ANDREW MARR:
Now last week, the Government announced that privatisation of the Royal Mail will go ahead, probably in the next couple of months, which is possibly not the best timing as postal workers decide whether or not to go on strike over their pay, pensions and conditions after the business is sold. The Leader of the Communication Workers Union, Billy Hayes, says they can’t be bought off by £2,000 sweeteners of free shares. But can the union be persuaded not to wreck the sell-off? Do they have any room for compromise? Billy Hayes joins me now from Liverpool. Mr Hayes, this strike, is this mainly a strike against privatisation, or is it as it were a traditional dispute about pay and pensions?

BILLY HAYES:
Well it’s about the impact of privatisation on our people’s terms and conditions. It always seems to be, doesn’t it, that when there’s a privatisation, it’s the chief executives make a fortune out of it and the postal workers you know will be damaged
by the impact of privatisation. So it’s about the impact that privatisation will have on our people’s terms and conditions.

ANDREW MARR:
But a £2,000 sweetener, that’s a lot of money. Are you absolutely sure your members won’t be tempted by that and vote against the strike?

BILLY HAYES:
Nobody turns back free money. We’re absolutely confident. You know in this country, we seem to have been more concerned about plastic bags than the postal services. We’ve got at the Liberal Dem conference the politics of plastic bags when this Conservative led government has managed to persuade Post Office managers and Post Office counters to have a strike ballot for the first time in 47 years. What kind of leadership is that?

ANDREW MARR:
But you’re not going to be able to stop privatisation at this stage, do you think? I mean even a strike, it’ll damage the process but it won’t stop it.

BILLY HAYES:
Well privatisation will definitely damage the postal service. No last week there was a poll in the Sunday Times that showed that 70 per cent of the great British public are against privatisation, you know and it’s just not called for, it’s not necessary, and this government, as I say, seem to be more interested in plastic bags than postal services.

ANDREW MARR:
Don’t you think that all this extra private money coming into the service however at a time when you’re facing competition from TNT and UK Mail, that could be very good for the service? That’s what the Government’s saying.

BILLY HAYES:
It certainly needs investment of money, but it’s the most expensive way to borrow money. The Government’s just allowed the GLA to borrow £1 billion for the extension of the Northern Line, so it can access capital. In fact in Canada where Moya
Greene (the Chief Executive of Canada Post) ran that service, she was able to borrow money on the open markets. So she kept, ironically enough, Canada Post in the public sector, so there’s no reason why Royal Mail can’t do exactly what Canada Post done.

ANDREW MARR:
At this stage, do you expect the strike to go ahead?

BILLY HAYES:
Oh I’m certain there’ll be a yes vote in the strike ballot. You know we’re so confident of our position, we invited Moya Greene to come and listen to every single postal representative in the UK and not one of them was convinced by the arguments that Moya Greene put forward. You know when there’s a privatisation chief executives do well. We intend to make sure that, whatever happens, our people’s conditions are protected and we will defend our people.

ANDREW MARR:
So there’ll be a complete stoppage of UK mail for a while; and this, even at this late stage, you think might make the Government think twice, if not stop?

BILLY HAYES:
This government, I don’t know what’s in the mind of this government. A government that asks to privatise a postal service when 70 per cent of the British public are against it is a government whose judgement I can’t check. It just doesn’t seem possible, this government, in terms of what it wants to do. It’s very difficult to read this government. We’re about protecting our people’s terms and conditions. That’s what this dispute is about.

ANDREW MARR:
If there’s one single concession that you’re looking for that would make a difference, what is it?

BILLY HAYES:
Protect the people that we represent. We want to make sure of our terms and conditions, want to legally bind an agreement to protect the terms and conditions of
postal workers, and make sure that the people who deliver the mail, the people who go from Land’s End … people say from Land’s End to John O’Groats that keep this nation together, that see more people in a day than chief executives and politicians see in a week, that their conditions are protected.

ANDREW MARR:
Billy Hayes, thank you very much for joining us this morning. Thanks for that.

INTERVIEW ENDS