

# Workers speak from the picket line during UK Royal Mail Christmas strikes

Our reporters

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*World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to striking postal workers involved in national walkouts on December 23/24.

**Matt**, a postal worker of 20 years was on the picket line at **Alder Hills Delivery Office, Bournemouth**. Co-worker **Neil** has 25 years at Royal Mail.

Matt said, “When we had our pay review at the start of this year, they tried to impose a new contract on us all, losing sick pay, changing hours, changing working conditions, working Sundays and losing allowances. We’re on strike to protect our jobs and this service.

“Most of these people who are on the picket today and many of those that are inside [working] are really struggling. At least half the posties that are working today are doing so because they’ve got no choice, they will lose their homes.”

Neil said, “No one can afford to lose money but at the end of the day, we can lose a bit of money now [striking] or lose a lot of money in the future.”

Matt responded, “It’s worth noting that we’ve already lost more money than we’ll ever get in this pay deal. Even if it was a 20 percent pay rise, if all the other conditions come in [Sunday working, cutting sick pay, job losses etc.] we’ll still be worse off. The strategy from the company is clearly to casualise our workforce. No one is getting full time contracts anymore. Somebody that works with me does the exact same hours that I get but is only on a 30 hour contract. So, every time he goes off sick, every time he goes on holiday, he gets a real-terms pay cut of couple hundred a week.”

Neil said, “For the last 10-15 years, whenever a full-timer leaves, he’s not replaced by a full-time worker. It’s always been 30 hours or below.”

Matt added, “And they’ll still be expected to do

overtime, to do the same job as a full time worker.”

Neil added, “The gulf in class terms is wide and it’s just getting wider and wider as years go on. It’s them and us. These big CEOs are getting paid multi-million pounds a year for doing practically nothing.

“We’ve done the work. We’ve made them over £700 million pounds profit. [CEO Simon] Thompson has given away three quarters of that to shareholders. Then within a month, he’s telling us, the workers, that they’re losing a million pounds a day.

“Last October, something happened at Amazon, and they couldn’t fulfil their obligations to deliver. So, they chucked everything they had to deliver at us. Us workers ended up doing overtime. We were beat down for those three months. My workload normally is one cage of parcels a day. With Amazon’s I was going out with three cages a day! We’re talking about 100 parcels a day, plus my normal workload.

“Our workload that we’re not getting done because of strike action, DPD, Evri, all the rest of them, they can’t cope with it. They’re stockpiling everything because they can’t get it out of their warehouses. So, when people say, ‘Royal Mail can go down the pan, I use Amazon, etc.’—they don’t do what we do. We go to 32 million addresses a day, with parcels and letters. No other courier service is going to do that.”

**Jason**, a postal worker for 28 years and **Chris** were picketing at **Dorset Mail Centre, Bournemouth**.

Jason said, “A lot of the reason for the strike is the cost of living. It’s also to do with the terms and conditions. It’s about the working hours, holiday pay, sick pay, and bringing in new recruits on 20 percent less pay and worse terms and conditions.

“It’s a difficult time of year, with bills, mortgages and rent which is going up and up. There have been a few colleagues who have retired early in the past few

months because they've been here a long time and they've had enough."

Chris said the company's pay offer to the workforce "is over 18 months, and they're not going to backdate it to April when they should've paid us. So really it's like two years. It's more like 4 percent."

At Royal Mail's **Manchester Sorting & Delivery Office**, a driver of 45 years, who started as a messenger boy delivering telegrams at 16, condemned the privatisation of the service in 2013. "They've sold everything off to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. That's all privatisation is—capitalism. The working class makes them richer, while workers are faced with food banks and poorer conditions.

"If they hadn't sold it off, the government would be making £758 million, that's how much profit Royal Mail made in May. Then they gave shareholders £500 million. Three weeks later they said they're losing a million a day.

"They [Royal Mail executives] told the *Daily Telegraph* they've got a £1.7 billion war chest to break the strike."

The Communication Workers Union said that it would support a "proper" 9 percent day deal, well below rampant inflation running at 14 percent. The striker said, "They're not giving us a 9 percent rise, they're taking all our allowances off us. We'll be £27 a week worse off."

Referring to Keir Starmer he continued, "How can you have a Sir in charge of the Labour Party? What we need is a party for the workers, a brand new party. Frances O'Grady [former Trades Union Congress leader who enters the House of Lords in January as Baroness O'Grady of Upper Holloway] will do five days a week and two, and a half hours a day for £300 a day.

"Unless you get the workers together, nothing will happen. This is an example of the unions not striking together. We've got the CWU in the Royal Mail, we've got Unite [union] managers doing postmen's jobs. Unite told them not to, but they've not come on site to tell them. Why have we got separate unions? That's how they got casuals coming in, working with the managers, otherwise Royal Mail would be completely shut.

"During the pandemic we were getting all the COVID tests, we were delivering them to every hospital. We didn't make one mistake. They praised us.

The managers just tick boxes, they don't know the job. The same managers are now trying to sack us. The harassment and bullying in there!" he said, pointing to the depot.

Driver **Steve** has worked at Royal Mail for 34 years. He said, "Simon Thompson wants to run it as a business. We get paid by the hour, not parcel, so if you finish deliveries early, they want money back off you. It's not a service anymore, they don't care about quality of service, but profits for shareholders."

"They want to get rid of thousands of us and employ casuals so they don't have to give sick pay," added Karl.

Another driver with 40 years' experience, said, "Energy should be nationalised. The railways, Royal Mail, the prison service should all be nationalised. It's GB Limited. Everything leads to profit."

Expressing support for nurses, he said, "With nurses it's a vocation. They're dragging themselves to work. If you get nurses going on strike, something is seriously wrong, when you get a bunch of people who've never been on strike before.

"In the separate disputes, it's terms and conditions, that's what all the strikes are about. [At Royal Mail] if you've been on sick for four months, and the doctor says you can't go back to work, you used to get 12 months' severance pay. Now Royal Mail say, you've already had four months, so you're only getting eight months."



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