

UK Royal Mail strikers: “They are aiming for an Amazon style business”

Our reporters
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On Thursday, 115,000 Royal Mail workers across the UK took part in a one-day strike demanding a cost-of-living pay rise and a halt to Royal Mail’s sweeping attacks on terms and conditions.

The latest strike followed talks between Royal Mail executives and Communication Workers Union (CWU) officials on Monday and Wednesday, with CWU General Secretary Dave Ward claiming the negotiations showed that “things are shifting”, and that there was “a different feeling in the room”.

Less than 48 hours later, Royal Mail announced plans to sack 10,000 full time equivalent workers from the company by August 2023.

At pickets in England and Scotland, Royal Mail workers explained the attacks they face as the company seeks to transform the postal service into an Amazon-style parcel delivery company.

On the picket line at **Crieff Delivery Office in Perth, Scotland**, a striker with 23 years’ service explained, “We are on strike because the pay is part of it. They gave us 2 percent but then take away allowances worth more than 2 percent. Also, terms and conditions; they want to remove them.

“Ultimately, they are aiming for an Amazon-style business. They changed the name from Royal Mail PLC to Parcel Delivery Group or something similar. We don’t get a uniform anymore. They are not buying any red vans. It looks like they’re trying to squash the business down. Sell off the parcel side, to get rid of the letters, just because they’re not profitable. It’s a 500-year-old business.

“And they want to take away our sick pay. All our terms and conditions are basically being pulled off the table. They first gave the union a letter saying they were removing all previous agreements from the last 20 years. They want to go back and start from scratch.

“They have started talks again. The shareholders are still getting their bonuses. You hear on the news they’re losing one million pounds per day. So how are they paying out dividends?

“All job functions have been out on the strikes we have done so far. What will be interesting is that in three weeks’ time we then go to functional strikes, so that Day 1 Distribution will go out, Day 2 Processing will be out, and then on Day 3 Delivery will go out. That will backlog on every single system but we will only be losing one day’s pay. That I’m looking forward to, because it will cause them major problems.

“BT are obviously quite supportive. When BT are out Royal Mail people will go there but it would be better if everybody did go out at the same time.”

Discussing the Socialist Equality Party’s call for general strike against the Truss government, he replied, “I think it has to happen. I don’t think anything else will lead to massive change. I have actually said we have to go to a general strike. I think the unions should all stand together. I will share the WSWS with my union branch.”

Another Royal Mail worker explained, “I’m in a fortunate position where our home is paid for, so the demands on us are not the same as perhaps on some of the younger employees.

“I’m not a terribly political person. I’ve not been forced to strike. I have chosen to take this action. It’s Royal Mail not being prepared to negotiate which has brought me to this. These strikes are very well supported by the employees—77 percent support it.”

Asked about the government’s plans to outlaw strikes in essential services, he replied, “It is an attack on people’s ability to withdraw their labour.”

At **Sheffield North delivery office**, a striker told WSWS, “The fact that Royal Mail is willing to talk

shows they are concerned about the situation. But we don't know the details of the talks.

"The company is infringing on our rights, taking away bonuses, benefits, agreements, and not giving us a pay rise. We are hoping that the talks will be fruitful, and until then we will just be striking for what we deserve.

"We worked through the pandemic, when the nation clapped for key workers. They anticipated losses but they made profits. I think it's just fair that we get a share. It's not just requesting a share of a piece of the pie, though. Everything has gone up. Fuel prices are going up as well. We just need a pay rise so we can live a comfortable lifestyle.

"The union is requesting a pay rise in line with inflation. 2 percent [imposed by Royal Mail] is a pay cut. We are just hoping that once they get into the room they can come up with an agreement and we will be okay, and everyone will be back to work. We love what we do. We don't like standing here. It's rather unfortunate that we still have to fight for our rights. That's why we are here."

Asked whether the CWU had issued a pay claim on Royal Mail, he said, "The CWU doesn't have any target they're going for, but something in line with inflation, to enable us to cater for our family. On the conditions, Royal Mail is proposing later start times and that means a late finishing time."

Later start times would delay urgent mail, including medical results and appointments, the workers explained. There were also safety implications, "If we start later, working in winter it's going to be dark, when there's a tendency to trip and fall, so we want to change that as well."

A discussion took place on the way forward in the dispute, including the absence of strike pay. Many picketers recognised the need to unify the strikes of rail, dock and BT workers, up to and including a general strike. Several workers had signed an online petition calling for a general election, which has now gathered 600,000 signatures. While there was support for an election to oust the Tories, workers raised that Labour was no different, pointing to leader Sir Keir Starmer's denunciation of strikes and his ban on Labour MPs visiting picket lines.

A CWU official said he had campaigned for former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn in the 2019 general

election and demanded to know why SEP members did not join the Labour Party and "fight from within". Our members explained that Jeremy Corbyn refused to fight Labour's right-wing, had capitulated to the Blairites on all key issues before handing the party over to Starmer. The CWU official responded that an independent socialist party of the working class would "never happen"—a position that SEP members challenged.



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