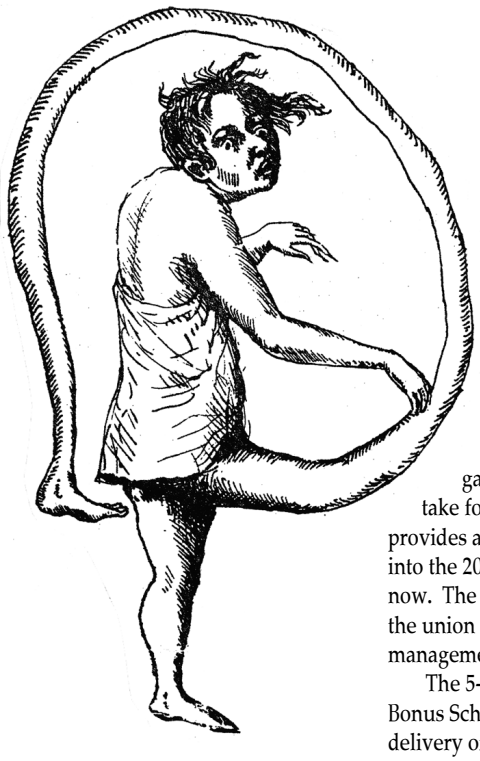
Communication Worker #7

Bulletin of the Communication Workers' Network - Solidarity Federation

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THE WAY BACKWARDS

The so-called 'Way Forward' is now a reality for postal workers. One reason it was narrowly voted in (at the second attempt) was the prospect of a 40-hour, 5-day week.

After years of working a 6-day week, many CWU members saw the chance of gaining what workers in many other industries take for granted. On paper, the Way Forward provides an opportunity to move working conditions into the 20th century. Only a hundred years behind now. The 21st century is still a long way off, thanks to the union leadership being hand in glove with management.

The 5-day, 40-hour week is linked to the Payment Bonus Scheme which provides extra payment for staff in delivery offices where delivery targets are met (i.e. pie in the sky). To qualify for the bonus, staff must be out on delivery by 07.00 and the delivery must be completed by 09.30. Owing to the 9% per annum increase in the volume of mail over the last four years, most deliveries are grossly overloaded and a two-and-a-half hour delivery span is a distant memory. In one local office recently, I saw a postman with no less than 11 full bags for his morning delivery - even 3 people would struggle to get that lot out in the time. This is not unusual - it is a regular occurrence *(send your ridiculous workload cases to CW and we'll print the best - ed.)*

The CWU and management have come up with a hefty document called 'The Delivery Toolkit'. This presents guidelines for union reps and managers to arrive at solutions where deliveries take longer. Management imagine some magical process will work on the postman/woman and their three or three and a half hour walk will only take two and a half hours. There is no provision to have walks timed, which is a problem for staff who are thoughtless enough to require the toilet or would like to take their break when they are entitled to have it. Management and the CWU leadership's answer to the problem is earlier starting times and 'pre-prep', which means someone sorts mail for a particular delivery through the night or on the previous afternoon so there is less to sort in the morning. Royal Mail have promised to return to the problem of overloaded deliveries next year. It is no secret that they believe they will not have to because of the magical 'indoor revision' they are pursuing this year.

Management are giving staff nothing. The 5-day week is being forced on them because of European legislation. Even now, there are those who 'cannot be given a 5-day week due to financial constraints' - who are being told to wait until next year (jam tomorrow). Meanwhile, they are munching on the fruits of the Way Forward, such as the reduction in Saturday overtime payment, the increase in the contribution of pension payments from workers' pay packets, having to wait twenty years to get the same holidays as a manager gets (then finding they have been funded by snatching away the odd day's which staff accrue as a reward for long service).

Not surprisingly, staff who were enthusiastic about the Way Forward are now realising they have been conned. The CWU leadership, complicit as ever, will not call for another vote on the issue. Neither will they sanction industrial action to force Royal Mail to deliver the 40-hour, 5-day week - which remains an empty promise.

The only real 'Way Forward' is for members to seize the initiative at local level and enforce the 09.30 cut off themselves. This involves simply taking out enough mail to last until 09.30 and leaving the rest in the frames. Remaining mail can then be delivered on overtime or left until the next day. Royal Mail are hoping their new system of timing deliveries (called Pegasus and on trial now) will lead to a reduction in jobs. In other words, postal workers' jobs are on the line. Enforcing the 09.30 delivery standard now will help guarantee jobs in the future. These are pre-privatisation days for Royal Mail (whoever wins the next general election), so why help them achieve it?

-ANTI-BULLYING
-NETWORKING WITH LIKE-MINDED COMMUNICATION WORKERS
-SPREADING THE WORD
-GOING ON THE OFFENSIVE

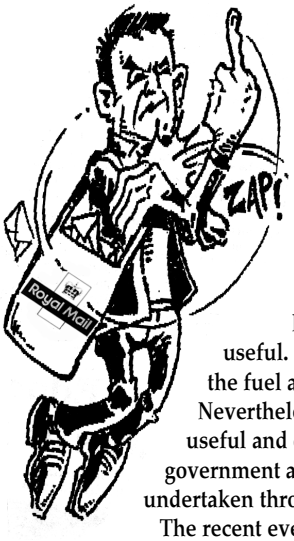
Do you work in the postal service or communications industry? Do you want a fair deal for all workers? To join a network of like-minded communication workers, or simply find out more, write to one of our regional addresses;
CWN-SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW or CWN-SF, PO Box 1681, London N8 7DN.
Tel. 0161 232 7889.

Catalyst

Freesheet of the Solidarity Federation - IWA

2nd issue of the quarterly freesheet is out now - with an emphasis on making the difference at work.
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Doing the Deed



From Prague to Petrol, to Postal Walkouts – there's never been a better time to take direct action.

Not all direct action is useful. Look no further than the fuel actions for example. Nevertheless, the most serious, useful and damaging attacks on the government and your boss can be undertaken through direct action.

The recent events in Prague were the latest in a series of direct actions against the managers of global capitalism. There is no sign of them dying down, quite the opposite. London, Seattle, Washington, Prague, where next? The short answer is, at work. Lobbying (or lobbing, as in bricks) on the streets shows anger, and may get some concessions. But decisive direct action at work, more than anything else, gets the bosses' attention. As soon as the job stops and the clock starts ticking on dead time, the profits and management bonuses start drying up. That is really serious.

'Strike' might be a long-established term, but then, so is work, and as long as capitalist work exists, there will be a role for the strike. 'Official' strikes may have been seriously undermined by Thatcher's (and now New Labour's) anti-union policies, but no-one can do anything about the unofficial version.

No surprise then, that the unofficial strike has recently been re-established as the direct action of choice for many postal workers up and down the country. From Edinburgh, where it all started in March, southwards and across England, increasing bullying by management on productivity and conditions have been sparking off walk-outs, slow-downs and a whole range of personal and small-group actions. Over half the strike days in the UK at the moment are in Royal Mail.

Postal workers generally view the national union as just another layer of management. Many of us have opted out of paying into the political fund on the grounds that the Labour Party does not look after the interests of the working class. Before the 1997 General Election, there were many more Party members active in the union than there are now. After 3 years of Blairedvision, workers have had enough and are leaving the Labour Party. Well-attended Union meetings held outside working hours indicate a growing feeling that, to gain any improvement in working conditions, staff must look to themselves and not to the union. The elected local representatives routinely refuse to sign any proposals without calling a meeting for staff to discuss the issues.

The rejection of the CWU leadership as a vehicle for postal worker action is fine. The problem is, individual offices, groups and individuals cannot work in a vacuum – we need co-ordination and sharing of ideas. Without a leadership. The Communication Workers' Network is one organisation which seeks to fill in this gap, by helping like-minded workers get together and co-ordinate their own direct actions, on their own terms, as and when they decide.

Inhuman Resources

Royal Mail makes a profit of over one and a half million pounds every day. To put two hundred workers on a 5-day week would cost half a million pounds a year. That's eight hours profit to make two hundred workers less tired and more contented than they are now. Not to mention another forty workers taken on to cover for the day's off of the original two hundred. Eight hours out of a yearly total of 8,760!

5-day weeks have been shown to reduce sickness levels and leave workers less tired and less prone to accidents on duty. Ask your Sector Operations Manager or your Area Manager how many days a week they work. Five is good enough for them, why not us? Ask your C.W.U. Branch Secretary or Area Representative how many days a week they work. If you fail to turn up for work one Saturday (for example, because of overwork), mail will be delayed. If the S.O.M. or A.M. do not turn up, the job gets done without them. So, who are the important ones here?

The P.B.S. Revision is divisive. Some will be on a five day week while others will not. Why should anyone lose out? Vote out all proposals until a five day week is given to ALL workers. You deserve nothing less than the management and union bosses already take for themselves.

It is us who make the profits for Royal Mail, and we get the least reward. This is capitalism, as endorsed by management, New Labour and the union bosses.

The CWU General Secretary gets more in a day than any of us earn in a week. £92K - that's not a wage, it's a lottery win! Such people will never fight for our interests. What is required is a new type of union in which representatives are elected and can be recalled at any given moment by the membership to whom they must be accountable. A union with no officials on fantastically high salaries and in which representatives are there to fight for better pay and conditions for the membership and not perks for themselves. A union in which the management has no say, and instead, all eyes are on the prize of total workers control of all industries.

The Personell Branch is now called 'Human Resources' within Royal Mail. That alone tells us all we need to know about management's attitude to workers. There is no longer any pretence - we are seen and referred to as 'resources' - like water or electricity, to be used and discarded when not required. All in the service of profit. Workers are no longer supposed to have a mind of their own - they can simply be trained and pressed into service as and when required, with no thought to their needs, feelings or views.

Welcome to Royal Mail's future. The worst thing is, with modern technology, there is no reason why anyone in a properly run society should need to work even a four day week. If we got rid of the real shirkers - management, politicians and union bosses, we could spread the work out and may work a couple of days. Now, that's more human.

New Labour, cheap labour

North Ayrshire Council has a website which boasts that workers in the area get paid a full 12% less than the national average. The low wages are described as one of the key attractions of the area, especially for businesses looking for cheap labour. You guessed - North Ayrshire is solid Labour.

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