

## Labour in crisis, London votes to strike...

# Let's strike while the iron is hot

Postal workers face a two-pronged assault - part-privatisation and massive office closures and job losses - thanks to the Labour Government, which the Communications Workers Union (CWU) supports financially to the tune of £1 million a year. In the last few months, Royal Mail disputes have sprung up across the country in response, centred on the CWU London Division's massive vote for strikes. If these disputes are quickly turned into a national strike, we could defeat these attacks.

### For a national strike

Royal Mail management has refused to talk to the CWU since last autumn. Instead they have ignored previous agreements and cut job, closed offices and undermined our conditions, causing a massive wave of anger.

Meanwhile Labour has pushed the part-privatisation of Royal Mail, aiming to sell a minority stake to private investors - something that will inevitably lead to full privatisation, as competitors demand an end to "government interference" - and to install a new union-busting management. They face increasing opposition from the CWU, 149 Labour MPs, who have come out against privatisation, and the public - a CWU poll found 75 per cent oppose the government's plan. With Labour's meltdown in the June elections, ministers have started hinting they may compromise or even drop privatisation. But with Lord Mandelson, the architect of mail privatisation, promoted in the cabinet reshuffle, we shouldn't bet on it.

Indeed we have never been in a better situation to force the government to back down all the way. London postal workers have voted to strike by a massive 91 per cent majority; not a single one of the 154 offices balloted voting against, a remarkable result. Meanwhile several offices in Scotland and elsewhere took strike action in May. CWU head office is inundated with up to a hundred requests for industrial ballots. Working class anger at unemployment, cuts and political corruption has created a favourable background for our action. There is even the possibility of linking up with other strikers, like the London tube workers. And of course our action could inspire many others.

All postal workers are under attack, so we should all strike together. A national strike would not only smack down Royal Mail's bullying bosses, but make privatisation unworkable. It would ratchet up the pressure on Labour and make private investors lined up for a slice of the company think twice.

### A "credible alternative"?

Yet so far the CWU leadership - Billy Hayes, Dave Ward and the postal executive - has held us back from fighting. They have offered negotiations for months, which Royal Mail has ignored, preferring to press ahead with closures and cuts. They have suspended strikes, such as the planned December 2008 mail centre action, supposedly to avoid alienating the public and MPs.

In reality the public supports us and, as for the MPs, the expenses scandal

### "A Credible Alternative"?

The Postal Executive's "A Credible CWU Alternative" is the basis for an emergency motion to conference and will provide the basis for amendments to the Postal Services Bill and negotiations with the government. However this is not a step forward for postal workers but means unnecessary, damaging concessions and further attacks in the future. Its proposals:

- sign up to job losses and closures, and "more flexible delivery spans"
- recognise the need to "reduce costs and increase efficiency", buying into the lie that Royal Mail's main problem is it has to make more profit.
- propose "freeing" Royal Mail to borrow money from private sources for modernisation, meaning even more pressure to turn a profit in the future to pay off these debts.
- push for a Royal Mail run along the lines of Network Rail, subsidising competitors and possibly with directors from private sector "stakeholders" like TNT
- put a few CWU leaders on the board to help impose cuts while ensuring that "national agreements are delivered consistently across the country", in other words stopping local resistance by postal workers.

Recognising that they would need to strong arm postal workers into accepting such a rotten deal, the PEC calls for secret negotiations and tying any gains to the cuts in a "take it or leave it" style deal that places "a necessary discipline" on postal workers - in other words, agree this or you get nothing. This bureaucratic approach means lashing up a deal behind closed doors and then putting a gun to postal workers' heads to accept it.

**Vote NO to any resolution incorporating these proposals!**

shows they are more concerned with feathering their own nests than with our jobs. Do we really need to trim our action to curry favour with these chiselers?

Now the pressure has from members has grown unbearable, and London and other offices are being given the go ahead to strike. We must support London and others with a national strike fund and solidarity appeals to other unions. But while supporting any action against Royal Mail's cuts, why should these sections fight alone? One out of three jobs could be lost and half the mail centres closed in the coming years. All of us are affected, and we need a national strike in response if we are to repel these attacks.

With the crisis in Labour reaching a peak around the Euro-election meltdown and resignation of several ministers in the first week of June, the government is wobbling. Some ministers are privately hinting privatisation could be dropped, and the postal executive has tabled A Credible CWU Alternative in response. However this "alternative" would see the union sign up to job cuts, closures, "more flexible delivery spans" and a publicly-owned but profit-driven Royal Mail. Not much of an alternative, is it? No way should we hold back for a rotten compromise that the government might not in the end accept, and if it did would still see massive job losses and worsening conditions.

## Rank and File must take the lead

Instead, at this month's CWU conference postal workers should demand a national strike against cuts, closures and privatisation, one that swiftly escalates to all-out if the bosses and Labour do not back down. Past experience shows, however, that victory will depend on a network of activists, reps and branches that understands the need for a decisive showdown.

This would represent a real alternative - an alternative leadership - that could direct the strike if the CWU officials surrender or unofficial action becomes necessary. If Royal Mail or the government got the courts to ban our strikes, as they did in 2007, we could demand - and in the current climate receive - solidarity strikes.

Many workers will be watching the postal strike (and London tube strike) closely, looking to see if such a well-organised section can show the way in the fight against the jobs massacre ripping through the economy. We have strong union organisation and industrial clout, as the 2007 strike showed. If we act with determination, we will inspire others to do the same. Workers everywhere are being asked to pay the price of the capitalist crisis. The battle against privatisation and cuts in Royal Mail could light the fuse to a mass movement of resistance.

Tories, Lib Dems and Labour won't do. Last of all, we need a party that unites the working class - those in unions, the millions at work but not in unions, the 2.2 million unemployed, the youth, pensioners - and ensure that workers do not pay for a crisis we did not cause. French workers and socialists have set up a new anti-capitalist party whose leader is a postman! The CWU should disaffiliate from Labour, get together with other unions, working class campaigns and Socialists and do the same here before the next general election.

## Vote motions 103 and 105!

## Let's break from Labour - and build a new, anti-capitalist Workers Party!

It was right to stop funding Labour MPs and MEPs in March who don't support CWU policy on privatisation, but not enough.

First off, we need a party that will support our fight, not just individual MPs. Secondly we need a party that will fight to defend the NHS and education from privatisation, to build council housing, to tax the rich for the things that all workers need but that the

## What's the Alternative?

Postal Workers should reject the leadership's current approach. We need a 180 degree turn around from the policy of accepting the market in the post, accepting efficiency cuts and closures, accepting workload-hiking efficiency.

We should demand a consistent fight to defend postal workers conditions and rejecting the market or profit in the postal sector:

- for the £400/week wage
- for a moratorium on job cuts and office and post office closures
- cut the hours not the workers: for a 35 hour gross working week, with no loss of pay.
- for a fully nationalised postal sector under workers' and consumers' control

Any strike action is welcome, but a national strike could see us win real gains. Ultimately the fastest and surest way of winning is an all-out strike. Strike committees accountable to mass workplace meetings are essential to control the action and negotiations, and ensure a victory.

## For a Rank and File Movement in the CWU

A grassroots movement in our union of the rank and file and workplace strike committees could deliver the pressure on the national leadership to win, and if necessary take action without them and breaking the anti-union laws with mass walkouts.

Ultimately such a movement could stand alternative candidates on its policies and on the average postal workers wage - not like the £80,000 or more that Hayes and Ward take home every year. The aim would be to transform the CWU into a democratic, fighting union, taking its place in the struggle for Socialism.

There is no such movement at the moment. The Telecom's Broad Left simply stands in elections. The Socialist Workers' Party has for years run the Post Worker paper with a member, Jane Loftus, President of the CWU. Yet the SWP has failed to build an alternative to the current CWU leadership. Their uncritical peace pact with Hayes in particular has blocked developing the left in the union.

CWU activists in Post Worker should demand it meets regularly and democratically decides its policies and leadership if it is to build a real grassroots alternative.

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