CWU announces drawn-out ballot at Royal Mail to stifle opposition

“I won’t accept an offer because it’s the best of a bad deal”

Tony Robson
28 April 2023

After five days of non-stop promotion of their sell-out deal with Royal Mail, CWU General Secretary Dave Ward and his deputy Andy Furey announced on Wednesday a postal ballot of members commencing May 17 and closing June 7.

Ward, Furey and the CWU’s Postal Executive are fully aware that such is the outpouring of opposition that if a ballot on their rotten deal were held tomorrow, it would be thrown out.

The CWU has already been dubbed the “non-communication workers union” and “Communication Management Union” by postal workers, expressing the widely shared view that the CWU bureaucracy is accountable only to the company not the members it is supposed to represent.

The official rationale for the drawn-out ballot timetable—to give members time to consider the agreement—met a scathing response from members on the CWU’s Facebook page, including:

• “NO, you’re dragging it out as much as you can in the hope the ‘NO voters’ are going to just give in for the sake of not wanting the stress and vote yes to get this mess finished and over and done with.
“Give us the vote now and save us the barrage of communications all over again, this time not from RM drones but now the Communication Workers Union drainers. If you bothered to check the comments in all of the recent posts there is a mass of unhappy members and as such you should not put further stress and pressure on the finalisation of this ‘deal’ by adding time to the dispute so you can push your propaganda.”

• “Would not bother wasting your time and money with a ballot as the majority of people on here are not gonna accept this terrible deal. You sold us a pipe dream of “pay rise with no strings” you’ve sold us short and let us down. The job with this agreement isn’t worth working and you’ll see a max exodus of people leaving. We gave up a lot for this fight, put out faith in you only to be sold short. Shame on you.”

• Sorry, it’s a no. Scaremongering on the financial future of a company that put itself in that position by giving its profits away, should never see the workers having to accept a less than favourable deal on the back of it.”

Postal workers voted by 96 percent to renew strike action in mid-February, but this was overruled by Ward, Furey and the Postal Executive. Their secret negotiations over the past months were the groundwork for a sell-out deal that amounts to the biggest attack on postal workers in history. This started with the March 2 Joint Agreement on a wave of revisions to drive up workloads and strip out hours and jobs.

As chief CWU negotiators, Ward and Furey announced their deal just under a fortnight ago, on April 15, and the following week the CWU Postal Executive fully endorsed the 35-page agreement. A National Briefing to divisional, branch and area reps followed on April 21. This was used to present a face of unanimity. The CWU reported there were “20 separate contributions” including by reps who questioned or opposed the deal, but there was no motion moved to reject the deal in its entirety.

Shamefully, the meeting included a standing ovation by reps for Labour MP Darren Jones who attended the meeting and who the CWU presented as a saviour of postal workers.

Jones has hailed the CWU’s rotten deal which is fully in line with Labour’s right-wing pro-business agenda.

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Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has announced that if elected he will create a tri-partite alliance with the unions, employers and government—it will be used to suppress wages, drive "productivity" and suppress strikes. Congratulating the CWU on Twitter, Jones stated, "Too many bosses think they can force through lower pay, fewer protection and more tech surveillance without consequence."

But this is precisely what the agreement delivers. Friday's meeting kickstarted a disinformation campaign by CWU headquarters to sell its deal. This included threadbare claims to have protected jobs and conditions and empty boasts that "Uberisation has been cancelled". But multiple videos from Ward, Furey and other stooges did not survive their first encounter with reality.

Postal workers who were finally able to clap eyes on the 35-page agreement immediately challenged the CWU leadership's self-aggrandisement and deception. On social media they catalogued the many red lines the CWU bureaucracy had crossed, including a de facto pay cut, the slashing of sick pay entitlements, seasonal work variations and extended hours that destroy any semblance of work life balance.

While demanding that discussion on the deal proceed in the spirit of "solidarity" and "togetherness", CWU officials were prepared to end the dispute based on hanging out to dry 400 sacked reps and postal workers framed-up by management.

The CWU's agenda of "communication and engagement" ahead of the postal ballot, including social media "activities", video content, live online Q&A sessions, and members meetings, will see further efforts to justify the unacceptable. "Local Representatives" briefings have also been announced, showing how reps and branch officials will be expected to toe the official line.

Since announcing their deal, Ward and Furey have swerved even the stage-managed online Q&A meetings where critical comments are heavily filtered out by the union's Head of Communications Chris Webb. The CWU's "engagement" with members is one of censorship and browbeating, with Webb repeatedly intervening to reprimand workers who have criticised the CWU's handling of the dispute.

While postal workers were denied a single penny of strike pay during 18 days of action, no expense will be spared in the CWU's marketing campaign to sell a deal which is detrimental to Royal Mail workers' most basic interests.

The Royal Mail agreement establishes a corporatist framework through which the union is fully integrated into management. As the WSWS has explained, "Ward and Furey declared the deal a "win" because it cements their partnership with Royal Mail executives via 'RMG/CWU joint recovery and transformation boards' and a Joint Working Group. These will enforce a relentless process of workplace revisions attacking our terms and conditions. The CWU acts as an arm of management and every part of its apparatus, down to the reps, will be expected to toe the line."

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is calling for resolutions at all workplaces to reject the CWU-RMG agreement, including a list of demands asserting the rights of postal workers to decent pay, terms and conditions, including the immediate reinstatement of all victimised reps and posties. The campaign for a No vote must be linked to the building of rank-and-file committees at every workplace aimed at transferring power from the CWU's unaccountable bureaucracy and to prepare the fight to defeat Royal Mail's plans.

Postal workers, sign up and support the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee and find out more about its work here. The Committee's email address is rmpw.rfc@gmail.com

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