

CWU: We need to strike against cuts and privatisation

by Workers Power
CWU members

The CWU campaign to block the part-privatisation of Royal Mail is splitting the Labour Party down the middle, with 145 Labour MPs signing Early Day Motion 428 so far and two members of government quitting over the issue.

However all the signs are that Gordon Brown and Business Secretary Peter Mandelson will push privatisation forward, relying on Tory support. Their aim is to sell a stake to giant multinational TNT, which has just announced a five per cent pay cut for its workers in Holland!

There is no doubt that privatisation will accelerate these attacks on our jobs and must be stopped. The next couple of months are crucial to derailing the government's plans. But will lobbying Labour MPs be enough? And even if we defeat privatisation, will the price still be "modernisation" and huge job losses?

Should we support "modernisation"?

Along with privatisation, the CWU should also reject "modernisation" and expose it for what it really means - cutting half our sorting offices, up to two-thirds of delivery offices, and possibly 50,000 jobs. The recent Hooper review insists that wages have to be looked at too since we are supposedly 25% overpaid.

Modernisation - or restructuring, the old Tory word for the same thing - threatens to turn the post into a casualised industry with a majority part-time workforce.

Modernisation is meant to bust the union so it is a shadow of its former strength, like many weak unions in the "modern" private sector. That is why many of the sorting offices slated for closure are among the most militant sections of the union - Liverpool Copperas Hill office, Oxford, etc.

Unfortunately instead of standing up to modernisation, Billy Hayes, Dave Ward and many Labour Party supporters of our campaign like Geraldine Smith MP have signed up to it, and accept there will be closures and mass job losses. Geraldine Smith even praises the CWU for already accepting 40,000 job losses in recent years, saying it shows that the union can be trusted to make "hard decisions"! Postal workers need 50,000 more "hard decisions" like we need a hole in the head

- we should reject a future where a third of us are in the dole queue and two-thirds face falling wages, back-breaking work loads and managers who run their offices like little dictatorships and ride roughshod over the union, whether they are from the public sector or private. (over)

Of course we are not against new technology such as walk-sorting machinery. New technology can be used to improve our working conditions if we fight for a 35 hour a week with no loss of pay - this is CWU policy and also a key demand of the European trade union movement.

Hayes, Ward and the Postal Executive (PEC) hope to cut a deal without a fight, accepting some cuts in order to keep a place at the negotiating table. This will just see Royal Mail (whether privatised or not) come back for cuts again and again, as they have done each year.

Lobby, protest... and strike!

We shouldn't accept either privatisation or restructuring. Instead we need to step up our campaign, keeping up the lobbying while piling on more pressure with protests and industrial action. Today's demonstration against Pat McFadden is a good start, we should aim for big contingents of postal workers on the 28 March TUC demo and go to the public and other unions to build support for massive local Mayday demonstrations against job losses and privatisation. Alongside this however we need to begin the build up to a national strike against these twin attacks on our jobs and industry.

A national strike would keep the pressure on the parliamentary rebels, while making a pact with the Tories unworkable. At the same time, it would defend our jobs, conditions and the service, should a deal - cuts for continued public ownership - be done behind our backs.

Control our leaders

CWU leaders Billy Hayes and Dave Ward say we cannot argue against the market. They have signed up to "modernisation" and called off strikes the December 2008 mail centre strikes as part of the campaign against privatisation, instead of building on resistance such as the mail centre campaigns and current Edmonton strike against imposed part-time duties.

Ballot CWU members on Labour

CWU 2008 conference resolved to ballot the membership by March 2009 if Labour did not reverse its privatisation plans and pension cuts. This is a key weapon to put pressure on Labour and we must go ahead with the ballot. There is a real danger CWU tops will argue we need to keep the Labour rebels on board, even though those in charge of the party, Brown and Mandelson, are steering privatisation through. Reps, branches and activists should demand that conference is respected and the ballot brought forward.

Break from Labour - build a new, mass working class party!

That's why we need our own network of rank and file activists and reps to control the campaign and fight for a national strike against cuts, closures and privatisation. We cannot afford to rely on Labour MPs to save Royal Mail but must go to other unions and working class users, who rely on our public service, for solidarity and joint action

- No sell-off - keep Royal Mail and post offices fully public!
- No closures, no job cuts: cut the hours, not the jobs with no loss of pay!
- For a national strike to defend jobs and public ownership!
- Nationalise the private carriers with no compensation - for a 100 per cent publicly-owned postal service under workers' control.

Fight for Jobs

28 March TUC national demonstration at the G20 meeting, London

Transport: www.putpeoplefirst.org.uk
Let's unite locally with other unions facing cuts, closures and privatisation and build for the 28 March demonstration, and then take this fighting spirit back home for massive Mayday demonstrations up and down the country: Unite and fight for every job!