

Why aren't UK Royal Mail workers receiving strike pay from the CWU?

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Today, 115,000 Royal Mail workers took their sixth day of national strike action and the first of 19 more one-day strikes scheduled in the run up to Christmas.

The Royal Mail dispute is by far the largest in a strike wave pitting workers against corporations and a Conservative government determined to enforce wage suppression, and the destruction of terms and conditions. The same is facing workers on the railways, ports, BT, the NHS, schools, FE colleges and universities, and public service.

At Royal Mail, CEO Simon Thompson has imposed a 2 percent “pay rise”—a savage pay cut. Inflation is 12.3 percent RPI, with predictions it will reach 18 percent by January 2023.

Across the channel in France, thousands of oil refinery workers are striking for a pay rise amid spiralling inflation caused by the energy companies' rampant profiteering from NATO's war against Russia. French President Emmanuel Macron has responded with a frontal attack on the right to strike, ordering police to “requisition” strikers, forcing them to work or face imprisonment.

With talks resuming this week between Communication Workers Union (CWU) officials and Royal Mail executives, there is growing unease among workers over the direction of the dispute.

Postal workers are striking for a genuine cost-of-living pay rise, with many forced to use foodbanks due to decades of wage suppression. Yet Royal Mail strikers have not received a penny of strike pay.

On the CWU's Facebook page, workers have raised the issue publicly, “A lot of us are now struggling to pay bills, not just because of our low pay not in line with standards, but also these strikes are killing us” and “Some people can't afford to feed their kids now!! This is something that needs to be taken seriously.”

On the picket line in Sheffield this morning, workers said a one or two-week strike would bring the national

postal service to its knees. Yet strikers explained such action was not feasible as they would face financial ruin.

A CWU official responded that with 115,000 members on strike, the CWU was in no position to provide strike pay. This argument must be rejected—it is tantamount to holding Royal Mail workers to ransom.

Some key facts:

The CWU's financial accounts for 2020 (the latest available via the certification office) show the union has 189,369 members who contributed dues money of nearly £29 million.

The CWU has not held a national strike at Royal Mail since 2009. In those 11 years, the CWU has amassed dues money of more than £300 million.

The CWU also sits on fixed assets of £20.5 million, investment assets (shares, etc) of £7.1 million and “other assets” worth £18.9 million. This took their total assets, excluding dues, for a single year to £46.7 million.

So where does all the money go?

A huge proportion is expended on CWU officials. The CWU paid out £12,053,036 in staff remuneration and expenses in 2020. General Secretary Dave Ward's salary package was £142,485.

On top of that, the CWU handed the Trades Union Congress (TUC) £584,000 in affiliation fees, for which the TUC does nothing for workers in return. It pays political donations to the Labour Party of £761,645, despite Sir Keir Starmer's denunciation of this summer's strike wave and his authoritarian edict banning Labour MPs from picket lines.

What is the CWU's strategy?

The CWU's refusal to provide strike pay is in line with a broader corporatist strategy aimed at convincing Royal Mail executives to partner with the CWU leadership. The CWU is using limited strikes to pressure the company to return to the negotiating table, where it hopes to convince Royal Mail that their shareholder-driven Pathway for

Change can best be achieved through the services of the union bureaucracy.

Ward and his fellow officials have been quite open about this. Interviewed this morning on LBC radio, he said the company had walked away from its agreement signed 18 months ago with the union, which had “helped to create record profits.” A Tory government led by Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng should be “stepping in and launching an inquiry into the practices of the people who are running the business.” [!]

The CWU has been tight-lipped about the content of its closed-door discussions Monday and Wednesday with Royal Mail bosses. In a CWU video update on the talks, Ward stated, “Things are shifting”, claiming there was “a different feeling in the room.” His statements are a warning that postal workers face the prospect of a deal at the direct expense of their pay, terms and conditions.

Ward emphasised the CWU’s “alternative business plan”, calling on Royal Mail to use the Universal Service Obligation as leverage over its competitors to “capture parcel growth within the core business.” He added ominously, “We know there are certain issues we need to face up to on change, our members know that.”

The union has not even recommended a pay claim figure, resorting to vague calls for an “adequate pay award”.

While Ward and other CWU officials are promoted as “left wing”, their record is one of collusion and partnership with Royal Mail executives over decades, especially since privatisation.

In July, the CWU stated there was “absolutely nothing” demanded by Royal Mail CEO or Chair Keith Williams which “could not be raised, discussed and negotiated via the various mechanisms, protocols and joint working groups provided within the existing agreement.” It added, “improving the efficiency, duty patterns, aligning workload, rebalancing the operations towards parcels, technology deployment, for example are all covered within the Pathway to Change.”

The CWU’s *London Calling* newsletter boasted in July, “This union has never faced away from change, in fact we have seen major change over decades. This includes Mail Centre Closures, RDC closures, the removal of second delivery. Delivery Office mergers, agreeing a productivity measure and the loss of thousands of jobs.”

On picket lines, there is a recognition that unified action is needed by post, rail, port and BT workers to defeat the coordinated onslaught against them. However, in Sheffield, after discussion among picketers turned to the

need for a general strike, a CWU official declared “it is illegal to call a general strike.”

Both Ward and RMT leader Mick Lynch claimed over summer they would support a general strike. But they insisted only the TUC had the authority to call one, knowing full well the TUC is bitterly hostile to any such action. Neither Ward nor Lynch demanded the TUC call a general strike because they too are opposed to any mass mobilisation of the working class.

As the strike wave escalated over summer, campaign group Enough is Enough was established by Lynch, Ward and Labour MPs from the Socialist Campaign Group. Its purpose was to block a general strike and corral workers behind the Labour Party as its marches in lockstep with the Tories.

On social media, Royal Mail workers have expressed reservations about the course being pursued by the CWU. Some are warning that Royal Mail has only agreed to talks while the Truss government prepares legislation to ban strikes by post, rail and other essential workers.

Comments include: “It’s just a ploy so we cancel strikes over Christmas. Let’s not fall for that one again. Stay strong.”; “How can we truly ever trust immoral and greedy vulture capitalists when all they seem to be doing is stalling to get Xmas out of the way so they can get back to the Plan A of Executive Action?”; “Time for a general strike. All workers coming together.”

The determined struggle by Royal Mail workers can only proceed by rejecting wholesale the pro-company Pathway to Change strategy of the CWU. Rank-and-file strike committees must be established at every workplace to take control of the dispute. The demand must be raised for immediate strike pay, a genuine above-inflation pay rise, and the defeat of Royal Mail’s plans.

We urge postal workers who want to take forward such a fight to contact us today.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)