



A test of strength

Saturday 19 July

IT'S 4am when I drag myself from bed and set off for the picket line at my sorting office. We are striking against management's use of the discipline procedure to intimidate our branch secretary into toeing their line in negotiations. He refused to be intimidated and, in a flagrant abuse of procedure, was sacked.

The dispute is a test of strength for the union. Initially our strike demands included the cases of other individuals unfairly sacked and changes to the 'attendance procedure' under which they were sacked. After the first day's strike management conceded all these demands but refused to move on the case of our ex-branch secretary.

At first the union's national negotiators believed, or wanted to believe, that our comrade would win an appeal. The appeal, heard by a Royal Mail manager, upheld the sacking — clearly management wanted a fight! They got one: we called a series of four Friday to Monday strikes.

Management went onto the offensive. "The union are defending one of their own who deserved the sack, they would not do the same for you", they told the workforce. "We will not talk to the union and he will never get his job back", they added.

Royal Mail spewed out lying propaganda about our sacked colleague in leaflets and in the compulsory shopfloor 'Team Briefings'. The union argued the case for solidarity with our colleague. Every day this week I have been arguing with the cynics at work about the need to strike.

Yesterday a manager stood between me and one big-mouthed cynic while we shouted across him. Management loved all this. They sent out a letter to everyone's home claiming that we had lied about the details of the case. That was a serious mistake.

The union's response was simple: we printed up and distributed the documents. The effect was fantastic. Exposing the managers as liars changed

the mood. One senior manager publicly apologised to staff on the night shift. I've been lied to as well, he bleated.

With these events buzzing round my head, I travelled up to the picket line. In arguments this week some of the cynics said they will cross the picket line. Will they?

Tuesday 22 July

THE strike was more solid than ever, one or two scabs from over a thousand in the office. I even turned around one temporary contract postman who having only been in the job for three weeks thought he should go in. He joined the union and went home.

We are all very up. Management thought they could split the union but we stuck together.

Wednesday 13 August

TOMORROW is the next strike day. We cancelled the weekend strikes because the union's national negotiator, Billy Hayes, told us management were close to accepting arbitration. Surprise, surprise, after messing about they turned down an independent review of the sacking.

The union gave management the seven days' notice legally required for a series of one-day strikes.

The law is a major obstacle. Lots of people think an immediate walk-out would have won all our demands. I wanted a walk-out too, but the national union would have faced huge fines unless it disowned the strike. To remain legal we have to give management seven days' notice... time for them to draft in managers from all over London to do some of our work on the strike day.

Management have been on the propaganda offensive again but with little effect. Their frustration is leading them to nasty tactics. Today one of the more aggressive managers came out with some classic divide and rule filth in a Team Briefing. Losing the argument with a black union rep, he turned to his mostly black staff and said: "I ask you West Indians, would they strike for you?"

The whole group took offence and several people argued with him after the Team Briefing. Realising the manager had gone too far, senior management told him to apologise, but no-one thinks that is enough.

Friday 15 August

THURSDAY'S strike was solid, but all the talk is about the racist governor.

The sorting floor in a delivery office is a noisy place to work and about as un-PC as you can get. People are constantly joking and slagging each other off. There are no holds barred.

The banter is treated as a joke and it is hard to get anyone to take objections seriously: "It's only a joke, mate."

There are hardened racists, but they keep their real views to themselves while on the floor, partly, no doubt, because it is a very mixed office. It is often hard to tell exactly what people think and how much the jokes about accents or culture and even colour veil real racism, but the reaction to the racist governor today was spot on.

It was not only black workers who were angry. White workers were furious too and, amid the inevitable jokes, they were determined that he should be sacked. "He's calling us racists, ain't he?" one white lad told me. "It's not on! An apology? He should never work for Royal Mail again."

Most of the union reps on our floor are black, and they were elected by a large majority of the white workers. Except for the few brooding hard racists, the workers in my office see each other, regardless of colour, as workmates, not enemies. They know we must stick together against the management or we are stuffed.

We work together, and a lot of us mix at work but what really holds black and white together is our fight as wage slaves against the governors. Managers don't seem to understand this basic fact. They miscalculate when they use divisive lies to split us.

By a London CWU member