

Postal workers comment on UK strike

Royal Mail workers
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The World Socialist Web Site has received information in recent days from Royal Mail workers about the current dispute that is pitting 115,000 postal workers against a company intent on slashing thousands of jobs and re-writing employment contracts to establish a gig-economy style conditions along the lines of Evri, DPD and Amazon.

At mass meetings convened by the Communication Workers Union on October 31 and November 2, anger erupted over the union's unilateral cancellation of strikes announced by CWU officials led by Dave Ward and Andy Furey. On Friday, the CWU signed a joint communique committing to "a de-escalation of tension to avoid flashpoints and restoring calmness in the workplace".

We urge other Royal Mail workers to contact the WSWs and share information and your own views on the dispute. We will protect your anonymity.

I am a postman currently involved in the Royal Mail dispute. As Royal Mail constantly reminds the media that they are losing £1million per day, here's an insight into what management and the company are doing. This week commencing 31st October, Royal Mail has imposed a complete overtime ban. No overtime whatsoever. In normal circumstances on a post round, if the postman has a very heavy day of mail and will not complete his round in the allocated time, they have the option to carry on and complete the round and book the extra time as overtime. This has now stopped, and postmen are told either finish your round for free (newer employees feel intimidated to do so) or bring the undelivered mail back to the office.

As you can imagine, post keeps on coming and has a serious snowball effect so the next day on top of the leftover mail from the previous day, postmen are quickly overwhelmed with the amount of post, so again, cannot complete the round. It doesn't take very long for mail to be get collected up in boxes stored

under postmen's fittings and deemed as non-essential.

Let me explain, normal stamped letters are not traceable and can be undetected sitting in offices for days on end, these include important doctors' appointments, energy bill credits, Christmas cards, normal post not important in Royal managers' eyes and why? Royal Mail offer more expensive tracked 24- and 48-hour parcel service, which are tracked every part of the journey, hence traceable throughout Royal Mail. In real terms, if these get left in, the office looks bad, and the manager has to be made accountable. So, all managers in all delivery offices prioritise these items over normal post and they get treated the same as the flagship products of Special Delivery.

It is common practice now that managers instruct postmen to concentrate on tracked items and special deliveries and if there is not enough time to complete, then leave the letters for the next day! As you can imagine, parcel volumes have significantly increased and letters are in decline and as parcels are more profitable, letters are regularly being left in. I have witnessed letters from "walks" being left in for up to 5 days and only parcels being delivered. This is not the best of it. Now, due to the strike action, and is actively using agency workers, paying the agency over £20 per hour to cover work they are refusing postmen to deliver, plus paying hundreds of thousands of pounds using white vans hired from companies like Hertz and europcar.

We have also seen complaints go through the roof as these agency workers are not trained or committed to do the job properly as Royal Mail postmen/women. When we are due to strike over a Black Friday and Cyber Monday, if they are still stopping postmen overtime, EVERY office throughout the UK will be at breaking point and I can guarantee will be complete chaos. I have photos to back up what I'm saying from past strike aftermath but obviously I need to be discreet

and confidential as I will lose my job.

Coming up to 20 years working for Royal Mail. What a waste of 20 years. I work 6 days a week, come rain, snow, or shine, with Sunday as my only day off, and now they want to take that away from me. What 1 day of the week should I cram my whole life into? It's package delivery, not life and death for the most part, and frankly it's the rise of the other package companies i.e., Hermes and Yodel etc. that has made Royal Mail bosses think that we should be downgraded to a gig economy job. Henry the 8th would be spinning in his grave if he knew what had become of his mail service.

I work at Parcelforce and see this dispute as a watershed moment. Last week we had letters from the CEO [of Parcelforce] saying if you keep striking there's a potential the depot will close. A lot of us saw this as intimidation, yet the union called off the strikes. There's a lot of anger over this. Royal Mail has set out their stall, but the union is not representing us, and we have no idea what they are discussing at the ACAS talks.

I get over 100 parcels per day to deliver and you're given two and a half minutes per parcel delivery, and just a few minutes to drive to the next drop. We are worked like robots and tracked every second. This is doubly difficult when you're a "reserve", when you've got to find unfamiliar addresses, which usually means you're running late.

A lot of drivers say it's a young man's job. When you're in your 50s, when you get to the end of the week you are physically and mentally exhausted. We are expected to work under all conditions, rain, snow, sleet and 40-degree heat, and we have only a half hour break each day. Many don't take a break so they can finish their deliveries, so they're eating at the wheel. That doesn't include toilet breaks if you can find one. Many drivers use plastic bottles, it's completely humiliating. There was a manager calling us together in groups complaining about drivers leaving bottles of urine in the vans. The union rep was standing next to him and saying nothing.

The complaints about the workforce being unproductive are untrue. We see mismanagement virtually every day. I go in and see my van loaded incorrectly and I have to take every single box out and

put it back correctly so I can deliver the parcels in an efficient and appropriate way.

Conditions are very bad. It's about £13.30 an hour. You do get a thing called London weighting so that pumps it up a bit and attendance bonus. But we actually get less money for overtime than our normal hourly rate, and the union agreed to that in previous years.

The claim that the company are losing £1 million a day because of the strike is nonsense. When you send a parcel, the company has already been paid, so Royal Mail has that money.

Roughly 25 percent of the staff at Parcelforce are owner-drivers, and they want to increase that enormously. Owner-drivers get paid per parcel and if they don't deliver it, through no fault of their own, they get nothing. This leads to all sorts of problems with drivers leaving it wherever they can and then it gets nicked or something. At Hermes they get 68p per parcel delivery which means if you deliver 100 parcels, you're only getting £68 per day, and they have to buy their own petrol.

Over the last week or two, a few drivers have left Parcelforce because the conditions are so dreadful. One of the things they want to bring in is Sunday working at the normal rate. A lot of drivers are saying they are going to leave if that's the case. It's not that we are all militant, it's that the changes will affect our whole lives. We'll be at work more than our own homes. There will be no work-life balance.

Are you a Royal Mail worker who would like to share your views or other information on the dispute? Please get in touch. Your anonymity will be protected.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact