



# postalworker

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## Build the ballot:

# We need national strikes

## Resist anti-union laws!

Before the 1997 election, Tony Blair assured bosses that, even after reforms planned by New Labour, Britain would still have “the most restrictive union laws in the western world.”

He wasn't kidding. And the situation has only worsened. New anti-union laws were imposed in 2016, requiring turnout thresholds in industrial action ballots. The Tories now plan further restrictions, with a proposal to ban all-out strikes in the transport industry.

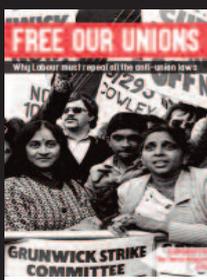
If the law passes and becomes entrenched, the Tories will be emboldened to spread it to other services. It's far from implausible that the postal service could be in their sights.

Unions must act, organising a campaign of national direct action, including demonstrations and rallies, to resist the new laws and demand the repeal of existing ones. Grassroots campaigns like Free Our Unions can help catalyse and supplement that.

**Free Our Unions has campaign resources that can be sent to union branches and workplace. To find out more, see the website in the box below.**

The Free Our Unions campaign fights for the abolition of all anti-trade union laws, and their replacement with a positive right to strike. The campaign is backed by three

national unions, FBV, RMT, and IWGB, and dozens of branches and regions, including CWU Greater London Combined. To find out more about the campaign, visit [bit.ly/FreeOurUnions](http://bit.ly/FreeOurUnions)



The national union has announced it will be “serving notice” of a new national ballot of Royal Mail members on 25 February.

As anti-union laws require that unions give seven days' notice to employers of any ballot, presumably this means that the actual ballot will start the following week, on or around 3 March.

There's no good reason why it's taken this long to gear back up for a national ballot. Deputy General Secretary Terry Pullinger signalled that the ballot might start sooner, then rowed back from that by saying the union would encourage local disputes.

Local disputes are important; the threat of strikes at Bootle and Seaforth DOs, planned for 18-19 January, forced the bosses to back off from sacking a rep and taking disciplinary action against other members, following an unofficial walkout there last year. Wherever members want to take action over local issues, including over specific local breaches of national agreements, they should be encouraged and empowered in doing that.

But local disputes are not a substitute for a national fight with the employer. It'll take national industrial action to force Royal Mail to back down from its plan to restructure parcel delivery, and to force it to implement previous agreements over issues like working hours. It's vital that workplace reps and local branches keep the pressure on the union's national leadership to ensure horizons don't narrow.

Once the ballot starts, everyone needs to be in campaign mode. While we shouldn't be reckless, we can't let the previous injunction inhibit us from organising an active, vibrant, and assertive campaign.

We also need to discuss how to respond if our ballot is enjoined a second time. Last time, workers in some



We will be serving notice on Royal Mail Group for a national ballot of all postal workers on 25th February.

Stand by your postie 🗨️

*The union's tweet announcing the new ballot*

workplaces discussed the prospect of an unofficial “work-to-rule”, something which we can effectively implement at any time without needing a ballot, as it only involves working to our contracts, agreed hours, and formal rules and procedures. Tactics like that should be discussed again.

### UNOFFICIAL

**Royal Mail workers have retained traditions of unofficial, “wildcat” strike action better than perhaps any other group of workers.**

Usually unofficial actions take place over local issues, such as the victimisation of individual reps or members, rather than around national disputes. A few wildcat strikes in a few offices aren't a substitute for national action, but where members feel like unofficial action could be pulled off in an effective way, that should be discussed.

The first task is to ensure the national ballot starts as soon as possible, no later than the 3 March date suggested by the union's recent announcement. A programme of gate meetings across the country can provide a space for rank-and-file posties to discuss strategy for the dispute.

**Grassroots coordination, and linking up with other unions to resist anti-union laws, will put us in a stronger position to respond should our bosses turn to the courts again to scupper a strike.**

# Share and share alike?

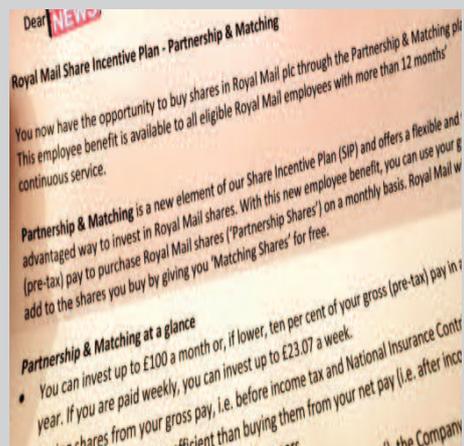
It was announced on 6 February that Royal Mail's shares had plummeted to their lowest ever price since privatisation.

The company is now valued at £1.8 billion, down from £3.3 billion when it was first floated. The share prices is now 176p, down from 469p at its height.

Meanwhile, top boss Rico Bach is pocketing an eye-watering salary.

Presumably it's this dire financial situation that led to the recent drive to get younger workers to take out shares (see image). But why would any young postie want to invest in a failing company that increasingly treats its workers like garbage?

**Privatisation has been a failure. The only sensible solution is to take Royal Mail back into full public ownership, with proper democratic oversight and control, and run our postal service as just that - a public service, rather than a for-profit business enterprise.**



# Solidarité!

France has recently seen a mass strike wave, with postal workers playing their part.

The website of Permanent Revolution, a tendency within the New Anticapitalist Party in France, reports: "The postal workers of Versailles went on strike for 43 days against the pension reform and over their own local demands [...] They have been fighting against incessant reforms carried out by La Poste [the French equivalent of Royal Mail] to increase its profitability. Jobs are cut, routes canceled, and delivery workers' workloads increased..."

**Sound familiar?! More online at [bit.ly/pr-facteurs](http://bit.ly/pr-facteurs)\***

\*In French, but Google Translate is effective if you don't speak French or have a French speaker to hand!

# Build rank-and-file democracy



**A key aim of rank-and-file - i.e., grassroots, democratic - trade unionism is to minimise the distance between the union's decision-making structures and the workplace.**

The CWU's practise of gate meetings is an excellent one that must be maintained and extended. Mass assemblies at the workplace itself give workers a chance to discuss their conditions and deliberate on the way forward, in the context of the collective solidarity of their workmates.

Gate meetings need to be more than just an opportunity to hear reports from reps and officials; they can also be a means for rank-and-file postal workers to exercise democratic control over the direction of the dispute.

Although gate meetings can not and should not supplant or bypass the formal democracy of the CWU, via branch and divisional structures, reps and activists can find ways to ensure the discussions had there and any consensus reached are fed directly into those formal structures.

A rank-and-file perspective doesn't mean condemning all union leaders and officials as sell-outs, or sell-outs in waiting, or expecting that our leaders will stitch us up. But within any union, even the most democratic, there is always some inbuilt tension between the rank and file, the grassroots membership of the union in workplaces, and what socialists call "the bureaucracy", the union officialdom for whom the union is primarily a set of structures, financial considerations, and, on an individual level, a career, rather than an instrument of struggle. Independent rank-and-file organisation, that seeks to weight the balance of power in the union towards the rank and file and away from the bureaucracy, is needed to ensure the union is effective as a tool in its members' hands for the purpose of improving their lives at work.

**Continuing the gate meetings, and taking the energy of those mass assemblies into the formal structures of the union, can be the foundations for that rank-and-file independence.**

## The Story of Solidarność



In 1980-1, a mass workers' movement, 10 million strong, developed in Poland, then under the totalitarian rule of a Stalinist bureaucracy.

It developed tactics we can still learn from today, including a practise of broadcasting negotiations between union officials and employers live to occupied shipyards, to ensure maximum transparency and democratic accountability of members over the union. This new book tells the inspiring story of those workers and the movement they built.

**Buy copies online at [workersliberty.org/solidarnosc](http://workersliberty.org/solidarnosc)**

## About Workers' Liberty

This bulletin is produced by members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. We are a socialist group active in the labour and student movements in Britain, fighting for a revolutionary alternative to capitalism and

Stalinism based on common ownership and workers' democracy. To find out more about our ideas and activity, visit our website at [workersliberty.org](http://workersliberty.org), or email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org)

