

UK: BT workers denounce Communication Workers Union sellout deal seeking end of national strike

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The attempted sellout by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) of the national strike by 40,000 telecoms workers has provoked outrage.

Workers have been in bitter dispute with BT for months, holding eight days of strikes since July. On Monday, the CWU released the details of a proposed agreement to end the strike, which hands the company everything it wanted

In April, BT imposed a flat rate pay increase of £1,500, an average rise of just 4.8 percent. The new deal maintains the flat rate payment of £1,500 for 2022 and proposes the same for next year. The new instalment of £1,500 is to be paid from January 2023 until September 2023.

The deal is so disastrous for the workforce that the two main responses to it among the more than 1,500 postings by BT employees on Twitter and Facebook were that they would vote to reject it in a ballot this month, and that many would leave the union.

The CWU announced the deal in celebratory terms, stating on Twitter, “Agreement reached with BT on pay... They said we couldn’t do it. We did.”

In no doubt that its dirty work would cause outrage, the bureaucracy cancelled a promised “CWU Live” event in which it was to have outlined the deal before thousands of hostile members. One worker responded, “There you go people, can’t even face us live... shows the contempt for their members #nothanks.”

Among other responses to the CWU’s arrogant tweet and its Facebook posting were:

- “We done it? You done f**k all! You got us our strike days back spread over twelve months in 2023, If this goes through I will be leaving the union and I won’t be the only one! Absolute joke of a union”.
- “I’m still waiting for my fair pay rise. My job roles

been de valued. How do i cancel my union membership?”

- “Absolute joke! You as a union seem to be quite proud that you’ve come to an agreement, yet it’s appalling. A lot of engineers will be cancelling their membership that’s for sure!”

- “you won’t be having another penny off me for membership.”

- “The CWU should hang their heads in shame for agreeing this utterly Shocking deal. What a waste of time and MONEY.... I will never have faith in the CWU again.”

- “It’s Shameful that the CWU thought this was an acceptable deal.”

- “CWU is an absolute sell out... You are BT puppets. You have no power and soon no members.”

- “The only thing I’ve gained from striking is £18 per month & that’s your membership fees I’ll be no longer paying. Waste of space.”

A Royal Mail (RM) worker—also involved in a national strike being presided over by the CWU—commented, “Looks like BT staff have been sold down the river (reading all the comments) us next . Where is the BT-RM-CWU Christmas Dinner being held?”

Many workers pointed out that the CWU lied when they promised workers that any pay deal would be backdated to April. In reference to the CWU deputy general secretary (responsible for Telecoms & Financial Services), one worker recalled:

- “Andy Kerr stated very clearly on video at the start of this whole shit show that they wouldn’t accept an offer unless it was back dated.” Other comments included:

- “Andy Kerr... you told 30 strikers on the picket line in Merthyr, South Wales, ‘Any deal will 100% need to be back dated’ Shame on you.... It’s a NO from me”

- “This is an awful offer! Basically a 6% pay rise and

not even backdated. Should have pushed for a standard % pay increase and to be backdated. This is a victory for BT not for the engineers/employees. Vote no”

- “All you have done is negotiated the same poor deal for next year that caused the strike this year. It’s not even backdated! Kind of makes me wish I hadn’t gone on strike. I going to reject the offer.”

- “Is this what the CWU have spent the last few months coming up with? An increase that’s less than the cost of living and nothing back-dated? And we lost how many days pay for this? You’re a joke, not fit for purpose. Membership cancelled.”

- Another said, “Terrible decisions from the CWU, seems to be one after another I’ve lost all confidence in them.”

- “My god, that is awful. Hopefully the members reject it! Basically equates to no payrise for 2022 and a kick in the face for 2023.

- “This isn’t a win, make no mistake our strike action delivered us nothing.”

Workers raised that the pay deal negotiated was worth even less due to surging inflation which is now above 14 percent.

- ““They said we couldn’t do it’? Do what? This is hopeless. You urged us to strike over an inadequate payment of £1500. Now you urge us to accept £1500 which is now worth less because of inflation.”

Other workers noted that they had lost more money in unpaid strike days and in paying dues to the union than anything gained in the CWU’s deal.

- “£1500 a year? Take into account 8 days strikes unpaid and unions fees, about £6-700 a year? And it’s not even for all the staff??”

- “Lost £928 on strike days so not really a great offer”.

- “So this £375 extra I’m supposed to appreciate and ignore the fact I’ve lost about £1000 striking and not only that... any proposed increase I would hope to get in April is now getting discussed in September but taking into account the January rise. So really I’ve lost about £1000 and you have pulled our April pay rise forward to January. Absolute sell out! You sold us the dream and told us to be strong and stand together then you sold us out. Absolute disgrace.”

The CWU bureaucracy has dubbed BT CEO Philip Jansen, “Foodbank Phil”—after the foodbanks which have been opened at several BT sites to serve the workforce, so poor is their pay. One worker responded in reference to the CWU’s Andy Kerr:

- “#foodbanKerr has pretty much agreed next year’s

payrise for this year. Whilst branding it as £3000 in total for 22 whilst getting rid of the April 23 review, not to mention the fact it’s not back dated.”

One worker was incredulous that:

- “The CWU useless think they have won us a good deal, but Andy [Kerr] and his team have had their bellies tickled and given [BT CEO] Jansen a victory.”

For the CWU bureaucracy, however, this is a genuinely good deal as it is premised on their working intimately with management as BT seeks the completion of a mammoth £3 billion cost cutting agenda over the next three years.

The company declared as the deal was announced that the CWU and Prospect union would be “partners” in imposing the £3 billion cuts strategy. The CWU responded, “As part of the conversations with BT we have agreed to renew and strengthen the way we work together. This will be important as the company seeks to deliver its commitment to reduce cost and improve efficiency by the end of FY25...”

One worker pointedly asked the CWU on Twitter:

- “What have you also given them for the £3billion savings they want to make in the same time period?”

The Socialist Equality Party warned at the outset that if the struggle against BT was left in the hands of CWU leaders Dave Ward, Andy Kerr, et al, it would go down to defeat. The same danger is faced by striking Royal Mail workers, rail workers and every other section of the working class fighting to defend their pay, conditions and pensions.

The struggle must be taken out of the hands of the union bureaucrats by workers creating their own network of rank and committees, operating in opposition to the CWU/BT partnership. The SEP urges BT workers to contact us today to discuss the way forward.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact