

CWU launches “mass engagement exercise” to ram through rotten sell-out at Royal Mail

Laura Tiernan

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The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has announced a five-week “mass engagement exercise” to ram through its pro-company “Business Recovery, Transformation and Growth Agreement” with Royal Mail. The postal ballot will run from June 22-July 11.

CWU General Secretary Dave Ward and his deputy Andy Furey announced a revised ballot timetable Friday, after what Ward described as the CWU’s “very strong” joint statement with Royal Mail. They claimed that postal workers’ concerns over revisions, start and finish times, and compliance with the Universal Service Obligation (USO) on letter deliveries will be addressed jointly by the company and the union.

“We are pleased to confirm progress has been made in all of these areas,” they announced.

The four-page “RMG & CWU Joint Statement, June 2023” confirms that Ward, Furey and the postal executive have used the past month—since their anti-democratic cancellation of the May 17 postal ballot—to deepen their partnership with Royal Mail and conspire against the workforce.

The CWU’s June 16 joint statement has nothing to do with protecting jobs, terms and conditions. The “progress” they cite is focused on “full restoration of the Industrial Relations Framework” under section 2.5 of the negotiators’ agreement signed in April. Its sole purpose is to protect the role of the bureaucracy. Section 2.5 stipulates that “future revision activity will involve the restoration of joint working” between Royal Mail and the CWU “in all functions in line with current national agreements including the IR Framework.”

What this means is spelled out in Friday’s statement. It introduces new union-management bodies committed “to build a greater understanding of the environment the business is currently operating in, whilst developing positive actions and mutual interest solutions”.

Quality of service and USO will be overseen by a Joint

National Quality of Service Steering Group. These will develop “local action plans” and “review” brutal revisions imposed during the dispute. The reviews “will assess what is and isn’t working [for who? Postal workers? Shareholders?], make any necessary adjustments and resolve any ongoing issues.”

Local Pipeline Working Groups (LPWG) will be established in each Mail Centre catchment area to ensure that service level agreements are “strictly adhered to” across “Collection, Mail Centre, Network and Delivery.”

Having driven 10,000 staff from Royal Mail this past year through revisions, bullying and victimisations, Royal Mail and the CWU now state “there is no embargo on filling vacancies” and “in some locations recruitment is needed to help restore Quality of Service”. Under the terms of the negotiators’ agreement, all new recruits will enter with inferior pay, terms and conditions.

Royal Mail and the CWU recommit to all National Productivity Joint Working Group recommendations, noting “the national parties are now meeting to review the inputs to the WIPWH [Weighted Items Per Work Hour] performance calculation” and that findings will be used to implement change “in those units identified requiring a further phase of revisions”.

A second super delivery hub in the Midlands and one opening in Northern Ireland this summer will act as “a catalyst for the next revision”, a senior postal worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. He explained that revisions imposed so far were about “setting the structure and processes in place”. With the super hubs, “all mail, packets and parcels will arrive in offices, sequenced and ready to go. No early prepping required.” This would pile even more work on outdoor delivery staff and “further duties will be disbanded.”

Section 9 of the joint statement commits the CWU to work on “Mail Centre Supernumerary/Surplus issues” (i.e., job destruction and forced redeployment). These will

be achieved via the MTSF [Managing the Surplus Framework] and the CWU-Royal Mail negotiators' agreement. The latter slashes redundancy payments by thousands of pounds. Its sole "job protection" measure, a ban on compulsory redundancies (which expires in April 2025) is meaningless. Most staff are being driven out "voluntarily".

Revisions already implemented will not be overturned. They will instead be jointly assessed in a Post Implementation Review (PIR) to ensure they are "properly aligned to workload", quality of service targets and "efficiency performance" i.e., based on criteria dictated by Royal Mail's senior executives, shareholders, and investors.

The extra £900 lump sum is grotesque. The money will be taken from workers' own pension funds—the 'escrow' cited by Ward and Furey is derived from pension contributions—and will be taxed. Ward and Furey are cynically manipulating those struggling financially and frustrated after a year-long dispute that has led them up the garden path.

As for having "clarified" the situation on later start and finish times—the joint statement simply confirms they are going ahead. Last letter delivery is pushed back by between 60 and 90 minutes and will be far longer once travel time back to the office is factored in. Ward's talk of "mitigations" and a "family friendly approach" is farcical.

The centrepiece of the CWU's "mass engagement exercise" is a national Zoom meeting this Wednesday at 8am "for every CWU representative and operational manager in the UK". All reps are being put on notice about what is expected of them: total compliance and active enforcement of revisions and other "mutual interest" solutions against the membership.

Ward and Furey had the gall to boast on Friday that "our reps are back at the negotiating table". They were silent on the hundreds of CWU reps and workers sacked, suspended or otherwise victimised during the year-long dispute for opposing the company's savage attacks.

The sole reference to any further "engagement" by Ward and Furey with the membership was a "CWU National Briefing" with details available "in due course". This will be another stage-managed Zoom meeting with "participation" from members confined to chat messages. Statements by workers opposing the CWU-Royal Mail agreement will be censored and ridiculed by the union's unelected Head of Communications Chris Webb (annual salary £60,000-£70,000).

Postal workers reacted angrily to Friday's joint announcement, with thousands of hostile comments on the CWU's Facebook and Twitter accounts and across social media. They denounced the lump sum as a bribe and dismissed the CWU's pretence that "failed" revisions would be withdrawn, with many demanding that Ward and Furey be removed.

This is the significance of the instantaneous attack launched by the CWU on Twitter against the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The bureaucracy is terrified at the prospect of an organised and politically conscious challenge being mounted by postal workers that would break the grip of the bureaucracy.

A fightback by Royal Mail's 140,000-strong workforce will quickly find powerful allies at Amazon, Evri, UPS and among Royal Mail's GLS workforce in Europe and North America who face identical attacks. As the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee stated on Friday, "Royal Mail and the CWU have two main advantages in their fight against postal workers: they have a worked-out global strategy and they are organised." The PWRFC, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is providing the means provides a forum to discuss and develop a global strategy to win, placing the interests of the working class before shareholder profit."

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an online Zoom meeting next Sunday, June 25 at 7pm. All postal workers are invited to attend. Register here.



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