

An invitation to Sunday's Zoom meeting from the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (UK)

Statement by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee
12 May 2023

Dear brothers and sisters,

Our fight is at a critical stage. Under the cynical guise of “consultation and engagement”, Communication Workers Union (CWU) officials led by Dave Ward are waging a campaign of disinformation and intimidation against Royal Mail workers to try and ram through their pro-company agreement.

A members' vote on the agreement is now being delayed an extra week, with the union's postal executive announcing Wednesday that ballot papers will be sent on May 25 (not May 17) and that voting will close on June 14 (instead of June 7). The executive cited the need “to create the right environment for the ballot to be conducted,” specifically to address “failed revisions”—the very same revisions endorsed by the CWU executive on March 2!

CWU head office is trampling our rights, pushing a company narrative that this is “the best agreement we are going to get”.

Stage-managed online events—including last week's members' meeting in Portsmouth, and this week's live interview with Ward and Andy Furey in York—exclude any genuine input from members. They have blared out a single message: there is no alternative to this sell-out deal and all resistance is futile.

Two arguments are being used by CWU officials to try and batter postal workers into submission:

First is the claim that technology means “change is inevitable”. The shift to online shopping and decline in letter volumes means Royal Mail workers must “adapt” by accepting Amazon-style conditions and the junking of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) on six-day-a-week letter delivery for customers.

Second is the claim that Royal Mail faces bankruptcy,

which can be averted only by accepting the company agreement. As Ward put it last week during the union's 35-strong “members meeting” in Portsmouth, “If this deal goes down then we're on the path to some sort of mutual self-destruction of this company.”

Ward's talk of “mutual interest” obliterates the fundamental division between workers who produce the company's wealth and major shareholders such as billionaire Daniel Kretinsky who exploit our labour for profit. Ward claims that if we surrender conditions now, we will benefit “in future” as the company's financial position improves. The CWU has embraced the mantras of “trickle-down economics” used by Margaret Thatcher to justify privatisation, asset stripping and other forms of corporate vandalism in the 1980s.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) rejects these arguments. New technology is not the problem—digital platforms and the shift to online shopping are being used to exploit the existing workforce for profit. The answer is obvious: confiscate the immense wealth of large shareholders and use this to massively expand the workforce, reducing the working week with no loss in pay.

Ward has the gall to lecture members about Royal Mail's “most serious financial, economic and market conditions in its history”. How is that our problem? Royal Mail profits quadrupled to £726 million in the first year of the pandemic alone, through our work and sacrifice. Revenue hit £12.6 billion and the company's market value tripled to £5.2 billion. A criminal looting operation followed: £400 million handed to shareholders, taking dividends to £1.2 billion since privatisation.

There are grounds to conclude that Royal Mail has deliberately engineered the current financial and operational crisis as a pretext to restructure, hive off unprofitable areas, and drive thousands of senior staff from the industry. There is no innocent explanation for the total shambles that exists across the company, including industrial-scale breaches of the USO. Workplace revisions have produced an unprecedented health crisis for thousands of long-serving Royal Mail workers. Combined with inferior pay, terms and conditions for new entrants—creating a two-tier workforce—this amounts to fire-and-rehire via the back door.

£400 million in dividends would fund a pay rise of £2,600 for 150,000 Royal Mail workers. £726 million would fund an additional 20,000 full-time employees based on a pay and entitlements package of £36,300. As for the £1.2 billion leached by shareholders since 2013, we will leave it to colleagues to consider how this money could be better spent.

Over the past week Ward (£144,635 annual salary) and “Head of Communications” Chris Webb (salary unknown) have stepped up their attack on “extremists” in the union. Thousands of postal workers who oppose the deal, barred from speaking at the CWU’s online events, are portrayed as cowardly “keyboard warriors” who don’t care about the company’s future.

Significantly, Ward focused his attack on “extreme political groups who sometimes look to infiltrate trade unions” and who have “no interest in you and the future of this company”. Acknowledging widespread opposition to the agreement, he declared, “What I don’t accept is that they [political groups] should over-influence our members in this particular dispute.”

This confirms the central importance of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Opposition among Royal Mail workers is massive, but how is that to be organised? Ward’s red-baiting attack on “outside agitators” expresses the bureaucracy’s fear that workers will start to organise under the political influence of the socialist movement, building rank-and-file committees that put workers’ interests before shareholder profit.

Ward doesn’t mention the *World Socialist Web Site* or the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee by name, but the CWU is acutely aware that PWRFC statements and articles are being read by tens of

thousands of postal workers. A previous attack on WSWS and the rank-and-file committee by head office backfired. Hundreds of postal workers have submitted written reports to WSWS exposing the horrendous conditions they face, because they know the CWU leadership is deep in the pockets of Royal Mail. Thousands of workers are looking for a way to fight back.

WSWS writers and members of the Socialist Equality Party have helped to initiate the PWRFC, but it can only succeed through the involvement of ever-wider sections of workers. Rank-and-file committees must be built in every workplace, creating a forum for democratic discussion, organisation and collective struggle, coordinating across Royal Mail and beyond.

Pseudo-left groups, such as the Socialist Workers Party and Workers Power, promoting the Postal Workers Say Vote No Facebook page, are seeking to confine the campaign to a no vote. They deliberately evade the issue raised constantly by posties of what to do next. Their aim is to block a struggle against the CWU’s unaccountable bureaucracy.

A majority no vote in the May-June ballot will immediately pit workers not just against the plans of Royal Mail, but against the CWU leadership. Royal Mail will move to implement its agenda regardless, and they will be backed by the Tory government and the most right-wing Labour Party in history. To defeat this combined attack a rank-and-file insurgency is needed, breaking the grip of Ward and the apparatus and restoring control to the membership. We urge workers who want to prepare such a fight to attend this Sunday’s Zoom meeting.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding a Zoom meeting “A Fighting Programme for Royal Mail workers” this Sunday May 14 at 7pm. Register here to attend.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact