

At latest Zoom meeting: Parcelforce, mail centre, delivery and international postal workers discuss way forward in Royal Mail dispute

Our reporter
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The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee held its third meeting Sunday on its call, “Reject the Agreement, Renew the Strikes, Remove Ward and Furey.”

Speakers addressed the Communication Workers Union (CWU)’s second postponement of the ballot on its sellout agreement with Royal Mail to prevent a crushing NO vote.

The discussion brought together postal workers from across the Royal Mail Group (RMG)—in Delivery, Parcelforce and Mail Centres. A Belgian postal worker who contacted the committee to send his solidarity also participated.

World Socialist Web Site writer Tony Robson noted how the CWU leadership had “branded opposition to the sellout deal as ‘ill informed’ ‘cowards’ and ‘keyboard warriors’,” answering, “It is Ward and Furey who have avoided facing the membership...in favour of stage-managed events, including CWU reps meetings behind closed doors.”

Ward and the postal executive “are using their control of the apparatus to ride roughshod over the membership—17 members of the postal executive dictate whether 115,000 even get to vote. Because you can only vote if you vote the way Ward and Furey want you to!”

In the union leadership workers are “dealing literally with an arm of management” whose pre-conditions for restarting the ballot are “based on protecting the role of the union apparatus as trusted hands for the company. Their call to restore the Industrial Relations framework is coupled with calls for ‘realistic’ productivity and savings targets which ‘are achievable’. We all know what these words mean.”

Robson insisted, “It is no longer necessary for a ballot to be held on a rotten deal that should never have been signed up to in the first place... The demand must now be for strike action to resume immediately to take the fight to Royal Mail. As for Ward, Furey and the rest, they must be removed from office.”

Events of the past month had “put our committee to the test,” with attacks made by union activists that its founding was “premature”, and that attention should be focussed on “winning

over the reps and pressuring the CWU leadership.”

“This is fantasy politics,” said Robson. “It conceals the reality that the CWU is a privileged apparatus entrenched with the company and the government.”

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee was “outlining the broadest perspective for a fightback not only at Royal Mail, but across the logistics and delivery industry and across national borders.”

A victimised postal worker from Doncaster explained, “All the postal workers I have spoken to at the delivery office I was based in and in Halifax don’t want this deal. It is disgusting what is going on. They are asking the union reps who can’t give an answer.”

Describing management bullying, he added, “They brought in the revision in 2021 in Doncaster and we said it could not work. Nobody is happy and the union are just standing by letting managers do what they want. It’s not fair, in fact it is disgusting that the CWU is denying posties a vote.”

A delivery driver from Parcelforce in London explained that the CWU was up to its neck in a new wave of brutal revisions. “I’m getting 150 parcels to deliver daily which is an impossibility and this is what is happening across the depot.

“The union has signed up to this. The rep stood next to management at a workplace meeting as we were told what was going to happen.”

The Scheduled Attendance premium worth up to £250 a month for working over 8 hours duty is also under threat, with each delivery driver required to organise a work colleague to cover them if they are unable to complete their workload.

It was “critical” to have “workers from mail delivery and Parcelforce together, talking to each other, which the union has done everything to prevent.”

A mail delivery worker from Glasgow agreed. “For too long now we’ve been isolated.” Now, “we can go back to our workplace and say, ‘Listen, those guys they [the CWU] are telling us in London they are not doing this, they actually are.’”

He continued, “Ward and Furey have just become the facilitators of management, I hope everyone can see this now... They have completely sold out and are trying to take us for mugs.”

“Nobody’s attacking *their* terms and conditions,” he added.

Speaking from Belgium, a worker at the part-privatised postal service, BPost explained how he and his colleagues faced the same issues as they prepared for strike action. “It is hard times everywhere for postal workers. Our workloads are increasing all the time and I am thinking, when will this stop? You can’t keep adding more work to make more profits; we cannot do our job... I’m not OK with providing this shit service.”

He asked why some of the post’s big business clients could not pay more for the service, rather than expect workers to do more for less. Robson replied that postal workers were engaged in a political struggle. Ward and Furey speak about “partnership with Royal Mail stakeholders” and a “future for the business.” Referring to the recent WSWs article “Royal Mail: A hedge fund that delivers parcels”, he asked, “What is this business?”

“It has been a cash cow since privatisation for the shareholders. It is majority owned by just five large investors, including the main shareholder Daniel Křetřnský worth more than £7 billion.

“This poses the need to mobilise the collective strength of the working class against the financial dictatorship. If this business cannot provide a decent job and terms and conditions for its workforce and a public service, that is an argument for it to be taken out of private hands and into public ownership under workers’ control. The profits made by workers should be confiscated from the billionaires.

“This means a fight not only against the Tory government, but the right-wing, pro-business Labour Party and the CWU bureaucracy.”

Royal Mail is “a subsidiary of a global company International Distribution Services” whose “highly profitable international parcels arm GLS employs over 20,000 workers in Europe and worldwide in 40 countries.” That was why the committee had affiliated to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, “to forge direct ties and unify the struggles of workers internationally against the race to the bottom by the nationally based, pro-corporate unions.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, attendees passed the following resolution and agreed to popularise it among their colleagues.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee denounces Dave Ward, Andy Furey and the Communication Workers Union postal executive who are functioning openly as an arm of Royal Mail management and the government.

Their actions last Wednesday in postponing for a second time a postal ballot on their pro-company agreement with Royal Mail are those of an unaccountable bureaucracy.

Facing the defeat of their negotiators’ agreement with Royal Mail due to mass opposition from postal workers, Ward and company have used their control of the union apparatus to ride roughshod over the membership—17 members of the executive dictate whether 115,000 even get to vote because you can only vote if you vote the way Ward and Furey want you to!

Ward and Furey are not retreating one inch. They have reaffirmed their rotten pro-company agreement as “the best for our time”, citing Royal Mail’s “financial circumstances” to demand we accept the destruction of our jobs, pay, terms and conditions.

No mass meetings of the membership are being called. Instead, they called for an online Zoom meeting between reps and managers!

This must end. Their decision to pull the postal ballot is tacit admission that it would have been defeated. It should never have been agreed in the first place. If this clique dares to put this agreement before the members, it must be met by a massive no vote.

Postal workers must now demand the immediate organisation of strike action, honouring the overwhelming Feb 16 mandate. This fight must go forward based on the following red lines:

- No pay cuts! For an inflation-busting pay-rise funded by major shareholders!
- No surrender of terms and conditions! Hands off sick pay, hours and entitlements!
- 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!

Ward, Furey and the authors of the surrender document must be removed from office and the union’s assets and conduct of the strike placed under the control of the rank-and-file.

Events have refuted all claims that this bureaucracy can be pushed to fight. Their response to rank-and-file pressure has been to shut down every democratic mechanism, censoring and brow-beating critics, postponing the ballot and even cancelling the CWU’s annual conference.

We urge postal workers to convene workplace meetings to organise this fightback. Rank-and-file committees should be elected at every depot to coordinate the struggle against Royal Mail and for the removal of Ward, Furey and company.



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