

UK: Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee's call for No vote against CWU's pro-company deal welcomed by Royal Mail workers

Our correspondents

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The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee's call to reject the rotten agreement between the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and Royal Mail received a welcome response at sorting and delivery offices this past week.

Hundreds of copies of the committee's resolution were distributed as leaflets in Sheffield, Manchester, Bradford and London, encouraging widespread discussion. Postal workers spoke to *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) reporting teams on why they are voting No.

Sheffield Central Delivery Office

At the Delivery Office on Pond Street, Royal Mail workers took leaflets as they arrived on shift, with others stopping as they drove into the yard. The overriding sentiment was to reject the deal.

"We are being sold out big time!" one postal worker said as he took the leaflet.

Another, when asked their opinion on the CWU's agreement, pointed to a rat scurrying along the pavement, "That about sums it up."

Other postal workers explained why they would be voting No.

"It is a capitulation by the CWU to everything Royal Mail has demanded," one stated. He referred to later start times and longer hours in winter that would see delivery staff working in the dark, along with a de facto pay cut, "The £500 lump sum does not even cover what we have lost through our strike days."

Workers have lost around £1,800 during 18 strike days between August and December.

Some said the CWU was justifying its rotten deal by

claiming the company had been pushed back on issues such as sick pay. But those distributing leaflets cited last week's WSWS article showing how the CWU had endorsed a reduction in sick pay to the pitiful level of statutory sick pay from the second absence. The CWU postal executive had agreed that higher rates of company sick pay would only be restored by the company if average absences fall below 5.5 percent—but workers face record sickness and injury due to punishing workloads and "revisions" being enforced across the business. A worker replied, "Yes a lot of injuries are work related."

One postie described the agreement as a "disgrace", saying, "Royal Mail is already breaking the USO [Universal Service Obligation to deliver letters six days a week to all postal addresses], so the agreement is worth nothing". A No vote, "could probably spell the end of the business but you have to fight, the workloads are impossible."

Those spoken to all agreed that Royal Mail had been transformed into a cash cow for shareholders and investors since privatisation. CEO Simon Thompson—backed by the CWU—was decreeing that workers must not receive an above inflation pay rise and must sacrifice terms and conditions, while profits are gouged, and workers agreed this had to be challenged directly.

Manchester Delivery and Sorting Office

The vast majority at the depot on Oldham Road said they are voting to reject. Comments included, "The deal's not good, especially with the cost of living going up"; "It's a load of crap. I've worked for 40 years. It's

all wrong, I think they [CWU leadership] took a back hander”; and “A banker said this morning we’re all going to get poorer, but they’ll still get their bonuses.”

A postal worker with decades of service stated, “The deal is dependent on the membership, and it’s not speaking for the membership. Things are massively disengaged with these people [at the top of society] telling us how to live our lives. We are working stiffs. They are a little percentage. Why do they need all that wealth?”

“I’m for a fair distribution of wealth, that’s a common-sense way to live. Pre-COVID the mindset was international, there was a big groundswell, we were speaking as one, and now they’re going to start pushing us back. I believe in equality.

“I’m not comfortable with the trade union leadership—90 percent of the staff voted no. How can you sell a deal that will have a negative effect on us? There’s a massive disconnect. They [the CWU] take £14 million a year from us. Where are our subs going [there is no strike pay]—important questions are being asked. The way the deal was presented, the language, was like a management deal.”

Bradford

At Bradford North Royal Mail depot workers expressed their anger at the sell-out. On his way out, one worker said, “This is not what we built trade unions for”, while another worker said, “It compares with the sell-out by Nelson Mandela against the black workers in South Africa. Workers need to organise differently”.

Mount Pleasant Sorting Office, London

The sentiment among postal workers at Mount Pleasant Sorting Office was scathing toward CWU national and local officials and their deal with Royal Mail. The major sorting office is in Farringdon, central London, where Royal Mail headquarters is located.

“Management is running the union at this depot,” said one worker as he walked by. Another said, “The union is lying about this agreement.”

Posties were disgusted that up to 400 CWU reps and union members victimised during the dispute have been abandoned. General Secretary Dave Ward and the CWU Postal Executive have agreed their fate will be decided by a so-called independent review headed by management stooge Lord Thoroton.

“It says nothing in the agreement about reinstating

the 400 sacked workers, and we should not be voting on a deal which does not include them,” a Royal Mail worker told WSWS.

Only one worker said they would be voting yes, but they had yet to read the agreement and based their decision on the CWU’s 5-page “summary” selling the deal provided by a local union rep. Most worker viewed the CWU as working directly with management or stepping aside. A former CWU rep said he had resigned his position because the union were kowtowing to management.

The largely experienced and senior workforce recounted cases of management intimidation and increased workloads, recruitment frozen and staff harassed for bringing back undelivered mail. This was being done via revisions agreed by the CWU. These have been used to force through job losses, with huge numbers of staff driven to quit, allowing Royal Mail to maintain the fiction that such staff departures are “voluntary”.

One worker reported that a CWU rep had been sacked because of a remark he made about management. Workers believed the remarks were obtained by management hacking the rep’s Facebook account. He said he was interested in the committee as it had more in common with them than Ward. Another worker took a batch of leaflets to share with colleagues.

The WSWS has a history of supporting rank and file postal workers at Mount Pleasant, most recently in the fight against the CWU’s sell-out of national strike action in 2009 which prepared the groundwork for privatisation.



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