
BFAWU Branch Secretary Network September 2025

Around the branches

Holiday season was quieter than normal during the summer, though is starting to pick up now, management tried to make drivers change holidays, but they stood firm, one non-member changed their holidays after pressure from management, the branch challenged the pressure being put upon drivers to change their holidays due to volume issues, and this led to them backing off.

A member was diagnosed with breast cancer, reps from the branch have been supporting her and she recently got the all clear, her husband has also had heart problems during this time, so the branch persuaded the employer to ensure that she received paid time off whilst dealing with the illnesses and have negotiated reasonable adjustments when returning to work along with an arrangement to support her when attending Dr and hospital appointments.

Members reaching retirement age was discussed, with examples given of members believing that they were mere months away from retiring, but when they looked into it found out that they still had 12 months to go, which can be devastating, it is important that members understand when they can retire and what resources and support there is available to them through that process.

Being a rep, or a branch secretary is more than just representing members in the workplace, there is also a social, caring side of the role when members need support with issues that impact work but may be happening to themselves or outside of it.

Other branches are experiencing volumes picking up slightly as we move into the back end of the year, which is moving production back towards 7 days, which is positive. Finsbury Foods are seemingly moving down a similar route as the Private Equity owners of Morrisons, they currently have 4 factories listed for sale, when it has been raised with the company by reps they have responded saying that it is more cost effective to sell the land and rent it back, it means that they can concentrate on production and not have the additional responsibilities and costs of owning and upkeep of the land etc. They have recently bought Lola Cupcakes, which gives them wider access to the market.

The unintended consequences of being busier is that it is triggering shift changes in sites, which can ultimately cause upheaval to members families, especially when the changes aren't long term shift changes, and lead to multiple or fairly frequent changes, the importance of this being discussed and worked through with branches at site (or nationally where appropriate) cannot be underestimated.

Ageing workforces were discussed, members who have been in the industry for years are experiencing aches and pains that make some aspects of the work difficult, discussions are being held about support in these circumstances such as chairs in production areas so people can get off their feet if they need to, these are already present in some workplaces, though other employers are 'struggling' finding food safe ones that are cheap.

A discussion was had around the Mergers happening in the industry, Greencore and Bakkavor and Hovis and Allied. CMA (Competition and Markets Authority) are investigating both situations though they are at different stages of the process.

There have been a lot of rumour's certainly in the Hovis and Allied branches about what may or may not happen, though they seem to have died off slightly since the announcement was made confirming the merger is happening.

Heat was an issue during the summer, there was a TUC campaign which a number of branches engaged with and sent information from their workplaces to as well as raising them with their employers, now the pressure is on for Next Summer.

There have been some interesting developments around Average Holidays, with some employers not changing their calculations initially when legislation changed, individual and collective grievances are being raised in order to fight for the money back that members are owed due to calculations not being correct.

Issues with wage negotiations stalling, for different reasons, the industry is moving closer and closer to minimum wage and as another hike is expected, which is great overall, employers are looking to remove premiums, paid breaks and other terms and conditions in order to pay for the rises, which leaves members with less and less



benefits. The frustrating thing is employers have known the NMW plan for as long as we have and, in some cases, have just not planned well enough to ensure they remain away from being minimum wage employers, members shouldn't have to fund pay rises, especially when the same employers are purchasing other businesses and swallowing them up!

Reform and the Rise of the Far Right

It was agreed that the biggest concern is the current situation around the rhetoric and anger surrounding Migrants, which is being fueled by misinformation and lies. People in branches are as a result blaming migrants for all the issues they are facing and championing Yaxley- Lennon and Farage as some sort of saviors who are going to sort out all our problems by removing migrants. There is a genuine shock that despite working alongside people for many years, they are being pulled into the divisive rhetoric and have become blinkered by the facts, listening only to snappy one liners and no real solutions to change our lives, it feels like we are constantly arguing all the time. There is a perception that we are mates with Starmer and therefore not with working class people, just because we are a trade union, despite us not being affiliated to them since 2021.

Cities like Liverpool have historically been proud to support people, and despite seeing Reform as the answer, they have few answers to what they would do if they were in power though. Yet now there are members and non-members in Liverpool and other Cities with a proud history of diversity and inclusion now making comments about how 'all foreigners should be sent home' which is distressing for our migrant members of which there are many, and for other marginalized groups who know that the rhetoric will turn to them too.

How we can link branches up to regional Anti-Fascist groups was discussed so that those who want to challenge the divisive rhetoric and support Anti-Fascist work in their local area can do so, it was agreed that this would be looked into and that more communication about local, regional and national events and demonstrations should be circulated. This could also lead to union branches putting on their own local events, and beyond that courses about Class Consciousness, Political Economy and other elements should be looked into as it is the Political decisions of successive Government's that have put our economy in such a situation that people are struggling to survive, not migrants and refugees.

Concerns were raised about members saying they 'Don't want their subs' supporting Palestine, after online meetings were set up at the request of a number of branches and how we get the message through that trade unionism is international

Branch secretary WhatsApp groups

The Branch Secretary WhatsApp groups are set up, just need to send the emails out to the different regions with the relevant links to join, the Branch Secretaries can then talk to each other in between Regional Council and Network meetings, support each other and bounce ideas etc. The regional groups will be supported by an announcement group where Circulars, member emails and other information can be placed to ensure information gets through.