

How to fight back at Royal Mail—A meeting for rank-and-file workers

Socialist Equality Party (UK)
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The Socialist Equality Party (UK) and the World Socialist Web Site will be hosting an online meeting of rank-and-file postal workers next Monday, March 27, at 7pm to discuss taking forward the fight against attacks on living standards and working conditions, and the victimisation of their colleagues. Register for the meeting [here](#).

Royal Mail (RM) workers are looking for a way to stop their fight with the company being turned into a rout by the Communication Workers Union (CWU). Scores have been written in to the *World Socialist Web Site* from across the country explaining the brutal exploitation in mail centres and delivery offices and their frustration and anger that strikes have been blocked.

In August last year, CWU members delivered two near unanimous mandates authorising industrial action through to February 17, 2023, against a savage real terms pay cut and the imposition of sweatshop conditions.

They carried out 18 days of determined strikes up to December 24. But in the three months since, the union has organised nothing, cancelling action planned for February 16/17 after bowing to a legal threat from Royal Mail.

A new strike vote revealed on February 16 gave another resounding 96 percent majority in favour. General Secretary Dave Ward said the union would allow the “ballot result to breathe”. But it has smothered it, burying the dispute in closed-door talks at the arbitration service ACAS.

By demobilising workers, the CWU has allowed Royal Mail to go on the offensive. In a company review published last May, RM directors announced “a number of cost saving initiatives. Already in deployment, or associated with agreements already made with our trade unions, are initiatives totalling over £350 million.”

“Effective working relationships with our trade unions are key to the delivery of ongoing efficiency benefits,” it added.

This conspiracy against postal workers was brought into the open on March 2 this year with the publication of a joint CWU-Royal Mail statement. It pledged to find “the most constructive way to work together in local revision activity,” designed to meet the cost-cutting agenda of the company with increased workloads and reduced staffing levels.

References to the “challenging financial, economic and market conditions” facing Royal Mail were highlighted. The meaning was clear: workers must sacrifice their health, pay and jobs to boost returns for Royal Mail’s wealthy shareholders. No wonder the CWU has dropped all reference to the hundreds of millions paid out in dividends in recent years!

This cannot continue. Against the CWU’s sabotage, rank-and-file postal workers must agree a plan of action based on the experience of countless other disputes and union-endorsed sell-outs.

End the talks and resume strike action!

The Royal Mail-CWU talks are a cover for the attacks on postal workers being carried out in every mail centre and delivery office. They are being used to prepare a sell-out of the struggle behind members’ backs.

All company-union discussions should end, and the strike action for which there is an overwhelming mandate be immediately resumed. Emergency branch meetings should be organised to set a date for strikes to begin, agree a programme of action and a concrete pay demand.

Stop management’s workplace revisions!

The damage Royal Mail and the CWU have inflicted during the dispute must be reversed. Workloads have been piled up and workers dehumanised, their activity measured down to the second by electronic trackers. When they fall ill, they are harassed by management with demands they return to work the next day or provide proof of sickness.

Red lines must be drawn, with Royal Mail put on notice

that any revision of schedules or workloads which worsens conditions will be met with collective action. An injury to one is an injury to all.

Open Royal Mail's books!

The company and the union both portray Royal Mail as a poverty-stricken enterprise which cannot afford to provide workers a decent standard of living. This lie must be fully exposed.

More than £240 million was paid out in dividends to shareholders in 2020, and £467 million after a bumper 2021. Since privatisation in 2013, £1.9 billion has been paid out in dividends—enough to have lifted the annual salary of every Royal Mail worker by over £1,300. Royal Mail's CEO Simon Thompson was given a salary of £525,000, a bonus of £140,000 and pension payments of £86,000 in 2020-21, while food banks were set up in company workplaces.

No end to the strike while a single worker is victimised!

Roughly 300 workers, including CWU reps, have been disciplined, suspended or dismissed since the start of the dispute. This intimidation is reminiscent of the building workers and miners' strikes of the 1970s and 80s and demands an uncompromising response. But the CWU has thrown these workers to the wolves, saying cases will be reviewed by an "independent" person appointed by ACAS.

Victimised workers must be defended by the rank-and-file. Strikes should continue until every colleague has been reinstated with full compensation. No one left behind.

Remove the union leadership!

The leadership of the CWU has sabotaged the strike and will act to stop this programme of action being implemented. This is what members get for the nearly £28 million they give the union each year in dues, nearly £12 million of which is spent on "Remuneration and expenses of staff" and from which Ward personally takes a £103,000 salary and £26,000 in pension contributions.

These self-satisfied bureaucrats have lost the confidence of the membership and have no right to continue in their positions. Emergency branch meetings should pass motions of no confidence to remove them.

Form rank-and-file committees!

Stopping the CWU's sell-out will require rank-and-file workers to organise themselves independently of the union through their own committees led by the most trusted workers. The betrayal of the strike is not simply a question of a few bad leaders but of a whole union

apparatus, working hand-in-glove with the company and hostile to the interest of the membership. Power must be taken away from the bureaucracy by the rank-and-file.

These experiences are not unique to the CWU and Royal Mail. NHS workers are fighting back against the outrageous sellout of their dispute orchestrated by the health unions, after weeks of closed-doors talks and cancelled strikes. Internationally, workers at Deutsche Post DHL in Germany have already set up a rank-and-file committee to oppose the Verdi union's sabotage of their struggle.

Rank-and-file committees can reach out to these and other workers throughout the sector. Royal Mail is slashing working conditions citing the need to compete with rivals like Amazon. Under the leadership of the unions, Amazon workers are a competitive benchmark for Royal Mail workers. Led by rank-and-file committees, they would be comrades in struggle against both corporations.

The same applies to all other workers. The fight at Royal Mail is part of a growing wave of industrial disputes across Europe and the world, as the working class resists cuts to pay and public services designed to enrich shareholders, fill the coffers of the super-rich and the giant corporations and fund NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine.

Millions are striking and protesting in France over attempts to raise the pension age and in Greece over the deadly consequences of gutted social infrastructure.

Workers see the way the Royal Mail dispute is headed. Nothing will change unless they change it. Monday's meeting is a chance for a free and confidential discussion of these vital questions among those who want to fight.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact