

# LIVEWIRE

Issue 16 October 1998

UNISON Manweb Branch

Despite profits of over £140 million and repeated union calls for an end to the use of cheap labour, Manweb continue to adopt the cynical practise of filling permanent posts with agency staff.

## *Peak workloads?*

Originally brought in under the guise of 'dealing with peak workloads', use of agency staff is now seen as a strategic mechanism for filling permanent vacancies on the cheap. From Call Centres to general clerical posts to HR, an army of cheap labour is taking up permanent posts directly under the noses of permanent staff who have to train them to do our jobs.

To add insult to injury many,

## *Cheap Labour ...*

disillusioned with poverty pay, stay only a few months and get replaced with more agency workers who also need training.

Such is the turnover that generic computer id's are now being set up for agency staff because of the workload of repeatedly having to provide new sign-ons every few weeks.

rights at work the trade unions will not continue to tolerate cynical abuse of young people on agency schemes.

## *Time to act !*

**The company will need to address this issue seriously and soon if they want to maintain harmonious industrial relations with the trade unions over the coming period.**

## *...Enough is Enough*

### *No excuses !*

In a company the size of Manweb - part of a group with a turnover of over £3 billion - there is no excuse for cheap labour. The wage bill for permanent staff, down to under £40 million from £65 million two years ago and from nearly £100 million 8 years ago now represents just a tiny fraction of pre-tax profits. In the second year of a new Labour government and with legislation in the pipeline to improve

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# *National Minimum Wage*

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**UNISON  
demands  
£4.61 per  
hour**

**The long awaited National Minimum Wage should have offered a bedrock to help tackle poverty pay in Britain.**

Instead, under pressure from big business the government is proposing to set such a low rate (£3.50 an hour) that millions of low paid workers will not even be touched.

To compound this slap in the face, 18-21 year olds apparently aren't even worth that measly sum and instead will have to get by on £3 an hour - 20p less than actually recommended by the

business-dominated Low Pay Commission.

Unison, who have consistently fought for a decent minimum wage based on half male median earnings, rising to two thirds of average earnings, are calling for a National Demonstration to protest at such a low rate and demand a decent rate for all irrespective of age.

**A date has still to be set, but if you want to attend please contact your local steward for details.**

**WORK!** **it's a  
risky  
business**

**Unison has taken the lead in negotiating an excellent financial package for emergency call-out, in Energy supply.**

The agreement has now been ratified at the Energy Business council and the first payments have been made following an emergency during the summer.

It has been agreed that anyone signing for Standby/callout will receive a payment of £16.02 but must guarantee attendance if required.

If called out they are to be paid £45.00 for the first hour and subsequent hours at the appropriate rate of payment, subject to working a minimum of four hours.

Yet again Unison have helped our Management to realise that loyalty is a two-way street and that if employees are prepared to cover emergencies the recompense should equal the inconvenience. Not bad eh?

*Shirley Vickery & Sian Taylor  
Warrington Unison Reps*

**Call  
Centre  
Callouts**

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**New  
Rates  
Agreed**

Unison members from across Manweb gave a ringing endorsement to the North West Region Unison Campaign against Fuel and Water Poverty at a full AGM in March this year.

Supported by a video highlighting problems facing many low income families trying to afford to heat their homes, Regional Officer Joan Fletcher explained how Unison had successfully launched a Fuel Poverty Charter earlier that day at a Press Conference in Manchester with Rodney Bickerstaff (Unison General Secretary).

The motion agreed has since been endorsed by Unison's National Delegate Conference - proof that electricity members in Unison can still have an important voice in a large union.



## Members Have Their Say

The urgent need to address Health and Safety matters in the Customer Service Centres was also widely discussed at the AGM and officers have continued to work closely with CSC stewards to ensure a variety of problems are sorted out by the company.

In elections of stewards and officers there was a welcome influx of newcomers who since their election have started to play an important role in the

representation of members in their workplaces.

The AGM also made presentations to Jim Brown and Mary Morgan, both of whom had given long service to the branch and had now left or were leaving the company. Both individuals thanked the meeting and wished their successors luck in continuing to provide a strong union capable of fighting to protect its members.



## ***ISD Negotiations continue***

The move to business bargaining in ISD has heralded the start of joint talks between unions and ISD managers on a common agreement for ISD staff in Manweb and Scottish Power. Joint working groups have been set up on a range of issues and detailed discussions on the contents of a new agreement are in progress.

Unison have already expressed their concern at a Performance Related Pay scheme which operates for ISD staff in Scotland and anticipate some strong debate on the question of pay progression.

Whatever shape the final proposals take it will be put to all Unison members in ISD who will have to decide whether to accept or reject the package. Otherwise negotiations will proceed in the current Forums. Given the buoyant state of the local IT market and the fears which staff have over the long term future for ISD in Manweb, staff will clearly expect fulfilment of the pledge made last June by ISD Director David Jones that any new agreement will be superior to current Terms and Conditions.

### ***Moving on up!***

Steve Williams, Branch Organiser for Unison Manweb is soon to move onto a regional Unison post. Although Steve will continue to assist the branch for the foreseeable future the costs will no longer be born by the branch, putting finances back onto a healthy footing.

### ***Sign up for a tenner***

Want to earn a tenner? Unison's National Recruitment scheme will pay you a tenner for the first new member and £5 for each subsequent new member you sign up to Unison. Forms are available from your local reps - so get recruiting. Just by way of an extra, the top recruiter in the country stands to win over £2,000 in holiday vouchers at the end of the 6 months campaign.

### ***Don't be left out in the cold.***

Anyone who is not in the company pension scheme should JOIN NOW before it is too late. Plans have been announced recently by Scottish Power to close the current scheme to new members - they even approached the unions to ask their permission to waive the 6 months notice they had to give to close the scheme ! More details next issue.

GET TO KNOW THE  
TEAM

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