

# Ford challenged in legal bid Pay the Visteon pensioners now!

**O**N THE very day that Ford Motor Company announced huge profits of \$6.6 billion after tax, Unite has launched legal action against the car giant in a bid to win back lost pensions for over 3,000 pensioners.

**Rob Williams**

Former Unite convenor at Swansea Visteon/Linamar Plant

In 2000 Ford set up or 'spun-off' a separate and so-called independent company called Visteon which mainly comprised its component manufacturing plants - in Britain the plants at Basildon, Belfast, Enfield and Swansea.

These workers were promised that their jobs would now be safe and their terms and conditions and pensions would be 'mirrored' to that of workers still working at Ford for the rest of their working lives and retirement. Further, they were encouraged to transfer their pensions from the more stable Ford fund to a new Visteon one with the promise that even if Visteon got into economic difficulties, the pensions would be guaranteed.

These promises proved worthless when Visteon UK went into administration on 31 March 2009 - leaving 600 workers sacked and 3,000 pensioners facing the Pension Protec-

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tion Fund, with cuts to pensions and concerns about the long-term if the PPF runs out of money. Many workers have lost over £200 a month with others losing up to £600.

These pensioners were inspired into action by the heroic struggle of the Visteon workers who occupied and picketed their plants and won enhanced redundancy. Since then pensioners from all the areas affected have become organised. They have lobbied and protested continuously over the last 18 months or so, from Ford plants and dealerships to Parliament just before Christmas.

Finally, Unite has agreed to launch the legal action. Visteon pensioners are adamant, Ford should come up with the money to fill the black hole in the pension fund to ensure that these workers, many of whom gave 30 years or more unstinting service, get their full pensions.



Visteon pensioners are adamant that Ford should pay up.

photo Mike Gard

## Arriva Trains Wales - strike called off

**R**MT TRAIN drivers working for Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) were planning a second day of strike action on 4 February as part of their campaign for fair pay. ATW drivers, who are amongst the worst-paid in the UK, have been offered a below-inflation basic pay rise of 3.7% this year and 4% next year.

**Ross Saunders**

But now their union, RMT, has been forced by the anti trade union laws to call the strike off and rebalot

the workers.

Management is demanding a significant worsening of working conditions in return for further small increases. RMT leaders have called the offer a "pay cut loaded with strings" and are calling for a 5.1% basic pay rise.

The strike would have coincided with the Wales-v-England Six-Nations match, when 74,000 fans will descend on Cardiff. A leaked document, which ATW management disowned, predicted "major crowd control issues" if the action went ahead. Management sought an injunction to declare the strike illegal.

RMT members are resolute, reports Cardiff Rail branch secretary Greg Harrison, and will be looking for a strategy to win their dispute.

As an initial step, action could be coordinated with Aslef, and from there train drivers could add their voice to the call for a one-day public sector general strike, including the privatised public services.

The trade union movement will also have the opportunity of developing a political wing by supporting Trade Unionist and Socialist candidates in the upcoming Welsh Assembly elections.

## Defend democracy in the CWU

**T**HE COMMUNICATION Workers Union (CWU) national executive (NEC) has scandalously and without precedent postponed this year's NEC elections until after annual conference in May. At the end of conference the union will not have a constitutionally elected executive.

**Socialist Party members in the CWU**

Socialist Party members take union democracy very seriously. Annual elections are the means by which the members can hold their leaders to account.

Postponing the elections has been justified on the basis of the need for change and for cost cutting, given the decline in membership numbers. There are a multitude of other ways of saving, not least a review of officers' pay, which was agreed at 2010 conference, despite the NEC's opposition.

Large sections of the members are justified in criticising the lacklustre campaign against Royal Mail privatisation. Only now has the union started organising public demonstrations. Their campaign of lobbying MPs, particularly in marginal constituencies, has been totally ineffective. 71 MPs were lobbied but

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none of them indicated any willingness to vote against it in Parliament.

This lack of fighting leadership has resulted in disillusionment in the union from some postal workers. They took national action in Autumn 2009, in large part to defend the whole CWU from being de-recognised, not just in Royal Mail but in BT and elsewhere, in addition to stopping management attacks on the workers within Royal Mail itself. But the leadership was weak and the result was a three-year deal which produced a pay cut for doing more work.

In the telecoms constituency the leadership has failed to protect jobs and conditions. CWU members currently face a three-year pay deal. This is on the basis of current Retail Price Index (RPI) figures, which means another pay cut in real terms

for 2011.

BT have recently announced their intention to update pensions by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than the normally higher RPI. This will increase pensioner hardship amongst our members while £2.5 billion is wiped off the BT pension fund deficit.

And the leadership shamefully allowed the Royal Mail final salary pension scheme to be closed two years ago without so much as a ballot on action in defence of it.

These are all burning issues on which many members believe that the leadership has been found wanting.

But a declining membership is far from inevitable. The CWU can strengthen and grow in this period, when workers need a union more than ever. But only if the union proves it is up for the fight! This attack on the democracy of the union is a block on the methods that members can use to ensure the leadership leads that fight.

A proposal to bring forward the Rules Revision Conference, scheduled for next year, is another example of union rules being manipulated by the NEC.

Socialist Party members recognise the need for change. However, we believe that current union rules

## Discussing an electoral challenge to service cutters

**O**N 18 January the general secretary of the FBU firefighters' union, Matt Wrack, visited Rugby fire station.

Subjects discussed included pensions, job losses, cuts and the general undermining of the service. Though the content was quite bleak, he delivered an uplifting speech which urged members to stick together.

Warwickshire FBU are considering putting up candidates in the

local elections to stand against county councillors who voted to close fire stations after expressing support for the firefighters at those stations.

Warwickshire FBU hope to be able to work with other unions and groups and raise awareness of the threat that the Tory councillors' policies of cutting vital services poses to the people of Warwickshire.

**Steve Roberts,**  
Chair Warwickshire FBU

## Keep the post public demo

**A**ROUND 350 people marched through Birmingham city centre on 29 January as the Communication Workers Union's (CWU) Keep the Post Public campaign continued its journey around the country.

It provided a very loud and lively spectacle for Saturday shoppers, led as they were by a Sikh drumming band whilst blowing whistles and chanting: "Royal Mail not for sale" and "Hey, Ho David Cameron's got to go".

The marchers were made up of postal workers and their families, anti-cuts groups, trade unionists and students and it was clear that the protest was not just about the proposed sell-off of Royal Mail but also the Coalition's plans to make ordinary people pay for the bankers' crisis.

The next march and rally is on 19 February in Beeston, Nottingham. Assemble from 1pm at the Mail Centre, Padge Road, Beeston. March to commence at 2pm.

**A Coventry postie and CWU member**

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should not be overlooked or dismissed during the period of discussions and decision making.

Socialist Party members are prepared to consider proposals to reduce the size of the executive in line with the union's membership. But we need to ensure that there is adequate representation for those members not employed in the traditional sectors. We are implacably opposed to the proposal for biennial executive elections. We believe this weakens accountability.

The leadership's justification for moving to biennial elections is that the union's postal executive have already agreed this. That is their right in a member-led union but it is an arrangement that has much less support amongst telecoms branches.

It is crucially important that grass roots anger at the employers' attacks and the union's lack of fight is translated into building the broad left, which can advance policies that defend our members and stand up to employer attacks.

We demand:

- Reinstate the scheduled executive elections.
- For a full debate in the union over future structure.
- No to biennial elections in the telecoms constituency.
- For a fighting democratic union.