Communication Workers Union pleads at national rally for pro-business settlement to end UK postal strike

Robert Stevens
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Around 15,000 postal workers demonstrated on Friday in London. The national rally in Parliament Square was held during the 13th day of national strike action by 115,000 postal workers.

Royal Mail workers are fighting for higher pay and to stop the erosion of their working conditions and thousands of job losses.

The demonstration was called by the Communication Workers Union (CWU), under the banner "Thompson Out"—a reference to Royal Mail's CEO. Music and football terrace chants were modified in support of Simon Thompson's removal while various trade union bureaucrats were paraded as staunch fighters for the working class.

In attendance with CWU leader Dave Ward and Acting Deputy General Secretary (Postal) Andy Furey were leaders of two other national strikes, Mick Lynch of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) and Jo Grady of the University and College Union. They were joined by National Education Union joint leader Kevin Courtney and Trades Union Congress (TUC) General Secretary designate Paul Nowak.

The WSWS spoke to many rank-and-file postal workers in attendance.

But thousands of those present were local and regional officials from the CWU's substantial and well-financed union apparatus.

The main purpose of the jamboree was to conceal the CWU's rotten stitch-up of the months-long strike. The union plans to do to Royal Mail workers what it has just done to 40,000 BT workers: agree a sellout deal claiming this is the best that can be achieved. The BT deal, well below inflation and pledging the union to a partnership with the company in a £3 billion cost-cutting agenda, was recommended by Ward and hailed by the union bureaucracy everywhere.

BT workers now being balloted on the deal reacted with outrage and denunciations, with many saying they will leave the CWU.

Ward and Furey came to Friday's rally straight from three days of talks with Royal Mail management at the ACAS conciliation service, where they put forward the CWU's pro-business plan to ensure Royal Mail remains a profitable concern able to compete with major rivals including Amazon.

After the talks, Ward said Thursday the union were not "just making demands without recognising the position that the company is in."

Furey said an intransigent management was preventing a deal and "If we were able to move forward onto a number of key areas including the guarantee of no compulsory redundancies, we said we would be able to support proper revisions, properly negotiated… We were prepared to work at pace to deliver those revisions."

Furey, paving the way for job losses to be imposed via other means in a final settlement, told the rally, "There is no need for *compulsory* redundancies whatsoever." With inflation running at over 14 percent, it is clear, as the BT deal demonstrates, that a shoddy deal is being negotiated. Furey added, "Pay is fine, we can deal with pay" and "find a way through with pay."

Speaking to *Sky News* before the rally began, Ward laid out what "pay is fine" means. The CWU would accept a below-inflation deal in exchange for the union being fully integrated into future restructuring. He complained Royal Mail was offering 7 percent in pay, "but if it was a proper 9 percent [still 5 percent below RPI inflation] and if the change was the right change for our members, and crucially, for customers and the future of this company, then we would probably find a settlement on that figure."

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Ward's rally speech was a plea for Royal Mail to see sense and appoint a more union friendly board. He doubled down on his pro-company interview with the *Telegraph* December 3. The company said they were now losing more than a million pounds a day, but, "The people who have created a crisis here, the CEO and a few handfuls of people on the board, the chair of the company, they have not got the knowledge or the ability to lead us out of that crisis."

This could be addressed, said Ward, by appointing a UK-based board with representation on the board for workers, i.e., CWU bureaucrats. The company made £750 million in profits, giving £567 million to shareholders, of which Ward's main complaint was "most of them don't come from the UK."

Lynch's speech centred on claiming that the Labour Party and its self-described "proud of being pro-business" leader, Sir Keir Starmer, can be recruited in support of workers fighting the Conservative government.

Starmer has spent the last six months attacking strikes and banning his own front bench MPs from even attending a picket line. Pointing at parliament, Lynch said, "I'm saying to Starmer and [shadow chancellor Rachel] Reeves and anyone else who seeks to represent working people, whose side are you on? Come out of there and come over here and get on them picket lines."

Only around a dozen representatives of the 30 or so Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs even attended the rally, included former party leader Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell. Corbyn is not a Labour MP anymore having been booted out two years ago by Starmer.

TUC leader designate Nowak, who takes office in January when his predecessor Frances O'Grady enters the House of Lords, declared that the TUC would back every strike and fight the next raft of anti-strike legislation. The great news for everyone, said Nowak, was that they could count on the support of Starmer!

Everyone knows there will be no fight. The TUC has not lifted a finger to oppose any anti-strike legislation in over 40 years.

Nowak acknowledged tamely that proposed Minimum Services Levels legislation—requiring the unions guarantee a proportion of services, around 20 percent, must still run during a strike—will soon become law. But Starmer would then come to the rescue, he declared. "If he [Prime Minister Rishi Sunak] manages to get a little bit of legislation through, let's be clear we're going vote them out at the ballot box as well. And let's elect a government, a Labour government, to repeal the anti-trade union legislation, restore the right to strike, bring our public services back into public ownership and deliver a new deal for working people up and down this country."

The reality is that Labour kept the entire gamut of Thatcherite anti-strike legislation on the books for the 13 years it was in power from 1997. Nowak spoke just hours after Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves refused to commit Labour to repealing any new anti-strike laws, saying that would be "jumping the gun."

The revolting logic of the pro-corporate agenda of the CWU bureaucracy, shared by all the unions, was no more evident than at the conclusion of the rally.

Fulminating that the present Royal Mail board was not going to "look after the UK infrastructure", Ward proclaimed, "This is called the Royal Mail isn't it? We're going to keep it that way aren't we? We're going to have a little walk, a little bit later on up to the royal palace to show that postal workers do stand up for the service."

CWU's head of communications Chris Webb concluded the rally with the instruction, "We're going to go see the King."

What followed was the most revolting and ludicrous stunt in recent memory, carried out to "defend a service" for "the nation". The union bureaucracy's nationalism and servility before the capitalist state was epitomised by its march to Buckingham Palace to plead for the support of King Charles, the widely despised monarch and epitome of wealth and class privilege.

Outside the palace gates, Ward pointed to a large mock-up postcard which included a silhouette of the crowned head of Charles next to the CWU's logo above the slogan "Stand By Your Post". Ward said, "Changing governance of the company," is "something that we will deliver at some point… We're going to deliver a special postcard to the King of the UK, the King of Britain. It says, 'King Charles the nation's posties need your support.'"

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