

London postal workers condemn strike sell-out by Communication Workers Union

Our correspondents
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Since the Communication Workers Union called off national strike action at the end of last week, reporting teams from the *World Socialist Web Site* have been talking to postal workers in London.

At Mount Pleasant depot, teams distributed around 350 copies of the statement “Communication Workers Union sabotages postal strike” on the morning shift. By lunchtime many workers had already read the statement. One worker told us, “We’ve read it, and we all agree with it.”

Workers spoke of their anger at the betrayal of the CWU. This anger had mounted as news broke last Thursday of the CWU-Royal Mail deal to end the strike. According to one worker, the CWU representatives were nowhere to be seen when the news was announced.

On Friday, with news of the betrayal just emerging, there were reports of workers resigning from the union. One worker told us, “If the union has betrayed us we might all have to come out of the union.” Another worker, with 30 years’ service, said he would now “have to seriously think for the first time about the union, and who is going to defend my conditions, because it is clear they won’t.”

Several workers raised the betrayal of the 2007 dispute, which paved the way for the present assault on jobs, wages and conditions. In particular they pointed to the role of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in negotiating the end of that dispute. The deal done with management then not only left unresolved all the issues in dispute, but enabled Royal Mail to pursue their privatisation agenda even more vigorously.

“We are being turned over again by the union and the TUC,” one worker said. “They did it in 2007 and they’re doing it again this time.”

Another worker said he had warned co-workers about the betrayal in 2007, and that it would be repeated. “The TUC,” he said, “have assisted the CWU in this all the way to do what management want.”

The CWU has disarmed postal workers during these disputes. One worker argued that to be fully effective, strike action should have been held back until the Christmas period. The strike had started “too early,” he said.

“We raised that what had been required was a full strike of all postal workers, not separated by function or locality, from the outset,” he said. They had been told in the summer that London was isolated, and would not have received full support across the country.

In fact, during the summer wildcat strikes were breaking out across the country. The CWU was only finally forced to call a national strike ballot by the sheer scale of regional demands for ballots. Extra staff had had to be allocated to deal with the nearly 500 regional applications for ballots received by June.

This worker summarised the record of the strikes that the CWU had reluctantly been forced to call as “Seventeen strikes and f**k all.” Other workers explained the personal impact of the strike: “I have lost £1,600 due to the strikes...and they have called off the strikes at the busiest time of the year. I don’t understand. It’s wrong.”

He was clear on the level of disillusionment with the union. “If the CWU call us out in January,” he said, “no one will strike.” In this way the service the CWU performs for Royal Mail can be seen quite clearly. The CWU has channelled and thwarted the anger of postal workers, and served to prevent any fight against management.

As the interim agreement reached between the CWU and Royal Mail makes perfectly clear, the union’s commitment is to the company, not the workers. According to the agreement, “Royal Mail and the CWU share a common understanding of the scale and nature of the challenges facing the business and a determination to address these challenges in a way that secures a successful future.”

As one worker said to the WSWs, “What deal? We have been sold down the river.”

As in 2007, a crucial role has been played in the betrayal of postal workers by pseudo-left groups like the Socialist Workers Party. SWP member Jane Loftus is on the national executive of the CWU. Although she voted against the 2007 agreement, she conducted no campaign within the CWU against it, issued no public criticism of it, and afterward covered up the political lessons of that betrayal.

This time around, Loftus did vote for the deal done to sabotage this strike. The CWU announced that the deal had been agreed unanimously by the Postal Executive, which includes Loftus. The SWP has acknowledged that this was a disgraceful deal, but has said nothing about Loftus and is trying might and main to confine postal workers within the structures of the CWU.

The WSWs has insisted from the outset that the dispute against Royal Mail can only be pursued by taking the struggle out of the hands of the union. New rank-and-file organisations must be built, in a rebellion against the trade unions, to press forward the interests of the working class. This can only be done by breaking definitively with the Labour Party, a right-wing party of big business, and fighting to build a new and genuinely socialist party to reorganise society for the economic

benefit of all and not the corporate profits of a tiny minority. That party is the Socialist Equality Party.



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