
BFAWU Branch Secretary Network January 2025

Overview of last meeting

We went over the main points of the October meeting, especially the concerns over branch engagement at branch meetings and in elections, the functions of branch mapping and knowing where to target time and resources, the importance of having substantive and facilities agreement saved on the unions server so that if there are changes in the branch or issues like fires, floods or site closures we still have the information going forwards so companies are not able to change things without new reps knowing about it, which has been a problem historically.

A reminder was given about filling in rep's codes of conduct forms upon election and ratification as well as the GDPR forms, so that the union and members are as protected as possible as well as the reps.

Around the branches

The SALT branch workers enquiry report was highlighted to those in attendance, a 68-page report about the realities of working on the land, hard copies were ordered for a recent conference the branch was at, which flew out, more physical copies are being investigated. We are looking at getting the report up on the website, but it can be found here in the meantime:



Burnt out,
Overworked & Under

Activists in in Kernow who fall under the district branch had set up a West Cornwall against Racism group, with friends from PCS union and others, this will be launched on the 1st February.

Branches covered their pay claims, ranging from £15 per hour (roughly a 23% increase) to 10%. Concerns were also raised about low volume levels and the impact of that on the workforce, jobs and potential growth in branches, January and February are historically quieter months in some parts of the industry, but the levels of orders are low even on normal levels. This in turn is leading to a reduction in agency staff and potential discussions around shift pattern changes, and consultations around reductions in head counts. Sites are in limbo hoping for supermarkets and other customers to agree to orders, and their pressure on reducing costs so much is making those conversation take longer and longer, in the meantime the pressure on the workforce not having clarity on what is happening and whether they will have jobs is growing.

Others had similar concerns but have experienced this a number of times over the last 20 years, so weren't as concerned about the impact as orders normally come through March/April time – there was also a discussion about the timing of this happening at the beginning of wage negotiations.

Examples of small groups of members trying to break away in an attempt to negotiate their own terms and conditions was discussed with a couple of examples given, attendees raised concerns about how vulnerable this makes those workers, they may feel like they have a 'voice' but in actual fact they are losing the protection of being in the wider branch and may be more likely to be singled out as a group and offered less than others as a result.

The difficulties of not having bargaining rights was discussed at length too, where branches have been set up but haven't yet negotiated a recognition agreement, it was agreed that this shouldn't mean the branch doesn't have a say, or shouldn't attempt to input into the process, but it often means being ignored, having information for these branches to take to employers to showcase how they will lose employees if they don't increase T&Cs would be helpful.

The rise of Reform

Reform and members and activists voting for them and supporting them was a concern raised in the meeting, they are building in places such as Kernow, trying to recruit food workers, land workers, farmers and it was felt that in Cornwall and other places they have a grip of working people who are believing the rhetoric they are pushing! It was agreed that we need to push back, how do we talk to members who are supporting Reform but who are not reading their manifesto which would explain to them they are not the party for the working class, people are instead listening to their rhetoric around migrants and in the main not understanding the implications of what



impact it is having on people in their branches and communities. It was agreed that people need an alternative but that it cannot be Reform!

Rathbones Branch update

After heading into pay negotiations mid-November, the reps were informed that the site was closing, initially it was to be the whole site affecting just shy of 400 people. After we began applying pressure, through our links with the GFTU and their ability to contact MPs, encourage people to contact the CEO and board, the company came back with a proposal to keep open the 'new build' section of the site which produces morning goods. We raised concerns about the pay rates and shift patterns for the new world and made it clear people would not stay for what they were offering. We negotiated an enhanced redundancy package as members were clear they didn't want to fight to save the factory in a company owned by a Private Equity Firm that is stripping back everything slowly but surely. We also negotiated pay protection for anyone who stayed with the business, which was less than 40 of the 130+ they needed.

Because so many of the workforce wanted to leave and leave on the 6th January which was the first possible opportunity, there were changes to the ability to leave on that date, those who had jobs were able to leave, they then were phasing others through the month and the last people would be going on the 26th January. Shamefully the company decided they were going to recoup any overused holiday pay people had received, which frustrated the team.

AOB

We were updated on the relationship with the group of young people in Kenya and our members in Kernow, who have sent over a football kit and footballs for them to be able to play, a similar relationship with young people is in development and the potential to have one or both of them send a video to conference was discussed so other branch delegates can see the importance of such initiatives.