

An open letter to Royal Mail workers from the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (UK)

22 May 2023

Dear brothers and sisters,

Thousands of our colleagues are preparing to vote down the CWU's sell-out agreement with Royal Mail when balloting begins on May 25. But nothing can be taken for granted.

With CWU officials threatening "mutual destruction" if their deal is rejected, postal workers are not just in a fight against a ruthless company but also the leadership of our own union.

The CWU has co-authored the equivalent of a slave-owners' charter. Their 35-page *Business, Recovery, Transformation and Growth Agreement* will impose sweatshop terms and conditions on Royal Mail's entire workforce, overseen by union-management working groups and "transformation boards".

Ward and company are conducting a propaganda blitz, browbeating members, branding critics as clueless "keyboard warriors" whose opposition to the deal will push Royal Mail into bankruptcy. Meanwhile, the company last week confirmed it has access to £1.7 billion in liquidity and has boasted that its deal with the CWU will "return the Group to profitability next year and see both companies [GLS and Royal Mail] in profit the year after."

At the May 14 online zoom meeting of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, a CWU rep summed up the state of play that doubtless exists right across Royal Mail: "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."

Ward and his cronies are hoping to exploit economic hardship and the absence of a worked-out alternative to push their rotten deal over the line. The primary issue

facing Royal Mail workers is the following: what strategy is needed to galvanise mass opposition, providing a clear path of struggle to defeat the corporatist alliance between Royal Mail and the CWU's bureaucratic apparatus?

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, established on April 2, has put forward a fighting program for Royal Mail workers. On May 14 our committee proposed the following red lines in the fight to overturn the CWU's pro-company agreement:

- No pay cuts! For an inflation-busting pay-rise funded by major shareholders!
- No surrender of terms and conditions! Hands off sick pay and hands off our hours!
- No inferior conditions for new entrants! Reject a two-tier workforce!
- No agreement with Royal Mail unless all victimised workers and reps are unconditionally reinstated!

Achieving these policies means preparing a rank-and-file rebellion against Ward, Furey and the postal executive who act as an arm of management. Postal workers must take control of the dispute by forming rank-and-file committees at every workplace, coordinating our fight across Royal Mail and appealing for support from logistics, transport and other key workers across the UK, Europe and internationally.

The fighting strategy proposed by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is opposed by those who set up the Postal Workers Say Vote NO Facebook group. Its Admins are working to block a genuine insurgency by Royal Mail workers and to protect the CWU bureaucracy.

A model resolution drawn up by the group—which they are urging CWU branches to adopt—repeats Dave Ward's Big Lie that the agreement "has blocked a few of the worst policies Royal Mail tried to impose on

workers and our union.” The authors do not explain which “worst policies” the agreement has supposedly blocked. They merely “note” many of the attacks contained in the agreement, which they describe as “a big step back.”

Under the heading “We believe,” the model resolution states: “This dispute has shown the failure of the privatised model, which puts shareholder value and profits over the public service and workforce. This proves that CWU policy of renationalisation is correct.”

They cite the CWU’s nationalisation policy without stating the obvious fact that it isn’t worth the paper it’s written on. The CWU signed up to privatisation more than a decade ago and has worked with Royal Mail ever since via pro-company agreements that have systematically eroded pay, terms, conditions and pensions.

The model resolution promotes the illusion that the CWU’s entrenched bureaucracy can be pressured to fight for workers’ interests. It states, “The alternative to accepting these concessions on pay and our basic terms and conditions is to strike in defence of them, and campaign for the renationalisation of Royal Mail.” But any such strike will pitch workers into conflict with the CWU leadership.

The only concrete action they propose is for CWU branches to recommend a no vote and to circulate the motion to members and other branches. Disgracefully, they do not even demand the reinstatement of 400 victimised workers and reps sacked during the dispute as the precondition for any agreement with Royal Mail.

The co-founder of the Postal Workers Say Vote NO Facebook group is a victimised CWU rep Andy Young, a member of the Labour Party and supporter of the Workers Power group. The Facebook group is being promoted by the Socialist Workers Party, Counterfire and other pseudo-left tendencies seeking to preserve the domination of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. They are proclaiming various fake rank-and-file initiatives headed by left-talking trade union bureaucrats aimed at heading off a genuine rebellion from below.

The Postal Workers Say Vote NO Facebook group was founded in direct opposition to the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Co-founder Andy Young had emailed the PWRFC on April 21 asking to join. But when he attended our Zoom meeting two days

later, he opposed the committee’s formation, abstained on the main resolution adopted and insisted that the fight had to be limited to calling for a NO vote. He denounced the committee’s fight for an organised rank-and-file insurgency against the CWU leadership as “sectarian.” Less than 48 hours later he set up the Postal Workers Say Vote NO Facebook group.

Over the past fortnight, as CWU head office rolled out its phoney “communication and engagement” roadshow, Young promoted the line that national reps meetings and branch meetings would provide the forum for a fightback.

What is the reality? A handful of branches—three in Scotland, plus the South East Wales Amalgamated branch and South Central branch in Oxford—have passed resolutions calling for a no vote. But at no point has any organised opposition been mounted by any of the reps to demand the removal of Ward, Furey and the postal executive over their co-authorship of the biggest attack on postal workers in history.

Despite most reps falling into line and even browbeating members to vote yes, Young now claims that Ward is “being forced to confront management.” The only place Ward will be confronting management is over tea and biscuits at ACAS, at our expense. Young even cited Ward’s phoney threats that he will cancel the postal ballot unless the union is consulted on revisions.

The perspective advanced by the Postal Workers Say Vote NO Facebook group is a road to defeat. The CWU leadership cannot be pressured to fight, it is a privileged bureaucracy that has been fully integrated with the company and government. The road forward lies in independent struggle by postal workers to abolish the bureaucracy, and for rank-and-file control to defeat Royal Mail’s offensive. We invite all Royal Mail workers to register for Sunday’s Zoom meeting and to join the committee.



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