

The Royal Mail dispute

Ward and Furey's live Q&A: Browbeating by the Communication Workers Union to impose a betrayal

Tony Robson
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The online meeting held Thursday evening by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) with its membership at Royal Mail was nothing more than a browbeating exercise by union leaders Dave Ward and Andy Furey, trying to force members to accept their surrender terms to end the bitter year-long dispute.

It was an insult to the fight waged by 115,000 workers for a cost-of-living pay increase and to defend their jobs, terms and conditions against brutal restructuring. This included 18 days of national action between August and December last year, before the CWU allowed two strike mandates to run down and vetoed a third to stitch up a sell-out deal in mid-April.

A CWU Live event had been avoided for two months after Ward and Furey's "negotiators' agreement", rubber stamped by the union's postal executive, was put forward. The meeting coincided with the start of the rescheduled June 22-July 11 ballot, which the CWU leadership had twice undemocratically postponed to forestall the deal's rejection.

As with previous CWU Live events, postal workers had no opportunity to directly voice their opinions, with comments confined to the chat column and questions vetted by the chair and CWU Head of Communications Chris Webb.

Rather than the Q&A session and "informed debate" on the National Agreement promised to members, it consisted of a full hour-and-a-half of deception and beratement of postal workers.

The meeting opened with an injunction to limit even the use of the chat function, with Webb stating, "We are asking you to breathe before smashing the comments box," making an arbitrary distinction between what he dismissively referred to as "a sea of people trying to spam" and "genuine questions."

Throughout the meeting, complaints were made over comments being deleted. Questions raised about the

detrimental impact of the agreement were left unanswered.

Ward stated repeatedly that he was not "apologising" as he justified the surrender terms offered to Royal Mail, skirting over what he described as "difficult elements" and pleading poverty on behalf of the company.

He began by stating that the second suspension of the vote was "fully justified" based on producing a "really, really strong" CWU-Royal Mail joint statement (June 16) on revisions, claiming the Industrial Relations (IR) framework would make the National Agreement work and hold management "to account".

There is not a shred of credibility to the claim that the joint statement addresses postal workers' concerns over "restoring the USO" and a review of the revisions imposed during the dispute. Ward later went on to state, "we are coming to a moment where we may have to consider a five-day scenario" rather than a six-days-a-week letters service.

In relation to revisions, he cited the Zoom meeting held between all CWU reps and managers the day before, referring to a "senior manager" who had stated they must work through the IR framework. He did not mention this was Grant McPherson, the Chief Operating Officer of Royal Mail who had recently gloated over the completion of "the biggest revision ever in the history of this business."

The gospel according to Ward is there is no alternative to postal workers footing the bill for the obscene plundering of wealth by the company's executives and shareholders. Referring to the more than £600 million showered on shareholders, and the company posting record profits in 2022 at the start of the dispute, he stated, "We don't like how we got here, we don't agree with Royal Mail, it was a self-inflicted financial crisis."

Ward nonetheless continued to hector about the financial crisis which postal workers had to take responsibility for. Any surrender of rights won through past struggle was

justified on the grounds of supposedly protecting jobs. The level of cynicism was breathtaking; the 10,000 redundancies implemented within the last year did not warrant even a mention.

The chat column as the meeting progressed reflected workers' growing anger at the CWU's lame justifications: "Sold up the river"; "You sound like a RM manager Dave"; "Massive surrender, members leaving CWU, no trust"; "Terms and conditions shot through."

As one postal worker commented on the pushing back of start and finish times in delivery by between 60-90 minutes, "This agreement puts thousands of parents out of work."

Ward stated that because of "life choices" some would "not be able to continue," meaning business interests must come before workers' family or social lives.

The attempt by Furey to claim that an additional £900 lump sum payment now included in the deal is anything other than a bribe to ram through a sell-out was farcical. He answered that the payment from the pension fund's "escrow" would be paid to cleaners, not just managers—who postal workers pointed out had broken their strike and received bonuses. He did not address the glaring contradiction that, unlike other Royal Mail employees, postal workers would only receive the paltry amount by voting Yes and signing away their terms and conditions.

Ward and Furey have mapped out a role for CWU reps in enforcing the agreement through the IR framework. But as a postal worker commented about those left behind, "What about the sacked reps! Do you think you've done enough to support them? Who would want to be a rep now! Hung out to dry!"

Around 400 CWU reps and members have been sacked or suspended in the victimisation campaign waged by Royal Mail during the dispute. Furey had the brass neck to present the review of conduct cases set up between the CWU, Royal Mail and the arbitration service ACAS as a victory which "itself recommended the agreement to the membership."

What a fraud. The review was set up to pre-empt the demand for the immediate reinstatement of all those victimised as a precondition for any agreement. Lord Falconer was not selected to head the review because of his legal standing, as suggested, but due to his political connections. What Furey referred to as a "proper mechanism" is a kangaroo court based on the approval of the guilty party, Royal Mail, and overseen by the former Blairite minister who advised the National Coal Board during the 1984-5 miners' strike.

The biggest lie told by Ward, Furey and Webb was that there existed no legitimate grounds to reject their self-serving deal. Webb asked those who were voting No "to explain their rationale," as if the reasons for opposing the

ripping up of terms and conditions were a mystery, with thousands calling for a rejection and a renewal of strike action based on a mandate still live until mid-August.

The CWU bureaucracy has intervened to suppress and wear down this rank-and-file insurgency, postponing balloting and suppressing democracy while waging a propaganda offensive.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) founded in April has put forward a strategy to fight. The committee rejected all demands that postal workers sacrifice their pay and conditions to help Royal Mail overcome its self-inflicted "financial difficulties".

In a series of fortnightly Zoom meetings convened by the PWRFC, postal workers from across the UK and internationally have mapped out plans for a rank-and-file fightback.

In resolution published May 15, the Committee wrote: "We draw the attention of colleagues to the struggle of Amazon, postal and logistics workers across the UK, Europe, the United States and internationally against the same savage demands for 'restructuring' and increased exploitation. An injury to one, is an injury to all.

"Our red lines in this fight must be:

"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!"

The CWU responded with denunciations and attacks. However their pro-company agreement and their joint statement last Friday, combined with their arrogant browbeating of members, reveals their complete integration with the company.

The PWRFC calls for a resounding "NO" vote but warns that, regardless of the vote's outcome, postal workers face a bitter fight. The task now is to consolidate a new rank-and-file leadership in the mail centres and delivery offices through the formation of rank-and-file committees to prepare the next stage of struggle that lies ahead and attend the next online Zoom meeting this Sunday to discuss this perspective. [Click here to register to attend.](#)



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