

CWU/Royal Mail “agreement” on revisions fails to materialise a week after being announced

Postal workers must put an end to this sabotage and take charge!

Tony Robson
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We urge Royal Mail workers to contact the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee to coordinate the fightback against the Communication Workers Union’s move to sell-out their year long struggle. The committee’s next online Zoom meeting is on Sunday June 11, 7pm. Register here to attend.

On June 1, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) claimed to have reached an agreement with Royal Mail over a review of revisions.

It stated, “The employer has accepted the need for a joint statement and more importantly, a set of agreed actions on these issues. It has also agreed any statement will be launched via a joint zoom meeting of every manager and CWU representative in the UK... We are fully committed to getting this matter resolved to enable the ballot to commence but it is absolutely crucial we get this right – for members, customers and the future of the company.”

More than a week later, as this article goes to press, the CWU has not provided a single scrap of further information to the membership. Instead, CWU Head of Communications Chris Webb produced a “personal message” on June 6 lashing out at CWU members, writing that it was “bollocks” that “the union is running scared of a live” (on-line) meeting with members or that the “union is scared of a no vote that’s why no comms.”

The CWU’s contempt for postal workers and refusal to reveal its filthy manoeuvres with Royal Mail confirms the warnings made by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee:

- The postponement for a second time of the ballot over the sell-out deal to end the year long dispute by CWU leaders Dave Ward and Andy Furey was to prevent a massive no vote.

- Citing a “toxic” environment due to “failed revisions” as preventing the ballot from being held was tacit

acknowledgement that the cost-cutting exercise which the CWU signed up to in a joint management-union statement on March 2 was fuelling opposition to the brutal restructuring.

Postal workers had already reached their own verdict on the CWU’s latest manoeuvre, posting comments on the union’s Facebook page such as:

- “What an absolute shambles this has become. Starting to think this deal is more about the survival of the CWU as an institution, rather than what’s good for the members.”

- “Royal Fail versus the Non-Communication Workers union.”

- “Have you not realised yet Dave and Andy have secured their own positions, have their feet firmly under Royal Mail’s table and sacrificed the workforce and everything we were on strike for. The whole ‘win the vote, win the war’ was actually ‘win the vote so we can use it to look after ourselves#sold out.’”

Corporatism versus the rank and file

Two opposed camps have been revealed in this dispute: rank-and-file postal workers on one side and an alliance between Royal Mail and the union bureaucracy on the other. Definite conclusions need to be drawn. The bureaucracy cannot be made accountable. It is an arm of corporate management.

The sole concern of the CWU top brass is to preserve its longstanding role as corporate partner with Royal Mail, which has deepened since privatisation. The “win” cited by Ward and company in the agreement is one that codifies the role of the bureaucracy as an appendage of management in

Joint Working Party and Transformation Boards that will oversee brutal restructuring.

The sweatshop conditions being demanded by Royal Mail and the CWU cannot be imposed without the complete suppression of democracy in the union. Ward, Furey and the CWU Postal Executive have closed down every conceivable means through which the members have *any* say over how to conduct *their* struggle.

Since the start of the year the CWU has prevented any further strike action, allowing two live strike mandates on pay and conditions to run down as it bowed down for a second time to a threat of legal action. Ward, Furey and the executive then vetoed the 96 percent renewed strike mandate to re-enter behind the scenes talks with management. This was followed by the constant postponement of a ballot on Ward and Furey's "ground-breaking" agreement. The bureaucracy recognises it cannot get a genuine mandate, so it aims to get a Yes vote by default through grinding down opposition.

The CWU has even cancelled its annual conference this year, which will now not take place until April 2024.

The same objectives achieved through union-busting operations during the 1984-85 Miners Strike and 1986 Wapping printers dispute are to be imposed with the collusion of the CWU bureaucracy. CWU members at BT Group who took eight days of national strike action alongside Royal Mail workers last year are now facing 55,000 jobs losses. If the CWU gets its way similar or worse job losses can be expected at Royal Mail.

This is why there has not even been a demand for the reinstatement of some 400 CWU reps and members victimised during the dispute as a precondition for calling off the dispute. In future, only those who will faithfully toe the company-union line will have any place in Royal Mail.

An industrial and political struggle

Counter measures must be taken to return decision making to the rank and file and end the sabotage of this fight. Strike action must be renewed immediately. The attempted sell out deal must be the end of Ward and Furey's time in office, not of the determined fight by 115,000 postal workers. They have lost the confidence of the membership and should be removed as the start of a dismantling of the bureaucratic apparatus. Members' dues must not be funnelled into six figure salaries for bureaucrats, but used as a fighting fund to reinstate action.

This requires the establishment of rank-and-file

committees at every delivery office, mail centre and division across Royal Mail Group, including Parcelforce, to exchange information and link up the struggles. These committees should reach out to telecoms workers at BT Group in their fight against the destruction of jobs.

- No sacrifice by workers must be made to fund handovers to billionaire investors such as Daniel Kretinsky and corrupt executives, including the "golden goodbye" for departing chief executive Simon Thompson.

- The books must be opened to expose their business secrets. Privatisation has been a £2 billion cash cow for the shareholders, while the service has been run down and workers jobs and conditions destroyed with the collusion of the CWU.

- If the owners of Royal Mail cannot provide secure and decent paid jobs and protect a statutory public service, it must be taken out of private hands and placed under public ownership under workers' control. This would involve not only a fight against the Sunak government, but the right-wing, pro-business Labour Party.

The Postal Workers Rank-and File Committee fights to mobilise postal workers in a common struggle against the major corporations dominating the world's integrated logistics and delivery network. Royal Mail is a subsidiary of transnational corporation International Distribution Services. The international arm GLS employs over 20,000 postal workers in 40 different countries across Europe and North America. In opposition to the union bureaucracy whose nationalist programmes line up workers against each other in a race to the bottom, as an affiliate of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees we offer a new road of struggle that unleashes the collective strength of the working class on a global basis.

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