

Sellout being prepared in closed-door talks between Royal Mail and CWU

Tony Robson
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Postal workers have picked up on the undeniable stench of a sellout hanging over the closed-door talks between Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and are up in arms.

CWU General Secretary Dave Ward on Thursday March 2 stated at an online meeting with postal workers that a deal would be announced March 12 to settle the long-running dispute over a pitiful pay award, the tearing up of terms and conditions and 10,000 redundancies. The deadline came and went without any response.

On March 13 the CWU produced a vaguely worded statement claiming “progress” in certain areas had been made, adding that negotiations would continue. The cursory five paragraph statement ended with the throw-away line, “We will update you as soon as we can.”

The “update” appeared in the form of yet another joint statement from the CWU and Royal Mail, demonstrating that the union bureaucracy is conspiring with management and reading from the same hymn sheet on the financial and competitive demands of the company. Postal workers are being kept in the dark about what is being cooked up at the arbitration service ACAS, chaired by the former leader of Trades Union Congress, Brendan Barber.

Failing to reveal any details of what constitutes “progress”, the central purpose of the communication was to restate a commitment to the joint statement between Royal Mail and the CWU agreed March 2 over the implementation of revision activity.

The cost-cutting exercise involves extending the delivery and collection rounds of postal workers and reducing staffing levels. The CWU promoted the agreement as ending “executive action” by management in which the measures were imposed unilaterally. But this was based on the undertaking that

CWU representatives were fully on board with the process. This has proceeded under the excuse of “reducing workplace tensions”, which means suppressing postal workers’ opposition and giving Royal Mail free rein.

The clearest expression of this has been the CWU Postal Executive Committee ignoring the 96 percent mandate for the renewal of strike action returned in a ballot on February 16. The CWU had declared, “Win the ballot, win the dispute”, but immediately protected Royal Mail from further strike action by 115,000 postal workers by re-entering negotiations. The plans of Royal Mail had been upended by 18 days of national strike action since last August. But the last action was on Christmas Eve, as the CWU ran down the clock on the live strike mandates and cancelled strike action on February 16/17 following a legal challenge by Royal Mail.

The agreement to enforce revisions to cut costs and increase workloads confirms that any final deal reached on pay and changes between the CWU and the Royal Mail will prioritise corporate profits and sell out the fight against far wider restructuring. The insistence of Royal Mail on overturning terms and conditions to establish a benchmark modelled on Amazon and other rival carriers in parcel deliveries has fuelled postal workers opposition.

Postal workers challenged the latest update from the CWU when it appeared on its Facebook and Twitter accounts on March 13, explaining that the joint statement on revision activity had produced no let-up in the management offensive and had instead seen the CWU enforce these attacks.

Around a hundred critical comments were directed against the CWU on its Twitter page.

“The update is, that there is no update. RM are taking

us all for mugs. This is a big moment for the CWU, because they may lose all support of the workforce if this doesn't end up well. They're already allowing their reps to advise us to accept bad 'revisions'."

"More talks is just a bloody joke! Changes that haven't been agreed in our office were implemented over 3 weeks ago, I've lost my duty and my shift pattern and my union reps have no answers for me. Nearly 20 years of service mean nothing to Royal Mail, fed up is an understatement."

"Revisions forced through 2 weeks ago in our depot. Told they were put in place before a 'deadline' so we have to take. Questioned rep about this and they agreed with management. 100 extra units added to my duty. Becoming a joke. People leaving in droves."

"[O]ur office is already being destroyed with change[s] in times, shift patterns and work loads being made unmanageable, and judging by the responses this is pretty universal. And you just continue to talk and talk."

"Unagreed changes are happening all over the country, I can see my 33 years as a cwu member coming to an end very soon."

In addition to the union-company lineup over the detrimental changes to start times, de-staffing and increased workloads, many raised how the CWU executive had made itself unaccountable to postal workers, including by flouting of their strike mandate.

"For a union with 'communication' in its name, you have been poor with telling your members how things are going. A massive yes vote was delivered and it's like you haven't acknowledged your workforce since. Changes have already been made in many offices."

"What a joke more talks ...until when?? Does our voice of solidarity not count for anything... you were delighted with ballot results but nothing but getting more talks it's a complete and utter joke now.. you'll take our union dues every week but not delivering anything for us!!!!"

Postal workers demanded the strike mandate should be honoured immediately to overturn executive action and end cooperation with all revisions. This elementary demand places them in outright opposition to Ward, who is committed to completion of revision activity by April, citing the financial difficulties facing the company.

In response to a significant number of comments

about leaving the CWU out of disgust, one postal worker considering the same action advised others not to do so before voting down a sell-out deal to make clear the bureaucracy does not speak for the workers.

"Anyone thinking about stopping their subs (I know I am) should wait as we will need everyone to vote no to a bad deal coming our way. Then stop."

The oppositional sentiments expressed by postal workers across social media proves that there exists a constituency to wage a fight against a sellout deal by the CWU bureaucracy.

An alternative means to wage the fight is being sought. The World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) article "Communication Workers Union deepens collusion with Royal Mail to sell-out strike" was shared widely across social media and was viewed over 50,000 times.

Postal workers need to go beyond criticising the cosy set up between Royal Mail and the CWU apparatus which overrides their interests. Genuinely democratic organs of workers struggle must be built—rank-and-file committees—which will expose the naked profiteering by the privatised utility and advance demands for a genuine pay increase, a defence of jobs, and opposition to a sweatshop charter to plough further millions to shareholders and major investors.

We encourage postal workers to contact the WSWS to report on their conditions and to discuss how to take forward the fight.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact