

Bosses' shift shows strength of union...

Major progress so far, we can win an even better deal

IT'S CLEAR that the CWU's huge strike vote, and the strength of feeling across the union, has forced Royal Mail to shift massively in the talks.

A key demand has been for there to be one pension scheme for all. The new pension scheme is a big improvement on bosses' plans to move all workers to a Defined Contribution (DC) scheme. It would have robbed thousands from many workers—and left the amount paid out at the mercy of the stock market.

As CWU ballots, a momentous strike by 40,000 UCU university workers has seen inspiring rank and file mobilisation, with support from students and the public. UCU are fighting to defend their Defined Benefit (DB) pension scheme from attack, with slogans like “The money's there, where's our share”.

With hundreds on picket lines and thousands on marches, they managed to stop their union leadership suspending action for a deal that falls short of what they are fighting for. Their strike shows the potential our unions have to win serious victories when they lead combatative strikes mobilising their membership in a mass, active way.

Legislation?

CWU's #FourPillars campaign wasn't built on a demand to get all members at Royal Mail on a DB scheme. It was for one pension scheme for all that was not simply a DC scheme where all the risk is with the workers. So what has been won is not to be sniffed at. Yet for those who started working before 2008, and on the DB scheme already, it's a backward step.

Crucially though, the proposed scheme depends on legislation that is not written. The defined benefits are targets, not guarantees, based on stocks and shares, which can be volatile.

With the interim scheme, it won't be one pension scheme for all. Contributions from the employer differ depending workers' length of service. What if the new legislation doesn't get passed?



Striking, in the sun or in the snow!

Members could be stuck on the interim scheme, still a two-tier scheme.

What has been won so far shows that the union has leverage when it threatens a strike, and when members mobilise effectively. But it also means the CWU can shift bosses further on outstanding issues or problems with the deal.

Brilliant campaign

It's a credit to the brilliant campaign run by the CWU that Royal Mail is now offering percentage pay increases—and reductions in the working week—where previously they only offered meagre lump sums. This will mean a 12.33 percent rise for part timers.

With one-hour reductions to the week in both years, the hourly rate will go up.

But the amount of money paid into full time workers' bank accounts will stay the same—while prices continue to rise.

The rise is 5 percent for 2017 and to be backdated. There will be no increase for 2018 and a 2 percent increase in 2019.

This is more than other workers have secured—but many are keen for their unions to call action over pay.

When you consider the inflated six figure salaries of top CEOs, it doesn't feel unreasonable to expect a fully above inflation rise for the workers who generate all the bosses' profits.

Moya Greene's package of pay and perks rose almost a quarter to £1.9million last year—that's a 23 percent rise! Royal Mail started this dispute insisting the “gold-plated” pension scheme for members was “unaffordable”.

Well Moya received a £200,000 contribution to her pension, and her £43,000 benefits pot includes a car allowance and flights to her native Canada! Royal Mail said, “We understand executive remuneration is a sensitive subject in this economic environment.” Er... yes!

CEOs and pro-market mantra

The political backdrop, with the rise in support for Corbyn's policies giving millions confidence in a real anti-austerity alternative, is very favourable for striking workers, as the UCU strike shows.

It's not so favourable for rich CEOs like Moya and her pro-market mantra!

Royal Mail conceded because they fear a strike in this climate. Once the threat passes, how willing will they be to concede over other issues, whether it's the PDA, Pipeline, or implementing the shorter week? There are only vague references to reviews, trials and aims rather than concrete gains. With the ‘data capture’, there's a danger, particularly in a culture of bullying management in Royal Mail, that this leads to more pressure and monitoring of workers.

This deal shows the CWU's strength. Imagine how much more bosses could shift with a strike on the cards.

CWU members have shown that they are prepared to strike if need be to defend the service, and to protect conditions in an era of sustained pay freezes and austerity.

With the Tories in deep crisis, and the rich bosses as unpopular as ever, the CWU can be confident that if it was to strike to push bosses further, there will be huge solidarity from the movement.

CWU members should reject this deal, and strike for the full victory they deserve. Victory to the CWU!