



# The next steps

**I**N addition to a rolling programme of strike action on a functional basis, the CWU postal executive has also resolved to set up a national strike fund, to seek financial support from other unions and to call for the building of local postal workers' support groups. This is all progress.

## Making the new strategy work

**The union needs to up the ante at a local level.**

**Firstly, if reps or members are victimised for refusing to do work normally done by people engaged in action, then the full force of the union has to be mobilised in their support.** Suspensions of members for supporting industrial action can't be treated as isolated instances, with the union leadership running around the country trying to put fires out (see below), but as a challenge to the union itself.

**Secondly, this needs to be an active strike.** It's not enough for people to not come in. On 12-13 July, some places saw smaller picket lines than in June: It's important to try to reverse this by involving the maximum possible number of people in picketing. The union also needs to involve members in a programme of activities during the day, such as stalls, leafleting the public and lobbies of Labour MPs. A strike day is not a day off work!

**Thirdly, for all this to happen, there is a need to build rank-and-file organisation to oversee the action.** Workplace and branch strike committees, elected at mass meetings, are essential if the rank and file, including new and reactivated CWU members getting involved because they can see the union organising a fight, are to take active control of the dispute. They can also give some life and direction to the national reps meetings that have now started to take place.

**Lastly, dig in for a fight.** Royal Mail has taken a beating in the first round of the strike - and they know it. There are signs, for instance, that the company is backing away from its plan to impose a uniform start time across the country, which was due to come into effect on 13 August. But management are still spoiling for a fight, as events in Oxford show.

## Fighting victimisation in Oxford

**S**EVERAL hundred workers at Cowley Mail Centre in Oxford got back to work on Monday 16 July to find that their union rep Steve Gill had been suspended from work without charge.

Management threw their agreement with the union out of the window, refusing to tell the workers why they'd been suspended or allow him to be represented in interviews about the suspension by anyone from the CWU. They tried the same thing with a rep at Abingdon, a few miles from Oxford. In both places, there was a spontaneous walk out of everyone on shift; in Abingdon, management backed down immediately. In Oxford, however, management retaliated by threatening to suspend three other reps on no grounds at all; and trying to impose changes in shift times, terms and working conditions.

The Oxford workers stayed out for a week. Here is the Oxford reps' statement on the dispute:

*Dave Ward, CWU Deputy General Secretary (Postal sector), met with the Oxford Royal Mail management yesterday and negotiated a return to work agreement for the Mail Centre that the members were happy with and voted to accept. In exchange for unofficial action being called off, Royal Mail have:*

*1) disclosed the accusations against Steve Gill and the suspended driver (which they had refused to do); 2) accepted to follow the correct disciplinary procedure agreed with the CWU*

*(which they had also refused to do) with an unusually fast and strict timetable of 3 weeks;*

*3) accepted that a national official will deal with both cases (also unusual at this stage of a disciplinary);*

*4) withdrawn all threats to the other three stewards at the sorting office, and another rep in Abingdon who was also threatened with suspension last week.*

*During a packed meeting at the Cowley Workers Social Club this morning Dave Ward told the members that in consideration for the loss of pay in the last week the workers at the Oxford Mail Centre had special dispensation from the CWU national leadership NOT to take part in the planned official strike this coming Wednesday (from 7pm through to Thursday)! However, our postal workers unanimously voted TO STRIKE on Wednesday with the rest of the Mail Centres (sorting offices) in the country. (Please note that according to the national CWU plans, Delivery Offices will strike separately from Friday evening through to Saturday).*

*CWU have asked us to show our support with a RALLY THIS WEDNESDAY from 7:00 pm, when the pickets arrive at the Mail Centre. Please circulate the request widely, come along with colleagues, family, friends and banners. Let's force the Oxford Mail to publish photos showing that Oxford supports the posties and thanks them for withstanding the horrendous pressure and attacks from all sides, even if (shock and horror!) they dared having a barbecue on the picket line last week instead of publicly flagellating themselves. They have shown wonderful solidarity with each other while defending the mail service for us all.*

**• Demonstration in support of the Oxford postal workers: at Oxford Mail Centre, Cowley, 7pm, Wednesday 25 July**

## Organising agency workers

**O**NE worrying aspect of the Oxford dispute is that, while the unofficial walk out was 100% solid among sorting workers, 25 or so delivery workers scabbed - all of them newly-recruited agency workers under 25, and none of them union members. The union has not done nearly enough to win equal pay for such workers, let alone fight for them to be integrated into permanent, directly employed jobs.

Management *do* use agency workers to push down wages, terms and conditions, weaken the power of the union and so on. But the question is how to respond. Agency workers are not the enemy; we need to find ways to organise them.

The CWU must make a big push to recruit agency workers into the union. *On that basis* the union can organise an effective campaign against the use of agency labour. Otherwise a greater and greater percentage of the workforce will be employed by agencies, and the union's power pushed back further and further.

## CMA: Can't Manage Anything

**W**HAT is the Amicus section of UNITE (to which the old CMA now belongs) doing about managers carrying out striking postal workers' duties?

During the Oxford walk out sorting work was being done by managers, with the result that there was expected to be a backlog of seven million items when the strikers returned to work. The scabs were too shamefaced to cross the picket line themselves, so they met the managers in a nearby Tesco car park and receive/hand over the delivery vans there!

Amicus should follow the TGWU, whose leader Tony Woodley has put out a clear instruction to members working in the private mail companies not to touch work normally done by us.

## Why is the union ducking a fight in the Labour Party?

**L**AST week the postal executive rejected a proposal to go on a financial 'strike' within the Labour Party. It was right to do so - not because we should trust and support the Labour government, but because it is the wrong move to make at this stage of the dispute.

The idea of the union stopping the payment of the hundreds of thousands of pounds that it gives to Labour every year is not without attraction. Why should the CWU continue to fund the party responsible for attacks on us? The answer is that it shouldn't.

**The CWU should only pay money to the Labour Party in order to take part in a trade union campaign to change the policies and leadership of the party. If we did this we could count on the support of most rank-and-file trade unionists and the great majority of Labour voters. We would be helping to rally a force that would put working class politics back on the agenda.**

A campaign to change the policy of the Labour government is a serious business. It won't be done with gestures like bolting in protest with no attempt to rally forces behind us.

Given the importance of challenging government policy Dave Ward's decision to resign from the NEC of the Labour Party on the eve of the strike has to be one of the daftest things that a trade union leader has ever done.

In April Dave resigned from what is still formally the elected leadership body of the Labour Party on the grounds of an alleged "conflict of interests" between "my role in representing and defending the views of the CWU and continuing to spend time on the Labour Party NEC".

**The fact is that you can't be an effective trade union leader and avoid "conflict". Conflict goes with the job and being involved in a fight that is as political as this dispute is, means that if you want to win you are going to get into political conflict with the government.**

Think about this for a moment. Dave was elected to Labour's NEC not just by the CWU but by all the trade unions within the party to represent the interests, goals and aspirations of the trade union movement. His job on the NEC was not to disappear up Gordon Brown's arse, but to get into conflict with the government if it carries out anti-trade union policies and to try and get those policies changed.

Instead of walking away from a fight with the government on the NEC, Dave should have been organising with the other trade unionists, with sympathetic MPs and representatives from the local Labour Parties to get the NEC to come out in support of the union and against Royal Mail. We've done the maths. If you add together all the trade union representatives who Dave should have been putting on the spot and the local party representatives we know would support the CWU there is a majority on the NEC for the union and against Royal Mail.

### Build support groups!

The postal executive has called for postal workers' support groups to be built locally. The labour movement must take up this call as a matter of urgency.

In most places, trades councils will be the most appropriate bodies to launch a support group, but the exact form does not matter. What is important is to establish a local coordinating meeting of trade unionists in support of the CWU dispute, also attempting to draw in activists from local Labour Parties and socialist groups, service-users' campaigns like Keep Our NHS public, student unions and others.

Such support groups were massively important during the miners' strike of 1984-5; they can be massively important in building support for this strike today.

The union needs to posing the question at every level of the Labour Party: which side are you on? Are you with the CWU and the fight to keep a proper public postal service and to defend jobs and conditions? Or are you with Royal Mail management, the private mail operators, and the ministers who want to drive the competition policy through?

Every single Labour MP has to be put on the spot. We need lobbies of MPs' surgeries and it has to be made crystal clear that siding with Royal Mail in their attempt to break the CWU will have disastrous consequences. This week's lobby of parliament is a start, but just a start.

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## We should control the postal service, not Leighton and Crozier!

By Pete Keenlyside, CWU Executive (pc)

**A**S a union, we have never really developed our thinking on what "public ownership" should look like. The view still prevails that nationalisation means government control. But even in the past, government-controlled industries always operated in the interests of big business. Even when there was 100% monopoly, a firm sending out one million letters always paid far less per letter than an individual sending one, even though the firm had nowhere else to go.

Both to protect and improve our conditions, and to protect and improve the service, we need a form of nationalisation that gives the public and the workforce, locally and nationally, democratic control over decision-making. Why should we have high paid managers running the show, when postal workers can run it ourselves?

Such democratic control would allow the the introduction of new technology, for instance, to take place so that it benefits workers and service-users, rather than pushing them harder to make greater profits. It could underpin a workers' "modernisation" which can we counterpose to the bosses' "modernisation" plans.

We need to ram home the idea that the very postal service itself is under threat and mobilise all those who want to save it to our side. We also need to involve those working for potential competitors. They are our allies, not our enemies. The threat of competition will undoubtedly be used to drive down terms and conditions, not to mention jobs, in all areas of the industry. Maximising resistance to this will not only blunt the edge of those who seek to gain from privatisation, but will strengthen the hand of those opposing it.

Where the workforce in other companies are already unionised, we need to develop joint strategies with those unions. Where they are not unionised, we need to recruit them. All this is even more important during this strike, when vultures like TNT are hovering to take over as much of the postal service as they can.

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**This is an abridged, adapted version of a longer article on the future of the postal service, which can be found at [www.workersliberty.org/node/4243](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/4243)**

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**This bulletin was produced by CWU activists who are members and supporters of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. We are a socialist group fighting in the labour movement for a democratic working-class revolution against capitalism. You can find out more about us at [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)**

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