

Rank-and-file meeting adopts fighting programme for Royal Mail workers

Our reporter
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A Zoom meeting of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee on Sunday delivered a powerful answer to the propaganda by Communication Workers Union (CWU) officials who are insisting “there is no alternative” to accepting their pro-company agreement with Royal Mail and that a no vote will result in “mutual destruction”.

Sunday’s online meeting brought together Royal Mail workers from across the UK, including delivery workers, sorters and Parcelforce couriers to discuss a fighting programme for postal workers. A resolution, “It is time to declare our own red lines in the fight against Royal Mail and the CWU bureaucracy”, was adopted unanimously.

Tony Robson, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* and a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party, gave the opening report. His remarks were followed by a wide-ranging discussion.

“There is no red line which the CWU has not crossed,” Robson said, summarising the historic assault on pay, terms and conditions agreed by CWU leaders Dave Ward, Andy Furey and the postal executive, described by workers as a “negotiated capitulation”.

Robson said the agreement “cements the union bureaucracy’s partnership with the company through a Joint Working Group and business transformation boards to enforce every attack.” That’s why CWU officials view the agreement as a “victory”.

A groundswell of opposition to the deal showed the dispute had divided into “two clear camps”, with thousands of postal workers on one side, and the CWU and Royal Mail on the other, backed by Rishi Sunak’s Conservative government and the Labour Party.

The government feared that postal workers could “spearhead a broader strike wave among nurses, teachers, rail workers and others,” Robson said, “which

the trade union bureaucracy has been trying to suffocate since last summer.” Similar sell-out agreements were being imposed by the RMT, and health and teacher unions, with millions looking for a way to fight back.

“To defeat this line-up requires more than a No vote”, he insisted. A genuine rank-and-file insurgency must challenge the profit dictates of Royal Mail shareholders. Pointing to the departure of company CEO Simon Thompson, Robson asked, “if Thompson has been ‘forced out’ out for failing to effectively represent Royal Mail, why should postal workers allow Ward, Furey and company the authors of this sell-out agreement—to remain in charge?”

Answering Ward’s public attacks on “extreme political groups” and “outside agitators” for “over-influencing” Royal Mail workers, Robson said, “This is an extraordinary admission. Ward has acknowledged he has lost all political authority among the members.” The CWU’s attacks were aimed against the WSWs and the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, because the WSWs was giving programmatic expression to a developing insurgency by workers. PWRFC statements and articles are being read by thousands of Royal Mail workers.

“The claim about outside agitators unduly influencing postal workers is a slander. The WSWs has published reports from around 250 posties on the sweatshop conditions established across Royal Mail thanks to the CWU. All we did was ask for them to be sent in! This has broken the conspiracy of silence which the CWU has tried to enforce.

“The purpose of this committee is to give postal workers themselves the organisation and perspective they need to fight back. We are calling for rank and file committees across all Royal Mail workplaces, run by and for postal workers.”

Discussion

Discussion followed for more than an hour, with many Royal Mail workers speaking and others posting contributions and questions in the Zoom chat.

A delivery worker from London asked about Simon Thompson's departure as CEO with £680,000 excluding bonuses, "What can we do against it, because the company is saying there's no money for the workers and then giving him a golden bonus goodbye?"

Robson said the golden handshake was paid for by postal workers' pay and conditions being gutted. He added, "We don't need to tell workers they're in a fight. They've shown that through 18 days of strike action, without any strike pay.

"What we're seeking to do through the committee is to set out the terms for the fight that must be waged. To reject the whole notion presented by the CWU that there's some kind of shared interest between the company and the workers, because it's contradicted by reality at every stage."

A postal worker from Glasgow said, "I would just like to thank Tony for the report. I thought that was excellent. I think he really nailed it. At one point, he quoted Margaret Thatcher ['there is no alternative' TINA]. I'd like to remember another quote, from Watergate: "Follow the money". I'd like to see the union publish their accounts, as far back as they can and find out exactly where our money has been going.

"We've sleepwalked into this scenario. I've seen this coming for five years. They've grown too comfortable, Ward and Pullinger—the Invisible Man. And the members have been taken for a ride. I think it's an excellent meeting. I'm just an ordinary delivery post person, but I'll go back and drum up support for the next meeting. Guys, more power to your elbow."

A postal worker with 26 years' service from Lancaster left a chat message saying, "Year after year, this has been going on... Less hours, more work, revision after revision badly implemented. The USO [legally requiring Royal Mail to provide letter deliveries six days a week] has been failing for years.

Well before this current dispute." Others agreed, and Robson pointed to a recent WSWs article reviewing the CWU's partnership with the government and Royal Mail since 2007, including its de facto support for privatisation.

A rep from the south of England said he had voted against the agreement, but he and others were outvoted by branch officials. For this reason, he said he was unable to hold a meeting at his delivery office to oppose the deal. A postal worker from the committee commented in the chat, "that is an example of why the CWU is not a rank and file led union. Once a branch has decided to campaign for a yes vote, all the reps are bound by that decision. But there is nothing to stop you holding a gate meeting..."

A rep from Merseyside wrote, "In my opinion, a no vote is going to push Dave Ward and co to rethink their strategy and will make them realise what the members will not accept. CWU HQ will have no option to challenge Royal Mail, as without that, the CWU is finished." A committee member from Parcelforce in London replied, "It's not a question of trying to force the CWU leadership to fight. They've shown what side they're on. I start at 7 in the morning and finish 7 at night. I walk 18 miles a day sometimes, carrying 25 to 30 kilo boxes. This is what's on the agenda across Royal Mail. It's a smash and grab operation backed by the CWU. They've shown where their loyalty lies and it's with the profits of the companies, not us. So we have to do this ourselves".

A delivery worker from Lancaster wrote in the chat, "There's two main camps in my office: 1) absolutely livid with RM and CWU bureaucracy for this awful deal but just want the dispute over with and 2) absolutely livid with RM and CWU bureaucracy for this awful deal and want to fight but don't know how."

The PWRFC urges Royal Mail workers to share the resolution adopted at Sunday's meeting. Organise delegations to join the next Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee Zoom meeting on Sunday May 28, at 7pm. Register here.



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