

Defend Postal Workers Sack the Royal Mail Executive!



Royal Mail management, acting in collusion with the government, have begun a battle to attempt to crush its workforce. A secret document leaked last week confirms the plans that management have been drawing up for months. The announcement of the recruitment of 30,000 casual workers in an effort to break the strike further shows the preparations that have already been made throughout the summer. As Socialist Appeal reported in September "Royal Mail placed adverts in Jobcentres for casual workers to be employed on an 'emergency' basis. This is clearly an organised attempt to try to undermine any strike action and to smash the union."

In July Royal Mail management implemented a national directive cutting duties without any negotiation. This was a deliberate provocation from the management in breach of the 2007 phase four pay and modernisation agreement. Modernisation was supposed to mean acceptance of new technology but management has failed to invest in machinery that was supposed to automatically walk sort. Only a few walk sequencing machines have actually been installed and like the flat sorting machines they do not work properly. Instead management are forcing through 'absorptions' - or to give it its proper name 'extra workload' - on delivery workers. They have introduced 'Network 2009' as an attack on distribution drivers and abolished duties by increased workloads in sorting offices.

The rationale given is that mail volumes are declining by 10%. But packet drivers have also been given 'absorptions' despite the Royal Mail March 2009 Annual Report stating that "our postmen and women have never delivered more packets and parcels". In a Royal Mail press release on the 10th September entitled "Royal Mail condemns CWU strike ballot" Paul Tolhurst, Royal Mail's Operations Director says "mail volumes" are "now falling by around 10% a year". Yet the Annual Report states that the actual decline in mail volume is only 5.5%, not the fictitious 10% mentioned by Paul Tolhurst. The reported decline is based on a mail volume which they admit in the report reached an all time peak in 2005. The 60,000 reduction in the workforce in the last five years therefore means that Royal Mail workers have never been so productive! But even the reported falls in the volume of mail in the annual report is questionable as accounting procedures have been changed. This should come as no surprise as the Chief Executive of Royal Mail Group, Adam Crozier, has admitted he was nearly sacked when he falsified sales figures when working as an advertising representative for the 'Daily Telegraph' in the 1980's.

Crozier was also a former joint managing director of Saatchi and Saatchi, the advertising company who ran Thatcher's election campaigns in the 1980's. Last year he was paid £3.04million in wages and benefits and this year he has been given £995,000 as well as pocketing £45,000 as a Director of Debenhams. Other Royal Mail Executives such as Mark Higson, Managing Director, Royal Mail Letters received £722,000. He replaced Ian Griffiths, who left his job as managing director of the letters business in 2007 but received £500,000 as compensation for loss of office after doing the job for only a year! Ian Duncan, Director of Royal Mail Group, took home £862,000 in 2008 and £498,000 this year.

It's not just fat cat Executive Management who received unjustified bonuses. Delivery Sector Managers have been paid £9,000, Cluster Managers £6,500 and Delivery Office Managers £4,000 as an encouragement to drive through the attack on conditions and to work to undermine the resistance of the workforce who are expected to do the extra work! Managers are also co-operating with Royal Mail's plans to set up 'strike breaking centres', and are

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bullying and harassing postal workers, and refusing normal union facilities.

Behind the attempt by the Royal Mail management to crush the workforce is the New Labour government, which is hell bent on preparing Royal Mail for privatisation, despite commitments given in the 2005 Labour election manifesto that there were “no plans to privatise” and “to see a publicly owned Royal Mail fully restored to good health, providing customers with an excellent service and its employees with rewarding employment”. This election promise has been ignored. Lord Mandelson, the Business Secretary, was forced to back down from privatisation plans in July following a campaign from the CWU and opposition from Labour MP’s, but he said the plans had only been “postponed” due to “market conditions” with CVC Capital Partners and TNT, the Dutch postal group, failing to match the Government’s expected price tag.

Mandelson, is one of the architects of the pro-business New Labour project. In an interview in 2002 he said “in the urgent need to remove rigidities and incorporate flexibility in capital, product and labour markets, we are all Thatcherites now.” Mandelson says that he is “beyond anger” with the CWU for obstructing the Royal Mail’s modernisation! By modernisation he means exploitation and sweated labour and CWU members are ‘beyond anger’ with him!

In 2000 the Postal Services Act paved the way for ‘liberalisation’. The then ‘Minister for Competitiveness’ and right wing former CWU General Secretary Alan Johnson summed up the Bill before the House. “We are modernising the Post Office. It was a Labour Government who, in 1969, took the Post Office out of the civil service and made it a public corporation. We are now modernising it so that it is able to face the new challenges of the 21st century”. When moving the Act the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Stephen Byers said “The measure will promote competition by establishing a regulator, which will reduce the part of the market that is reserved largely as a monopoly for the Post Office. The reserved area will be reduced and opened to competitors”.

It is this Act that led to the establishment of ‘competitor’ companies who have been given ‘downstream access’ to the Royal Mail delivery service and created the myth that Royal Mail is uncompetitive and unprofitable. The CWU should use its position in the Labour Party to campaign to abolish this Act and bring the Royal Mail under workers control and management. They should demand that the Labour leadership sack Mandelson, Crozier and the Executive and replace the Executive with an elected management board with representatives from the workforce, the TUC and the government, subject to recall and with all members on the same wage as the average postal worker.

Royal Mail management are out to crush the workforce and smash the union. The only way to prevent their plans is through decisive strike action by postal workers. The workforce voted by 76.24% in favour of a national strike and have begun the battle with a one day strike. Management will attempt to use the casuals to clear the backlog of work created. As a response to this the union should prepare for a one week stoppage in November to cut across their plans to break the strike. The future of Royal Mail and its workforce depends on it.



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Contact us by email on: contact@socialist.net Tel: 0207 515 7675