

Britain: Post workers speak to SEP during second day of national strike

Our reporters

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The second day of national strike action by postal workers on October 22, called by the Communication Workers Union (CWU), involved 76,000 postal delivery workers. The previous day 42,000 Royal Mail sorting office staff and drivers took action at 30 key mail sorting centres.

Royal Mail, which previously opposed CWU demands to involve the arbitration service ACAS in the resolution of the dispute, has since agreed to arbitration by the Trades Union Congress (TUC).

The TUC, which true to form has refused to mobilise any of its nearly seven million members in support of the postal workers, has come forward in order to ensure that the postal workers strike does not escalate out of control. It was under the auspices of the TUC that the 2007 national strike of postal workers was also called off.

With three days of action scheduled to begin on October 29, the intervention of the TUC has been precipitated because of the widespread support the postal workers' strike has received. The efforts to mobilise public hostility to the strike has failed miserably. A ComRes poll conducted by BBC's *Newsnight* programme on October 22 (the first day of the action) found that twice as many people sympathised with postal workers as with Royal Mail management in the postal dispute.

Another poll found that two thirds of Conservative Party voters were opposed to plans to privatise Royal Mail.

Socialist Equality Party campaigners distributed dozens of copies of the statement, "Postal workers face a political struggle against Labour government" to striking postal delivery staff last Friday.

At the Dorset Mail Centre the refusal of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) leadership to call national strike action for all postal workers on the same day created a situation where sorting and delivery workers crossed each others' picket lines.

Dorset Mail Centre is situated in an industrial estate in

the town of Poole. Poole Harbour is one of the preferred destinations of the super rich in Britain. Such grotesque levels of inequality are fuelling the strikers' determination to resist Royal Mail and the Labour government. In discussions with SEP campaign teams, strikers pointed to the enormous sums of money used to bailout the banks and financial institutions and that they were now being made to pay for it.

A striker said, "In the Mail centre alone we've had to face a lot of disciplinary action since 'executive actions' were imposed. They want us to speed up our work, otherwise you face disciplinary actions. Management do not care about us when they impose sanctions on workers. That's not good."

Another postal worker, Gordon, explained, "I strike because of so-called modernisation. We were told that we would get lighter work and it has become harder. Our pension's got to be sorted out. We are owned by the government, which does not want to do anything in favour of the workers. They say that they can't pay their own workers, but they can bail out the bankers who they are associating with. I am not a political man. I recently started thinking. I do not like the Labour government. I don't think they are for the workers. They've lost support among the workers. They were able to come to power as a result of wider illusions."

One subject not broached in the political and media assault on postal workers is the fact that they get paid just ?16,000 per annum. They are amongst the lowest paid group of unionised workers in the country, for backbreaking work. Their salary is well below the European decency threshold. Pickets told campaigners that Royal Mail in Dorset is demanding 10 percent savings in each office, with managers receiving bonuses for cutting services.

At Bournemouth delivery office, where there are 170 workers, a striker explained, "Under the executive actions

started six months ago they have chopped 800 hours of work per week—equivalent to 24 full time jobs. Workers face enormous workloads here. We work under pressure. If you go over your usual time you have to tell management beforehand otherwise we won't be paid."

At the Warrington Milner Road delivery office in the northwest of England, John, a striker, said, "Things started to change in 2007 when they brought in the pay and modernisation into it. They didn't adhere to their side of the bargain. We are on strike now due to the changes they are trying to implement using bully tactics. We are being forced down paths that we don't really want to go.

"It's got to a point now where, like the rest of the country, like the binmen on strike in Leeds, we aren't going to be pushed around any longer. We are fed up. We are willing to put our jobs, our pay and our houses on the line. We are in the middle of a recession, but we are still prepared to give up pay to prove how strongly we feel about this. We are prepared to stand out here for as long as it takes, and fight it to the end."

Responding to a question regarding the role of the Labour government John replied, "I don't think you can call it a Labour government anymore can you? No way on this earth is this a Labour government. It's a Tory government in disguise. Gordon Brown stands up and fights for the banks. He put his pennyworth in for them. Royal Mail is a national company that is run from Lands End to John O'Groats. But he's not come to the table here. Any Prime Minister should be intervening here. I don't think he is for the working man, he is absolutely rubbish."

See Also:

Britain: Postal workers face a political struggle against Labour government
[20 October 2009]

British postal workers launch two-day national strike
[23 October 2009]



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