads needs to be roadworthy and as such the minimum tyre depth tread is 1.6 mm, however most road professional organisations recommend changing tyres at 3mm following extensive research into stopping distance and, for example, BT Fleet currently recommends tyre depth tread and renewal of tyre at 2mm. In the event of an incident, if a tyre is legal, no prosecution could be brought for defective tyres. Other contributing factors such as speed or driver error would be identified as the cause. As far as stopping distances are concerned, there are optimum levels of tread for best performance and the distance required to stop noticeably increases when the tread depth is below 3mm. The CWU should campaign for a minimum tyre tread depth of 3mm to assist in safer stopping distance wherever we have members who drive fleet vehicles for any company.

The politics of health and safety was raised by the NW from the rostrum and told the National Executive Council and the Health and Safety Department continue to oppose both the Young and Loftstedt reports and many of the following them. Furthermore to campaign that the removal of strict liability should be restored to protect the most vulnerable workers and the CWU continue to support to the TUC "Defend Health and Safety" campaign, seeking to reverse changes to the way Health and Safety at work is both legislated and enforced.

The prop broke down into three areas, The Young and Löfstedt reports and subsequent actions, the reinstatement of strict liability and the defending health and safety campaign.

Firstly the Professor Löfstedt's report, Reclaiming Health and Safety for all, was not all bad many of the regulations did need tidying up; for example under a Labour administration seventy two different fire regulations into the regulatory reform order. Most of us who met the Professor during or following the review respect his integrity, however even he is annoyed with the misuse of much of his findings and he wouldn't even recognise some of the actions being taken in his name. Furthermore he has already written to the parliamentary scrutinising committee saying they are going to far.

Secondly the re-instatement of strict liability and the media love the stories about the compensation culture but we know there isn't one. Over one hundred and eighty thousand compensation claims in 2002/03; less than 90 thousand by 12/13 - a fall of more than 50 per cent. Yet in spite of this decline the government made even harder for workers to pursue claims. These are not frivolous claims; these are against a negligent or even vicious employer

They took away the burden of proof and then if that wasn't enough they increased the costs workers have to pay to attempt to get justice.

Thirdly the TUC and other campaigns we need not too be involved but to be at the front of it. It really was quite apt that on international workers memorial day where we remember the dead and injured, the workers who just went out to earn a living but didn't go home. A major part of the international theme is also to fight for the living, no more dead and no more injured.

The CWU have been punching above their weight on the politics of safety, nationally and regionally, and must continue to do so. The NW Regional Safety Forum are currently responding to the HSE consultation regarding replacing the CDM Regs and withdrawing the ACoP which ends 6 June. Others have been the ACoP on PUWER, the [ACoP on asbestos](#) last September, [COSHH Regs](#) last August; the consultation on workplace health, safety and welfare. Even though [CD260 may sound meaningless but it revoked twelve pieces of legislation](#). There are more and we should not leave this all to Head Office.

We need to make more use of bodies where we have members such as IOSH and IIRSM - they are not just for letters after the name – they are an opportunity to influence and must be used. Regional or local meetings have business managers attending and they need to hear a trade union point of view. We can influence their response to consultations and discussions.

There are health and safety trade conferences which are always attended by safety professionals and we should ramp our visibility, we should coordinate CWU attendance for example.

Cameron will happily announce that one million self-employed people will be completely exempt from health and safety law under the Deregulation Bill. There will be talk of needless health and safety regulation yet we know that the lowering of standards will lead to more workplace accidents and deaths. Issues like maximum workplace temperature, occupational health, Directors accountability are all issues we must increase our effort. Company directors will pay greater regard to workplace health and safety if there is a prospect they could end up with a criminal record

Put simply good health and safety saves lives and supports the UK economy and the CWU must continue to lead on the politics of safety.

Understandably conference was angered that the current government have actively worked against the trade union movement in respect to the new Mesothelioma Act. Mesothelioma is a horrific disease that is contracted by exposure to Asbestos. Those that are diagnosed often pass away within months from a form of cancer caused almost exclusively by this exposure. It is a disease where symptoms may not appear until years, even decades after the exposure, but sadly when they do appear, it is often terminal. The NEC were instructed to work with other trade unions, not only to continue the campaign for improvements to the Act, such as to extend the compensation arrangements, and also, to campaign vigorously towards further medical research into Mesothelioma.

With work related stress becoming more prevalent conference recognised that this could well become the dominant health issue of a generation. Conference asked that a campaign in all businesses where the CWU represents members should be undertaken to gain recognition that this is a growing problem and that all businesses carry out the HSE stress risk assessment questionnaire at the earliest opportunity.

The CWU successfully spearheaded the 'Bite-Back' Campaign and securing new dog control laws in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland which will protect postal, telecom and other workers in the future. The NEC must now campaign for better dog law enforcement through a well-resourced dog warden service and more specialist Police Dog Legislation Officers (DLOs).

As a matter of urgency we agreed to consider the provision of support and help to branch officers and representatives who are suffering work related stress, depression and mental health issues. The levels of stress union reps are increasingly experiencing in their day to day role and the lack of a cohesive support network from the union. Too often reps are left with the onus of struggling to cope with long hours, abusive members and lack of support. More and more we are seeing reps having to cope with member's personal issues, members who see us as an outlet for their domestic problems, members who are themselves suffering mental health problems that impact on the reps who are dealing with them. While some employers have support networks for their employees we have nothing similar for our reps. In those companies that have employee counselling or other support services available, reps can feel uncomfortable at accessing them, not only by admitting they need help in the first place, but also because we don't like to admit to their employer they may need help, especially when it relates to pressure felt from members. In supporting SANE the mental health charity and the Samaritans it was felt that it is imperative this union puts in place at the earliest opportunity a support and advice provision for union reps at all levels suffering mental health issues, stress and depression.

Continuing in this area with the ever increasing issues that CWU Reps deal with on a day to day basis, it is inevitable that some issues are of a more sensitive nature than the normal attendance and conduct discussions that take place. To this end, there should be a support network to help Reps with the stress and trauma that some issues can cause. As a branch we believe there should be a CWU counselling service solely for Reps who require it when dealing with a very delicate and emotional problem. In some cases the Rep has to deal with certain issues that even with the best will in the world, they are not trained or indeed skilled to deal with and this causes high levels of stress and added pressure. ATOS provides a counselling service to employees; this should be addressed by the CWU by providing an independent counselling service to help our reps when dealing with sensitive and emotional problems.

The decision by the Coalition Government to sell off a vital lifesaving supplier to the NHS 'Plasma Resources UK' to a private equity firm Bain Capital during 2013 is appalling. Blood plasma is essential for the treatment of many conditions, including burns, shock and major trauma, immune disorders and neurological conditions. This action demonstrates the Government's intention to privatise all or parts of the NHS without a mandate or manifesto pledge. Conference therefore agrees that the NEC to support all campaigns to oppose any further sell off of the NHS.

Statistically 1 in 4 people are affected by mental health issues at some point in their life and that, for many, this can result in long term illness. There can be a stigma that some workers with mental health issues feel and that, consequently, they are unable to share this problem with other work colleagues, or inform their employer that they have a problem for fear that they may damage their job or career prospects. We will join in the fight against the stigmatisation of mental health in our society and form links with any organisations that are dedicated to supporting individuals with mental health issues to provide our members and representatives with information and guidance on mental health and the rights and protections for those suffering with such conditions.

T & FS conference

The Branch combined with colleagues from Manchester to move a proposition on high risk areas and it was agreed to enter into discussions with BT on the subject and the associated ISIS document. We want changes to highlight the need for adequate advanced resourcing with advanced two man working teams planned by the WMC and recognition that the following information should be highlighted;

'It is important to note that in some situations where there is a known threat at a specific location a situation can exist and can only be minimised by having a safety assist in attendance before the engineer arrives on site. In these situations it is advisable that a safety assist be requested and allocated before the engineer travels to site to avoid any risk of harm to the person during the initial assessment stage as opposed to other jobs on which a safety person is requested as a result of the findings of the initial on site risk assessment.'

Any review, additions or removal of data entries in the 'High Risk' database must be conducted by BT Safety Reps in conjunction with the local LOB operations manager and any disagreements at local level would be escalated through the LOB safety leads.

The new suggested amendments are to provide a more robust safe system of work for engineers working in the 'High Risk Areas', with a view to reducing both the risks and complying with business needs.

BT Estates need to increase expenditure on BT buildings in relation to safety, general maintenance and improvement including the viability of the return, to BT Group Estate, all the BT buildings currently owned by Telereal.

Conference acknowledged that BT pay lip service to members with disabilities especially around those who need specialist DSE equipment and when such equipment goes faulty it often takes weeks if not months to resolve. We need a central point of contact and expertise within the company to deal with queries and solve problems which would enable problems to be dealt with in a timely, knowledgeable and sensitive manner,

Some MDFs extensions have been bizarre, U bends are common but non the less unsuitable. We need to negotiate with BT Openreach to ensure that in all cases of MDF extension work, priority is given to the installation of Travelling Ladder access equipment, extra lighting, and an extension of any raised flooring prior to the provision and installation of block terminal equipment.

The value of driver and passenger air bags in reducing the levels of deaths and serious injury in road traffic accidents is clear and the majority of BT vehicles used by CWU represented grades are not provided with both driver and passenger airbags thus placing individuals at increased risk of death and serious injury. Increasing cost saving measures like the carrying of passengers to attend team and other meetings results in individuals being placed at greater risk of injury. The failure to provide passenger airbags in particular puts apprentices and new starters at greater risk as they are more likely to be carried as passengers. We will negotiate the fitting of both driver and passenger airbags on all new vehicles that are to be used by our members whilst working for BT.

Adam went to the rostrum to highlight the dangerous and unsafe practice of only servicing BT Openreach vehicles every two years is not acceptable and has resulted in members being disciplined when their vehicles are found to be defective or in an unsafe condition, through no fault of their own. We need an agreement from BT Openreach that their vehicles will be serviced annually.

Pam got up to speak of the incident in Lancaster House with the window falling out. The investment of £3.1million by BT in the uplift of the estate in 2012/13 and the investment of a further £3 million in 2014 is welcome, especially in the welfare facilities in exchanges. That has been the subject of so many conference propositions over the years.

However, after so many years of neglect there is still more to do to ensure that our members' working environment reaches an acceptable standard and is sustained at an acceptable standard and there must be further funds made available in future years to maintain the momentum created in the last two years.

Health & Safety Fringe meeting.

There is always a health and safety fringe meeting which is traditionally the best attended lunchtime event.

This year Nigel Bryson OBE BSc CFIOSH, former GMB National Health, Safety and Environment Officer and former BFAWU National Health and Safety Officer was the guest speaker.



with the HSE on Worker Involvement. Nigel is the author of the book "Zero Harm: Worker involvement – the missing piece" and now runs his own Health and Safety Consultancy 'Bryson Consulting' which aims to develop expertise in workforce motivation and to improve health and safety standards in organisations, by generating

workforce involvement and participation.

In June 1981 he was appointed as the first National Health and Safety Officer in the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union, at the age of 24 becoming the youngest National Officer in the UK Trade Union movement at that time.

Nigel spoke of developing expertise in workforce motivation to improve health and safety standards with clients so that they become more efficient businesses and continuously improve their health and safety standards at the same time. By working with various organisations, he has proved that significant improvements in health and safety can be made by generating workforce enthusiasm and participation within a clear

management framework. His mantra that "People support what they help create" ran through his presentation which highlighted the plusses to business such as less injuries and ill-health with the subsequent reduced sickness absence and associated costs

In a hugely enjoyable session Nigel went from the First World War and working conditions meal breaks, food and job design to prove worker engagement is good for business. Productivity rocketed when workers were looked after during that time of national crisis and the current government attacks on workplace health safety are just nonsensical and have no evidence based substance.

The NW BT Unions Health and Safety Coordinating Committee wished to put out a conference flyer at the fringe event but were refused permission [we thought it polite to ask] – seemed pretty harmless and we were not given an explanation but above would have been part of it. The rest of the flyer was words like "The UN International Labour Organisation estimates that worldwide more people are killed by work than war every year: a minimum 2.3 million killed by work every year In UK for 2012/13 the HSE provisionally reports 148 fatalities in work-places; however this figure excludes the majority of workers killed at work, and ignores all those dying from poor working conditions".

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STILL THINK
HEALTH &
SAFETY IS A
JOKE?



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