

Communication Worker

#8

Bulletin of the Communication Workers' Network - Solidarity Federation
Free/Donation

FREE TO STARVE US

Consignia are starting to use their 'commercial freedom' which Tony Blair is so keen on. With their new Logistics toy, they can contemplate delivering pizzas along with letters, while making backroom deals with private firms over sorting their parcels.

Their starting point for getting rid of our basic rights is to inflict it on new recruits in interpretation centres, where Consignia are looking to take people on at 'competitive rates' i.e. minimum wage, no sick pay.

It is not difficult to predict Consignia's line within the near future - 'well, we are now in a commercial market place so we need to tighten our belts and face the new challenges - if you go on strike, business will go elsewhere and you will be made redundant'. Or words to that effect.

Secretly, they welcome strike action, not least so they can justify being heavy-handed. The Labour Government, the regulators and the Consignia bosses are all looking for a way to manipulate and force the commercialisation and privatisation agenda.

In short, Consignia have spent all the profits that we the workers have all made for them - on buying up foreign parcel firms and other capital acquisitions. Now, having spent up, they are skint. The vultures are gathering around. Once again, they are picking over our bones for more scraps of profit.

SUMMER OF SLAVERY

AFTER A RASH OF STRIKES UP AND DOWN THE COUNTRY EARLIER IN THE YEAR, INDUSTRIAL UNREST HAS CONTINUED INTO THE SUMMER.

NOT SURPRISING, GIVEN THAT THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE ARE WORKING 41.5 HOURS FOR 40 HOURS PAY.

Consignia (formerly the Post Office) bosses are up to their old tricks with smoke and mirrors. While trying to juggle the national agreement (The Way Forward) with local ones, they ignore the bits they do not like. They want to end shift allowance while sick, and then sick pay; then they want people to get no employer sick pay at all. It's the way backwards - to Victorian times.

By cherry picking The Way Forward to try to take advantage of workers locally, the bosses have implemented the bits they want and made a killing. As a result, since May, when the revisions should have been implemented, people have been working to their old 41.5 hour week contracts, but only getting paid for 40 hours - as under the new agreement. There are 3 mail centres in this farcical position - Sheffield, Birmingham and Oxford while, on the deliveries side, 70% of staff nationally are affected the same way. In Sheffield, management have repeatedly stalled and shown their general incompetence in full glory. As CW goes to press, strike action has been postponed at the eleventh hour by CWU leaders, pending re-opened negotiations.

Many people with memories long enough will be able to cast their minds back to the late 1980's and the last reduction in working hours for postal staff. We were then still working forty three hours a week. Thatcher

was still reigning supreme and many people still imagined things would be better under a Labour Government. One proviso which the then UCW leadership secured was that in the period of time between the one and a half hour reduction being agreed and it's implementation, the time worked would be 'banked' and paid back in time off. This meant many workers having a couple of extra days leave.

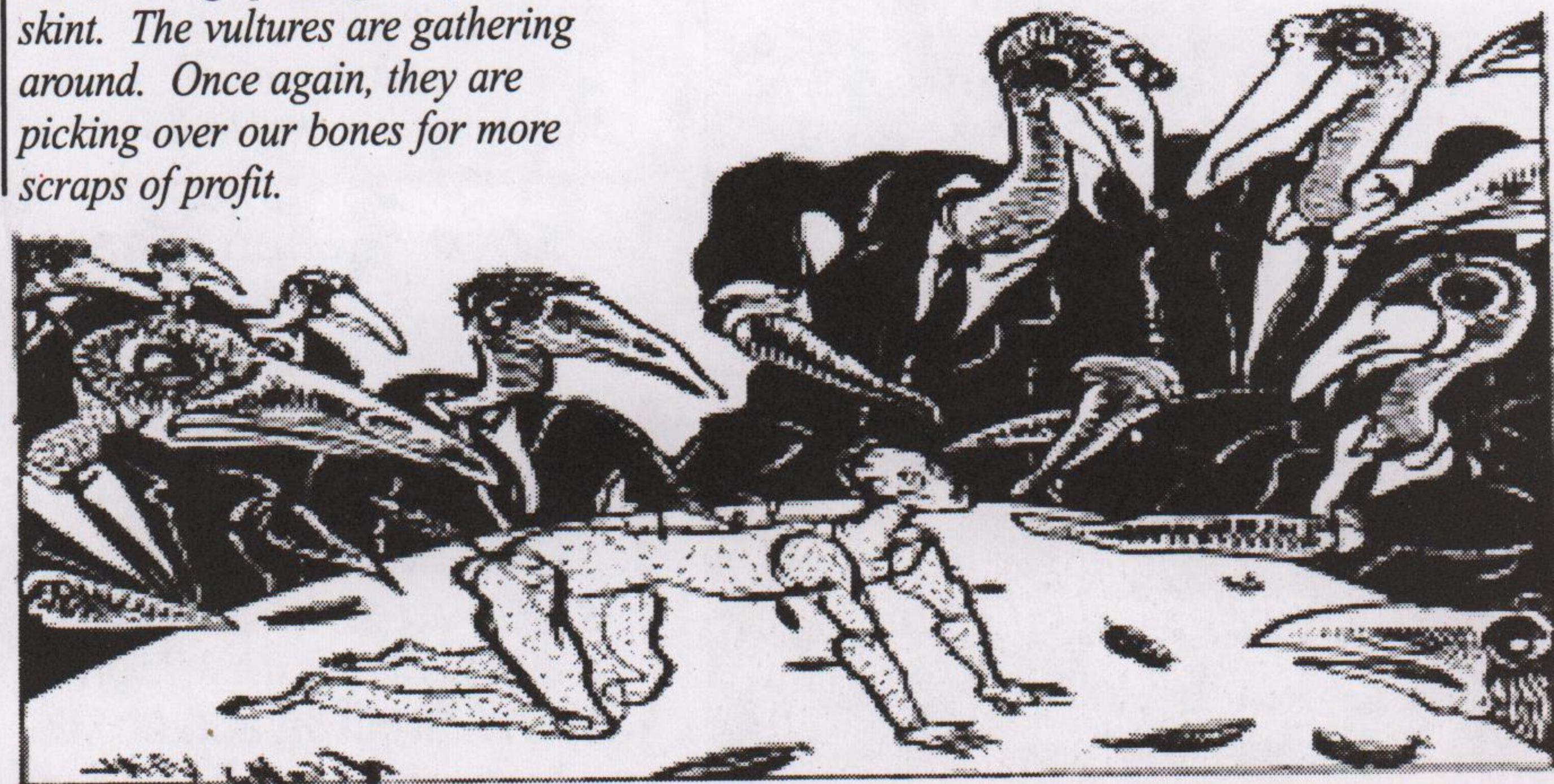
Here we are under a Labour Government, with many of us doing unpaid hours. Things can only get better? True, we have been promised a forty hour week, just as soon as we can fund it ourselves by working that bit harder in a shorter time. The so-called 'Way Forward' agreement came into force, in May 2000. Since then, many of us have worked over ninety hours for no pay. Over two weeks worked for Royal Mail with not a penny in payment and no chance of getting that time back.

Of course, there are those who enjoy working for nothing. They're the goon squad who insist on starting work even earlier than the official starting time says they have to. The bosses love these people, and this practice, along with using private cars on delivery saves Royal Mail hundreds of thousands of pounds every year. It also costs jobs. If you are one of the goon squad, you won't complain as you obviously love the job so much.

For the rest of us, we don't see why we should work for nothing. We think the CWU leadership should have had the wit to see through Royal Mail's game and had the intelligence to get an agreement for the hours worked to be paid back to us.

We think the new 'left-wing' General Secretary should be made aware of how we feel and that he should immediately pursue a deal on behalf of those of us still working forty one and a half hours, thereby getting us our time back and applying pressure on Royal Mail to implement forty hour, five day week's as soon as possible.

Why not drop him a line at CWU Headquarters, 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1RQ. Tel. 0208 971 7200.



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Communication Workers' Network - Solidarity Federation - International Workers' Association

FIGHTING TALK

The election to General Secretary of the Communication Workers Union of one time militant, Billy Hayes, has had the effect of injecting a little fighting spirit into his defeated Blairite opponent, John Keggie.

Keggie, probably hoping to gain a bit of credibility with the rank and file, stated at conference that the CWU would ballot for strike action if any further privatisation took place within Royal Mail. Of course we could ask why Keggie didn't start waving his red flag when Royal Mail sold off the engineering and catering departments? Could it be he thought the General Secretary's job was in the bag once Derek Hodgson retired, and he would be better off keeping quiet rather than rock the New Labour boat? In any event, there being no suitable candidates with the bottle to take on Royal Mail management, Billy Hayes got the top job. The low return of ballot papers perhaps summed up our sense of having to choose between frying pan and fire, with Keggie's fingerprints on the 'Way Forward' knife probably being the deciding factor.

CWU leaders had been quick to distance themselves from the recent waves of so-called unofficial industrial action which has been one manifestation of discontent among the workforce. However Pat O'Hara of the E.C. boldly stated at conference that the CWU would defend unofficial as well as official strike action in future. The proof of the pudding will be in the eating, but this is certainly a new departure for a union which has laid down it's arms at the first whiff of action too often.

Almost certainly this fighting talk has been prompted by the knowledge, recognised by Hayes in his election address, that the membership of the CWU is completely disillusioned with the leadership. The fact is, many people remain in the CWU not because the union will fight for better pay and conditions, but because it offers legal cover in the event of an accident on duty.

The CWU leadership is seen as another layer of management, to be fought against and not to be trusted

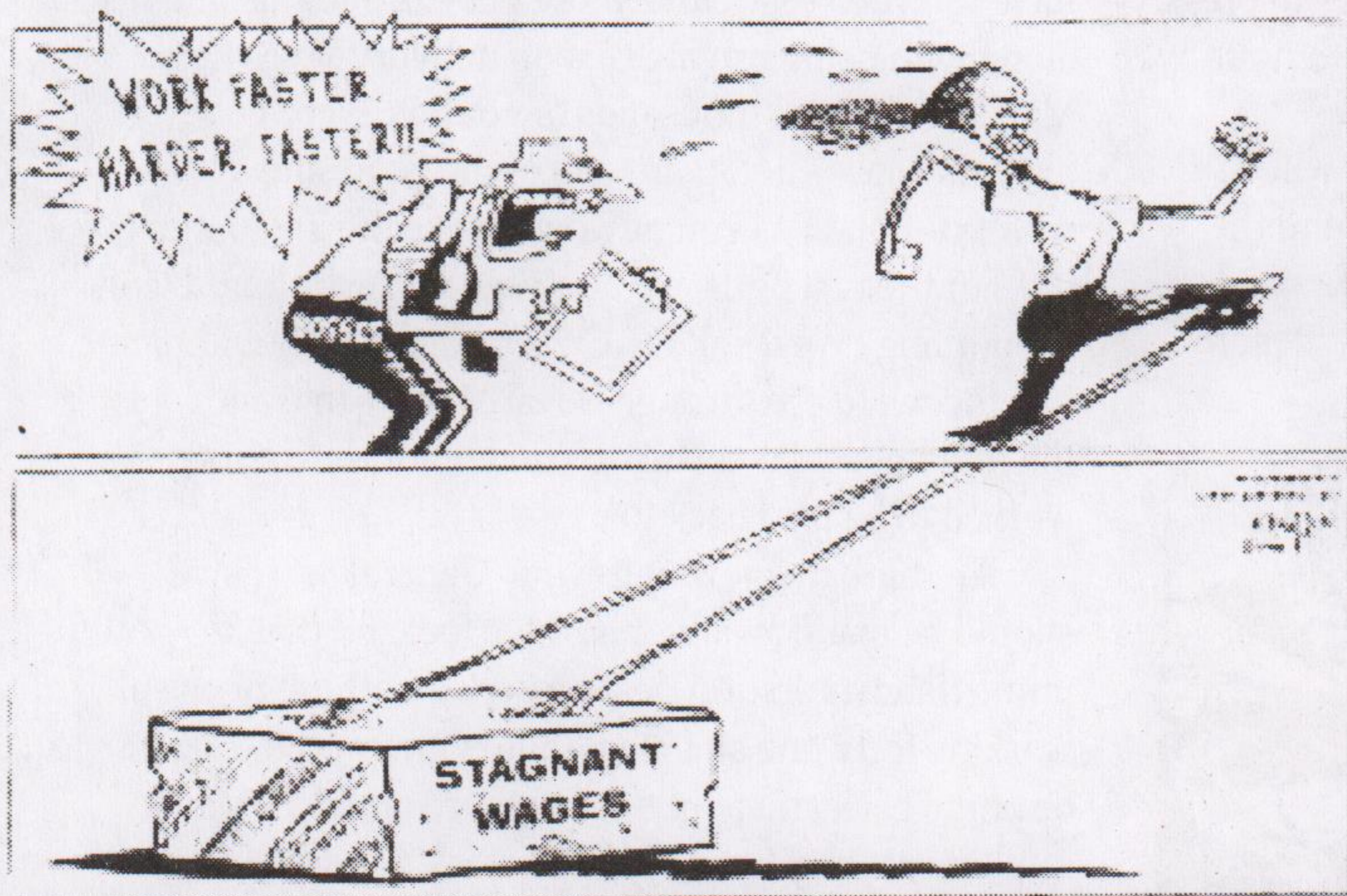
in making vital decisions regarding working practices. Worse is that we have to pay a weekly sum to keep them in a manner the rest of us will never be accustomed to. To add insult to injury, the CWU insists on throwing huge sums of cash (our cash) into Blair's coffers.

Fighting talk at the conference rostrum in front of the faithful is one thing. Supporting direct action to combat bullying management or to secure better conditions for the rank and file might well be another. It would be foolhardy in the extreme to give any credence to the promises of the E.C. The militancy of the membership might be forming the tune on their lips at the moment, but they will dance with the management when the time comes.

If anything of value is to be achieved which will benefit the workers at all, it will only come when we take matters into our own hands and join a union which is democratically formed from among our own kind. Such unions are growing already in parts of Europe, Australia, and North and South America. These are the anarcho-syndicalist unions with no connection whatsoever with the vested interests of party politics and the state. Solidarity Federation is the British section of the International Workers Association. We are such a union. We believe talk is cheap and that action speaks louder than words. We believe Direct Action speaks loudest of all. What is more, we will still be here when those on the present E.C. have given up tub thumping and gone back to the high life. Join us and fight back.

FAT CAT BRITAIN

Bosses are fat cats – whether they are bosses of parties, companies, or Unions. Indeed, the CWU Exec did rather well in the last financial year. Keggie got £101,000, Hodgson got £92,000, and so on. The lowest was Tony Rupa who got a mere paupers wage of £65,000. It's the first time we at CWN have had sight of these sorts of figures – despite the fact that it's a legal requirement that the info should be available to members.



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SCABS IN THE OFFICES

150 managers were drafted in during the dispute in Cardiff recently. This begs the question, what are they doing for the rest of the time when there is no strike to break? Do Royal Mail employ a pool of managers who do nothing but sit on their arses until a dispute breaks out? Apparently, Consignia profits are down to an average £7 per person per week. Hardly surprising, with so many useless parasites doing nothing but living off the labour of others.

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