

UK postal workers speak during national strike: Bradford, Bournemouth and Cambridge

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with Royal Mail and post office workers on picket lines across the UK on Friday, during the first of six days of strikes. A first set of interviews was published on Friday.

Bradford

At **Bradford North Delivery Office**, a postal worker for over a decade said of the cost-of-living surge, “We can’t do it. We need people to recognise just what we need for surviving life, never mind any luxuries.”

Asked about the two percent pay offer while shareholders voted themselves an extra £130 million, he responded, “They’re happy with two percent. That’s fair and realistic to them. But unfortunately, it’s nowhere near the realistic cost of living. It’s a kick in the teeth. Absolute insult.”

Another striker said that inflation is “affecting all of my bills. Everything’s going up, but I’m not getting paid more. I’m making sure that I’m doing lots of overtime to make up for that. If I just did my standard hours, I would be struggling.

“People shouldn’t have to live like that. If you do a full-time job, you should be able to afford to live. No one should be struggling if they’re working. We all pay taxes to help out other people, so no one should be living in poverty. It’s 2022.

On the raft of anti-strike laws being brought in by the Conservative government, she said of one of the measures, “It is to undermine striking completely isn’t it, if you can just get agency people in to do the job?”

Supporting a general strike, she said, “Yeah. Bring the whole country to its knees.”

Bournemouth

Outside Royal Mail’s depot in **Bournemouth**, striker Dean said, “They’re trying to eradicate our terms and conditions that we fought for a long time. They want to attack our sick pay, to take lots of bonuses away and just our general terms--later start times, finish times. A lot of people here, they started the job for the hours, and it’s just our general

terms and conditions more than our pay really for me. Whether you’ve been here one day, a week, or even 30 years. You deserve to be treated equally and that’s what I’m fighting for.

“They imposed the 2 percent pay rise because they couldn’t come to an agreement with our union over a decent pay rise, so they just imposed it. But 2 percent is negligible. It’s not coming anywhere near the rising cost of living for my family.

“I think if we had a general strike, we could have a massive effect on this country. I’m all for coming out together. If we all got together, we could easily work out a settlement because they would all have to come and listen to us. That’s the thing about unions, we should all be working together. It works much better when we’re all on the same side. Rather than just doing little disputes here and there. Let’s have a big one.”

“I think the public is coming around to our way of thinking. They see the fat cats becoming richer and richer and the people doing the donkey work are not getting rewarded for that. That’s across all industries. Not just ours, even the train drivers now, what they are trying to do to them. In previous years, they wouldn’t have that much public support but now from what I gauge, the public is behind us, because they realise what’s happening in this country.”

Asked what he thought of the Communication Workers Union’s call for negotiations and a compromise from Royal Mail, he said, “It doesn’t appear that they want to compromise. They’ve got their agenda. We’ve seen this in previous disputes where they’ve not wanted to engage and then when we’ve been on strike before generally it’s brought them back to the negotiating table, But I’m not so sure this time. I think the present governor of Royal Mail, he doesn’t really want to engage.

“They want to do what they did with the P&O ferries, to fire us. I think they want to get rid of most of us who have

been here a long time, our existing contracts, which are good, they want to get rid of us and employ everyone on poor terms and conditions for the future.”

On the super profits racked up by Royal Mail over the last two years, he said, “They really benefited off the back of the pandemic. And that’s not particularly their fault, because we had to stay at home, and everyone shopped online. And what have we seen from that? We’ve seen absolutely nothing. We all worked, every one of us worked long hours. That was fine, but now we have this kick in the teeth where they don’t want to give you a decent pay rise and want to take away your terms and conditions.”

On the call of the SEP are calling for a general election and general strike, he responded, “I don’t know what the prospect is, but I hate this government with a passion. My dad was a big trade unionist in Birmingham where I was brought up. I’ve lost a lot of faith in Labour as well. This government are dreadful, all they try and do is ruin workers’ rights. They think that we should just take everything they give us. But we do need somebody standing up for the workers more, a lot more, in my opinion.”

Cambridge

Paul Gilmour, a striker at **Royal Mail House in Cambridge** said, “They offered us 5.5 percent, but it’s not a true 5.5 percent. First there’s a 2 percent raise, then there’s a further 1.5 percent on offer, provided we slash our terms and conditions. That equates to a pay cut, because there are certain benefits, which 50 percent of the workforce get, which will make it a pay cut. Regardless of inflation, it will make it a pay cut. So, it’s a ‘self-funding’ pay rise. And then there’s a bonus of £500, provided you meet the targets. It’s called ‘above and beyond’. And that’s how 5.5 percent is equated to. It’s nonsense.

“This is all at a time when the business has made record profits of £780 million, and they paid £400 million to the shareholders. To top it off, they paid £1,000 to every manager, four days before the strike, to buy their loyalty.

“Yet they keep telling us there’s no money for the workers. The workers who worked through the pandemic. That was a time when everyone was scared and yet we soldiered through.”

Speaking about the growing number of strikes by workers in other sectors he said, “This is bigger than Royal Mail. How this plays out is going to affect generations of working-class people. We’ve got everything to play for, and every working-class person is going to be affected. Every working-class person needs to stand up against the Conservative government and say we are not accepting this, where the rich are getting richer.

“I think Royal Mail are trying to get into a total flexible workforce, where they can call on workers as and when the

demand is, which has no respect for people’s work-life balance. If we lose this dispute it will give confidence not just to Royal Mail, but other companies as well and they will think they can treat workers any way they want. It’s not right because people deserve to earn a good wage and have the right terms and conditions.”

Picket Paul Allen said, “The main issues are the same as everybody else is fighting for, keeping food on the table and being able to heat their houses. The thing that really rouses is the fact that we worked through COVID. It was embarrassing to be called heroes when there were the NHS workers; we were just trying to do our job.

“Our bosses called us heroes, while they were sat at home, working from home, allegedly, when we were out, doing our job. Then suddenly we wanted a pay rise, and we get 2 percent foisted on us, while inflation is going up to 12 percent, 13 percent, 14 percent. That’s ridiculous, that’s a pay cut. We just want to feed our families. We went from heroes, in their eyes, to zeroes.

“They don’t want post, they don’t want letters, they want an Amazon-like service, guys going out in jeans and T-shirts delivering parcels, like in the gig economy.

“The pressure within the business to get the job done is immense. The deliveries are not going out sometimes because they don’t have enough staff.

“The churn of staff is incredible. You can have four people arrive, by the end of the week, you might have lost two, by the end of the second week, you might have lost another; you are lucky if you’ve got one out of four.”

Asked if Royal Mail planned to casualise the workforce, Paul said, “They’ll never admit that, but that’s ultimately where they’re trying to go. They’re trying to get the lowest pay for what they’re sending out and they’re saying we’ve got to change because customers want to be able to order things at midnight and have them delivered the next day. They’re just chasing Amazon.”



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