

UK postal workers speak on fight against Royal Mail and wider strike movement

Our reporters

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The WSWS spoke with postal workers attending the Communication Workers Union (CWU) rally in London's Parliament Square on Friday, the thirteenth day of national strike action since August.

A postal worker who was part of a large delegation from a Mail Centre in Wolverhampton in the west Midlands said:

“We deserve more than this. It is not fair the way they are treating us. The CEO is to blame but the shareholders are to blame as well. We have come this far and nobody is helping. They want to get rid of us all and bring the casuals in, bring self-employed in and kick us all out.

“They made £750 million last year--£400 million they gave to shareholders. People with 20, 30 years' service are going to get casuals replacing them. They can't do the work, but this is what they want.

“That is what we are fighting for, to save our jobs. The youngsters haven't got a future. It is their future we are fighting for.”

Keith, a CWU area delivery rep at South Central came with a large group from Oxford:

“Everything is at stake, absolutely everything. We haven't had any industrial action since 2009. I have been with Royal Mail for 28 years and this is the most bitter dispute I have ever known. Royal Mail want to take away all our terms and conditions, take away our good quality jobs and drive us down to gig economy employment models.

“I think there is a systemic working-class issue in this country. Greed creates greed. Corporate greed has been around for a while, but corporate greed now is dangerously out of control. Jobs that you can build a life around are going to be extinct if the likes of [Royal Mail CEO Simon] Thompson gets away with what they want. They got away with it at P&O [Ferries]. If they

get away with it with us, there will be another massive company around the corner and they will do exactly the same, attack the working class and take us back years and years, back to the Thatcher years. That is what Thompson wants and that is what the government want.

“[Labour Party leader Sir] Keir Starmer has already said he is not going to repeal the 2016 anti-trade union act. It is bizarre that this is coming from a social democratic party that should be standing up for working people.

“I go to quite a few meetings and I speak on platforms, and I always call for coordinated industrial action, a general strike. You are not really allowed to do coordinated action, but with all the people that are on strike—doctors, nurses, teachers, the rail—all of that tells you that we have an inequality problem in this country. During COVID, the richest people in this country got richer by 10 percent. They say there is not enough money, that is rubbish. The money in this country needs to be distributed in a more equal way.”

Rizwan, a postal worker from Hounslow in west London explained:

“We worked in the pandemic for two years as key workers and now we are striking over terms and conditions. Nurses, rail workers, they were all key workers during the pandemic and now they are all struggling--teachers, everyone, they are all out on strike. So what the government is saying is we will give you two percent or four percent, which is not worth it. Look at the cost of living.

“It's the system and the company. The company is looking after profit not the workers, so that is what we are fighting for.

“We are fighting for our terms and conditions and our pay. What they want is to wipe out all the allowances, sick pay, and bring in Sunday working, flexible hours,

zero-hour contracts. And they want to take 10,000 jobs. They want recruitment to be 30 percent less. We don't want that. We want our terms and conditions up to the minimum level, that is why we are fighting. It is not all about pay.

“I have heard parliament wants to bring in stricter laws against strikes. There should be an investigation. If we are standing here on strike for 13 days, there is something wrong. Same with the nurses. We should organise and investigate, form a committee to look into this matter.”

A postal worker from Tottenham in north London commented:

“I think the company have the backing of the Conservative government. Simon Thompson, he was the NHS Test and Trace boss. The Conservatives put him there. He is now in Royal Mail and that is why he hasn't moved, although lots of parcels are still lying there in delivery offices. He doesn't care about the customer and he doesn't care about us. He just cares about having more money.”

Asked what he thought of workers being described by the governments as “Putin stooges”, the workers replied:

“That's the thing, they have given billions of pounds to support Ukraine, and us, here, we don't have that money. And they say if we upset their demands it will cost billions of pounds of tax payers money, but we are tax payers as well! So rather than giving our money to Ukraine, give it is us!”

A WSWS reporter explained that the money for Ukraine was not for aid but weapons and raised the connection between the proxy war against Russia and austerity at home and the clampdown on workers' rights. The WSWS team distributed the statement for the global anti-war webinar on December 10.

Another postal worker from Tottenham added: “This is supposed to be a first-class country, it doesn't feel like that. I have been to third world countries that have more freedom. A revolution is long overdue in this country. Look at every industry, the trains, the nurses, everyone. I don't believe the unions are conspiring to overthrow this government, but everyone wants to overthrow this government!”

“They want to rip up our terms and conditions and make it into another Amazon. I know what it is like, I worked for them for a year and a half. They give you a

device in a warehouse. If you are idle for 20 seconds, you get a message saying, ‘Carry on working’. If you have a few strikes, you get called into the manager's office. If that happens five times in a week then you are dismissed.

“Are we slaves? Is this what our ancestors fought for? It is elitism. They want to reshape society, the government, everything. A group of billionaires want to have all the wealth and control the rest of us. That is what they want to do and we are saying no to it.”



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