

Communication Workers Union unites with management to enforce revisions at Parcelforce

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The Communication Workers Union (CWU) is joining hands with Royal Mail Group to implement a fresh round of revisions in never-ending increased exploitation including at its dedicated parcels arm, Parcelforce Worldwide

On May 10, the CWU announced a delay to the start of the month-long ballot of 115,000 postal workers by a week to May 25 over the pro-company agreement citing the need “to create the right environment for the ballot to be conducted”, specifically to address “failed revisions.”

CWU leaders Dave Ward and Andy Furey are acutely aware that the joint union/management statement on revisions on March 2 to complete the previous round of cost cutting and productivity increases has fed opposition to their sell-out deal to end the 10-month dispute.

The involvement of CWU reps in a re-engagement with management over local revisions ordered by the union executive has nothing to do with safeguarding postal workers. The goal is to police opposition and deepen the CWU’s partnership with Royal Mail in a desperate bid to get the Yes vote over the line.

This much can be established from the recent experience of delivery drivers at the London North West Parcel Depot in Acton of Parcelforce Worldwide.

On Monday morning those delivery drivers directly employed by the company, CWU members, were summoned to workplace meetings convened by senior management and the CWU with line managers rounding up workers with as little as 10 minutes notice.

Operations Manager Andy Shaw complained that delivery drivers were only hitting 90 percent of the daily productivity targets and this had to improve to 98 percent. He announced new revisions would go live in a couple of weeks and that delivery drivers would be informed on an individual basis what would happen to their jobs and changes to their post codes and routes.

During one of the short meetings, which lasted around 10 minutes, CWU rep Andy Stedman nodded along with

management. He stated that the paid shift allowance of £250 a month was under threat but uttered not one word of opposition. The aim was to browbeat delivery drivers to accept whatever punishing demands are to be extracted through further revisions behind the smokescreen of a consultation exercise.

Delivery drivers at the Acton depot have now been informed the revisions will be trialled for the next two weeks, starting next Monday, confirming that this was already rubber-stamped by the CWU.

As a Parcelforce worker informed his Royal Mail colleagues at the recent Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee meeting last Sunday, some delivery drivers are already having to work from 7.00am to 7.00pm trying to complete their workloads. These involve walking up to 18 miles a day and carrying parcels which can weigh up to 25-30 kilograms. Even this level of backbreaking labour is now deemed insufficient.

Worker’s democracy trampled on

The CWU has yet to organise any members meeting at the Acton depot in connection with the ballot over the deal that Ward, Furey and the Postal Executive drew up behind closed doors with Royal Mail more than a month ago. But CWU officials are quite prepared to organise a workplace meeting at the behest of management where their members receive a dressing down and are instructed to work harder.

The workplace regime of intimidation is enforced by workers being called in to face management on a one-to-one basis over more punishing demands.

This shows in practice how integrated the union apparatus has become as an extended arm of corporate management—a process which the agreement, through Joint Working Group

and Transformation Boards, will enforce the historic attacks on jobs, pay and conditions.

The Parcelforce Worldwide division of the Royal Mail Group directly employs around 6,500 workers at 54 depots around the UK. What happened at the Acton depot is being replicated across the entire workforce.

A May 9 joint letter signed by Aaron Barnes, Managing Director Parcelforce WorldWide, and CWU National Officer Davie Robertson, is titled, “RMG and CWU Re-Engagement on Joint Revision Activity in Parcelforce Worldwide.”

Before any member has cast a single vote on the deal proposed to end the national dispute on the surrender terms offered by the CWU leadership, it is being treated as an accomplished fact. The letter states, “Following the conclusion of the national negotiators agreement on Business, Recovery, Transformation and Growth it is agreed the following process will apply to immediate revision activity in Parcelforce covered by Appendix 3.”

It continues, “Given the serious financial and economic challenges facing the business, Parcelforce Worldwide and the CWU will now commit to work together to-reengage in local revision and target to deploy all **revisions at pace** (emphasis added).”

Delivery drivers at Acton wanted to know why they had to accept the cost-cutting exercise. If the business “was failing,” why was the Parcelforce Worldwide Managing Director rewarded with bonuses and Royal Mail chief executive Simon Thompson leaving with a “golden goodbye” of at least £680,000.

They will find no answer from CWU National Officer Davie Robertson, who as part of the CWU Postal Executive and lead for Parcelforce, Mail centres and processing, has signed up to the rotten agreement. This sacrifices postal workers’ terms and conditions to further enrich the shareholders and investors, parroting the line that the company is broke.

Uberization by the backdoor, courtesy of the CWU

On April 21, in its first press briefing on the agreement, the CWU announced to great fanfare that “Uberisation is cancelled” at Royal Mail, based on freezing the recruitment of owner-drivers at Parcelforce. The deep inroads already accepted over a two-tier workforce means that owners-drivers constitute 20 percent of the workforce in some depots, on inferior terms, paid per item and having to pay their own petrol costs, health and insurance.

The deal also accepts that new entrants across the whole of

RMG will be employed on lesser terms. The compulsory Sunday working element is only the first stage. Through its Joint Working Group the CWU has agreed that pay and conditions are to be considered based on “the broader labour market” and “RMG’s competitors”—Amazon and other sweatshop employers. The CWU will enforce its roll-out as parcel delivery becomes integrated into one 24/7 service across RMG.

The freeze on new owner-drivers is conditional. In Appendix 3, cited by Robertson, this is while “considering alternative solutions.” The experience at Acton depot makes clear what this means in practice. The benchmark of owner-drivers and agency workers is being used to sweat more labour from those directly employed.

The CWU present as some kind of concession that job losses or “headcount reduction” will be managed first at the expense of owner-drivers and agency workers. The most exploited workers are presented as the enemy, not Royal Mail, which the CWU cosies up to with its agreement “to reduce the overall cost base and make RMG more competitive and agile.”

The divisions sewn by the bureaucracy must be overcome through workplace organisation encompassing *all* workers in a unified struggle. Such a perspective can only be built from below in a fight not only against Ward and Furey but to dismantle the top-down union apparatus working lockstep with management, and for the rank-and-file to take control.

Parcelforce Worldwide delivery workers are a smaller section of RMG than their colleagues in Delivery, but their numerical size is outweighed by the position they occupy in the highly integrated international operations of RMG and its parent company, International Distribution Services. They are part of a global network which spans 96 percent of the globe.

As the resolution by the Postal Workers Rank-and File-Committee calling for a “No” vote explains:

“We draw the attention of colleagues to the struggle of Amazon, postal and logistics workers across the UK, Europe, the United States and internationally against the same savage demands for ‘restructuring’ and increased exploitation. An injury to one is an injury to all.”



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