

A message of solidarity to Royal Mail workers from a Belgian postal worker

Our correspondent
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The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) is publishing a message of solidarity from a Belgium postal worker with the struggle of Royal Mail workers in Britain, informing them of similar conditions faced by their colleagues at Bpost—the country’s part-privatised postal service.

Jack (an alias) is an experienced postal worker and had written in to the WSWS originally with the following comment:

“Hi, I’m a postal worker in Belgium. Our mail centre harbours about 150 postal workers. This is an estimate, it might be off a bit. We have a nice team who shows a lot of support when needed. Situation is mostly good. Though during holidays like Black Friday, Christmas or seasonal sales our workload increases. Sometimes we do get some support, sometimes we don’t.”

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee wrote to Jack:

“The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee here in Britain was founded in collaboration with the rank-and-file committees established in Germany and Australia and at our first meeting we also received a report of the heroic struggle waged in France by workers against Macron.

“In opposition to the nationalist and corporatist union bureaucracy which works hand in glove with the employers and governments to rob us of the profits we produce and destroy our jobs and conditions, we are for the unity of workers internationally against the race to the bottom.

“We are sure that postal workers here would look forward to learning more about the conditions confronting their colleagues in Belgium.”

This is Jack’s reply.

“I have been working as a postie for several years.

“I currently drive round with the car in the quieter parts [of the postal area] and ride a bike in busier parts. I deliver up to 1,200 customer letter boxes per day, which

includes mail, magazines, assigned mail, leaflets and between 30 and 90 packages a day.

“There are two types of contracts: mail person and aid mail person. They have different wage and benefits for doing the same job. It is like a two-tier system, which is like what you guys are fighting.

“Every two years there is a restructuring. All shifts will get revised to conform to a normal working day. Because of the sending of letters declining, we’ll get more customer postal boxes to serve.

“With every restructuring we get to choose a pre-defined route which we’ll get to work on every day. All routes will be filled by posties based on their time with the company. All other posties will be working flexible schedules, with daily changing starting hours ranging from 4.00am to 7.30am.

“We do earn a decent living for decent hard work. It would be nice to be compensated for increased productivity.

“We are under a lot of scrutiny now and the government wants to clean the house. I think they are going to push forward with changes like they did with you guys during the COVID crisis.

“My usual working day is about eight hours at a normal pace for me. There are others though, the slow ones and the fast ones. The slow often work unpaid overtime while the fast quit early. Would you start cutting corners when consistently working unpaid overtime?

“Our gross wage is adjusted to inflation whenever it passes 2 percent, if I’m not mistaken. With the cost-of-living crisis it has been financially hard, but we managed. Energy prices have fallen by quite a bit now and gave some room to breathe.

“A few years ago, we went on strike after one of the CEOs said, ‘These posties ride around on their bikes all day not carrying much and do other jobs’. We went on strike for four days. We got a pay increase of 5 percent

over the span of 12 years, 2 extra holidays, a bit extra on our yearly bonus and some other minor things. It was a major strike spanning all over the country and every part of the company was involved. Five percent over 12 years is a pittance on top of the index-related pay increase.

“We have made something like €1 billion and €400 million for our government which still owns 51 percent of the postal service.

“We have a big dispute in Belgium with the supermarket chain, Delhaize. They want to run it a bit like the McDonalds franchise system to transfer it to individual independent operators. They want to privatise and deregulate every space for the rich investors, which will probably decrease the pay and conditions of the workers at the supermarkets and distribution centres. They have been on strike since March and have faced a ban on the action.

“The employer is being brutal and has sent the police in. They say they will go to the court and then a judge decides that you cannot strike anymore.

“You have strikes in Britain, Germany, France and Holland, it’s everywhere today. It is like a little bit of a spark because COVID really showed the importance of essential workers and their value. I believe all workers should get a decent wage in line with the value they provide for their profits.

“I don’t know if I’m allowed to openly talk about my job like this, so I choose to protect my identity in terms of this interview. I am doing this from the standpoint of improving things for the better. I like my job and want to keep working.

“I would like to take part in the next online meeting of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, and I will reach out to some of my workmates. I am interested in what is happening in the postal world and it’s good to talk to others who are well informed. Keep up the good fight for your terms and conditions, a proper wage and dignity.”



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