

Dispatch



Public sector pay dispute—information for action

Royal Mail workers: Fighting to win

Doing the job as it's meant to be done

Several offices now, and many individual postmen and women across the country have been turning up on time, weighing their bags, not using their cars, taking the vans out and cutting off at their finish time. In other words, "doing the job as it should be done".

At Southend, Royal Mail have had to bring up to 70 managers a day from all over the South East to try to deal with the resulting backlog.

It costs you nothing to do this, and is essential if the

strikes are going to be effective so backlogs don't get cleared. Why not join in now?

Wildcats back on the prowl

Oxford and Abingdon, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Liverpool and Chester are just some of the offices that have been out on wildcat strike during this dispute, from a few hours up to a week.

It's essential that we support each other if people are suspended or mail diverted, and that unofficial action is spread as far as possible once it has started to maximise its impact.

Work the 318

- Don't use your personal car for deliveries
- Weigh your bags - follow the legal maximum of 13kg
- Take your meal break
- Cut off at your finish time

For more views on the wildcats see the back page of this issue, check out libcom.org/pay-2007 for the latest news and log on to royalmailchat.co.uk for minute-by-minute updates and discussion.

Pay 2007 disputes roundup

Civil service: 280,000 PCS members are being consulted on further strike action, following previous strikes and action-short-of strike over a 2% pay offer.

Local government: Unison is consulting its one million members in local councils over pay. Areas counted so far have overwhelmingly rejected the offer and voted to ballot on industrial action. 600 social care workers are on indefinite strike over other pay cuts. Parking attendants in Manchester went on wildcat strike over pay and management treatment. In Norfolk bin men worked to rule over job cuts, and bus drivers struck over pay

Health: The Royal College of

Nursing is consulting its members in England and Wales on a ballot for strike action. Midwives are undertaking their first ever ballot over a 1.9% pay offer. Unison health workers have also rejected the pay offer as "insulting."

Education: Teachers are building a campaign for their pay to be reviewed after the government reneged on its promise to do so.

Postal service: Workers at Crown Post Offices have been striking over the transfer of services to WH Smith which will cost jobs and conditions.

Elsewhere: Thousands of workers at Heinz, Coca-Cola, Scottish airports have all been

on strike against sub-inflation pay offers, some launching on-the-job action as well. More strikes at Grampian foods, Manchester NHS and information about possible strikes by PCS, Unison and Unite members all online at libcom.org/pay-2007

It is essential that we coordinate strike action across the public sector for us all to win. Some of the unions are talking the talk about fighting together, but in practice are keeping all of us separate when we're fighting for the same thing. Visit picket lines of other workers, leaflet, invite them to meetings, discuss online. *Direct communication between workers in different sectors is the only way this will happen.*

Issue 1

August 2007

New postal strike dates

Week 3

- Mail Centres and Airports - 7pm Thu 09/08 - 7pm Fri 10/08
- MDECs - 12 noon Fri 10/08 - 12 noon Sat 11/08
- Deliveries and Separate Collection Hubs - 7pm Fri 10/08 - 7pm Sat 11/08

Week 4

- Network and International/HWDC - 7pm Mon 13/08 - 7pm Tue 14/08
- Airports - 12 noon Tues 14/08 - 12 noon Wed 15/08
- Mail Centres - 7pm Wed 15/08 - 7pm Thu 16/08
- MDECs - 12 noon Thu 16/08 - 12 noon Fri 17/08
- Deliveries and Separate Collection Hubs - 7pm Thu 16/08 - 7pm Fri 17/08

Discuss the strike

Postal workers from around the country are discussing this strike and the best ways to take it forward at royalmailchat.co.uk

Mass meetings have controlled and won strikes at Royal Mail and in workplaces all over the world for decades. Don't just take your meal break, take it with everyone else and use it!

Posties, public sector and other workers are exchanging information and discussing the wider public and private sector disputes at libcom.org/pay-2007

libcom.org/pay-2007

"This will be bloody. We have had the miners, we have had Longbridge and now we have this." - Royal Mail Director, Sunday Telegraph, 3 June 2007

A striking London postal worker's analysis of the dispute and where to go from here...

Royal Mail with the support of the government have provoked this strike. It's not just about a 2.5% pay offer when inflation is more like 5%, it's the business plan, what they call 'modernisation'. Royal Mail bosses know that to get their business plan through – 40,000 job losses, closure of post offices, slashed pensions, reduced pay, increased workload, a flexible and largely part-time workforce – they have to break postal workers' tradition of sticking together and of standing up for themselves. That tradition has meant that management in the past have had to do deals through the union about how the job is organized. Postal workers and the union were not going to make the kind of agreement that Royal Mail wanted on the business plan, so Royal Mail decided to have a showdown and break this tradition of deals once and for all.

Royal Mail's strategy has been to play hardball: they've talked about being ready for months of strike action; they've refused to negotiate with the union and simply reiterated their position; the plan seemed to be to give a constant message to the workforce – "We will not back down, there is no 'give and take' any more, you just have to accept our plan". They have also said they will proceed unilaterally with plans to impose new start times and reduced overtime rates.

With the first two one day strikes they managed to filter the work through the

following days so it seemed our action was having no impact except on our pay-packets. The feeling was we had to escalate the action. But while two-day strikes would surely have more effect, RM had expected this move and made contingency plans. The union came up with a new idea - staggered strikes with different workers in the different parts (functions) of the postal system striking one day after the next. The hope was that for no extra cost to posties the impact on RM would be increased. This does seem to be working. Mail is backing up and managers are at a loss on how to deal with it. Though we are only at the stage of 'talks about talks', Royal Mail's refusal to negotiate seems to be cracking.

But there is a problem with this tactic. With some postal workers striking while others work it creates the possibility of one postie being told to cross another's picket line. This means we go against the very traditions of solidarity that Royal Mail

wants to modernize away. The union has tried to avoid this kind of clash, but inevitably some posties have come up against a picket-line, refused to

cross and then been disciplined by management. In the great postal tradition their colleagues have come out in support and we have then had unofficial strikes.

The union response to unofficial strikes during the national dispute is to do everything possible to get those posties back to work, even if the issue bringing them out has not been satisfactorily resolved. The

argument the union is making and which seems to be winning out at the moment is that the staggered action is working, we should keep disciplined, and - at least for now - stay within the protection of the official strike. There is also the point that August is the lightest month for mail so it may be best to just keep the strike going at a pace that we can manage for a month and then escalate. Also by that time other groups of workers will possibly be in a better position to join us.

What is the alternative? Should an area provoked by management into going on unofficial action try to bring out everyone else? Even if they don't, management attempts to divert work from a striking area could provoke other areas out anyway. But going for an all out unofficial strike is a high stakes gamble for either side. At some point we may have to go this direction. It may not be our choice. Royal Mail was hoping the action would start to falter after the first few strike days. Instead the strike, if anything, is more solid. If the staggered action really starts to hurt them, they may decide to up the stakes by provoking us into an all out unofficial action. They did this in response to the 2003 London weighting strike, and we took the challenge and beat them.

Royal Mail have said they will unilaterally impose new times and work arrangements on the 13th. They may well back down from this but if they don't it will be the spark for more unofficial action.

While Crozier and Leighton have talked the tough talk they have underestimated our determination. We have shown them and their masters in the government that we are up for the fight:
We can win this one.

Dispatch Public sector pay dispute— information for action

Dispatch

c/o libcom.org
Freedom Press
84b Whitechapel High St
London E1 7QX

dispatch@libcom.org

 libcom.org/pay-2007

We're a group of workers who are interested in discussing and co-ordinating a response to the ongoing public sector pay disputes. We believe the key to winning is to unite the disputes, fight together and for workers ourselves to control the struggle.

We work in several different sectors, including the postal service, NHS, education and local government and all use the website libcom.org

To contact us with feedback or comments for the next issue e-mail dispatch@libcom.org

We are not related to royalmailchat.co.uk in any way, although we support their work.
