

UK Royal Mail workers oppose Communications Workers Union sellout

Our reporter
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On Friday, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) leadership agreed to allow Royal Mail to end Saturday mail delivery, threatening 20,000 job losses. The following day an email was sent to the Socialist Equality Party, which said:

“I am a HGV driver at Royal Mail, and over the years I have noted that the union reps are far too friendly with management. Royal Mail are walking all over us and the union are letting them do it. Some of the shift patterns are unsafe, i.e., nights on a split week, Monday/Tuesday off, Wednesday in, Thursday/Friday/Saturday night till 4, 5, or 6. Then you’re in Monday morning at 4/5 or 6 in the morning!!! “Union allows that!!! Joke!!!”

The email is just one indication of the widespread hostility among postal workers to the CWU’s sellout. Thousands of Royal Mail workers viewed the CWU’s “live emergency statement to postal members” video address, held last Friday evening by General Secretary Dave Ward and Deputy General Secretary Terry Pullinger seeking to justify the sellout.

Many of the around 3,500 comments posted denounced the deal and the CWU during the video conference and also on another thread in which the union published the correspondence with Royal Mail regarding the suspension of Saturday deliveries. Workers opposed the decision by the CWU to call off a threatened strike based on supposed assurances by Royal Mail Group that ending Saturday deliveries was only a temporary measure during the coronavirus lockdown. Some called for immediate strike action.

This is a selection of comments:

• “Royal Mail are changing things everyday. We need things done Now. Strike now.”

• “There has been no shift from the company. They [Royal Mail] said it [the move to end Saturday mail delivery] was temporary, the union got everyone’s back up saying it wasn’t, now the union has agreed. Total joke.”

• “The union have let us down again!!! This so-called director [Royal Mail CEO Rico Back] and his pathetic minions are shafting us again!!!! We work so hard on delivery, we multi-task, we go out in all weathers we carry on through the greatest Crisis the world has ever seen since the Second World War and the bloody union roll over!!!! Our staff risk their lives and their families and still we have loyalty!!! It’s not a one-way street bloody wake up union and staff and don’t allow this to happen!!!!”

• “It now appears the Union have backtracked, relented, & are in cahoots with the employer.”

• “Typical union ... smug and self-congratulatory yet achieved very little ... suckers.”

• “Rico’s the cat and the union are the mice.”

• “Played the union like fiddle once again.”

• “What a joke. The union has lost the plot.”

• “CWU rolling over again. Cancelling my membership the second this is over.”

Many Royal Mail employees were clear that what the union and company claimed was a “temporary” agreement—in place just during the pandemic—was the thin end of the wedge and that this would be enforced permanently.

• “Yet again Royal Mail prevails in what they want and the CWU agree to the deal because it’s a temporary deal and will be reviewed every 2 weeks ... come on are you so naive to believe this wake up, it astonishes me how easily this union is manipulated and seems to be a constant thing every time there is a dispute. 2 years you say this has been going on and now since you have had communication from Rico Back to resolve the executive action they are trying to implement ... they have told you they are going to sit down and come to some sort of agreement regarding this decision ... behave guys they are stalling for WHAT’S TO COME...”

• “You are not seriously going to believe this man [Rico Back] again are you, he has lied, gone back on agreements, refused to meet you and now you are rolling over and listening to him again. This union is starting to lose touch with its members, whilst climbing into bed with management ...”

• “And so they dance together ... I mean the CWU and the CEO ...”

• “What a load of rubbish, he’s having our pants down as always. It is of no benefit to the company during Covid. It’s all to push it through for the long term,”

A worker cited the CWU’s statement that “The company has also confirmed that they are prepared to meet with us next week to discuss a framework for talks to resolve our current dispute,” saying:

- “How many times we heard that over the last 2 years!!”

Another worker added:

- “Far too many, and it always amounts to nothing!”

Another said of the agreement and announced upcoming talks:

• “Reminds me a bit like Neville Chamberlain return from Germany in 1938, waving that piece of paper, saying ‘Peace in our Time,’ we all know what happened in 1939.”

Several workers stated that the Royal Mail/CWU deal would be instrumental in pushing up profits at their expense.

• “It is just a wolf in sheep’s clothing ... it [the agreement] has been put into place to prove how profitable it is for the major shareholders.”

A co-worker agreed:

• “Exactly mate once the management knows it’s working then it’ll be in for good!”

• Others commented, “This isn’t a way to ease the burden on posties, it’s a well-hidden way of smashing more packets to maximize profits, the board must think we are idiots.”

• “Not sure how this can [be] dressed up as some kind of victory, Rico went behind our backs and all he has to do is quote the corona and keep this rolling for as long as he can.”

• “Not worth the paper it’s written on. RM [Royal Mail] have proved time and time again they are not to be trusted and will just do what they want and when they want. This is still just a way for them to push it through in the future, if it’s worked once already ...”

• “So basically in a nut shell the CWU has bottled it once again. They dangle a little carrot and you all eat it ... well I personally along with many others don’t buy it ... out the other side of this crisis they will walk all over you even more than they are now ... you have your chance to call notice and you bottled it ... watch this space see if I’m wrong.”

Many workers pointed out that not delivering letters on Saturday would mean a huge extra workload on top of the high volumes of mail and packets they are already expected to deliver.

• “CWU has been absolutely played for the fools that they are. Royal Mail has ended up with exactly what they wanted, and we’ve been shafted with no mail on Saturdays and double the workload on Mondays. But hey, at least we get to keep our fixed days off, which they had no intention of actually changing in the first place.”

Another worker posted a photo of a Royal Mail van packed with parcels and filled mail bags. She commented:

• “So this is the plan that for our benefit???? My partner ... took off our duty and put somewhere else on her own. I was expected to do both walks on my own in duty time. The amount shows it’s clearly not possible!!! My partner ended up doing her single walk then

coming to help me. Absolute lunacy!”

And this:

• “Today was worse than Christmas in my office. 5 drop bags full of parcels and 60 oversized parcels I had. Struggling to cope with that never mind the potential of 20,000 job cuts.” The worker asked of Ward and Pullinger, “What are you doing about this?”

• “The fact remains that our workload is no lighter due to double mail on Mondays so what’s the justification in the change.”

• “Can anyone explain how not delivering letters on Saturdays helps us posties? Anyone?”

• “All this means is that all drivers on delivery will be doing all the work on Saturday.”

Many opposed Ward’s statement that “duty changes on a temporary basis will be voluntary and negotiated on a local basis.”

• “How is this voluntary when we’ve been told who’s doing what and when.”

• “Certainly not voluntary. Concerted campaign to prioritise packets over letters. Letters in our office left for days. No overtime available to clear them.”

Another worker pointed to the health and social implications of not being able to deliver mail to the homes of millions of people during the pandemic:

• “If we can’t deliver letters on Saturday ... What about doctors and hospital letters customers may be waiting for ... If they have an appointment Monday morning and don’t get the letter till Monday afternoon ... they’ve missed it.”

Another pointed out that the deal undermines the role of postal workers as “key workers,” stating:

• “How can we argue Royal Mail is a key worker job? Because of essential letters at the start of all this. Now nothing has changed but now we don’t deliver mail on Saturdays.”

To these postal workers and all those who agree with the sentiments expressed, the Socialist Equality Party makes the following appeal:

No trust whatsoever can be placed in the CWU. Sooner or later, Saturday deliveries will be cancelled permanently and 20,000 jobs will go.

The strike postal workers demanded must be organised now.

End all attacks on jobs and conditions, return pay and pensions lost in previous union sellouts and implement a safe working environment for those in work and financial security for those who self-isolate.

Form rank-and-file committees led by trusted workers, independent of the union bureaucracy.

Contact *the SEP* and we will do all we can to help wage such a struggle.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact