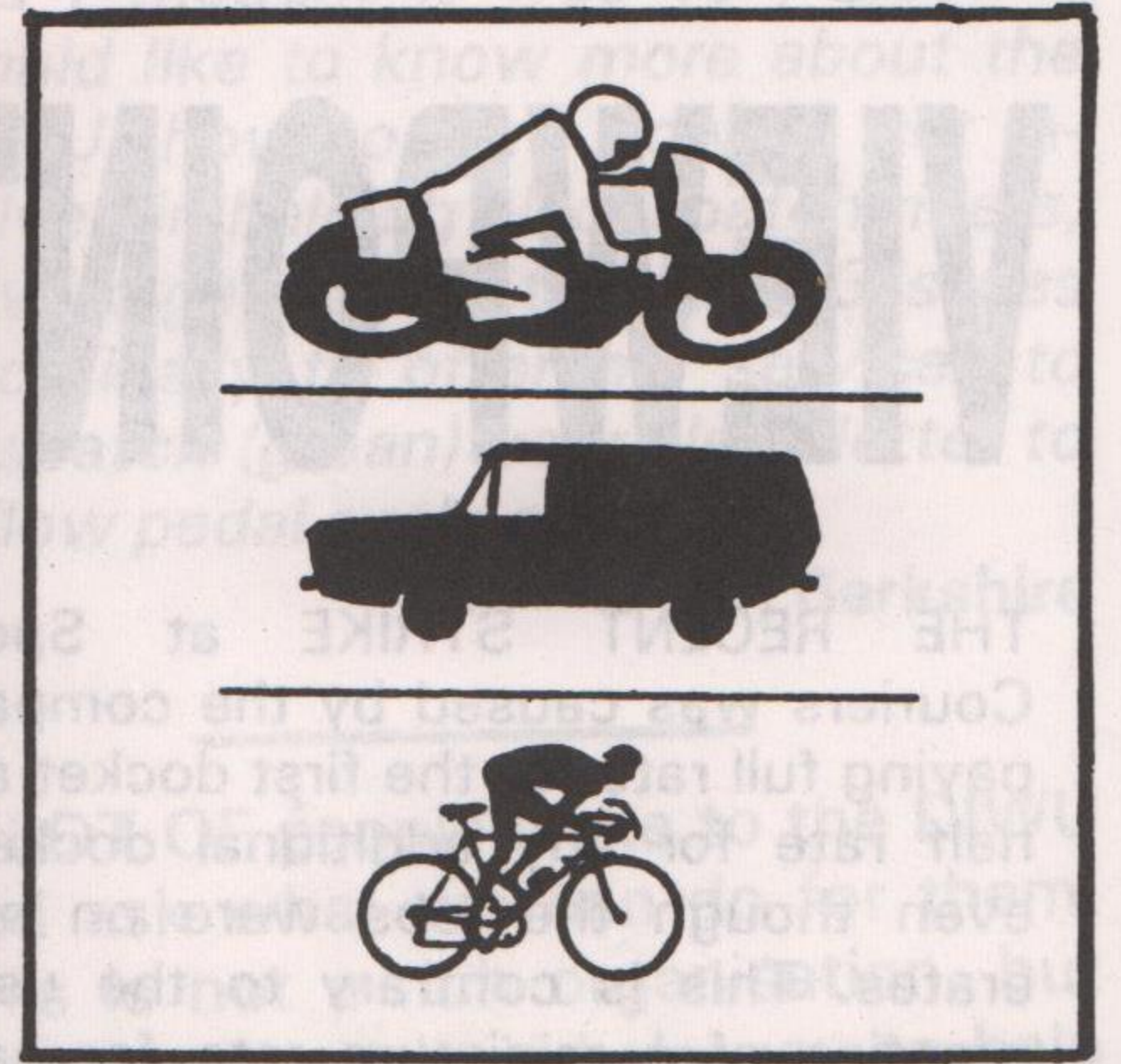


# DESPATCHES

Issue No.5 Autumn 1990



## BREAKING THE SPEED LIMIT

## The Couriers Quid

### SPEED STRIKE – WHAT MCN FAILED TO MENTION

ON FRIDAY 6th July, the riders at Speed Couriers were shocked to find some memos lying around saying that their rates were to be cut from the following Monday. A rate cut is bad enough but the underhand way this was done, when the management had been planning it for two

months, got everybody's back up. This meant war. Basically the Speed management were trying to end separate dockets for separate jobs. They only wanted to pay 50% for second, third, fourth etc., dockets. Separate dockets is the only way to make any money in the despatch industry these days, and they wanted to end it. To add insult to industry, the management had recently put up the rates to the clients by 9% but they had not passed this increase on to the workers. Representatives of the DIWU were invited by the riders to a mass-meeting on Monday 9th July. At the time the Union had no members at Speed but that was not a problem. The role of the Union was merely to advise and assisted as requested. Our attitude is that we can help you to help yourself. If the dispute had escalated then other action by the DIWU would have been considered. The Union members stressed the need to stick together to prevent victimisation, and that the negotiators should not make any decisions without consulting all their fellow riders. By the simple fact of being there during the action we hope that the DIWU gave the Speed

IT IS ILLEGAL for a self-employed courier to do a collection and delivery for less than a pound (even for multi-drops) according to a 1981 Amendment to the Post Office Act.

This opens up a whole can of worms because many firms give their riders/drivers less than a pound a drop. You might say that your boss charges the customer more than a pound and therefore gets around the law. But it becomes illegal if you are self-employed and the boss is giving you less than a pound, because you are independently sub-contracted to do the job.

So, if your firm pays less than a pound a drop, there are several things that you should do. Firstly, tell all your workmates and try to get a meeting together to discuss a plan of action. Secondly, as a group tell your boss that the rates are too low and illegal. Thirdly, if your boss won't improve the rates then a strike could be necessary to bring him/her round. Fourthly, at any stage don't hesitate to contact the Union if you want any advice or assistance.

The Post Office Act is one of the few laws that can actually help the most poorly-paid workers in the despatch industry. For cowboy firms that pay less than a pound a drop should not only be up against the law but could also find a mob of flying pickets from the DIWU and the postal workers union on their doorsteps.

## SOLIDARITY



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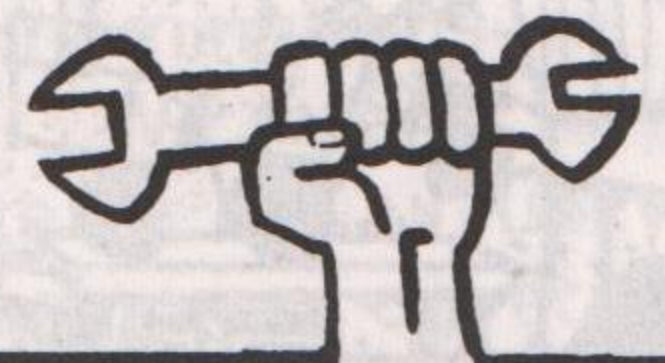
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riders that little bit of extra confidence in knowing what they were doing was right.

The riders decided to stop work from nine on the Tuesday morning until the bosses backed down. So the strike was on. That morning some thirty-five Speed riders, three DIWU reps and an MCN photographer assembled outside the office off Millharbour, and four riders went inside to negotiate. The negotiators had the good sense to bring a tape-recorder which they plonked down on the middle of the table thereby ensuring the bosses could not make any hollow promises.

The strike lasted for one and a

**continued on page 2**



# VIEWPOINT

THE RECENT STRIKE at Speed Couriers was caused by the company paying full rate for the first docket and half rate for any additional dockets, even though the jobs were on separates. This is contrary to the usual practice of a minimum rate for each job. When a courier is given an urgent job which is awkward and/or time consuming and pays little, no one offers to pay any more than the agreed rate for the job. So why do they have the right to cut out the perks and advantages on our side of the job and leave us with a rotten deal? At the time of the Speed Courier strike, *Motor Cycle News* covered the story and in the same article another well known courier company stated that they thought courier companies should be bringing their prices down. Hopefully they did not mean courier's earnings—rates to the courier have remained static at most companies for the last two years, during which inflation and petrol and maintenance charges have risen sharply. Now, the Gulf Crisis is threatening to put petrol prices through the roof. Under these circumstances there is no way that any company should be paying less than a £3 minimum rate before any bonuses. *Despatches* also thinks the pisstaking on the four, even five mile minimum has gone far enough. For example, for a minimum of 4 miles: 2 miles to pick the job up, 4 miles to deliver, and 4 miles back—a total of 10 miles. Then take into account the cost per mile which ranges between 10–20 pence. With a £2.75 minimum this leaves very little for a job that has taken the best part of an hour. (Unfortunately some couriers seem to get singled out for this type of job too often and can find themselves doing two or three a day.) If minimum mileage was put back to the three miles it used to be for motorbikes, and less for cycle couriers, we feel it would even things a bit and limit the pisstaking. We are in the business to make a living, not for the fun of it.

I DON'T WANT TO WORK, MARY,  
BUT I HAVE TO... CHRIST, I  
DON'T KNOW ANYBODY WHO  
WORKS FOR THE FUN OF IT....

THAT'S TRUE!



# STATE OF THE UNION

SINCE THE LAST issue of *Despatches* the DIWU has established another branch at Megacycles and we assisted in the Speed strike. Membership overall has stayed roughly the same. We had a Union 'run' out to Brands Hatch to watch the racing; a reet good laff all doing a ton down the motorway (pushbikers went pillion). The DIWU Film Night in July did not fill the cinema unfortunately but those who did come said they enjoyed the films. A new batch of T-shirts sold out almost straight away. We were

also interviewed by BBC's Radio 5.

You may have seen some of the 500 or so posters we stuck up one afternoon in June—we had to make a few rapid disappearances from the plod that day! All-in-all the Union has been ticking over during the summer, which is better than nothing. However, to improve pay and conditions right across the industry we have got to get members and branches in all the firms. On that note, isn't it about time you joined the DIWU?



Clerkcan'tspell Road, EC1

## SPEED STRIKE—continued from front page

quarter hours. The bosses kept blubbering 'we never expected you to react like this'. Well what did they expect? For everyone to accept a pay cut with pleasure? Then one of the directors, Martin Rutty, came out and begged everyone to get back to work on the full rate of pay and no loss of bonuses. This would be for a week with more discussions on Friday.

During the strike four people scabbed—two were sent from the Cambridge office specially. You can ask yourself why should scabs receive the benefits of improved pay and conditions, when others had put their jobs on the line, and the scabs just helped the bosses.

At the end of the week the riders accepted a compromise whereby they would get the full rate for the first and second jobs but only 50% for subsequent dockets. However, they got it in writing that there would be no victimisation and no

new riders taken on unless somebody leaves. But no matter what you have got in writing, the best way to defend yourself is to start a full Branch of the Union. This is not a difficult task and will enable you to be prepared and in a position of strength in future.

Recently riders at A-Z and Just-In-A-Tick, among others, accepted cuts in their rates. The riders at Speed had the bottle to stand up for themselves. The Speed dispute is the latest in a long line of strikes in the despatch industry, as covered in previous issues of *Despatches*. No doubt there have been other strikes which have received no publicity. What we need is for all the workers, at all the firms, to go on strike at the same time. That is a cast-iron guaranteed way to get increased pay right across the industry. All it requires is a little organisation and that, of course, is what the DIWU is all about.



# LETTERS

Dear DIWU,

....motorbike couriers can easily earn £12,000—£15,000 per year.... breeze in at 10.30 if they bother to get out of bed at all....get cheap kicks from the chance and risk of beating the traffic at speed.... they're impolite....have no responsibilities or hassles and don't want to make any effort....don't deserve respect with their dirty faces and trashed clothes...but I work hard ...my boss is not bad....I cross picket lines....I take parcels the size of beer kegs....etc,etc

J. of NW1

REPLY:

It may be true that some despatch riders earn in excess of £10000, but the bottom line is that we are earning less due to reduced rates, generally less work and increased circuits. We are pressured to start early, some companies such as West End actually dock 20% off a riders wages if they are late or don't get out of bed.

The thrill of beating traffic at speed wears off especially when friends get killed or injured. You say despatch riders are impolite—bad tempered, wound up maybe, but don't judge others by your standards. We are no more impolite than the yuppies we generally pick up from and deliver to.

You may have no responsibilities but more and more despatch riders are staying in the job for longer and thus have families and mortgages or rent to cater for. These are hassles themselves without the added worry of free police MOTs, the tax and N.I. people, let alone the worry of being able to cover the bills and put food on the table. So despatch riders are increasingly putting in more effort, more hours, taking more risks for ever diminishing wages while the bosses capitalise on their riders needs by sending them out on late jobs in all weather conditions and offering no bonuses, and in many cases reducing the rates. As for not deserving respect, surely that is the one thing any worker deserves. We get filthy in this job due to the disgusting conditions we work in and

your prejudiced attitude will only serve to maintain those degrading conditions.

We are classed as 'self-employed' and so we should be able to dictate the hours we work; if we 'come in late' we are not breaking any contract—the only time we can be in the wrong is if we fail to deliver a parcel, and yet we are pressurised to start and finish at a certain time. Surely that is grounds for an argument of being employed, especially if a guarantee is offered.

J of NW1, you have failed to realise just how abused your rights are. The majority of despatch riders are totally ripped off and know it, but like you fail to do anything about it. It's about time you stopped being a selfish, gutless moron and stood up for yourself.

Dear DIWU,

Picture if you will a poor forlorn little pedal cycle courier pedalling his heart out and having a really shitty day. He works for a crap company who thinks he is a motor cycle with the load carrying ability of a Ford Transit.

London buses try desperately to kill him, taxis do 'U' turns on top of him and those ignorant blind cretins (often called pedestrians) run out in front of him.

The rain is slowly trickling down his back and the wind is in his face. He arrives at Waterloo station and makes his way to the Red Star parcel office. He gets to the counter and smiles, the robot behind the counter is on the 'rude and abrasive' mode, all actions to be carried out dead slow and with the utmost misery.

The little cycle courier goes back outside to unlock his bike. Is that a tear we see in his eye? As he stands there a motor cycle courier zooms up, approaches him and gives him a copy of your Newsletter. (This is a true story, the little cycle courier is me).

The little cycle courier sits down to read the Newsletter from cover to cover, but firstly he reads the section: 'Ten Tasty Excuses To Give If You Are Late'. And do you know what happens next? He starts to smile and then to laugh. The clouds part and the sun comes pouring through. Birds start singing in the trees and a choir of angels descend from he....I think that last bit is pushing it, but you get the drift.

Seriously though, this is the first of your Newsletters that I have seen

and I thought it was very good. I would like to know more about the DIWU, how to join, how to get involved in helping all despatch riders, how to get hold of the other 3 issues and finally to offer my services to despatch (groan) your Newsletter to fellow pedal cycle couriers.

P., Berkshire

A LOT OF people write to the DIWU and ask what we can do for them. This is not a rich organisation, but what we can do is help you to help yourself. The DIWU provides support to workers in dispute against their bosses on the form of printing, meeting halls, tactical advice and in negotiations. And when push comes to shove the Union can provide assistance in a physical form...Solidarity is the basis of this Union, and we practice what we preach.

## SHITE COMPANY OF THE YEAR COMPETITION 1990

AS YOU MAY know, the annual Despatch Rider of the Year Competition is being held in September. Not to be out-done, the DIWU is organising a 'Shite Company of the Year Competition 1990'. You can nominate your company (anonymously) if it has done some really shite things this year. For example:

- Cut the rates.
- Advertise a £500 starting bonus which turns out to be virtually unattainable.
- Run a bent box ie.controllers feeding their favourite chums.
- Flood the circuit beyond all levels of human tolerance.
- Have a boss who is a complete and utter bastard.
- Increase the rates to the clients but not pass the increase on to the workers.
- Advertise 'no radio fee' but then stop £10 per week to rent the charger.
- For cash jobs, deduct the difference between the account rate from your wages.
- Financial penalties for not working set hours.

There are several top contenders for this prestigious award. Please send your nominations in by 1st November. We intend to present a certificate to the unlucky winner with as much press coverage as possible.

**Come along and find out what the Union is really about**

# OPEN MEETING

*All cycle and motorcycle couriers, van drivers, non-managerial office workers welcome*

**Thurs 25th October  
7.30 pm**

**Conway Hall  
Red Lion Square WC1**



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## CONSTITUTION

1 — The Despatch Industry Workers Union is a democratic organisation run by and for riders, drivers, mechanics and office staff. It is not open to employers, managers or persons acting on their behalf.

2 — In the short term this Union aims to improve pay and conditions. But behind our efforts to get these lies the demand for justice, individual freedom and human dignity. So, in the long term this Union aims to abolish exploitation and wage-slavery, and organise the despatch industry for the benefit of the workers not the bosses.

3 — To achieve its aims the DIWU uses direct action such as strikes, boycotts and any other tactics deemed to be effective. Solidarity between workers is the key to victory.

4 — Union members should never cross picket lines, unless the strikers consent.

5 — The DIWU is opposed to racism and sexism.

6 — The DIWU is independent of all political parties.

7 — Workplace meetings elect delegates for a limited tenure. They are unpaid, accountable and recallable. By organising in this way we are forming the structure of a new, fair society within the shell of the present, unjust one.

8 — Members should accept this Constitution and pay their dues.

### BARGAIN BASEMENT

● **DIWU Guide to Income Tax and National Insurance.** A modest little booklet that could save you a modest little fortune. Price £2.50.

● **Road Warriors or Road Worriers.** A personal history of the Independent Couriers Association in New York. A good read. Price £1.

● **DIWU key-rings.** They can double as ear-rings if you've got no taste. Price £1.

● **DIWU T-shirts.** Impress your friends and frighten your enemies. Black with DIWU logo

front and back. Large size. Price £5.

Concessions available to DIWU members and Associate Members.

## Want to find out more?

**Please send me more information about the Despatch Industry Workers Union.**

**NAME:**.....**Tel:**.....

**ADDRESS:**.....

**COMPANY:**.....

**Post to:**  
**DIWU, P.O. Box 574, Brockley, London, SE4 1DL**