

# On the Picket Line



Organise! actively supported striking postal workers from the start of their strike, attending picket lines and handing out leaflets to counter media misinformation about the dispute. As the CWU nationwide strike entered its second day members of Organise! were on the picket line at Belfast's Tomb Street depot and spoke to 'Paul', a striking postal worker. There was a good turnout on the picket lines from workers and spirits were high, support was also shown from other Trades Unions, the Belfast and District Trades Union Council, the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party. The 'great and the good', in the persons of John Monks and Jack O'Connor also graced us with their

presence and voiced words of support for the dispute.

It was confirmed at that stage that action would be ongoing in a dispute over 'modernisation' and working conditions. Workers in Royal Mail's sorting offices were out again the following Thursday and no deliveries were made that Saturday.

At the start of the strike 'Paul' told us:

"This dispute really goes back to the strike in 2007... that strike action was called off when various agreements were reached between the CWU and Royal Mail management to go ahead with 'modernisation', including terms, pay and conditions, job cuts, contracted hours and all those various

things in consultation with the union. So over the last couple of years, obviously Royal Mail management say they have been talking to the union, but as far as the union and the workforce are concerned they were just pushing through their modernisation plans without consultation with the CWU or the consent of the workforce.

It got to the point where the resentment built up, and up, and up over excessive workloads, extra working hours without proper overtime payments, people being sacked and a range of other issues that led to the CWU ballot which saw 74% of union members voting to strike.

Today is the first day of strike action for posties, yesterday was collections and sorting offices."

Royal Mail had put up posters in the run up to the strike assuring scabs that they could report for work at other depots (where they would be less likely to be recognised) and that they did not have to wear uniforms. When asked if there was any indication of the number of scabs working in Tomb Street depot Paul stated:

"This is the difficult thing, because this is an official strike management know what is going on, they are down there letting scabs in the car park gates and they have been letting them in another entrance to the building. Scabs have already entered the building at 6.00 am. And yeah, I reckon there will be a handful, there are people who are selfish when it

comes to this sort of dispute unfortunately"

Day to day, in a division without a shop steward, Paul has been frustrated by the lack of communication to strikers from CWU full-timers "its word of mouth from your fellow posties".

Asked about the prospects for winning the dispute Paul told us that strikers were talking about going on to "the death" with this strike and that they wouldn't trust management "as far as y' could throw them".

In Derry there was no picket line on the Thursday but on Friday a member of Organise! visited the picket line to show solidarity. Around 60-70 posties were on the picket line in Derry. While their shop steward, Charlie Kelly had stated on local radio that he was not in favour of the strike, he later claimed that Mandelson's intervention has convinced him the strike was necessary after all. In the past Kelly also opposed wildcat strike action in Mallusk and Tomb Street.

Back in Tomb Street local CWU official Gabe McCurry called on strikers to "Stand firm, stand solid" in what he described as a struggle for a fair workload and a fair days pay with no harassment. A struggle that he pointed out had a lot of support locally and nationally.

It is criminal that the leadership of the CWU did not stand with its members and other postal workers, instead choosing to sabotage a dispute with solid support on the ground.

## CWU Ups and Downs

Recent announcements of further call centre jobs for Derry with the Indian-owned group, Firstsource makes recent moves to encourage unionization of the sector here by Communication Workers Union (CWU) members all the more important.

CWU full-timers recently held a low-key leafleting picket outside Firstsource's offices in Derry to draw attention to the anti-union attitude of such call centres and encourage workers to join a union. The Firstsource operation have hired quite a few former employees of the Stream call centre, several hundred of whom were laid off in the last couple of months in spite of the company posting ever-rising profits in the last financial year.

Stream was an American-owned outfit that came to Derry in the usual blaze of publicity as a 'high-end' technical and IT consultancy firm (corporate bullshit for a call centre that services the telecommunications industry). They were, of course, welcomed with the same mixture of embarrassing praise and self-

congratulatory back-slapping as the Firstsource group in spite of their blatant non-union policy and shit wages and conditions. All parties united in resurrecting old Nationalist Party MP, Eddie McAteer's maxim that 'half a loaf is better than no loaf at all', an economic insight of such brilliance that it remains the staple of the local Orange and Green parties.

Of course, the CWU's chances of recruiting new members might be better served if workers could actually see that they were willing to fight for them. The mood on the Derry postal workers' picket line during the recent strike reflected in the local press by shop steward, Charlie Kelly, was that the CWU would inevitably make their own decisions regardless of what local members felt or wanted. Despite an excellent turnout (only 5 of the 140 or so Derry workers balloted refused to support the strike), and some good militancy against management, who at one point during the strike called the PSNI to clear pickets from the depot entrance, it was clear many of the Derry CWU members saw the writing on the wall for the pathetic, whimpering end of this strike. Regardless of the sector involved, the CWU will have to go some way to persuade anyone that they are the union to join.

## Derry Docker's Struggle



Derry's dockers, like dock workers all over Britain and Ireland, have seen years of attrition that have slashed the numbers of people working in the industry or replaced generations of experience and skill with machinery, casualisation and temporary contracts.

The creation of Londonderry Port further up the Foyle at Lisahally in the late 1980's/early 1990's moved the entire workforce away from the city and provided the first big cut-back in numbers.

This has carried on relentlessly since

then until now when a relatively meagre workforce remains at the port augmented by a handful of agency workers with few rights and less security.

At the beginning of last month a worker made redundant in July decided he'd had enough and staged a sit-in on one of the ships at Lisahally.

Gavin McDermott

boarded the cargo ship the 'Lugano Basel' and prevented its grain and animal feed from being unloaded for six hours before he was physically removed by the PSNI and Port officials. Gavin's family have worked the docks for six generations. He said his action was to draw attention to the increasing use of agency workers and the laying off of experienced dockers like himself, which has been part of ongoing representations to management at the Port so far with no success.