

UK postal workers describe brutal exploitation by Royal Mail and complicity of Communication Workers Union

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The World Socialist Web Site has received correspondence from postal workers across the UK in response to its March 14 article, “Sell-out being prepared in closed-door talks between Royal Mail and CWU.”

The strike at Royal Mail by 115,000 postal workers, the first nationwide action since privatisation a decade ago, was in the forefront of the UK’s strike movement from last summer with 18 days of action taken by the end of the year.

It was provoked by a 2 percent pay award imposed last June, a more than 8 percent pay cut in real terms even based on the lower CPI rate of inflation. A 9 percent revised and final offer in November, which included the miserly 2 percent—spread over 18 months and tied to productivity strings—was rejected.

The company announced last autumn plans to make 10,000 redundancies by August this year. Postal workers have fought to defend their jobs and upend plans to transform the mail service into a gig economy-style employer in line with rivals like Amazon.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) under General Secretary Dave Ward and his deputy Andy Furey has sat on strike action since the beginning of the year and ignored the renewed strike mandate of 96 percent last month to pursue backroom negotiations with Royal Mail. Talk of a negotiated settlement is based on accepting the dictates of the Royal Mail board and investors with references to financial difficulties and market conditions the centrepiece of joint union-company statements.

The CWU Postal Executive has focussed on collaboration with Royal Mail specifically over revisions activity, aimed at cost-cutting, increasing workloads and de-staffing. It agreed a joint statement with Royal Mail March 2 concerning local revision activity, claiming it would end unilateral “executive action” by management

to enforce changes. Postal workers have exposed this as a lie. The CWU has been co-opted, working alongside management in the cost-cutting exercise. Royal Mail is trashing its legal requirements under the Universal Service Obligation (USO) to provide deliveries to deliver letters to every address in the UK six days a week, withholding sick pay and turning the postal service into a cash cow for investors.

Comments have been anonymised to protect postal workers from any retribution by management. Since the start of the dispute around 300 CWU reps and members have been disciplined, suspended or dismissed. The CWU has left the fate of victimised members to a review set up by the arbitration service ACAS

Postal workers wrote in from mail centres and delivery offices in Hemel Hempstead, Peterborough, Coventry, Brighton, Southampton, Birmingham, Blackpool and Dumfries (Scotland).

“I have worked for Royal Mail over 30 years and I feel so disgusted with the treatment all the workers are getting from Royal Mail. The managers don’t care about giving a service. If the walk is not covered it is left for the postie to do. It could be weeks before the walk goes out which is disgusting. There could be important letters for delivery. I am getting the attitude as if Royal Mail are not bothered about the service, why should I bother? But with the way Royal Mail treat us we make a big effort as posties to provide a service. I also feel that the union will sell us out with a deal that is more in their favour as the deals over the years have been a lose to the members.”

“42 years’ service with Royal Mail. I have been given 64 more calls on my delivery and expected to do my round in the same time. Absolutely IMPOSSIBLE!!! Start

times are to change in September so I will be finishing my rural round at about 4.30pm-5.00pm in the winter when it will be pitch dark, very unsafe!!! Who wants a letter at that time? They don't care about our welfare or safety just about profit nowadays."

"I have 40 years' service and I cannot remember a time as bad as it is now. Managers treat you with no respect, workload's undoable, mail left on frames despite our CEO denying this. Working conditions awful, our toilets have been out of action for four weeks now and when you have about 80 men you can imagine what it's like. We have 20 plus vacancies with staff still leaving. How can the job get done? I can't see it changing except for the worse."

"Our revision was implemented on March 13th without agreement from the union. Parcels and mail have been left undelivered since then. Letters were left before this date as we were told to prioritise parcels. Parcels were never left behind but have been since then. After 38 years in the service it's a disgrace what it's become."

"We voted in our office for no later start, which would mean working till 2.30pm plus on a Saturday. Still no USO coverage, still prioritising packets, later starts coming in. How about negotiating a decent redundancy package for all of those who've applied, i.e., me, instead of forcing people to leave by changing contracts without people's consent. They're supposed to be working for us not Royal Mail. Although voting for strike action, I for one, and know a number of my colleagues, will not strike again. Get your act together or lose every single member and your own job."

"Our office is forcing through changes most of which will make our job impossible. Still we only have to work to time, anything we can't complete we'll bring back. Which doesn't help our customers. Royal Mail is being destroyed by Simon Thompson CEO and no one seems to care. Sad times."

"The biggest thing is the way so-called resign is being introduced, with no agreements and seniority out the window. There are postmen like myself been here over 30 years who have been told we have no duty and postmen who have been there for 2 years being handpicked and given duties. I was told my 4 night week has gone and was offered 5 nights Saturday to Wednesday. I was also

told if I didn't take it, I could be made compulsory redundant. They are trying to bully us and some people are given to thinking they will lose their jobs. There is no consideration for all the part timers who work around family life. No consideration for loyalty over the years. There was a time we would do anything together to get the job done. This is now out the window. I have spent 33 years based on seniority and now have simply been cast aside like so many others. When will they realise if the workforce is happy they will get more out of us. I now have no time for Royal Mail or the bullying so called managers."

"I was off sick for three days with a bad back, I was informed by my manager that I would NOT get paid, even though my contract states that I should get paid and I met all the criteria to be paid. I watched the CEO Simon Thompson blatantly lie when questioned in parliament about employees not being paid for sick, when I was sitting here with proof in my wage slip that he's a liar. I have since resigned from my position because of this and a month on have still not been paid what I am rightfully due."

"Since privatisation of Royal Mail it has been an endless round of directors and CEOs who have all milked the company for their own benefit. There are no exceptions. Royal Mail should always have been kept in government ownership. Bent politicians who had backhanders to get the Royal Mail privatised have never been held accountable for the ruination of a special UK company. It is so bad now it cannot recover."

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