

Britain: Oppose efforts by Communication Workers Union to end postal strike

Statement by the Socialist Equality Party (Britain)
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The Communication Workers Union executive has endorsed a rotten deal with the Royal mail to bring an end to the postal workers' dispute.

The CWU is citing an improved offer from Royal Mail on pay, pensions and working practices, but as yet there is little to indicate any significant differences with the agreement endorsed last week by the union's negotiating team with Adam Crozier, Royal Mail's chief executive.

The executive was split on acceptance of that deal and went back for further discussions. It has now said it will ballot its 130,000 members on acceptance.

The CWU had previously warned that Royal Mail was seeking to impose measures that would lead to 40,000 job losses, but now says that it has settled "all areas of the dispute."

This can only signal a complete capitulation by the union.

The proposals that the executive was seeking minor amendments to are reportedly:

* The closing of the present pension scheme to new members from next year and a rise of the pension age to 65. New pensions will be at a much lower rate. Existing members will be able to still retire at 60, but will have to accept "actuarial reductions" in their pensions in return.

* Flexible working in every area, including a variation in hours by 30 minutes a day—longer hours on busy days with no overtime, just time in lieu. Transfer to other offices and jobs when required.

* A 6.9 percent pay rise over 18 months. This is not backdated to April, and works out only equivalent to a 5.4 percent increase covering the period from this October to next April when post workers will get another 1.5 percent. A paltry £175 lump sum will compensate for the period when no pay rise is being given. Royal Mail says the deal should cost no more than 2.5 per cent in the current financial year—well below inflation. The 1.5 percent increase is only "triggered" if and when full flexibility has been implemented.

* New shift patterns and other changes to working practices have reportedly been agreed, but will be negotiated locally. This will create the conditions for a wholesale assault on working conditions with various offices and depots pitted against one another.

The CWU has sold out its members' interests in the most naked fashion. The British Chambers of Commerce described the CWU's accepting the deal as "good news for small businesses in the UK."

In reality, it is the major corporations and the City of London that stand to make a financial killing from Royal Mail's "modernisation" plans, which are directed at the full privatisation of the postal service. Through the driving down of postal workers' pay and conditions, the government and Royal Mail hope to sell off the most profitable parts of the business to private operators, leaving a severely reduced rump service.

For more than a week, the CWU executive kept the contents of the deal secret from its own members, while working to systematically demobilise the series of strikes and wildcat actions that have been taking place—largely in response to management provocations.

Now, the union has also announced that it has "endorsed a Joint Statement entitled 'Restoring Good Industrial/Employee Relations,' " under conditions in which Royal Mail managers have been arbitrarily changing working hours as postal workers report to begin their shifts.

The new deal is proof—were any needed—that the CWU is in league with Royal Mail on its "liberalisation" agenda. When it refers to "restoring Good Industrial/Employee Relations," the union means that it will work with management to ensure that everything possible is done to make the UK postal service competitive, and that it will enforce these measures at the expense of its members.

Whenever a ballot is held, the deal should be voted down. But this alone is not enough. The entire conduct of the fight against Royal Mail's attacks and its sponsors in the Brown government must be waged independently of and in direct opposition to the CWU bureaucracy.

Rank-and-file committees must be established to organise a fight back against the CWU's treachery. The wildcat strikes that were wound up last week on the basis of promises made by local officials must be renewed.

Post workers must launch a campaign amongst other workers in the civil service and throughout the public sector facing similar attacks and amongst postal workers in Europe facing the threat of privatisation.

Above all, workers need their own party, which, on the basis of a socialist programme, will fight to reorganise economic life so that social need, not private greed, is the central principle. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party of Britain urges postal workers to contact us and discuss the political and industrial offensive now required.