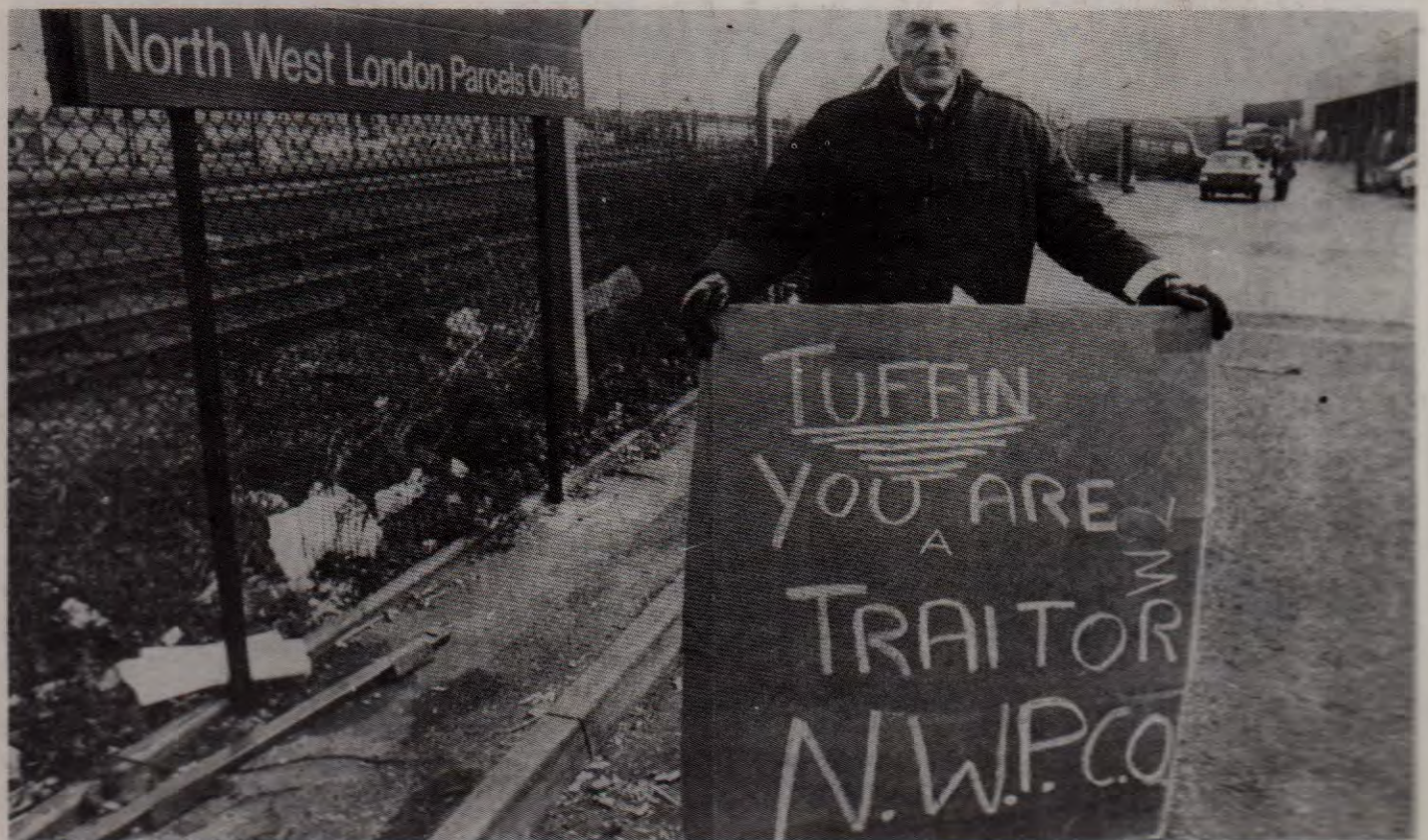


LESSONS OF THE POSTAL STRIKE



A Socialist Organiser pamphlet 30p

INTRODUCTION

A missed opportunity

By Pete Keenlyside, Manchester Amalgamated Branch (personal capacity)

By the time that the last group of workers at Liverpool and Coventry had gone back the Post Office strike had lasted for 3 weeks. At its height over 100,000 were out and every Mechanised Letter Office except Belfast had shut down. For many postal workers this was their first real taste of industrial action. For most of us it was certainly the first time we had been out on an official strike.

That a major blow-up should happen in the Post Office came as no surprise to those who work there. Industrial relations have got rapidly worse over the past few years. 65,000 days were lost last year in disputes, a fifth of the total for the whole of British industry. We are high up on the Tory's list for privatisation. What used to be a loss-making service has been turned into a money-spinner by a combination of a ruthless drive to increase productivity and a highly selective interpretation of the disciplinary code.

Despite little or no opposition at national level, branches have fought these attacks tooth and nail. Post Office workers have little fear of unemployment being in a growth industry. The UCW hasn't suffered a major defeat since 1971 and at local level have enjoyed a large measure of control on working practices. Attempts to erode this have been bitterly resisted by walk-outs, most lasting only a day or two.

The major issue at stake in this dispute was the Difficult To Recruit Area Supplements (DRAS) that the Post Office wanted to pay to some offices in the South-East. Compared to pay or the length of the working week the issue was an obscure one even for postal workers, although it certainly represented an attack on the national pay bargaining

structure. Perhaps that is why the National Executive chose it for a ballot on industrial action. Nevertheless, the ballot showed a 2:1 majority in favour of industrial action and when the Executive called a 24-hour strike on August 31st the response was solid.

The strike was due to end with the return of the early shift the next day. It was only when we went back in that we found that in certain selected offices throughout the country the management had flooded the place with casual labour. Casuals are an emotive subject for UCW members. Although there is no longer a closed shop in the Post Office, 100% membership is the norm. Casuals were clearly seen as an attempt to undermine this. The management's claim of a huge backlog of mail was simply a lie. They were using the excuse of the 24-hour strike to provoke a test of strength with the union.

If the management wanted a fight they certainly got one. 14 offices walked out immediately. The action then spread as other branches joined the strike through having members suspended for refusing to cross picket lines or handle diverted mail. In some instances branches came out simply because they were asked to. When pickets from Manchester went to Derby they were refused permission to go into the office to speak to the workers there. They put leaflets calling on Derby to come out in the letter boxes and the next day Derby was out.

By the end of the first week the strike had reached its peak. The support it enjoyed was entirely due to the activities of the rank and file at branch level. To my knowledge the Executive Council did not call a single branch out. In some branches such as Manchester and Liverpool Clerical and Counter staff had also walked out even though they weren't involved with the initial dispute. It was only after the publication of the Executive's agreement on Monday

September 12th that branches began going back. Some didn't need any persuading, some like in London had to be dragooned back, but a significant number still held out.

The centre of the resistance to the deal was in the North-West where the branches had voted not to return until they all did. Manchester, the largest branch in the country, threw out the management's proposals based on the deal with only 6 against in a meeting of almost 3,000. Even right at the end a sizeable minority, over 600 in a meeting of 1,500, voted not to return until Liverpool and Coventry did. In Liverpool daily mass pickets were held as management bussed scabs in. The militancy of the Liverpool branch became a powerful symbol for all of us.

If our Executive Council had displayed a tenth of the energy and commitment of the rank and file the strike could easily have been won. Not only DRAS but a host of other issues could have been settled. Instead, all their energy went into undermining the action. They failed to anticipate that management might take advantage of the 24-hour strike. Instead of keeping all the branches out until everybody had gone back, the Executive did absolutely nothing. As branches were walking out almost by the minute they even offered to suspend industrial action over DRAS. Even with over two-thirds of the membership out they refused to make the strike national, insisting that branches should negotiate on a local level. Management of course were operating a national strategy. And then came the infamous agreement. This not only gave the Post Office what they wanted on DRAS but on casuals and diversions as well. No wonder management started quoting from it.

In the end not even the spirit and militancy of the rank and file could overcome the treachery of the union leaders. The organisation that could have brought the rank and file together, that could have developed an alternative leadership and countered the actions of the Executive, does not as yet exist in our union. Despite the fact that those of us arguing for such an organisation are still a small minority, that remains the major task for all those who have now seen our leaders for what they are.

The strike cost us three weeks' wages. We got very little in return. Yet we did not go back defeated. The management weren't able to impose their terms on us as a condition of any return to work. But they'll be back. There are plenty of other issues on the agenda. Privatisation, productivity, office closures, discipline. What is certain is that we won't have to wait another 17 years for the next big dispute.

Whether we win that or not depends on how well the lessons of this strike are learnt. Hopefully this pamphlet will be of no small help in that process.

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BACKGROUND



Pickets versus police at Liverpool

A wave of anger

Every fifth strike last year was a postal strike. There is a pattern to these strikes.

They have been unofficial, mainly local guerilla battles against a new, hard-nosed management intent on softening up the union, increasing the number of casuals and imposing new technology.

Management's intentions are simple to understand: they want to increase the profitability of the Post Office to make its different sections ripe for privatisation. Because the Post Office is such a labour intensive industry — wages account for more than two-thirds of operating costs — their attack on wages and conditions, their drive for 'speed-up', is so important.

A look at some of the main disputes since 1985 makes the picture clear. Pete Keenlyside, a Manchester postal worker, described the situation faced in January of that year.

"Part of the agreement 1984's UCW Postal pay claim was settled on was that all the outstanding issues such as a reduction in hours, longer holidays and the five day working week, would be the subject of further discussions between the union and Post Office management.

Since then a series of meetings have been taking place and recently a special report was circulated to the membership which reported on the progress that had been made. This report will now form part of the agenda of a special conference called for March 4/5.

But any member reading the report, hoping to see what had been gained from all the discussions, would have got a very rude shock. Instead of listing any

gains, the report lists a series of management proposals which, if implemented, would threaten the jobs and working conditions of everyone in the industry.

Proposals

What they want is:

- Compulsory productivity schemes in all offices. At the moment there is a voluntary scheme and many offices have refused to implement it.

- Constant workload assessment. In other words, constantly increasing the workload on the staff.

- Increased mechanisation and the introduction of new technology. The union have opposed this over the last few years because of the effects it will have on jobs. Existing policy is to demand a new technology agreement which would link its introduction to a cut in hours. Otherwise the introduction of inward code sorting and optical character recognition (machines which can read handwriting) could lead to the work of some grades disappearing overnight.

- Flexible staffing. This would lead to the creation of a new part-time grade and the ability of management to move staff where and when they wanted. It has long been union policy to oppose these.

- A new overtime structure which could decrease the amount paid for weekday overtime. At the moment anything over 12 hours is paid at double time.

In return for all this, they are prepared to offer us a lump-sum payment of £150, a promise that they will look at the possibility of introducing more five-day-week duties and security

of employment if "there was full cooperation in any retraining and/or redeployment to other work areas".

And in the event of the union not wanting to take advantage of the management's generosity, the Post Office board member for Personnel and Industrial Relations K.M. Young, had this to say: "We would still prefer to proceed with the union's co-operation, but the union's present response will force the business to proceed without it".

The union leadership more or less got the free hand they wanted to negotiate these items at the special conference, held at the same time the miners voted to return to work. They were only defeated on two points when conference voted against any increase in part-time labour and against a compulsory extension of the IWM productivity scheme.

Management quickly tried to take advantage of this weakness. They were met by a militant rank and file and a craven union leadership. It was a pattern that was to be repeated time and time again.

At the beginning of April post office workers at the huge Mount Pleasant sorting office walked out. *Socialist Organiser* explained what happened:

"They had struck against management attempts unilaterally to put the job-slashing OCR (Optical Character Recognition) machine into operation, suspending workers who refused to co-operate.

Management immediately used the Tory anti-trade union laws to get an injunction against action without a ballot at Mount Pleasant or any other post office.

The UCW leadership immediately complied and told their members to return. However, pickets kept out the overwhelming majority of both the night and following day shifts.

The action began to rapidly escalate. On the night shift at the Basingstoke Post Office, management instructed workers to redirect Mount Pleasant mail to other offices. They refused and were threatened with discipline, but the management backed off when they stood firm.

Mount Pleasant strikers returned after they received an instruction from the UCW EC to go back immediately. Even in the middle of the action, the EC were making no secret of their desire to capitulate.

General Secretary Alan Tuffin complained that the Post Office were "exciting" the situation. If only they had waited another seven weeks, he moaned, he could have got all the proposals to slash jobs and conditions through the UCW Conference!"

Meanwhile the Mount Pleasant workers were told to keep working OCR.

Faced with a militant management, the union leadership's collapse became comprehensive within a week. They cancelled the Mount Pleasant strike ballot, overturned the special conference decision on part-time workers and compulsory IWM, and concluded a deal with the Post Office which the *Financial Times* described as giving management "virtually everything it wants".

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The immediate introduction of OCR machines; unrestricted use of other mechanised equipment; immediate imposition of IWM on the 47% of union members who had refused to accept it over the previous 4 years; immediate recruitment of 2,000 part-timers with another 16,000 to come. The carrot was a £100 bonus payment, which would have to be paid back if the UCW Conference later overturned the deal!

Tuffin's negotiating 'skill' ended with a deal which cost the Post Office £12 million in return for savings of £180 million.

But the battle was still being fought in the local offices. At the end of April the Northampton polling card dispute, over payment for extra work, spread through the Midlands as UCW members applied basic trade union principles and refused to handle scab mail.

This pattern — of strikes spreading as UCW members refuse to touch scab redirected mail — has been an important feature of the string of battles in the offices.

UCW officials pressurised the other striking offices to return before Northampton had voted on a deal. Bill Pearce, the only UCW executive member in Nottingham to vote against the return to work, commented: "The deal, which involves certain UCW members losing up to £45 each, cannot be described as a victory."

However, the action has in itself been a success in showing to the Post Office management and to the UCW leadership the strength of feeling of UCW members, their willingness to fight. Particularly satisfying was their respect for picket lines and spontaneous strike action.

This should serve as a warning to management and Tuffin."

At the same time workers in Birmingham threatened action if part-timers used a particular piece of machinery. When management threatened suspensions the workers struck and the threat was withdrawn.

In May a majority at the UCW's Conference voted to go along with the EC's capitulation. Greg Birch from Basinstoke Amalgamated Branch explained: "Not surprisingly, there is an overall mood of defeatism in the conference, which the EC has done much to create and continually plays on. We can't do anything, they say, to everything that comes up — it will involve confrontation and we can never win. Branches like mine will continue to fight against this capitulation through the week, and argue that we must organise to make a stand".

Billy Hayes from Liverpool Amalgamated Branch took up the point: "A substantial minority did vote for some kind of fight."

I think the payment of the £100 lump sum prior to this conference may have affected the way the vote went.

The other point is that while everybody agreed that it was a rotten report, they weren't confident that we could win the fight.

That is the fault of the leadership for not developing the struggle.

We get told that we can't struggle when the Tories are in because we'll get smashed. And we are told that we can't struggle when Labour are in because we've got to preserve a Labour government. So when do we get to struggle?

There has been a failure to develop a strong rank and file organisation which might have won a bigger vote against the executive."

A wave of local disputes

But it's one thing getting such deals through Conference, another implementing them on the ground. Time and again local disputes have erupted in the face of management's offensive. These are just some examples.

In September 1985 the Slough office struck against casuals, and were supported by counter staff. They were out for 6 days and the casuals were removed.

In November Liverpool were out for 10 days over bonus and flexibility and won.

In March 1986 Harrow came out when management suspended two reps. It was rapidly spread to other offices through picketing and refusing to handle Harrow's mail. UCW officials, however, got a return to work while negotiations continued.

In May Cardiff was out for 9 days against the victimisation of UCW Committee member Jimmy Quigley and the use of casual labour to clear the backlog. They won.

In June 6,000 postal workers in Yorkshire were out after management suspended Leeds postal workers, who were taking action against a new work study scheme (RRP) being imposed. Shaken by the rapidly spreading action management withdrew the suspensions and Stage 3 letters to 'work as instructed' — i.e. handle scab mail if necessary. But the union leadership was also panicked, and they rapidly signed a deal significantly short of the strikers' demands.

There was a lot of anger. At a Sheffield mass meeting the workers initially voted not to allow 'left' EC member Gerry Casey to speak. They relented but gave him a very rough time of it.

A Liverpool postal worker commented on the deal: "The new practices the bosses are bringing in will make it more like working in a car factory than the old Post Office. There will be more pressure on individuals, and jobs will be lost."

In Liverpool there will be resistance to the new work practices. The problem is that there is no national resistance.

The sell-out of the Leeds dispute showed that we still rely too much on national officials — and what happens when we do. The fact is that the Broad Left failed, after some initial success, to develop any coherent fight-back. On the EC some 'lefts' have been indistinguishable from the right. We urgently need to develop a national fightback."

In July workers at London's EDO in Whitechapel struck against management's attempt to introduce flexible working and a cut in pay. Management backed down after the strike on Friday; tried to do the same again over the weekend and were answered with another strike.

The picture on wages was no better. Pete Keenlyside explained:

"Hard on the heels of their sell-out over productivity, the EC have done the same with the 1986 pay claim."

The deal they are now recommending includes a 5.8% increase on basic rates. But for most postal workers the cost of living is going up by much more than that.

In Manchester, bus fares have just gone up by 15%. Our basic wage of £107 before tax is regarded as being on the poverty line for those with families, and many have to claim FIS.

The Post Office is making millions in profits as a result of the various schemes to make us work harder. They are developing a more and more elaborate management set-up — all on high wages

Work teams

By A Manchester postal worker

Having worked for the Post Office for many years, I thought I knew what my job was all about.

I thought all I had to do was go to work, sort the letters and packets, and then deliver them through people's doors. Not any more.

Some High Court judge, who probably thinks his mail is delivered by miracle each morning, has decided that I've got to sit through management propaganda talks as well.

These talks — team talks, as they are called — were first brought in with the blessing of the union leadership. They were supposed to be used to discuss the problems of the Post Office in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill.

During the ballot on industrial action for a shorter working week, they were used by management to urge all UCW members to vote against taking action. So not surprisingly, at this year's annual conference, the resolution calling on UCW members to boycott them was carried overwhelmingly. A circular was then sent round the branches instructing members not to attend.

Faced with this sudden act of militancy on the part of our leadership, the Post Office took the union to court, and that is how a judge has just come to rewrite our work contracts.

The Executive Council, for their part, have withdrawn the circular, while at the same time muttering about taking legal advice on our contracts.

Team talks are obviously an important issue for management. They see them as a way of weakening the union where we are strongest — on the shop floor. They wrote to every member in the Letters business telling us how well we were doing and how marvellous we are and what a pity it is to waste it all by kicking team talks into touch. They are obviously prepared to take the issue to a dispute.

UCW members at rank and file level can also appreciate what it's all about. There have been several strikes already over management attempts to discipline people for not attending the talks. The North West No.5 District Council have agreed that if anyone in their area is disciplined over this issue, then all branches will take action.

The only people who can't see what the fuss is about are the UCW Executive.

BACKGROUND

— as a prelude to privatisation. Yet those of us at the bottom who do all the work are forced to do long hours of overtime just to make ends meet.

Year after year we've accepted lousy wage deals, and now Alan Tuffin (on over £30,000 a year) wants us to accept one that will take us up to the princely sum of £113.26 per week.

The worst thing about this year's offer is that yet again the executive have caved in over the claim for a reduction in hours. Our basic week is 43 hours. It has been in force since 1965, and a reduction has been part of the union's annual claim for about 15 years."

1987 was a year of guerilla action as well. The anger in the offices was mounting — it had not been smothered by the EC's defeatism and treachery.

There were around 90 disputes during the year. 25% were in Liverpool. In April the Liverpool West Derby office was out for 2 weeks over the victimisation of a worker. Other Liverpool offices took selective action in support. The worker was reinstated.

In May the UCW Conference instructed the Executive to withdraw from all trials and negotiations on RRP (Revised Revision Procedure), and to ballot for strike action if management tried to impose it. They also told them to negotiate 3 hours off the working week, and back up the demand with industrial action if necessary.

Conference tried to tie the hands of the leadership on the shorter working week demand by telling them to: get a deal by 1st September — if not, ballot for strike action; put any offer to a special conference; make the claim for all grades and not accept any strings.

2 months after the Conference the Executive overturned the decision on RRP, and instructed the branches to cooperate in introducing it.

On the shorter working week claim the leadership procrastinated as long as possible. When they couldn't avoid the ballot on industrial action they held it with little information and no preparation. 53% voted for action. What happened next was predictable.

The shorter working week

Rather than prepare for confrontation the EC talked about 24-hour strikes and coupled this with a 'scabs charter' — telling branches to accept the diversion of mail, the use of casuals and non-striking members to do the work of those out on strike. It was also said they would instruct branches not to take action if members were suspended by management.

At the beginning of December Glasgow, Edinburgh, Southend, Cardiff and London branches were called out on 24-hour strike. The response was very solid and the time good in the run-up to Christmas. But the EC immediately surrendered and called off the action on the basis of a deal with the Post Office. It was a blatant sell-out.

Before September the Post Office had offered an hour off provided it was self-financing. The new deal involved an extra ½ hour on the same basis! The 1½ hours excluded counter staff and wasn't to be introduced until 1988 — for the parcels in September, and for letters even later. They agreed to look at increased flexibility. And they sold the IWM productivity deal with no new

benefits for the members!

Action continued briefly in Cardiff against the suspension of workers who refused to do Cardiff's work during the 24-hour strike and against management's use of casuals to clear the backlog. Meanwhile the Executive was cynically wrapping up the shorter working week fight.

Instead of calling a special conference they had a ballot on the deal, held after the key Christmas period. Pete Keenlyside commented on the result in February 1988:

"As expected, the leadership have managed to get a majority in favour of their sell-out deal on the shorter working week. But it was nothing like the majority they must have been expecting.

Out of 166,000 ballot papers issued, 108,000 were returned, with 62,778 voting in favour (57%) and 46,523 (43%) against.

The numbers of those voting 'no' is encouragingly high. Despite only 53% being in favour of strike action in the first place, despite the fact that Christmas had come and gone, and despite the complete absence of any campaign for rejection, over 46,000 were still prepared to take the issue further. Had the deal been put to a special conference, or even to a branch ballot, it would have been rejected.

46,000 have shown that they want something different. We now need to build the sort of active rank and file organisation that can involve them in getting it."

At the UCW's 1988 Conference in May a vote of censure was overwhelmingly carried on the whole Executive for the sell-out.

How the job has changed

By Pete Keenlyside, Manchester Amalgamated Branch (personal capacity)

In 1971 members of the UCW (then called the UPW) went on strike for seven weeks. They returned defeated, sold out by their own Executive.

After that, most postal workers said they'd never do it again. Every time you got up to oppose some lousy pay deal or other, the cry went up 'Remember 1971'.

The membership are now more willing to take strike action. What has changed? A lot of the 'old ones' have retired and young people have taken their place. But the main factor has probably been a reaction to the way the job has changed over the years.

In 1971 we worked just as long hours as we do now. But we certainly didn't work as hard or under as much pressure.

On the letters side, which is all I can speak about, things were conducted at a more leisurely pace. On the walks you had time to talk to people, to pop in for

the odd cup of tea and get to know your customers.

If you were inside sorting, although the work was boring, there were ways of breaking it up. Staff could go for a 'smoke', chat to their mates or use some excuse to wander round the office for a few minutes.

And heaven help the gaffer that tried to get you to do something that wasn't on your duty. Once the duties had been agreed with the union, that was that. You knew exactly what it was you should be doing almost every minute of your shift.

If it wasn't written in the duty book, you didn't do it. If the duty book said feed the horses (some had been around for a long time), then you disappeared for half an hour or so. In those days we were poor but happy!

Not anymore we're not — happy that is.

Then the Post Office made a loss but served the public. These days it makes huge profits. And that's been done in the time-honoured way — by making the workers work harder.

The first stage was mechanisation. Before 1971 everything was sorted by hand. Then the Post Office came to the

union with a scheme for creating mechanised offices. In future, letters would be faced, segregated and sorted by machines. Instead of people, ALFs, SEGs and code sort machines would stalk the sorting office floor. So in they came, to be followed by ever newer and faster machines such as OCRs (Optical Character Recognition) which can read handwritten script.

Now fewer workers sort more letters at a pace dictated by the machines and ruthlessly enforced. Marx's description of a worker being a mere extension of a machine is a living reality in the Post Office today. No wonder they have difficulty getting people to work the machines.

Stage two was the productivity deal. We used to have a scheme where everyone got a lump sum payment every now and again if by any chance some savings had been made. Now we've got IWM (Improved Working Methods). This is a compulsory scheme and it operates on the basis of individual offices or even parts of offices.

To qualify for payments either the same number of staff have to do more work or, more usually, fewer staff do the same work. This has led to staff sell-

BACKGROUND

Flexibility: what it is

The name of the game for the Post Office is 'functional flexibility': workers go anywhere and do anything — for the same pay of course! The model is Japan where over half the workers form a floating reserve of non-union labour on temporary contracts, doing the worst jobs for the worst pay and conditions.

The first step is to casualise the workforce. The Post Office, with help from the UCW Executive, pushed through agreements for a big increase in casuals 3 years ago. Casuals are cheaper, don't have the same employment rights, sickness or holiday benefits. They are drawn from the unemployed.

This is part of a growing trend throughout the economy towards casualisation: in 1984 1/3 of vacancies filled by Job Centres were for temporary jobs.

Next the Post Office plan to break up the national pay structure — enter DRAS. But DRAS also involves a move to 'merit pay' or 'the blue-eyed boy' syndrome. Continuation of the supplement depends on your record.

This too is a growing trend in the economy. Regional and merit pay excites the greedy minds of Tories. The philosophy is simple: play one area off against another, one worker off against another.

Banks, Building Societies and insurance companies have introduced a whole range of allowances for recruitment in the South-East. The Civil Service introduced an arbitrary supplement this year. And both Philips and the Water Authorities have broken off national pay bargaining agreements.

Fighting back means clarifying our attitudes towards casuals. Initially in Liverpool 1/4 of the casuals were persuaded not to scab. At London's Mount Pleasant, where the branch produced a special leaflet directed at them, over 50% refused to cross the picket line. In some cases they joined the picket lines although there was the clear risk of their dole being cut off.

Obviously we argue for more permanent jobs and against the casualisation of the industry. But where casuals exist and we have not been strong enough to stop them, then we should also try to unionise them and improve their rights.

Regional and merit pay must be thrown out. The way to attract workers is to improve the basic pay and conditions! If some first year entrants are now getting bonus payments then all should be getting it, but that should be tied to a call for a complete revision of the bonus scheme. Let's get one where all postal workers benefit.

ing off tea breaks for a few extra bob, and in many areas delivery staff can't finish their walks on time even by running round. Even the management have recognised that this has created problems.

But that hasn't stopped them bringing in son of IWM — Revised Revision Procedure (RRP). This operates by using so-called industrial engineers (work study to you and me). It caused a strike when first introduced in Leeds but is now being forced in throughout the country.

Next came the splitting of the businesses. Most people still think the Post Office is one big outfit. In fact it has been split into four — letters, parcels, counters and Giro. Each has its own highly-paid management structure and, believe it or not, they compete with each other.

This means, for instance, that when it comes to delivering parcels, drivers on the letters side have to compete with drivers on the parcels side for the contract. This has both the effect of worsening conditions and making the business ripe for privatisation.

And finally there is the use of discipline. With over three million on the dole, management are using the disciplinary procedure as a weapon against the workforce, and interpreting it as they see fit.

Once upon a time the only way you could get the sack was to be caught pinching or by hitting the gaffer. Now, if you're a new entrant, four days off in the first year and out you go. In sorting offices people are being disciplined for going to the toilet too often and for talking on the floor.

What has made things worse is that all of this has come in either with very little opposition from our union leadership or with their active assistance. Mechanisation was supposed to be the means by which we got our shorter working week. The new machines were blacked for four years. Then in the end the leadership got us to accept them for a pittance and we've got nothing for all the newer machines, while the Post Office have got everything.

IWM was actually dreamed up by a member of the Executive, John Taylor. It may have suited his members in East London who had all sorts of non-existent duties to sell, but it's been a curse for the rest of us. Not only do we have to work faster but it divides member from member on the basis of how much payment they get. In London you can get £70 or more a week, and in the provinces often nothing.

And with IWM came Associate Grades, denied overtime and shift payments and the introduction of casual labour. That's why branches like my own in Manchester resisted the scheme until we were dragged in and why we would like to see it scrapped.

Our leadership made a lot of noise about the splitting of the business but did nothing about it. No doubt we can expect the same when it comes to privatisation. And as for discipline, ask Alan Fraser how well they defended him from management abuses of the discipline code.

Women in the Post Office

By Jean Lane

I'll never forget that day we got our own back: me and Hyacinth on the walkie-talkie. For some reason all the women were so glad Hyacinth. All the women got their share of bum-pinching and breast-grabbing, except those of us who fought back. But Hyacinth seemed to cop for the lot. Perhaps because she let them get away with it. They used to make you feel like, if you didn't go along with it, you were a prude or a kill-joy — "can't take a joke". Hyacinth didn't want that saying about her. So she blushed and giggled and struggled. But she never said, "No", or hit out. So they pretended to believe she liked it.

I knew she didn't like it. I worked next to her. I watched her stiffen in anticipation when she knew it was coming. Then the forced smile and then the wriggling and "oh go on, let me go". And when he had gone away again, the smile suddenly disappearing, the rubbing of the sore spots, sometimes close to tears and having to work quicker now to get the bag packed and out in time for the bus.

But, I'll never forget that one day. A young lad, new in that week, and desperate to be "one of the lads", had noticed the treatment Hyacinth got and decided to try his luck. As he walked past us to his own frame he grabbed her round the waist from behind, picked her up and swung her round, then walked away laughing.

Hyacinth wasn't laughing though. Nor was she close to tears. She was mad! The indignity of it: a woman in her 40s being treated like a plaything by a young boy who hadn't been in the office 5 minutes. And the indignity of the fact that anyone can treat you so: invading your space, assaulting your body.

Well anyway, we decided to get him back. The next time he walked behind us, we both swung round. I got his feet. He got his head and we got him on the floor and sat on him. The whole place was laughing at him. He never tried to grab

anyone again. He looked ten feet tall.

Of course it wasn't just off our backs we got the lads. There were always stories of inspectors who would give you a bit of extra overtime if you put up with the groping. And if anyone heard of you getting a bit extra, or getting away without a ticking-off or something, you must have done something to get it. As though it's your fault that the inspector's a sexist pig who gives women special treatment they don't ask for or want. Of course, if they heard of you telling an inspector to get his bloody hands off, you were frigid!

One year I got to go to UCW Conference as a visitor. Looking at the delegate hall you could see how the National Union got away with using the women's page for weddings, recipes and knitting patterns instead of working women, equal opps and sexual harassment.

A sea of men's faces, despite the fact that a large percentage of the UCW are women. A woman was called by the chairperson, John Taylor, to take part in the debate. "Come on darling", he said. Wolf whistles followed her all the way down the delegate hall to the rostrum and all the way back — "Get 'em off, luv". I don't think anyone listened to what she had to say. I got told off by my delegation for complaining about it. They were all men too.

Over half the workers in my office were women. They never got anywhere near the union branch let alone the national conference. They worked there because the shifts fitted in with their family commitments. But the branch officers used to say that women weren't interested in the union and only worked for pin money. They should hold meetings in work time. That's the only way the women in my office could go. They should organise babysitting or a creche. And they should encourage women to get involved because they are just as militant, have just as much to offer the union and have special issues of their own to get the union to take up as well, like sexual harassment for a start.

THE STRIKE



How not to lead a strike

Right from the start Tuffin and the Executive did it all wrong.

The one-day strike, on August 31st, was badly prepared; in many offices the official call for strike action on Wednesday wasn't received until *after* the early shifts on Tuesday had gone home.

It didn't take a genius to work out that management might use the excuse of the 'backlog' to bring in casuals and redirect mail, so provoking strike action. Yet the Executive failed completely to prepare for this possibility; there was no attempt to set up a strike fund to sustain those who stayed out.

Nor was there any real attempt to use all the combined muscle of the postal workers to defeat DRAS (Difficult Recruitment Area Supplement). Engineers were not asked to join the action by the Executive — though in areas like Manchester they did — and when they did the Executive did its utmost to get them back to work. The C and CS (Counter Clerks) dispute over closures, backdoor privatisation and 5,000 job losses should have been linked up to the fight against DRAS. This would have strengthened and concentrated the union's forces.

But what did Tuffin and the Executive do? They postponed indefinitely the C and CS ballot result thus stopping the two sections of postal workers linking

arms together against management.

And when C&CS came out on strike in Manchester and other places, the full time national official, Ernie Dudley, told them to go back to work and cross picket lines!

This failure to unite the union's forces is particularly criminal given the obvious danger presented by a management determined to go on the offensive and the Tory government's strategy of privatisation and splitting up the Post Office. If management and the Tories

are allowed to get away with it now united action will be even more difficult in the future.

Tuffin should have been on the TV every night putting over the basic arguments in support of the strikers and walkouts. Instead he spent most of his time waffling on about the need for the Tories to hold an inquiry into Post Office management. This is a strange idea indeed. Who else but the Tories does Tuffin think Post Office management get their orders from?

The Executive failed to act as the co-

Emergency cover

What should our attitude be towards 'emergency cover' during a strike? The issue came up in different ways during the postal strike — blood donor cards, money for flood victims and giros for claimants. In the healthworkers strikes earlier this year almost everybody agreed that emergency cover should be provided. Socialist Organiser supporters argued that this should be organised and controlled by the unions. But what about during a postal strike?

For a start no responsible trade unionist would want to risk the lives of working class people. But this would not help anyway, because it would cut right against the solidarity necessary to win. Emergency cover can only be a problem in a strike when it is abused by management. **That**

is why it is essential it is decided upon and controlled by the workers themselves.

In 1971 striking postal workers opened offices to cash pensions and delivered urgent medical supplies. It was partly a public relations campaign, but also workers deciding who the strike hit and who it did not.

Why could something similar not have been done in the recent strike instead of, for example, turning a blind eye to scabs like TNT delivering bulk consignments of giros to unemployment benefit offices? To make this happen of course would require talks at all levels between the UCW and the other unions concerned (CPSA, NALGO, TGWU...). Such talks should be starting now.

THE STRIKE

The strike in Liverpool

Billy Hayes, Branch Secretary, Liverpool Amalgamated, described the strike in Liverpool.

Nationally it was a setback, not a defeat — more of a draw. We didn't get the withdrawal of DRAS, but the union wasn't smashed. That's what the Post Office was looking for, but they weren't completely ready for it. I think they will get ready in the future.

The big point of contention was casuals. Our return to work deal involved 60 additional posts, 30 of which are permanent part-timers and 30 temporary part-timers while the backlog is there. But those temporary part-timers are on 11% more pay and are entitled to join the union. They will go on the Post Office's books should they be finished. I don't think that is a defeat. The 30 permanent ones are members of our union and have a job now.

Locally, I feel as though we have been on a 3-week Charles Atlas course and are stronger as result. We forged unity with the clerical branch, the NCU and the two other UCW branches on Merseyside. Also, we learned how to organise the strike properly.

At the beginning of the dispute a lot of people thought that all you had to do was to go on a picket line and keep picketing until the 'casies' or the scabs had gone away. What we learnt was that the strike is not just won on one front — it is won on several fronts. We developed links with the

Labour Party, the Unemployed Centres and the trade unions on Merseyside. That helped us a lot.

In the past we have had many one, two, even three-day strikes. I don't think people begin to realise that you have to start organising, and digging in, until the fourth day of a strike.

This strike started on the Wednesday. On the following Monday we called together all the representatives from Merseyside and set up a strike committee. Everybody had a job. We met everyday at 1.30pm at the Unemployed Centre.

We also made sure that we picketed the main MLO every day and called upon people to support us. Everybody was welcome provided they accepted the discipline of our picket line.

The Post Office tried to undermine our morale by bussing in the casuals or scabs. They didn't succeed — in fact they only provided a focal point for the dispute. The 'casies' weren't that effective in what they did.

Everybody now thinks that any future strike in the Post Office has to be all-out, from day one. In an industry like ours, you cannot really have selective action because it's a national grid. If one part goes down the whole network, eventually, goes down. If we choose selective action then all that happens is that it allows the Post Office to set the pace, and can cause divisions.

The power of postal workers

The Post Office is a booming industry. Productivity is up ¼ since 1983, mail traffic by ½, and employment by 18,000 in the last 2 years alone. Forecasts for the next 5 years confirm this trend. Last year profits rose to £200 million. It is the most consistently profitable postal service in the European community. This buoyancy has given postal workers confidence in pressing their demands.

The Post Office is also one of the largest industries still under state control, with no serious competitors and a massive turnover. Over 50 million letters are handled daily. Last year's turnover in parcels was £531 million, and business from direct mail companies accounted for £183 million. With a membership of 140,000 the UCW is larger than the NUM.

Nor is there, yet, any practicable alternative distribution network to the Post Office that wouldn't be swamped by the volume of mail. The Post Office's monopoly of deliveries under £1 rests not on the Queen's head but on efficiency and a simplicity of postage rates. Roger Tabor, Post Office Director of Corporate Planning, has stated that he does not think that two or more competing firms could deliver letters throughout the country as cheaply as one integrated postal service. The Tories will encourage the development of an alternative network, possibly based on TNT, but they have nothing to hand at the moment.

So Post Office workers are in a strong position. The Mail Users' Association calculated losses of £25 million during the strike. Post Office management were under pressure to settle and even under Tuffin's deal most branches were able to

beat an orderly retreat with a commitment to no victimisations.

Perhaps the best indicator of industrial strength was shown in a negative fashion. **The Tory trade union laws were not used against the UCW in the dispute.** Britain now has the most repressive trade union legislation in Europe — outside the Eastern Bloc that is. There was no ballot to strike over the use of casuals. The solidarity action by counter staff in Liverpool and Manchester was clearly illegal. But Post Office management shied away from using legal action.

Proof that management is less confident now than it was in 1985, just after the defeat of the miners, was their quick use of the law then to get the UCW Executive to order the Mount Pleasant strikers back.

However, it would be wrong to be complacent. The bosses will also learn from the strike and take steps to overcome their vulnerability. During the strike the High Street banks made use of their internal distribution networks and a new Inter-Bank envelope exchange scheme. Many firms have begun to use facsimile machines (sales of which trebled during the strike) and there was a growth in courier firms and motorcycle messengers. TNT, famous for its strike-breaking operations at Wapping, doubled its business. They clearly have a very long way to go but they will be using the time between now and the next dispute.

So postal workers are strong, but it's important to beware of becoming overconfident. Next time management comes looking for a fight we can expect them to be better prepared. Let's make sure the union is.

ordinating centre of the union and keep the members informed. Strikers who wanted to know what was going on had to turn to the same hostile papers that attacked the strike.

And if that wasn't bad enough, Tuffin and the rest of the Executive kept the negotiations with management secret.

As one Manchester postal worker put it:

'I've said this all along. The union is made up of its members as far as I'm concerned and we are given a vote as to who we want to represent us. And nothing should be behind our backs — things shouldn't be kept behind closed doors.

'We've got to educate them in London to do what we want them to do — not what they want to do. They are paid by us, and paid a damn sight better than we're being paid'.

If all this wasn't bad enough, the real low point came with the national agreement on Monday 12th which Tuffin described as 'a very successful agreement — if not a victory — for the arguments we've been making'.

Tuffin is a liar, the deal was a sell-out and a disaster. Signed when the strike was at its strongest the agreement gives the postal workers nothing.

DRAS is accepted for now and there are only talks which may at a later stage give it a different title and maybe alter it a little.

The position is worse than that before the strike. Postal workers originally went on strike against the continuation of DRAS but now the Executive is recommending that DRAS be accepted for the time being.

Management and the Tories are delighted. The acceptance of DRAS means that the union has backed down over merit and regional pay. This looks like the beginning of the end of national pay agreements, something that the government wants and something that can only weaken the union in the face of management's aggressive divide and rule tactics.

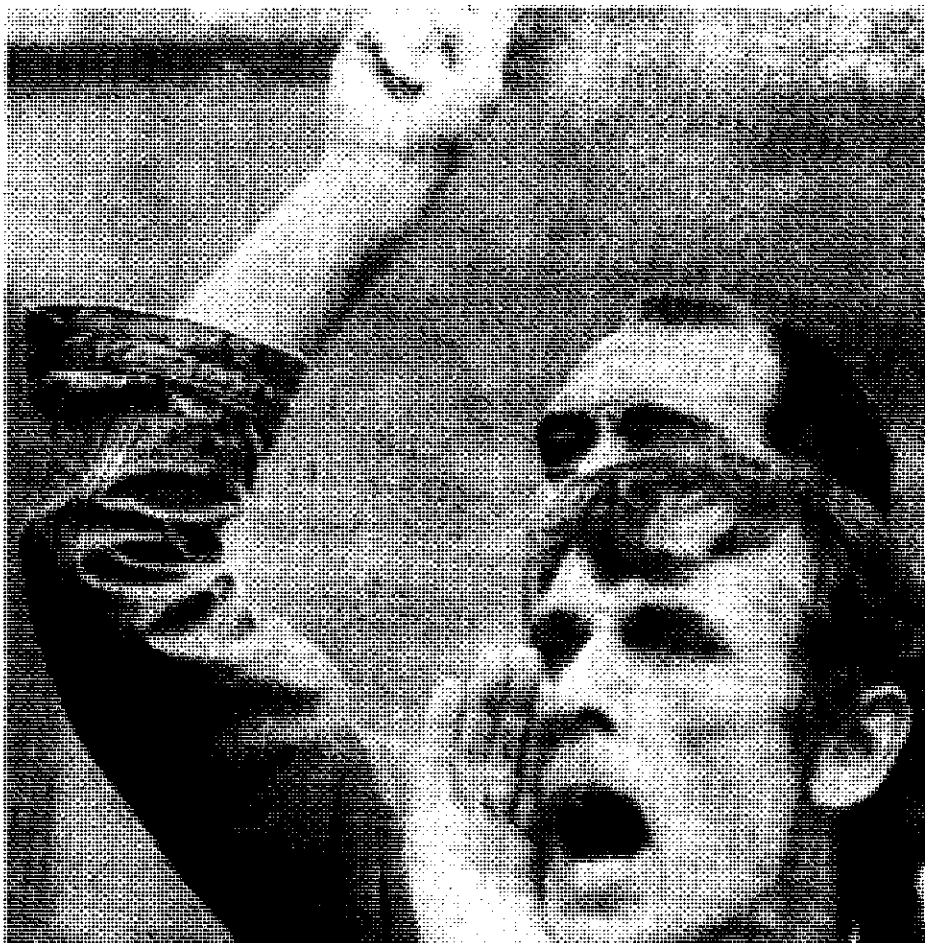
One Borough postal worker put it like this:

'I'm not happy with the way DRAS was settled. We should have sorted out both DRAS and London weighting but the Exec saw an open door and dived for it. We must not accept regional pay — it fits in with Post Office's plans to decentralise management responsibility and play one area off against another.'

The deal also recognises management's right to bring in casuals and divert mail — precisely the issues which sparked the walkouts! It is a particularly stupid concession given that management are talking about setting up a 'national grid' to by-pass individual striking offices.

With this deal the UCW Executive have given management a free hand to isolate and pick off the most militant branches by agreeing to the Post Office's deadline for return to work agreements. Those who stayed out because of lousy local deals got no backing from the national union, but they did get a lot of arm twisting from the Executive.

THE STRIKE



3 weeks of struggle

* Wednesday 31st August

One day UCW national strike in protest against Difficult Recruitment Area Supplement (DRAS). First official national postal workers strike since 1971.

* Thursday 1st September

12 regional and 2 London Mechanised letter offices (MLOs) stay out on strike in protest at UCW members suspended for refusing to handle redirected mail, cross picket lines or work with casuals.

UCW leader Alan Tuffin offers to suspend any further official industrial action if Post Office management will agree to 'open-ended' talks.

* Friday 2nd September

At least one third of all Post Offices and sorting offices are now out as strike spreads.

* Saturday 3rd September

Strike still spreading. Post Office management drops its insistence on agreement in advance to some form of regional/bonus pay. They say they are now prepared to discuss whether to agree this kind of system.

Tuffin says that dispute over casuals must be settled at local level.

* Sunday 4th September

Virtually all foreign mail halted as strike bites. Informal secret talks begin between second rank UCW officials and Post Office management.

The Tories hint at lifting the Royal Mail letter monopoly if the strike continues.

* Monday 5th September

Over half of Britain's sorting offices are at a standstill.

At least 45,000 workers involved in the strike action. All international post suspended indefinitely. Nearly all the West Midlands are out. Post Office management accept that the strike is solid in Scotland.

Tony Benn calls on the Labour Party leadership to give full backing to the strike.

* Tuesday 6th September

Strike continues to escalate. 60 out of 80 MLOs now out. At least 75,000 UCW members on strike. It's revealed that the government are using scab haulage firm TNT to distribute benefit cheques.

* Wednesday 7th September

Tuffin calls for public inquiry into Post Office management. NUR executive urge railworkers not to work with casuals handling scab mail.

* Thursday 8th September

Strikers at Mount Pleasant in London receive threats from management that unless they sign an agreement to work normally, ie. handle scab mail, they will be suspended.

The strike is still spreading. Belfast is now the only MLO still working. Tuffin leaves the TUC to 'take control of the strike centre in London'.

3 casuals sacked in Chester for tampering with the mail. Secret talks continue between Tuffin's hatchet man Alan Johnson and Bryan Roberts, Personnel Manager Royal Mail letters.

Backlog rises to 100 million items. Driver and vehicle licensing centre in Swansea threaten to lay off 1,000 if strike continues.

Labour's frontbench employment spokesperson finally gets round to in-

tervening in the dispute. He writes a letter to Lord Young and Norman Fowler asking them to hold an inquiry into Post Office management.

* Friday 9th September

Union and management continue secret talks at a secret venue. Post Office talk of 'a basis for agreement'. Tuffin talks of 'progress'.

Meanwhile 2 pickets hospitalised in Liverpool as police attack picket lines. Mass meeting of over 1,000 in Preston votes unanimously to continue the strike.

* Saturday 10th September

Talks continue.

* Sunday 11th September

UCW Executive and management working out final details of the deal. Postal service virtually at a standstill. Strike is at its strongest. 150 million item backlog.

* Monday 12th September

The dirty deal is signed.

Tuffin describes it as 'a very successful agreement indeed — if not a victory — for the arguments we have been making'.

In reality the deal leaves UCW members in a worse situation than before the one-day strike on 31st August.

* Tuesday 13th September

Branches up and down the country vote to stay out. Even in Leeds where workers go back they also pass a vote of no confidence in Tuffin and the Executive.

Branches still out include: Liverpool, Manchester, Preston, Chester, York, Hull, Glasgow, Coventry and London.

* Wednesday 14th September

More branches go back with local agreements. Great confusion. London District Council can't reach an agreement on a return to work so London stays out.

Liverpool rejects local deal and organises mass picket of local Post Office headquarters. Manchester votes virtually unanimously to continue strike.

* Thursday 15th September

The strike is weakening. London goes back. Micky Hogan, of the LDC, shrugs its shoulders and tells angry strikers at ECDO 'It's just one of those things'. Romford, the North West, Newport and Cardiff stay out. Glasgow go back.

* Friday 16th September

75 out of 80 MLOs are now back. Romford joins them. Royal Mail manager Cockburn attacks the Liverpool UCW branch for 'the worst industrial relations record in the industry'. Liverpool and the bulk of the North West stand firm.

* Saturday 17th September

600 Postal workers join the strike in South Wales after suspensions following refusal to handle scab mail redirected from Cardiff and Newport which are still out. Oldham and Hull vote to go back.

Talks continue in Liverpool and Manchester. Tuffin's hatchet man Alan Johnson takes charge of the negotiations the strikers back to work.

* Monday 19th September

Cardiff and Newport go back.

* Tuesday 20th September

Mass meeting in Manchester of 1,500 narrowly votes to go back. There is a lot of anger in the meeting at the idea of leaving Liverpool to fight alone. Stockport, which already has a deal, also goes back.

* Wednesday 21st September

Liverpool and Coventry go back.

LESSONS

What makes Tuffin tick?

Question: What does 'talks without preconditions' mean to Alan Tuffin? Answer: It means he can give away as much as he wants without preconditions.

This may sound like a sick joke, but sadly, it's a fair picture of postal workers' leader Alan Tuffin.

The question that comes to mind is how come such a shabby character can get to become the leader of a union?

Part of the answer to this question can be found by turning to the pages of the *Independent* for September 9th.

There we can find a profile of Tuffin ('A misunderstood mirror image of Arthur Scargill') by one Barrie Clement.

Unlike Scargill — who is universally hated by what we used to call Fleet Street — Tuffin gets a good press, well at least from the quality ones on the market. Clement writes:

'The "Postman Prat" tag hung on him by one paper, when a strike over working hours took place before last Christmas, was unfair. It was Mr Tuffin's discreet discussion with Sir Bryan Nicholson, the Post Office chairman that brought about the final settlement.

'Almost certainly it will be Mr Tuffin's confidential conversations with Sir Bryan on this occasion — over the head of Royal Mail management — which will help to smooth the way to industrial peace...

'His skill as a negotiator and his realisation of the realities of commercial life should mean that the present dispute will not develop into a life or death battle like the miner's strike.'

So Tuffin has all the qualities for a top trade union official according to Fleet St: he likes backroom stitch-ups and understands 'the realities of commercial life'. Now 'the realities of commercial life' is one of those strange phrases adopted by our rulers to disguise a cruder point. What they really mean is Tuffin understands that the bosses have got to make a profit and the union can't stand in the way of that.

Tuffin is the kind of trade union leader that management like. He accepts the rules of the game as they lay them down.

Though he comes from the working class (Tuffin joined the Post Office as a telegram boy straight from secondary school at the age of 16) he stands betwixt the workers and management. He sees his role as a dual one. He tries to do two different things at the same time. He is forced to defend 'my members' while at the same time attempting to limit the demands of the rank and file to the horizons set by management according to that magic formula 'commercial realities'.

Now in some conditions skilful trade union officials can get away with this. In conditions of boom and expansion trade unions can win major concessions out of

the employers. But, unfortunately for Alan Tuffin, the 1980s are not years of boom and expansion, and Post Office management want to modernise the industry by screwing as much as possible out of the workforce. As one Liverpool postal worker put it:

'In car industry towns we are faced with speed ups, and Post Office management is squeezing us more and more.

'They admit that the mail has gone up 25% in the last five years. With productivity deals there has been an increased pressure on the workers.

'Something like 80% of the Post Office costs go on wages, hence the attack on wages and conditions'.

In conditions like this Tuffin is forced to make some strong choices. He is faced with a militant and angry rank and file on the one hand who want to see some action and a determined management on the other who want see him face up to, yes, you've guessed it, 'commercial realities'.

In this kind of situation Tuffin can lose control. The *Financial Times* put it quite well:

'The Union of Communication Workers Executive Council will today attempt to answer a key question which the postal strike has raised for it: who is running the dispute, the union's leadership or the rank and file?'

The same Liverpool postal worker that we quoted earlier made a similar point:

'The Post Office is even beginning to sound like the old past employers, complaining about "wildcat" strikes. They make agreements with the national officials, which then get overturned by delegates and the shop floor. In the Post Office the bosses have got a union leadership that cannot deliver.'

In cooking up the present sell-out deal Tuffin has been at least as worried about how to bring the rank and file of the union under some kind of control as he has been to force concessions out of management.

He has to prove he can 'deliver'.



Tuffin on the picket line

In fact if anything the present 'agreement' looks like a deal between management and the national union leadership to pull the militant branches of the union into line.

Tuffin has described the deal as a success but really he's been about as 'successful' in the present negotiations as Sebastian Coe is likely to be in the Seoul Olympics!

Here's some food for thought for those strikers who've been on the picket lines for the last 12 days.

While you stand firm without strike pay your leader — sure of his salary because he hasn't declared a national strike — was enjoying the good life.

As the *Independent* put it:

'The conflict has not prevented Mr Tuffin from spending most of the week at Bournemouth... He plays squash and swims to ease the tension. "It's good to relax (says Tuffin) otherwise tempers can

Officials and a workers' wage

From 'Communique'

QUESTION Why should the General Secretary get less than a senior clerk?

ANSWER Because the senior clerk is not a policy maker. A senior clerk is a member of a different union — APEX — and his wages are negotiated with the UCW General Treasurer.

Q. But surely you don't mean that the General Secretary should earn less than some Head Postmasters?

A. Why not? Most of his members do as indeed do most other union representatives.

Q. But then nobody would want the position.

A. The same type of argument was used to try to prevent the five yearly re-election of full time officials. When the rule was introduced it didn't stop people contesting the election.

Q. But what about people who dedicate their lives to the movement? Aren't they entitled to some compensation if they have reached such high office?

A. What type of reward do they want? If it's just money they are looking for they should have gone on the management side. The reward that should compensate them should be the satisfaction of service to the movement. The reward that the vast majority of trade union activists receive.

LESSONS



become frayed."

So Tuffin relaxes whilst his members fight. Well he can afford to on £35,000 a year — but the postal workers certainly can't.

Under the last deal Tuffin negotiated some postal workers lost as much as £50 a week. Tuffin didn't start off in life to be such a scoundrel. But over time, the habits, the routine, the lifestyle of a modern trade union leader can bend and shape even the best individuals. Union leaders start to behave and think like the managers who they spend more and more of their time with. Their first loyalty is to the union machine from which they derive their status, position and livelihood — rather than the flesh and blood human beings who make up the union in the real world.

Union leaders start to view the world as the professional negotiators that they are. Strikes and militant action become **disruptions** to the smooth **normality** of concessions, compromises and cosy chats with the bosses.

So if you are a full-time official **separated** from the rank and file then strong forces start to act on you.

Liverpool UCW branch secretary, Billy Hayes, has described the problem:

"The pressures on any union official are great. He or she is under pressure to see the management point of view, and the greater the responsibility the greater the pressure.

"One of the great strengths of the UCW is that by and large the vast majority of union representatives live under the same conditions as their members. They know the pressures of trying to make ends meet and the long hours

The Industrial relations philosophy of Tuffin

"In the last few months the executive and the negotiating committee have had to live with the reality that one mistake could lead to a strike." June '86

"The UCW has negotiated efficiency schemes that have boosted productivity by 25%...costs have been reduced by nearly 15%...or £2,300 for each employee..."

"Delivery postmen have been forced to carry bags twice the traditional weight, many now have to push trolleys on their rounds...a six day working week adds to the problem of keeping staff..." September '88

needed to earn a living in the PO and BT. Unfortunately, paying full time officials inflated salaries takes away the reality of day-to-day pressures of making ends meet.

"This is not to say that full time officials would automatically do a better job on a wage linked to members' earnings, but they would at least experience the continuing reality of our members' pay packets."

The result of all this is that the union bureaucrats begin to create a set of ideas, an ideology, to justify their position and their role as professional negotiators.

Perhaps the crassest expression of this bureaucratic ideology came from the lips of Terry Duffy, the former right-wing leader of the engineers.

"My task is to convince workers that management can be trusted....I don't believe in strikes...I have never led a strike in my life. No victory can come from a strike. The main victory we can

have is in harmonisation."

Tuffin shares this basic view but he's bright enough (and well aware of the anger of many postal workers) not to express it so bluntly.

Leaders of strikes who hold these views don't lead the strikes very well, their performance reinforces cynicism amongst the rank and file. So you get anti-strike union leaders leading strikes to defeat and thus appearing to **prove** to many more conservative, less active union members that strikes don't work and fighting doesn't win.

Union bureaucrats help to create, and thrive on, the **passivity** of the rank and file.

The national full time officials don't, for the most part, rule the unions by a reign of terror. They combine bureaucratic control with attempts to incorporate, school and train union activists in their ways of operating and their view of the world.

Alan Fraser, victimised branch official in Basingstoke, explained: "All UCW branch officials attend educational courses. At these courses you will find members of the National Executive taking the classes. They go to a lot of effort to portray themselves as 'one of the lads'. They will put £20 on the bar..."

But when it comes to issues in the union they either treat you as a moron who wouldn't, couldn't and shouldn't try to understand difficult issues or they spin a line something like this: 'Yes, I know it's bad, we tried to get a fight...I argued on the Executive but I lost, you know how it is, we've got to stay loyal to the union...'"

At other times they will take activists aside and make it clear that, if they toe the line, then there's a 'future' for them in the union.

It's through processes like these that the full-time bureaucracy hope to create a buffer between themselves and the rank and file, and neuter potential leaders of what they see as the biggest threat — an organised rank and file movement.

Even principled left wingers can become right wing bureaucrats if they take up positions and responsibilities in the union machine without possessing clear political ideas or without **being** willing to subject themselves to rank and file control.

For instance during the Basingstoke postal workers strike of 1983 over the victimisation of Socialist Organiser supporter and UCW branch official Alan Fraser it was officials with a **left** orientation, John Taylor and Gerry Casey, who broke the strike.

But it's not inevitable that officials sell out. The situation is a complex one.

The ordinary members **don't** just get the leaders they deserve but on the other hand the rank and file are not simply a permanent militant force held back by a thin layer of corrupt bureaucrats.

What is decisive is how the rank and file of the unions **organise** to democratise the unions and turn them into effective fighting organisations with a clear political commitment to the interests of working class people.

LESSONS

What was missing

The strike was a rank and file revolt, showing the depth of commitment to basic trade union principles — like not crossing picket lines and not handling redirected scab mail — amongst ordinary postal workers.

A commitment to trade union principles which shames Tuffin, who advised members that Stage 3 letters should be signed, if "the employer makes it a condition of a return to work". These letters commit the signatories to agree to handle redirected mail, cross picket lines and work with strike breakers.

Behind the strike are broader issues than DRAS; there is the low pay, lousy hours and terrible conditions that have created a situation where postal workers have accounted for nearly 20% of the strikes in the last year even though they account for only around 1.5% of the TUC's membership.

The tragedy is that this rank and file anger lacked any clear focus. There was no alternative pole of attraction inside the union that could have prevented the executive riding out and then betraying the rank and file revolt.

If the militant branches had linked together during the strike it could have decisively effected the outcome. The strike could have been held together until DRAS was withdrawn and the Executive would have been that much more wary of pushing through a sell-out deal.

The case for a rank and file movement in the UCW is overwhelming.

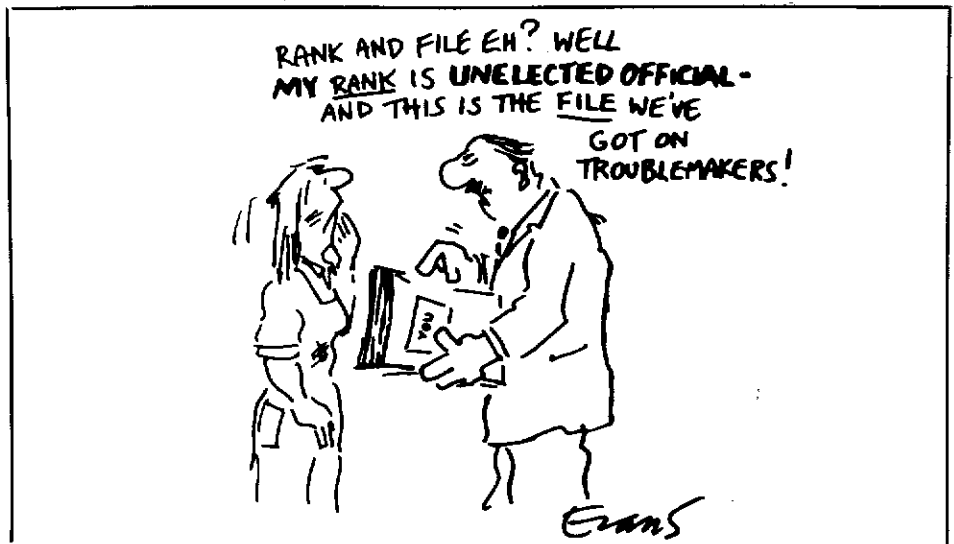
Time, after time, after time, the Executive manage to get away with pushing through some lousy deal. The worst they get are votes of censure, which can fill the bins at Head Office. They regularly manage to literally snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Now there is no reason on earth why this has to keep happening. The membership are angry, they want to fight. All that is needed is to focus that anger.

The situation needs to change. Immediately the militant active branches of the union, like Liverpool and Manchester, should call a national meeting of all the local UCW branches that are unhappy with Tuffin's leadership of the strike. The meeting should discuss the lessons of the strike and what needs to be done to re-arm the union and defeat Post Office management's offensive.

Such a meeting could be a first step towards knitting together a powerful movement of the rank and file inside the UCW.

What kind of rank and file movement?

It would be daft to try to spell out in advance exactly what form a rank and file movement in the UCW should take but a general picture of what kind of movement we need to build can be put together by looking at some past experiences of the British working class movement.



Mention the words 'rank and file movement' to most trade union officials and they'll burst their collar buttons right away. There is nothing so hated by the hardened trade union bureaucrat such as Tuffin as the well-organised unofficial movement.

These movements would not exist, of course, if trade union officialdom had not become so distant from the shop floor, so much more absorbed in the state machinery, and so corrupted by money, power and the company of capitalist high society.

Early in the twentieth century, the miners in particular developed a big rank and file movement pressing for amalgamation, union democracy and improvements in wages and conditions. These Reform Committees, as they were called, included all workers in the industry who supported a platform of militant trade union demands.

Organising against the bosses offensive

At the end of World War 1, the National Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement was founded, uniting the shop stewards in every union in a single organisation. This revolutionary-minded body was superseded in 1924 by the National Minority Movement, organised on the initiative of the Communist Party. It was a movement built after some serious defeats and had to aim to turn back the bosses' offensive.

The miners were locked out from March 31st 1921; the rail and transport unions, on 'Black Friday', refused to honour their pledges of support; and the miners were forced to accept defeat on July 1st.

The engineers in those days were the second central militant section of the union movement. They had created and sustained the shop stewards' movement during World War 1. From March 11th to June 13th 1922 they, too, were locked out and defeated. Militants were victimised wholesale. The shop stewards'

movement was broken. From 1921 to 1926 TUC membership fell by one million — more than it was ever to fall in the aftermath of 1926.

The first Minority Movement conference in 1924 had delegates representing a total of one million trade unionists (the TUC at the time having only four million affiliates).

They got the name **Minority Movement** because of the complaint of some bureaucrats about 'the minority of troublemakers'. The Minority Movement linked together the rank and file, coordinated the battle for militant policies in different unions and paralleled the fight of the Communist Party (which was then a more or less healthy socialist organisation) for affiliation to the Labour Party and the drive to change the political wing of the labour movement. Without its work the general strike of 1926 would probably never have happened; if it had not been derailed by the ruling Communist Party bureaucrats under Stalin in Moscow into softness towards the TUC 'lefts' (the 1926 equivalents of Ken Gill and Ron Todd) at the crucial time in 1926, it could even have been the driving force taking that general strike to victory.

But despite these events, the experience of the Minority Movement proved that it is possible to build a rank and file movement in a period of defeat, when the employers are on the offensive and when union membership is declining.

If it was possible to build amongst the rank and file then, it's also possible to do so today. In fact, the experience of the Minority Movement provides a powerful argument against those on the left who say that conditions **now** are too bad to organise the rank and file. It shouldn't be forgotten that the basis for the Minority Movement was laid by campaigning around slogans like 'Stop the retreat!' and 'Back to the unions!' — slogans that are relevant again today.

The movement was soon sabotaged by the ultra-left lunacy of the Communist International. They set-up breakaway

LESSONS

unions and called Labour Party supporters 'social fascists'. But it did not mean the end of rank and file movements: so long as the trade union leaders remain unresponsive to the interests of their members and distant from the shop floor, rank and file movements are bound to exist.

The low point in their development followed the alliance between Russia and Britain in World War II. Once the alliance was made, the Communist Party led its members and its far greater periphery of supporters into the wartime Joint Production Committees.

Even then, however, there were rank and file organisations, initiated by Trotskyists, anarchists and others.

During the long boom which followed the war, rank and file organisations developed again (though not in proportion to the enormous increase in the number of shop stewards). Above all, Britain saw the development of numerous combine committees. These were, of course, different from movements like the Reform Committees and the Minority Movement sections in that they based themselves on the stable factory level organisation and included all stewards (and only stewards) irrespective of their outlook.

The late fifties and early sixties saw both a development of combine committees and the growth of politically militant rank and file groups. The Communist Party and, to a less extent, the Socialist Labour League (the forerunner of the notorious and lunatic Workers Revolutionary Party) played leading roles in organising these.

Taking advantage of the drift of the SLL away from the mass labour movement and from reality, and foreseeing the attempt by the Labour Government to try to police the trade union movement, the International Socialism group (now the Socialist Workers Party) initiated the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Shop Stewards, in the mid-sixties. Unfortunately, it was the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, carefully cultivated by the Communist Party's Industrial Department, that emerged at that time as the most important rank and file movement, playing a major role in defeating both Labour's *In Place of Strife* and the Tories' Industrial Relations Act.

Unions and politics

The political weaknesses of this rank and file movement expressed themselves in the fact that neither the Communist Party nor the International Socialists managed to give a clear political lead to the powerful shop stewards-based movement that smashed the Tory anti-union Industrial Relations Act.

The '72 strike movement halted when the dockers, who'd been jailed under the Industrial Relations Act, were released. The upsurge two years later, driven on by a miners' strike, ended with the election of a Labour Government under Harold Wilson.

What was missing was a leadership which would have been able to take the movement forward, to bring down

The record of the Broad Left

The Broad Left in the UCW was formed in 1981. One of its first actions was to organise a highly successful conference fringe meeting in support of Tony Benn's challenge for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party. The meeting attracted nearly 500 people and was the first openly political meeting ever at conference and for that reason attracted a lot of hostility from the then general secretary Tom Jackson.

So the Broad Left was formed at a time of political ferment in the labour movement, when the left was still on the offensive, when democratic changes had just been pushed through party conference and many Labour activists were saying 'never again' to a Labour government like that of Wilson and Callaghan.

It was a time of opportunity for the left, before Post Office management's offensive had really started to bite and before the defeat of the healthworkers, miners and printers and of Labour in the elections of '83 and '87.

But the tragedy is that this opportunity was wasted. The Broad Left failed to sink deep roots amongst rank and file postal workers and become a credible force.

Just how the Broad Left missed this opportunity can be seen by looking at three test cases for the Broad Left:

Case 1: The victimisation of Alan Fraser

In September '83, Basingstoke branch official, regional Broad Left organiser and Socialist Organiser supporter, Alan Fraser, was sacked from his job. There followed a week-long strike demanding his reinstatement which was sabotaged by so-called left officials John Taylor and Gerry Casey.

It would be charitable to say the Broad Left was slow off the mark! Despite the fact that Alan was a leading member of the Broad Left, the *Militant* supporters in the Broad Left (who held the key positions) just did the absolute minimum, and even then had to be pushed.

There was no attempt to mobilise the rank and file outside Basingstoke over the issue. It took the Broad Left seven months to even send a list of questions to Alan for an interview in the Broad Left publication, *Communique*. The executive, on the other hand, acted a lot quicker: they produced a special branch circular, a BOB supplement and almost two pages in *The Post* to justify the victimisation.

Case 2: The shorter working week fight

In 1987 the Broad Left had a real chance to relaunch itself around the campaign for a shorter working week, exposing the executive's unwillingness to fight.

As Manchester postal worker Pete Keenlyside argued at the time:

"The most important job for activists in the union in the next three months is to stop this (sell-out) happening.

"What we need is a campaign — 'Post Office workers for the full claim' or whatever — which organises all those branches and individual members who are serious about fighting for the claim.

"It will have to prepare the membership for a massive yes vote in any ballot on industrial action, and prevent any attempt by the executive to sell out.

"Time is short. We need that campaign now. The planning for it has to start right away, and after 11th January the campaign will have to begin in earnest.

"If it is going to get off the ground, the left in the union will have to put other considerations and issues aside for one moment."

But the left missed the opportunity. The

Broad Left was too slow to act — it agitated at the special conference but not seriously amongst the rank and file. It produced no publication during the dispute, apart from a conference leaflet.

The executive yet again managed a sell-out.

Pete Keenlyside drew out the lessons:

"The tragedy of all this is that it could have been avoided. A rank and file organisation worthy of the name could have mobilised members against any sell-out.

"It could have organised limited unofficial action while the negotiations were going on, and when the deal was announced, brought out enough people to force the executive to withdraw it. If the feeling of those members who I have spoken to is at all general, this would not have been impossible. No such organisation exists at the moment and once again we are paying for this omission."

Case 3: The 1988 strike

This was a great opportunity for the Broad Left, but it was slow off the mark. As Socialist Organiser reported:

"About 60 people from branches throughout the country came to the UCW Broad Left meeting in Manchester on Sunday 11th.

"The meeting voted to campaign for much the sort of policies Socialist Organiser have been putting forward, although it lost touch with reality when it agreed with a *Militant*-sponsored resolution that a minimum conditions for a return to work should be a £20 across the board increase!

"The meeting also went on for two hours before the dispute was discussed.

"Even if the meeting had been better, however, 60 people isn't enough. We need hundreds if we are going to bring the executive under the control of the members."

The Broad Left suffered from the influence of supporters of the *Militant*. Their political approach is what can be called passive propagandism, i.e. they argue for things that in the abstract may be good ideas (that's what we call *propagandism*) but they don't relate that to action now amongst the rank and file to change the union (that's why we call it *passive propagandism*).

The crassest example of this was the way the *Militant* supporters passed a resolution for no return to work in the recent dispute unless management conceded a £20 across the board increase.

When at the same time none of them could seriously have believed that they could have argued that line and won it at their own branches' mass meetings.

Also, their activity is far more concerned with recruiting to their own tendency than building a genuinely broad-based and effective organised left in the union.

What the Broad Left should have been discussing was how to knit together the militant branches of the union to prevent a sell-out and to smash DRAS. But the Broad Left wasn't really prepared for that kind of active role.

Ideally, the Broad Left should be a delegate-based body with real roots in the union rather than a collection of members of left groups and a few independent people.

In the aftermath of the strike we have a great, and possibly never to be repeated, opportunity to build a decent rank and file organisation in the UCW by pulling together the militant branches who stood out against Tuffin's treachery.

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Heath in the first case, to hammer Wilson and establish a workers' government in the second.

Shop floor leaders had no answers to the arguments of Murray and Wilson that wages cause inflation, that this was the reason why the economy was in trouble, that an incomes policy could help, and so on.

Leastwise, their arguments were not strong enough to carry their members with them and stop the official leadership going with Wilson.

But while the LCDTU did unite militants in genuine rank and file movements like the Building Workers Charter and the more electoralist Engineers Broad Left, as well as many in no such organisations, it was itself only a pale shadow of what such a movement should be. It had a very limited (and wrongly expressed) platform, it had no branches, no industrial sections, no internal democracy, and relied on pressurising rather than fighting the trade union leaders.

At the same time the IS group began more systematically to create rank and file organisations in different unions, the most successful being Rank and File Teacher.

Whatever faults might have attended these efforts, they were an important contribution to the militant organisation of the real grass roots of the trade union movement.

While rank and file movements are often rather short-lived, there is no period in the 20th century when they have not existed and been the most vigorous expression of the workers' interests.

The leaders of the official movement (and of the Communist Party today) have always accused them of trying to direct people away from the official organisations. The opposite is the case: their aim is to cleanse the official movement of the bureaucrats, the careerists, the traitors and the dupes of capitalism; and to develop militant leaders and help the rank and file take possession of the official movement.

Building in the UCW

The rank and file movements of the past teach us that these movements can't be treated as the backyards of whatever political organisation may have founded them. (As the *Militant* try to do with the postal workers' Broad Left).

Their platforms must be clear and easily grasped by the militants, and they have to give answers to the burning questions of the moment which confront the workers' movement, even if these answers are only supported by a small minority: they cannot afford, for the sake of broader support, to limit themselves to the small change of day-to-day demands.

Right now, a rank and file movement in the UCW would have to aim to be a serious and effective force based on the branches where possible, and capable of exerting some real influence on developments in the union.

It would take disputes seriously, respond quickly and attempt to seize the initiative. It would try to generalise any action and operate to spread information and to agitate and organise for solidarity.

Where necessary it would have to attempt to act as an alternative leadership in the union. As the old slogan goes: "If the leaders won't lead, then the rank and file must!"

A serious rank and file body would stand militants for positions and challenge for the national leadership of the union, at the same time acting to make those leaders accountable.

It would do so on the basis laid down by the Minority Movement in the '20s but sadly not fully acted upon. "To those who say 'We have seen leaders turn before and what guarantee is there

that they will not continue to do so?' we reply, the Minority Movement must be strong enough inside the unions not only to make leaders but also to break them, if and when they reject the policy upon which they were elected."

Now all this might seem a long way from the concerns of activists inside the UCW — when the task is laying the foundations for a rank and file organisation. But it isn't. No builder sets to work without an architect's plan (or if they do work without a plan the building can soon fall down!) in the same way we need to know clearly what kind of movement we are out to build.

The first foundation stone for such a movement could be laid by a meeting of all the militant branches who want to fight Tuffin.

A model of strike organisation

Alan Fraser explains how the Basingstoke UCW branch organised in a strike earlier this year. The same basic ideas were applied in September providing a model of strike organisation.

On 7th-10th March 1988, Basingstoke postal workers scored a clear victory in a four-day strike.

They walked out on Monday 7th March at midnight, in protest over management breaking a long-standing training agreement.

The 40-odd night crew picketed all night, and after a mass meeting in the morning were joined by the early crew.

The strike call was initially for 24 hours. However, it soon escalated.

The training agreement broken by management was seen by the members as the thin end of the wedge of local and national attacks on workers' rights and conditions.

The agreement was made in the early 1980s to ensure new recruits received decent training and said that recruits would be limited to six in every three weeks to ensure this.

On Monday 7th, management decided that they would disregard the agreement and recruit as many new entrants as they wished. New postal workers would be thrown in at the deep end without proper training.

The local leadership and rank and file dug their heels in and demanded that management stuck by the local agreement. The picket line was heavily supported and mass meetings were organised on a daily basis.

The UCW Executive Committee responded by sending a regional official. On arrival with the usual brief — 'It is my job to get you back to work, lads' — he cobbled together a deal which would have meant giving in to management's demands with a few concessions. At the mass meeting the rank and file gave him a torrid time, and after a verbal mauling he scuttled off, never to be seen again.

On Wednesday, the members faced another official sent by the Executive. The strike was solid — 317 out, six scabbing. The new official adopted the same line.

By this time the members had decided

to elect two rank and filers in rotation to accompany local and national negotiators in any further talks. They also stuck to their original demands.

The second Executive Committee official went the same way as the first. The rank and file were in no mood for compromise, and rejected the second deal.

The strike committee then began to lay plans to escalate the action — sending delegations to other offices in the region, and looking for local support from other trade unionists.

On the Thursday, the fourth day of the strike, management knew they were in for a fight and posted — yes, posted! — every striker a letter asking them to return to work. The response by late afternoon was 200 on the picket line.

By this time another Executive Committee official had arrived, with the same grey suit as the others and, of course, the usual line — 'It's my job to get you back to work, lads'. By 7.00pm there were 317 on the picket line. When the mass meeting got under way it was clear that management had crumbled. The agreement was reinstated and they gave a couple of other concessions.

A clear victory had been achieved. The members were jubilant. When the EC official tried to take the credit for striking up an agreement he was told to get back to London. The strikers had won a great victory in taking on both the management and the EC.

The early initiative in strike organisation had helped consolidate the action. The two rank and filers on the negotiating team helped generate confidence and solidarity and put the bureaucrats under pressure.

The lessons are there. A determined, well-organised local leadership and a rank and file prepared to fight can beat off management's attacks.

This point should not be lost by the EC. But judging from their previous track record, UCW members cannot rely on them to fight. What is needed is a coordinated campaign of action by UCW militants right across the union.

The strike at Basingstoke shows the way forward. UCW members, despite the recent sell-out over the shorter working week, are still willing to fight back. The management and the bureaucracy can be beaten. The task is to organise and mobilise that fight now.

LESSONS

New battles loom

By a postal officer

UCW members on the delivery/sorting side of business are not alone in facing attacks on their jobs, pay and conditions. Those of us in the counter and clerical staff grades also have a struggle ahead.

Girobank is being sold off to the highest bidder. There are obvious threats to those who work for Girobank and Post Office counters from asset strippers and the demands for 'more efficiency'. In the counters, parcels and letters businesses, clerical staff face loss of jobs through regrading and further demands for increased workload from a particularly vicious management.

At the same time, the counters business propose closing 750 Crown Offices (half the Crown Offices nationwide) with a loss of 5,000 jobs.

The Post Office and UCW leadership have been proud of their industrial relations record following the 1971 strikes. Time and again the UCW leadership have caved in to the pressure from management. Union headquarters persistently argued we had to work together with management to secure the future of the business.

And, in 1983, the C and CS grades were recommended a productivity deal which lost us 1,500 jobs (according to union figures) in 1½ years.

Again, in 1986, the executive proposed a deal to accept part-timers and more flexible working practices to 'protect the Crown Office network by reducing costs.' They went so far as to produce a glossy brochure to put their case, including a letter from a Post Office board member echoing the executive's arguments.

The brochure urged us to exploit 'market opportunities' by becoming 'more competitive by reducing costs and prices' and by being 'more flexible and responsive to change.'

All the time the threat of privatisation was used to stamp on militancy. None of this compliance has prevented the Post Office from coming back for more. Last year the Tories sent in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to stitch up the counters business. They were to look for a way of increasing efficiency and standards of service without increasing costs, and to decide whether the counters business was operating against the public interest.

It was widely expected that their conclusions would not be good news for C and CS grades, yet all the decision got was a small mention in the News in Brief column of the December 1987 issue of the union journal.

Now the report is out and those expectations have been fulfilled. 5,000 jobs are to be lost.

On top of this, the Post Office will look at who does what work with a view

to getting it done cheaper, either by using more part-timers or by changing the grading structure.

The end product could be the near disappearance of higher paid full-time grades in parts of the business.

To begin with, the union responded to the threat posed by the MMC with sweet reason. It put submissions to the MMC explaining how the union bureaucrats could actually run the Post Office more efficiently and more profitably than the Post Office board.

Approaches were made to the Post Office for talks on the proposed closures, but the union was given the brush-off. The refusal of the Post Office to take part in negotiations finally spurred the UCW executive into action.

A ballot for industrial action was called for in September and a big effort made to get an overwhelming 'yes' vote.

There seemed little doubt that this was what would happen. But it appears that the executive wants a large 'yes' vote only as a bargaining counter with the counters management. They are peeved that management won't talk to them. This is clear, both from the tone in the union journal and from remarks made by the union's executive member responsible for counters, Ernie Dudley.

There are real problems facing the C and CS grades in the coming battle with the Post Office.

Firstly, there is the executive's desire to use the 'yes' vote only to get back in-

to negotiations with the Post Office. This can only raise false expectations amongst the members that we can avoid industrial action. Once in negotiations, what will we negotiate? What is an 'acceptable' number of closures?

Second, there is the problem of isolation. During the dispute over DRAS, the executive pulled out all the stops to keep the C and CS grades at work. Not only this; they put back the C and CS ballot until the DRAS action was over.

If we are to be successful we will need the power of the delivery/sorting workers alongside us. Or will they be told to cross our picket lines?

Last is the question of legality. The Post Office is now organised into four separate businesses: parcels, letters, counters and Girobank. The ballot on counters was a ballot of all C and CS grades in the Post Office. How will the union react if the letters business take out an injunction against its C and CS people going on strike over a counters business policy?

The fight against privatisation in Girobank is another case. Union policy is to oppose privatisation by all means up to and including industrial action. Will the Girobank workers be left isolated; and if not, does that mean going illegal? We cannot allow ourselves to be picked off and we cannot allow ourselves to be used as cannon fodder.

Our jobs are at stake.

Privatisation: divide and rule

'Divide and rule' is the motto behind the Tory government's drive for privatisation.

Through privatisation they can chop up big public-sector strongholds of trade unionism into separate enterprises with separate employers and separate negotiations.

Tory anti-union law will then ban workers in those separate enterprises from actively supporting each other. Sectors that the Tories want to cut back can be isolated and exposed to the cutting edge of the market.

The first steps in privatising a public enterprise are to squeeze up profitability — so that it will be saleable — and to chop it up into separate sectors which can then become separate private enterprises.

The Tories have already taken those first steps with the Post Office. Work rates have been speeded up and wages squeezed so that it is now the most profitable postal service in the world.

In 1981 Telecom was split off from the Post Office. Telecom was privatised in 1984 — and the spiral of increased prices for most customers and worse service has not stopped since then!

In 1986 the Post Office was split into four sections — Letters, Parcels, Counters and Girobank. The Government is now privatising Girobank.

Parcels and Counters are on the Tories' list as possibles for privatisation. Piecemeal semi-privatisation is already on the agenda

for Counters, through plans to shut a lot of Crown post offices and shift the business to more privately-run sub-post offices.

During the 1987 general election campaign, Margaret Thatcher said that Letters would not be privatised. There would indeed be problems from a Tory point of view in selling it off.

At present a letter to the next street in London costs the same as a letter to the Shetlands. Mail services for rural areas are subsidised from big city mail.

It would not be difficult for competitors to undercut the Post Office on big city mail. Then what would happen to the rural services? Post Office bosses say they would have to put the charge for a first class letter up to 75p to cover costs.

Now rural areas provide a lot of Tory voters — and a lot of customers for direct mail and mail order operations. So the Tories are hesitant about privatising the letter post.

Early this year, however, the Tory Centre for Policy Studies published proposals for gradual privatisation. First private companies would be allowed to compete for mail priced at 50p or above. (The present limit is 1p). Then they would be allowed to compete without restriction, and finally the letters business would be sold off.

Whatever their hesitations on detail, there is a consistent drive behind the Tories' plans. It's time we had more than a piecemeal fight back.

LESSONS

Labour and the UCW

The attacks on UCW members — DRAS, casualisation, privatisation and speed-up — have not fallen from the sky. They are the result of the calculated plans and policies of the Tory government.

Though a militant fightback is needed in every office it cannot be confined to that. It must be co-ordinated nationally. It must also be linked to our answers to the problems we face and to the fight for a government that will implement these policies — a government accountable to the labour movement, not the bosses.

That combination is the key: policies in the interests of postalworkers and the working class as a whole, combined with mechanisms of accountability in the labour movement to make sure the rank and file are in control and that the policies are carried out in practice.

A start can be made by campaigning in the UCW for:

- The decisions of conference to be binding on the Executive;
- Delegations to the Labour Party and TUC to consist of elected lay members only;
- Much higher priority to be given to political debate and education at national conference and at branch level;
- Build Labour Party workplace branches.

Tuffin uses the UCW's block vote at Labour Party Conference to help keep the right wing in control of the Party. Kinnoch and Hattersley's policies are just a parliamentary version of Tuffin's



Kinnoch: Tuffin's hero

trade union new realism. Trade unionists and Labour Party activists on the left need to link up in the same way to back up and reinforce each other.

Organisationally the trade unions make up 90% of the Labour Party membership (and votes at Conference), and nearly all the major industrial unions are affiliated to the Labour Party.

We need democracy in both wings of the movement. Without a fight for Labour Party democracy — to ensure the leadership carries out the democratically decided policies and fights for the working class, and to prevent a re-run of past Labour govern-



Ben: supported the strikers

ments managing capitalism — trade unionists can only carry out partial, defensive battles against the Tories and will not have a serious political alternative. Without trade union democracy, Labour Party democracy will be lifeless and empty.

So postalworkers need to get stuck into the battle against the right wing of the movement on two fronts — both in the unions and in their political wing, the Labour Party. The rank and file in the unions need to organise in parallel with the left inside the Labour Party — to link-up, crossover and re-inforce each other.

WHERE WE STAND

Socialist Organiser stands for workers' liberty, East and West. We aim to help organise the left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions to fight to replace capitalism with working class socialism.

We want public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control. We want democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy, with elected representatives recallable at any time, and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

Socialism can never be built in one country alone. The workers in every country have more in common with workers in other countries than with their own capitalist or Stalinist rulers. We support national liberation struggles and workers' struggles world-wide, including the struggle of workers and oppressed nationalities in the Stalinist states against their own

anti-socialist bureaucracies.

We stand:

For full equality for women, and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. For a mass working class based women's movement.

Against racism, and against deportations and all immigration controls.

For equality for lesbians and

gays.

For a united and free Ireland, with some federal system to protect the rights of the Protestant minority.

For left unity in action; clarity in debate and discussion.

For a labour movement accessible to the most oppressed, accountable to its rank and file, and militant against capitalism.

We want Labour Party and trade union members who support our basic ideas to become supporters of the paper — to take a bundle of papers to sell each week and pay a small contribution to help meet the paper's deficit. Our policy is democratically controlled by our supporters through Annual General Meetings and an elected National Editorial Board.

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