Postal workers at UK's Royal Mail vote to establish rank-and-file committee

Our reporters
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A meeting of postal workers Sunday evening called by the Socialist Equality Party (UK) voted unanimously to establish a rank-and-file committee, endorsing the following resolution:

> This meeting supports the formation of a rank-and-file committee of postal workers. The aim of the committee will be to mobilise workers against Royal Mail's attacks and lead a fight for an inflation-busting pay rise, a defence of terms and conditions, an end to all job cuts and the overturning of victimisations.
>
> We understand that this fight can only be waged in opposition to the Communication Workers Union leadership and apparatus, which is acting as Royal Mail's partner. This is the common experience of workers in all industries all over the world, whose unions act as an industrial police force for management.
>
> Millions of workers in the UK are waging the same fight in a strike wave ongoing since last summer. This is part of an international struggle against global corporations and governments seeking to impose the immense cost of pandemic corporate bailouts and rampant inflation on the working class.
>
> Our allies are workers in France waging a heroic battle against "President of the Rich" Emmanuel Macron, in Germany, including in the dispute at Deutsche Post, and throughout Europe and internationally.
>
> To unite with our class brothers and sisters, the committee will seek affiliation to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which provides a means through which workers globally can develop a common plan of struggle.

Chairing the meeting, SEP Assistant National Secretary Tom Scripps explained that it had been called following an "unprecedented response" to a series of *World Socialist Web Site* articles on the industrial dispute at Royal Mail. Hundreds of thousands of people had read the WSWS coverage and well over 100 postal workers had written in outlining their experiences.

On March 22, the SEP published a statement, "How to fight back at Royal Mail," proposing a plan of action for the rank-and-file and announcing a meeting in which a "free and confidential discussion" could take place on "taking forward the fight against attacks on living standards and working conditions, and the victimisation of their colleagues."

Tony Robson, a leading writer for the WSWS, introduced the discussion. He explained, "This past fortnight the *World Socialist Web Site* has been in discussion with postal workers across the country at mail centres and delivery offices who have contacted us to speak out both against the exploitative practices imposed by Royal Mail and the collusion of the CWU."

Describing the opposition to the union's attempted sellout of postal workers' struggle, Robson argued, "the opposition needs a voice, a means to organise and a strategy to fight," and set out the demands advanced in the SEP's March 22 statement.

These were to "End all talks and the resume strike action," fight "for an inflation-busting pay rise", "Open Royal Mail's books", "End all victimisations" and "Oppose all company intimidation."

Such demands, Robson explained, could "only be fought for against the sabotage by the CWU leadership. They can only be taken forward by establishing a rank-and-file committee to take the dispute out of the hands of the CWU officials and return control to postal workers."

Beginning the discussion, postal workers expressed the disappointment and isolation they felt as a result of the CWU's actions and asked on what basis an alternative organisation to the union would have to be formed.

Robson explained that workers have enormous collective strength, but putting this into action required a new political

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perspective based on workers rejecting any idea of shared interests between themselves and Royal Mail's managers and shareholders and instead turning to their allies in the international working class.

His points were underscored by Alex Lantier, National Secretary of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste, who spoke on the lessons of the struggle in France against the government of Emmanuel "President of the Rich" Macron.

Lantier insisted that what has emerged in France is "an objectively revolutionary situation" in which the demand for a general strike to bring down Macron and end his pension attacks once and for all has "overwhelming support," confirmed by interviews conducted by the WSWS and even the polls of the corporate media.

Yet, even under these most favourable of conditions for a struggle, the trade union bureaucracy in France is doing everything it can to block the movement.

In this context, he said, the decision of rank-and-file postal workers in the UK to come together to the discuss the formation of a committee was extremely important. Those in attendance were "showing the way forward" by creating a "forum in which workers can hold democratic discussions and organise independently" of the treacherous union bureaucracies which in every country are hostile to the struggles of the working class.

One comment submitted by a worker asked, "How can we coordinate action internationally?"

Answering this "critical question," Robson replied, "The Socialist Equality Party and its sister organisations internationally have been assisting workers around the world to build these new and democratic means of struggle, to fight against the sell-outs by the union bureaucracy and to unify the struggles against the employers and governments. This has been through the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees."

This work was brought into the meeting by contributions from a postal worker in Australia, and Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei member Dietmar Gaisenkersting, the industrial editor of the WSWS in Germany.

The member of the Australia Post Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee explained they had been "keenly following" events at Royal Mail which showed "striking similarities" to their own experiences.

He described how "the pandemic was cynically used as an excuse to introduce long-held plans to restructure Australia Post, which included ending every-day delivery" forcing "all posties to take on two full rounds" and leading to a "massive increase in parcels and packets" as well as injuries.

The union "did everything in its power to make sure we didn't go on strike to fight these changes… They signed a memorandum of understanding with senior management behind the backs of the membership."

Not long after the changes had to be abandoned amid the chaos they caused, a new version of the same scheme is being reintroduced.

The postal worker continued, "We formed our rank-and-file committee to fight these attacks and to share information about what is taking place because the union tells us nothing. They connive behind our backs on rotten deals with the company…

"Our struggles are international, but the union leaders are doing everything in their power to isolate and divide us… We can't go forward one inch with these pro-company unions."

He pledged, "Our postal workers' rank-and-file committee will do everything in our power to support and develop your struggle."

Gaisenkersting explained how he had been actively "involved in setting up a rank-and-file-committee in Germany with postal workers to oppose the United Services Union (Verdi) and put the social interests of workers before the profit interests of the corporation."

While postal workers struggle to get by on their salaries, he said, union representatives sit on the supervisory board of Deutsche Post and "regularly approve the billions in payments to the shareholders," €2.2 billion last year alone, plus €2 billion in share buybacks.

In the last days, Verdi had blocked a strike to impose a real terms wage cut.

Only "one conclusion" could be drawn: the need "to form action committees in all branches and to build an alternative to Verdi now. Our interests can only be asserted in confrontation with the union. It is on the side of the government and company."

He added, "We have emphasised from the beginning that postal workers must see themselves as part of the European workers' movement" and that "Only by breaking the control of the trade union apparatus can we unleash our true power and strength."

With the foundation of their own rank-and-file committee, postal workers in the UK are now able to take up the same fight. Those who want to join the Postal Workers Rank-and-file Committee should get in touch today.

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