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Postal workers go into action again

Anarchist Communist Federation

1995

We have had cause to mention the wildcat actions of postal workers a number of times in the pages of *Organise!* Recent struggles in Scotland and London have again shown that posties are lighting the way in organising actions outside the control of the unions.

In Scotland, a strike that spread to many sorting offices started in Edinburgh in November at Portobello Delivery Office when Royal Mail attempted to downgrade 4 jobs to part-time positions. What this means, apart from the end of four full-time positions, is that the remaining full-timers were meant to cover the extra second deliveries (part-timers only do a first delivery). Management have been threatening to down-grade thousands of jobs to part-time. It is a plan high on their agenda but they have been cautious in implementing it. The strike spread to Dundee and Perth initially when posties refused to handle mail redirected from Edinburgh. The rest of Edinburgh's postal workers came out in solidarity as well as those in Fife. The following day Glasgow's postal workers

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Retrieved on May 13, 2013 from web.archive.org
Published in *Organise!* Issue 41 – Winter 1995/1996.

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struck. this was followed a strike in Aberdeen's main sorting office.

The walkout at Portobello was unofficial and the Communications Workers Union called on strikers to return to work. The Royal Mail bosses had to admit , via their chief negotiator that:” We ‘ve had had a great punch on the nose because of this”. They had made sure through the courts that they obtained a ruling against the CWU. Lord Dawson demanded that the union submit its rulebook for examination to make sure that the union leaders were doing their utmost with their disciplinary powers to force members to return to work. The court came very close to ordering the union to suspend and if need be, expel any members who were taking action.

Royal Mail had to back down in the face of united action across Scotland from the postal workers. The 4 full-time posts were reinstated. What the union got out of it was that management would consult with them nationally before they made any further changes. Translation: Royal Mail and the CWU will work more closely together in attacking jobs and conditions, and any unofficial action could be more easily undermined.

The Scottish postal workers showed that struggle is not dead in the workplace. The national paper The Scotsman editorialised:”That this is an ill-advised move (the strike) is self-evident. As an unofficial strike, it is, insists the postal workers union...unsanctioned. It has wisely called on its members to return to work pending talks with Royal mail. They would do well to heed that call; strikes are not the modern way to resolve disputes”.

In London in early January workers Cricklewood sorting office struck against casualisation. A wildcat strike spread through London. The CWU again attempted to sabotage the struggle which involved 8,000 workers. Management backed down, though there are fears that Royal Mail may take action against certain workers. In Milton Keynes 40 posties

wildcatted over rota changes. In Abingdon, a threatened strike forced a backdown over casualisation.

And at Fords...

700 workers at Ford's Dagenham plant wildcatted over the derisory 3.5% pay offer on 16 November, followed by those at the Ford van factory in Southampton, leapfrogging over the unions' (the chief ones being the TGWU and AEEU) attempts to head off anger among the workforce. As well as the shitty pay offer, car workers in Britain have to work a 39 hour week- the longest in western Europe. The bosses rejected a call put through by the union for a 2 hour reduction- even though the unions are eager to swop this for more productivity deals- in other words work harder and harder. Another wildcat hit the Dagenham plant in early January. Car workers have to start creating liasons between different plants , linking up all those who work in the car industry, whether for Ford or Vauxhall, and going out to carworkers on the Continent, outside the control of the unions.

Footnote: A postal worker writes to us:” The “Employee Agenda”, the rise in money the government wants from Royal Mail (a further push to privatisation and/or a punishment of Royal Mail bosses for failing to privatise perhaps) changes in the ways duties are worked out, and the pathetic wage rises over the last 5 years are bound to lead to much more industrial action in Royal Mail. For posties the future is looking increasingly bleak. For sorters across the country who have been replaced by machines the future has already arrived. Save Posties jobs! Don't use the last part of the postcode. letters don't take any more time to arrive,they don't risk getting ruined in the machinery, and it keeps sorters' jobs”.