



POST WORKER



Under attack from Royal Mail, we need...

Unity in action

We are facing increasing attacks by Royal Mail. There's a national assault and an onslaught by many local managers as well.

The unofficial strike in Belfast, Monday's one-day counters strike in north west London, and the host of ballots (Dundee, Somerset & West Wiltshire, Cornwall, Oxfordshire) being approved across the country show the extent of the anger and the mood for resistance.

We are not short of issues to fight over—managers ignoring national and local agreements, job cuts, replacing full-time jobs with

part-time, liberalisation, attacks on seniority, the conduct code and attendance procedure—you name it, they are throwing it at us. And Royal Mail is trying to undermine our union in the process, sometimes talking to individuals rather than the union or imposing changes without negotiations.

It's good to resist at a local level, but national attacks need a national response. The strength of a national strike rather than piecemeal local battles is that it allows us to deliver a big, hard blow to Royal Mail.

We saw this last year when the government were forced back to the negotiating

table over pensions just by the threat of national strike action by some public sector unions.

With a proper campaign, the mood is there to win a national ballot. Look at the areas that are fighting back now and you'll find that many are not normally the most militant places.

National action could unite the union, show that we are serious in negotiating the best deal for our members and put us in the best position when it comes to negotiating future deals over automation and other major changes.

Don't panic

John Farnan, NEC (pc)

Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate - John F Kennedy's words from 1961 are very appropriate to our union today.

Many people would have you believe all is doom and despondency within our industry. The cries of "get a deal at any cost" have begun in earnest. We have heard it all before. TQM was going to be our death knell as was OCR/VCS and other such new technologies. However we have always come through all these difficulties and in many cases are stronger and wiser for the challenges.

Walk sequencing and the competition will not likewise destroy our industry or our union. Our members are looking for strength and leadership from all levels of our activists, not weakness or indecision.

We must have the confidence to deliver our members aspirations.

Whilst talks are continuing we must let the employer know that we will be prepared to back up our negotiations with industrial action if so required, and this should be part of our deliberations over the next couple of days.

Further we must have faith in the CWU membership. Royal Mail are losing the "hearts and minds" battle. Their messages have gone from being

very optimistic to pessimistic in the extreme. These mixed messages do them no credit and unite our members behind us.

Our people are fed up to the back teeth with the competition being used as a stick to beat us up with. All work time learning sessions are full of threat centred communications demanding cuts, efficiencies and savings with nothing coming back to benefit the workforce.

In order to take on the competition Royal Mail need a professional, dedicated and motivated workforce and that puts us in a strong position. The debates this week should be positive and steer our negotiators in the right direction.

Our members are behind us! I'll end by paraphrasing another JFK quote "ask not what your union can do for you, but what you can do for your union".

PostWorker meeting

UNITY IN ACTION

Speakers:

Jane Loftus, NEC

John Farnan, NEC

Mark Baulch, London

Joe Malone, Scotland No.5

Plus speaker from Belfast strike (invited)

Chair: **Chris Tapper, SE Wales**

Thurs 9 Feb at 6pm, Wedgewood Suite

Decent pay—no strings

Jane Loftus, NEC (pc)

The April 2006 pay deal should have no strings attached. Postal Workers have borne the brunt of Royal Mail's cost cutting.

Allan Leighton patronises us all by his Share in Success Scheme with one off payments which obviously come at a price to our jobs and conditions.

Royal Mail continually play good cop, bad cop. Good cop says Royal Mail is doing well, profits are up, here's a share in success hand out. Bad cop says Royal Mail is in crisis, we are financially bankrupt, 40,000 jobs must go and competition will take your jobs.

Postal workers have earned and deserve their basic pay to be increased to the national average of £390.60 a week. Cost cutting bonus schemes and one off share in success payment schemes are no substitute for basic pay rises and can be stopped or taken away at management's whim.

An increase in basic pay to the national average and an end to cost cutting bonus and share scheme shams is what postal workers want.

As a union we will need to organise and fight Royal Mail and the government to increase our pay to the national average.

Royal Mail has millions to pay fat cat board room salaries for managers to deliver job losses and introduce backroom privatisation by liberalisation of the postal market.

It's about time Royal Mail paid postal workers a decent wage. Unity in action can achieve this pay claim and end financial reliance on one off payments.

Defend national agreements

Paul Turnbull, Cambridge CWU (pc)

I believe that senior RM managers are undermining a number of important national agreements. You may think that some of these agreements could be better but, of course, RM is not improving them.

Attendance

The union has had serious issues with the attendance procedure for many years and last year at conference it was agreed that negotiations would be pursued with RM to improve it.

After lengthy talks agreement has not been reached on a new procedure. Apparently RM had agreed to appeals at stage 1 and stage 2 (the current agreement does not conform to ACAS guidelines) but they wanted harsher trigger points!

According to the agreement RM managers should use their discretion before issuing any warning; do you believe this happens?

When is an accident not an accident? Answer—when you work for RM it can become an incident and any absences will not be discounted!

Cases when a person is too sick to attend for interview

Managers have recently been issued guidelines, which have not been agreed by the CWU, on dealing with situations where people go sick when subject to Conduct, Bullying and Harassment or NCI / Improving Performance procedures.

Before these guidelines were issued if a person went sick during an investigation they would be interviewed when they returned to work unless the case was considered to be extremely serious such as in cases of dishonesty or abuse of sick leave provisions; now cases can continue if a person is not well enough to attend an interview.

This could mean that when a member goes sick after being bullied by a manager the case would be dealt with without the member being interviewed!

Seniority

RM has been trying to get rid of seniority for many years as, they say, it is discriminatory.

Seniority is discriminatory—simply the person who has been employed by RM for the longest is given preferential treatment. But it does not discriminate on the basis of

race, sex, sexuality etc or possibly more importantly for RM they cannot give preferential treatment to the “blue-eyed boy or girl” and therefore worse treatment for someone they see as a “troublemaker”.

Transfers

A new Transfer Policy has recently been implemented, without agreement from the CWU, which, what a surprise, does not involve seniority!

Teamworking

On the front page of the Courier we are told that “people will work in teams of about 12. Led by a team leader working alongside them, they will be responsible for organising themselves and their duties, solving any problems locally in the process.”!

This has many very serious implications for the union and hasn't been agreed. They want to see the end of revisions—negotiated by the rep and voted for by the members—where duties are then selected on the basis of seniority!

If these attacks continue and we wish to have an effective union I believe that consideration must be given to a national strike to defend our national agreements.

The pensions myth

Norman Candy, NEC (pc)

In 2004 Allan Leighton proclaimed how successful the ‘Renewal Plan’ had been in turning around a previous loss of £197 million in 2002 to produce a profit of £220 million in 2003.

Adam Crozier said ‘The improved financial performance ... had enabled Royal Mail to increase its contribution to the company’s pension fund, initially by £270 million’. ‘We want our postmen and women to continue to have the benefit of an excellent Pension Scheme’.

What a difference a year makes.

An article in the *Mail on Sunday* in September, 2005 gives a different view. ‘Royal Mail is only three years from being wiped out. It wants to be able to invest an extra £2 billion in its business to modernise its infrastructure, but is prevented by law from borrowing the money because of its massive £4.6 billion pension deficit. It believes the answer is to transfer the liabilities to the government.’

According to the Guardian the £318 million loss claimed by Royal Mail in 2002 could equally have been shown as a £121 million profit. The Guardian’s analysis of Royal

Mail profits in 2004 reduced them from £537 million to just £80 million.

Hang on. What about last year’s share in success payments of £1,000? According to the Guardian’s report Royal Mail was more financially successful before Leighton launched his renewal plan.

So does this mean our pension fund is in trouble?

No, but it does mean that Royal Mail owe it a great deal of money. Our pension fund is covered by the Pension Act 2004, has billions of assets and is administered by an independent Board of Trustees.

Press speculation claims Royal Mail is attempting to find a way around this by persuading the government to take on the pensions commitment as part of a package disguised as an Employees Stake Holder Scheme.

Our only protection against becoming the next generation of pension victims is eternal vigilance. We have collectively paid billions into our pension fund. Royal Mail’s contribution (less 13 years contributions holiday) is our deferred wages.

It belongs to the members of the scheme. We must ensure that the union not only protects our collective assets but also fights to improve the benefits for current and future pensioners.

Take a stand against New Labour’s attacks

When jobs are cut, privatisation hits, conditions are threatened... Who are you going to call?

Paul Garraway, South Central No. 1 CWU (pc)

Certainly not the Labour Party.

Royal Mail, with the support of New Labour, is driving through a programme of vicious competition and enforcing the “liberalisation” agenda.

We are also seeing the ongoing privatisation of the counters, a serious attack on our members, the service, and the union.

These attacks, despite the growing resistance both inside and outside of parliament, show that New Labour is wholly committed to pushing through an anti-CWU, pro-business agenda.

But it isn't just their policies concerning the post that we knock heads with the Labour Party over.

The war with Iraq,

privatisation of health and education, attacks on pensions and so on, are all issues where we oppose what the Labour Party is doing.

It raises the question, how can it be that they only political party we fund is the one that attacks us?

If we are serious about stopping the attacks from Royal Mail and the government then we need a response that reflects this.

We need to stop saying it and start doing it: strike to defend jobs and services, withdraw money from the party that continues to organise with management to smash our union, our jobs and conditions and fund those candidates who are prepared to support us.

Do you want to join the **PostWorker** editorial board?
Call 07763 593 389m
Make use of our website: www.postworker.org.uk/post