

UK: Communication Workers Union ditches talk of renewed strike action

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The Communication Workers Union (CWU)'s threat of renewed strike action has proved to be hot air.

Last Friday evening, CWU General Secretary Dave Ward said in a video to members that he understood the “anger” and “frustration” of postal workers over their treatment by Royal Mail, claiming that if it did not reach an agreement and stop the attacks by early next week “we will serve notice for strike action.”

This grandstanding had ended with a whimper by Wednesday, when the CWU announced it was to re-enter talks with Royal Mail without pointing to a single concession from the company.

In a perfunctory message to the membership the union stated, “Talks with Royal Mail will resume tomorrow. We will keep you fully updated with any major developments. Thank you for your continued support.”

Workers were scathing on the CWU's social media accounts. Facebook comments included, “Get the strikes called!! Royal Mail threatening so we back off...” and, “So the strikes that were supposed to be announced ‘early this week’ if a deal wasn’t met are out the window then.” On Twitter, postal workers compared the latest update with Groundhog Day, asking, “More talks, really???” and, “Where are the strike dates? Have they made you chicken out with the administration threat.”

After 115,000 postal workers took 18 days of national strike action from last August to the end of the year, the CWU has ensured no further action in the last three months. The 96 percent mandate to renew strike action delivered in mid-February was ignored as Ward and CWU Acting Deputy General Secretary Andy Furey resumed closed-door talks with Royal Mail, overseen by the arbitration service ACAS.

The CWU leadership is not an innocent bystander in the attacks by Royal Mail, it is a joint partner. The way was paved for management's latest round of attacks by the joint company-union statement of March 2 agreeing CWU

re-engagement with local revision activity—the cost-cutting exercise aimed at increasing workloads while reducing staffing levels.

Talk of renewed strike action by the CWU Postal Executive was a ploy to fend off postal workers' mounting opposition to the back-breaking levels of exploitation which have intensified with the union's own seal of approval.

As well as challenging the CWU on its social media accounts, workers have written to the *World Socialist Web Site* from around the country describing the “prison like” conditions in their workplaces and criticising the union hierarchy for “selling them down the river.”

The CWU leadership has continually postponed an online meeting with the membership where it would have to account for its actions. Instead it held an online briefing of 500 union reps on Saturday to shore-up its position while avoiding having to confront rank-and-file anger.

Renewed talks with Royal Mail will resume the company's relentless demand for the workforce's complete surrender, on which the union agreement on revisions is just a down payment.

This can be deciphered from a CWU update published Wednesday. While claiming “progress” has been made in certain areas it states that the changes demanded “if unchecked, will see Royal Mail Group turned into another Uber-style employer.”

On the question of revisions alone it states, “Royal Mail plans to commence yet another round of revisions imminently with the continued threat of imposition and even more unachievable targets.”

The update is full of slippery evasions and unevidenced claims that the company is “starting to move” or considering taking a “different approach”, contradicted by everything else the union describes. It is forced to admit that all the issues which led postal workers to strike eight months ago remain in place. These include the hiring of a

new entrants on inferior pay and terms, attacks on sickness entitlements and the increased use of owner drivers at Parcelforce.

In addition to this charter of sweatshop conditions, postal workers confront an extended real terms pay cut. Without providing any detail, the CWU's announcement states, "the offer on the table is not enough. Royal Mail Group have made a three-year offer, but it includes no further money to cover last year and no back pay."

Put plainly, the "final and best offer" made last November of 9 percent over 18 months, which incorporated the 2 percent already imposed and a £500 lump sum tied to productivity strings, has not changed one iota.

The CWU update refers to media reports of Royal Mail threatening to put the business into administration but adds that the company has made no statement "on the record" over this issue.

The union is regurgitating these threats to browbeat workers into accept a sell-out deal. Ward has constantly referred to the "financial difficulties" facing the company while a deafening silence is maintained over the more than £500 million handed over to shareholders and investors in the past two years. In contrast, postal workers have demanded the return of these profits they produced and their redistribution to fund a pay rise and protect their terms and livelihoods.

Ward and Furey have lost the confidence of postal workers, having conspired with management behind their backs and agreed further attacks, while undemocratically overruling the vote to renew strike action.

In opposition to the facts being created on the ground through the continued collusion between the CWU and Royal Mail, postal workers must draw up their own red lines. Decision-making must be put in the hands of the rank-and-file who are on the front line of the fight. This requires overturning the entire union apparatus, with the membership deciding where their dues go—starting with strike pay, rather than the six-figure salary which Ward commands.

Against the claim that postal workers' interests can be aligned with the company, there must be a frontal challenge to the looting operations of Royal Mail.

The Socialist Equality Party has produced a statement to outline the basis for such a strategy, "How to fight back at Royal Mail," and is holding an online meeting for rank-and-file postal workers this Sunday, April 2 at 7 p.m.

To succeed, postal workers cannot wage their fight against Royal Mail as if it were an isolated struggle. They

must organise alongside other key sections of workers. This includes their fellow workers at the Post Office where Ward and Furey have recommended a paltry 9 percent deal *covering three years* to end the nationwide strikes begun last May, demanded by members to fight a pay freeze!

Many major struggles, such as those by rail workers, National Health Service workers, teachers, lecturers and civil servants, are now posed point-blank with the need for the rank-and-file to take charge of their fight or accept union-endorsed real terms pay cuts. Social infrastructure is being bled dry to funnel yet more wealth upwards and impose a new era of austerity.

This is taking place amid the largest upsurge of the working class in over a generation, in Europe and internationally. The mass opposition in France to Emmanuel "President of the Rich" Macron's attack on pensions is in the forefront. This has pitted workers not only against his use of emergency powers but against a servile union bureaucracy preoccupied with containing the class struggle rather than defeating the lurch to dictatorial forms of rule.

In Germany, 100,000 postal workers voted 86 percent for indefinite strike action but their union, Verdi, ignored the mandate and brought back an offer similar to the one rejected, which would leave them 20 percent worse off than in 2010 in real terms. Postal workers have formed a Postal Action Committee to organise a mass rejection of the deal as the first step toward a no confidence vote in the Verdi leadership and the formation of a strike committee to take the fight forward.

Postal workers at Royal Mail are confronted with the same task as their co-workers internationally. Sunday's meeting will be joined by international speakers who can share these vital experiences. We encourage all postal workers to register to attend now.



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