

Livewire

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The price of private ownership

UNISON's National Energy Conference held earlier this summer adopted a clear position on the Energy Industry, with a resolution from the Manweb Branch calling for the return of public ownership adopted unanimously. A number of arguments exposed the real reasons behind the privatisation of the industry.

Twenty years of privatisation have seen the pay of the top executive at ScottishPower/Manweb rise from around £56,000 to £2,987,000. If a clerical officer had had the same percentage pay rise, their starting salary would now be £250,000.

Delegates denounced the claim that privatisation of energy was supposed to bring better service for customers, and pointed out that instead it has produced price rises for ordinary customers and pay rises for the executives. The five million customers living in fuel poverty have not had their interests served, said one speaker.

Members working in call centres are faced daily with calls from customers, beside themselves with distress, often having to find significant sums of money to light and heat their home, money which especially pensioners living on tiny incomes find it impossible to find.

Conference called for the utilities to be brought back into public ownership and it vowed to continue its campaign to put an end to fuel poverty, "the scandal of our time".

STRESS SURVEY SHOWS LITTLE IMPROVEMENT



An HSE Stress survey of UNISON workers in the Manweb area of ScottishPower has shocked union branch officers by revealing that over a quarter of Call Centre members report that they have been or continue to be bullied at work.

This was just one of many disturbing issues which members reported in the recent survey which show there are some fundamental health and safety issues which need tackling in the calls centres.

For many years UNISON representatives have tried to engage the company in discussions about a number of issues in the call centres which in the view of the union were leading to high turnover and increased levels of sickness absence. The problems which have been highlighted in the survey show how close to the mark UNISON representatives have been in the points they have been making.

Following the first UNISON survey of members (2008) which showed 25% of Call Centre agents were bullied, the second survey shows disappointingly little improvement in daily working operations. If anything the results were worse. Carried out early in 2009 the results show that over 28% of members in call centres reported they were bullied at work. Of all the categories of stressor, the worst scores were recorded on questions to establish whether employees felt they had any control over their daily work. Members overwhelmingly reported they have little or no control over how they work, what they do or when they can take a break. They have to work very fast on intensive tasks with unrealistic time pressures and deadlines and often have to neglect some tasks because they have too much to do in too short a time.

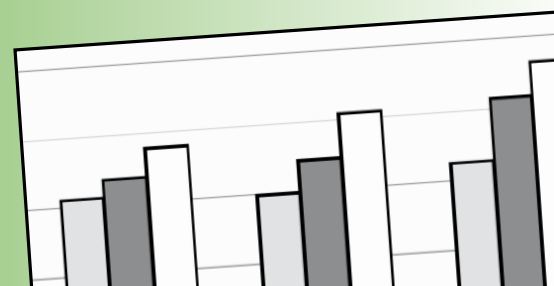
Shortly after the first UNISON survey in 2008 Energy Retail carried out their own survey which confirmed many of our findings. Although some of the more worrying observations were glossed over, the company was forced to acknowledge that improvements were required.

UNISON stewards have pressed the company for action on these points but so far the intense monitoring regime remains largely unchanged with members for example being penalised for being just seconds late from a break. Contrast this with the demands for members to remain on calls for up to 15 minutes after shift at no extra cost to the company and to come in before shift time starts to set up the PC and the injustices are obvious and bitterly felt.

The fact that this survey has confirmed what UNISON representatives have said for several years does not come as a great surprise, however it is the depth of the problems by comparison with workplaces across the country which is most worrying. The HSE survey was originally drawn up in 2004 as part of a plan to monitor trends and attitudes at work on issues relating to stress. Extensive tests were done and analysis was carried out to create a benchmark which could be used as a reliable indicator to measure stress at work.

As one agent who spoke to Livewire said "Like most agents we are not so stressed out with the job that we do but more with the way that we are treated. A big emphasis is now being put on giving better customer service but still we are target driven and therefore penalized from spending time providing an improved

➤ **Story and 'Summary of Results' chart continues on back page...**



Bullying at work

Do you think you are being bullied at work?

As workforces are put under increasing pressure to meet targets and achieve higher and higher levels of performance, the likelihood that this can lead to bullying of individual workers has increased. The extension of bullying from the playground to the workplace making the daily working lives of many workers intolerable.

Bullying at work can lead to work-related stress and ill-health causing untold misery to workers. Decisions on sickness absence levels, bullying and harassment can have a major impact on the career of individuals. Unfortunately bullying at work often remains a hidden problem and may even be accepted or encouraged by the culture of the organization. UNISON believes that all workers have the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work and as bullying denies this right it is totally unacceptable behavior.

Not only is bullying bad for the workforce it also bad for the company. The most productive workplaces are those where workers are contented whereas in workplaces with high levels of stress where a blind eye is turned to bullying the result is high levels of sickness absence, and poor performance.

Failure to deal with bullying also costs the employer in other ways. If it is not tackled it can become endemic being seen by others as acceptable behavior. If cases result

in an individual taking their employer to an industrial tribunal, which comes to the attention of the media, it can have a very damaging effect on the organization's reputation.

Under health and safety legislation employers have duties to assess risks to staff, including work-related violence, and to introduce separate policies and procedures to control the risks. UNISON has highlighted a number of areas of concerns in recent years and has pursued numerous individual cases where members report being bullied by their managers. Whilst dealing with problems on a case by case basis, UNISON want to see the underlying causes of workplace bullying dealt with, starting with a proper investigation into the systems of work in the areas where the greatest number of incidents are reported, namely the call centres.

The investigation needs to challenge the popular management misconception that the only way people will work is if they are afraid and anxious and instead look at how working arrangements can be implemented which focus on training and development, trust in the workforce and fair rewards, rather than micromanagement, intensive monitoring and setting unachievable targets.

If you have had any experiences at work which you believe amount to bullying then please contact one of you local UNISON stewards and they will help you tackle this issue.



STRESSED OUT

The problems of stress and stress related illness are some of the biggest difficulties facing our members at work today. Recent studies of workplace health issues by the Health and Safety Executive now suggest stress, and related illnesses, rival accidents as the biggest Health and Safety concern that affects employees. Stress may take many forms and often failure to recognise the symptoms by both employers and stress-affected members may add to the difficulty of providing effective counselling, support and welfare during sickness absence.

UNISON endeavours to work in partnership with employers wherever possible to provide a sensitive approach to dealing with stress and related illness. In the Manweb branch we have consistently raised the health and safety concerns of members. We train stewards and trade union Health and Safety reps to identify symptoms of stress and help develop their counselling skills to improve the service to members.

We continuously negotiate with the employer to encourage the development of sickness absence policies that emphasise the need for support and welfare as opposed to the routine management of sickness absence. If you have suggestions about some key issues you would like the union to tackle then please speak to your local steward or write to the branch with comments and suggestions.

Remember, YOU are the union.

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Enter UIA's fabulous FREE PRIZE DRAW and you could win a £500 shopping voucher to spend at the supermarket of your choice! One lucky winner will be picked at the end of each month up to and including December 2009.

Visit the UIA website for full details and your chance to win.

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www.uia.co.uk/UNISON/Competition

Recruit a friend – earn a tenner !

That's right, if you recruit a work colleague to UNISON we pay you £10 for the first recruit and £5 for each subsequent recruit.

Simply ask your local steward for a membership form and when completed put your name at the top of the form with the words "Recruited by..." and return it to the steward. When processed by the branch office you will receive a cheque for the relevant amount.

Membership density

Although UNISON has fairly widespread coverage at all company workplaces, there is sometimes a relatively high turnover of staff,

especially in call centres. As a result there are often many employees who are missed in our recruitment drives and end up never being approached to join the union. In a recent survey it was found that in some cases there is a danger of membership falling below 50% in some workplaces.

Protect & survive

In order to retain a strong presence in the workplace and act as an effective voice of members in negotiations with the company we need to make sure that as many employees as possible are members of the union. Are your colleagues union members? Do they realise that unless they are in the union they would have no-one to represent them in Capability, Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures.



Non-members have no direct access to legal services or advice from experienced stewards on any work issues they encounter.

Being a union member is probably the best insurance you can take out in the workplace and if you want to help secure your future then you can do so by helping encourage colleagues to join up today.



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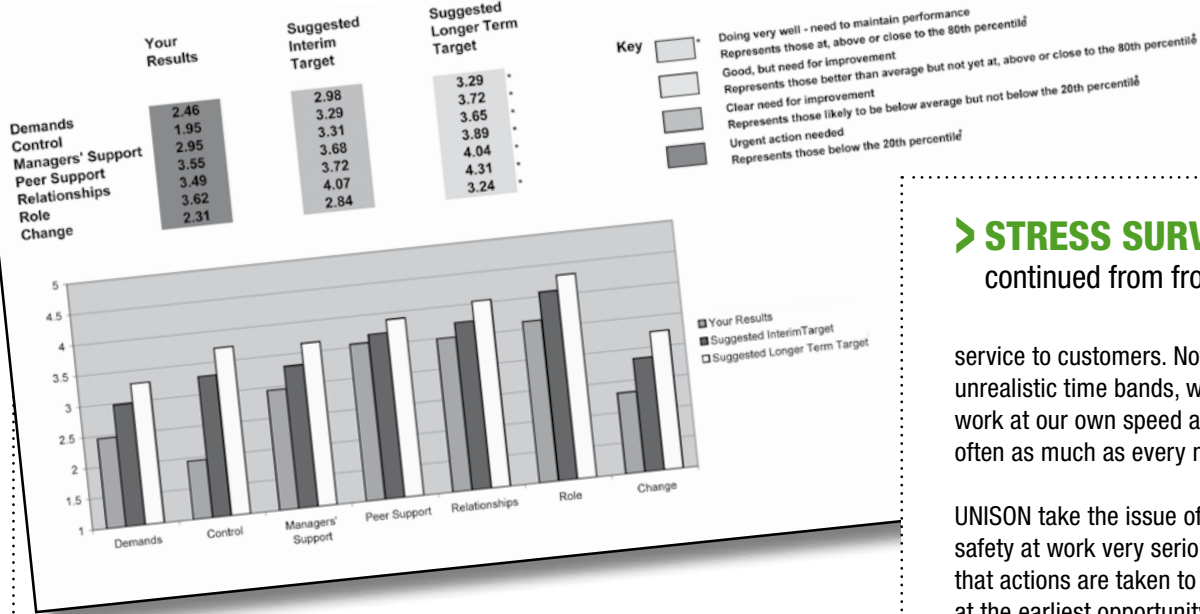
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Summary of Results Energy Retail Stress Survey



The latest results from earlier this year show little improvement over the previous stress survey, in some ways they are worse.

STRESS SURVEY

continued from front page

service to customers. Not only this but we have unrealistic time bands, we are no longer able to work at our own speed and objectives are changed often as much as every month."

UNISON take the issue of members' health and safety at work very seriously and will want to see that actions are taken to address these problems at the earliest opportunity. We will continue to keep members advised of any progress we make on these issues.

AGM and Branch Elections

The Branch AGM held earlier this year saw a welcome interest by members in volunteering to fill a number of steward vacancies across the branch. As a result we now have

the largest number of stewards for over 15 years. Details of the current stewards and Branch Officers are detailed below. If you are interested in filling any of the vacancies on

this list then please do not hesitate to contact the branch for more information either via a local steward or by emailing branch.office@unison-manweb.freeserve.co.uk

BRANCH OFFICERS

President	Joe Morgan
Vice-President	Stephen O'Connor
Hon Secretary	David Read
Hon Treasurer	Tom Gibbons
Branch Auditor (1)	Jim Brown
Branch Auditor (2)	Vacancy
Welfare Fund Secretary	Anita Guy
Education Secretary	Joe Morgan
Publicity Officer	Justine Bradey
Membership Services	Dean Slaven
Sports and Social	Julie Lockley
Equal Opportunities	Bernadette Woods
	Carol Smith
Health and Safety	Andy McEwan
Youth Officer	Kelly Booth
LGBT Officer	Michelle Kay
Labour Link Officer	Mike Kay

STEWARDS

Energy Networks

Prenton

Irene Adams, Geoff Littler, Dean Slaven
Stewards needed at Liverpool, Rhostyllen, Llandudno and Caernarfon

Energy Retail CSC

Warrington CSC

Gareth Foy, Darren Garnett, Paul Garrity, Michelle Kay, Mike Kay, Jackie Murphy, Ian Smith, Bernadette Woods

Rhos CSC

Kelly Ann Booth, Justine Bradey, Chris Jackson, Cath Littlewood, Julie Lockley, Andy McEwan, Steve O'Connor, Karen Shallcross

Caernarfon CSC

Kathleen Hughes, Carol Smith
Stewards needed at Liverpool Direct Sales and Queensferry

Energy Retail Dataserve

Warrington

Anita Guy, Jeff Pye
Stewards needed at Rhostyllen

Corporate Functions

Hoylake

Joe Morgan

SAIC

Tom Gibbons, Dave Read, Howell Watson