

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee meets as balloting opens on CWU-Royal Mail agreement

Our reporter
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The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) held its latest Zoom meeting Sunday as balloting opened on the Communication Workers Union's (CWU) pro-company deal with Royal Mail. Delivery, mail centre and Parcelforce workers attended from around the UK.

Tony Robson, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), gave the opening report calling for “a resounding no vote to throw out this rotten company agreement.”

“The dispute is at a critical turning point” he said. “Less than a year ago, 115,000 postal workers united in strike action to defeat Royal Mail’s attacks. But despite enormous rank-and-file opposition, there is a real possibility that Royal Mail’s plans, contained in the Business Recovery, Transformation and Growth Agreement, will be voted in.

“Responsibility for this rests entirely with the CWU bureaucracy. Ward, Furey and the postal executive have worked non-stop to impose the company’s dictates and to isolate and suppress mass opposition from postal workers.”

Robson noted the ballot was the third attempt by CWU leaders Dave Ward and Andy Furey to ram through their agreement, with earlier ballots “postponed” to forestall a rejection. Their promised “mass engagement” with members on the deals been a fraud.

Last Thursday’s CWU Live event, billed as a Q&A on the national agreement, was a travesty, Robson said. The hour and a half session saw Ward, Furey and Chris Webb (CWU Head of Communications) berating members. Thousands of postal workers opposed to the deal were branded by Furey as “delusional.”

Robson explained, “Workers launched 18 days of strikes to defeat Royal Mail’s attacks. But the CWU

bureaucracy opposed the company on one issue only: Royal Mail’s ‘imposition’ of change. Their entire dispute was focused on protecting the CWU’s partnership with the company. Ward and Furey’s backroom discussions with Royal Mail were all about proving that the CWU was open for business and that there was no line they were not prepared to cross.

“The outcome was the negotiator’s agreement published in April. This was the victory they had been working for. As soon as they had this—a joint conspiracy against the membership—they worked to suppress any kind of discussion, accountability or democracy within the union.”

Robson refuted Ward’s claims that the CWU’s Joint Statement with Royal Mail on June 16 was “progress” in defending the Universal Service Obligation (USO) and opposing revisions. The CWU had signed up to further attacks, including the forced redeployment of staff. As for the USO, Ward admitted the CWU was agreeable to a reduction of mail delivery from six to five days.

The additional £900 lump sum was a cynical effort to ram through the agreement, funded through a raid on the pension scheme. While managers would receive £900 gratis, for CWU members it was conditional on a Yes vote to sign away their terms and conditions.

In discussion at the PWRFC meeting, postal workers attacked the CWU bureaucracy for sabotaging their fight. A London delivery worker rejected Ward’s claims about securing a retreat, “Royal Mail will not change revisions, savings are more important than fixing the USO”. From the south coast, a delivery worker added, “We have 10 dedicated delivery routes in my Delivery Office. To do this they have merged 10 mail rounds. I have an extra 250 addresses, no extra time and get no extra pay.”

Others described coercion by the union to vote Yes,

“Reps are telling us there is nothing else and they don’t like it if you say you are voting No”. A delivery worker from the north-west stated, “We also need to remember it is not just Ward and Furey organising the sell-out. It’s Walsh, Bouch, Joyce, Elgar, Baulch. It’s impossible to tell where the employer ends and union begins.”

A victimised delivery worker said he had been “ghosted” by the CWU. Responding to a report about workplace huddles between the CWU and Royal Mail to push for a Yes vote, he asked, “What about the guys who are currently suspended? who is talking to us? The only info I get is from the news, or you guys.”

A victimised rep described the June 20 national Zoom meeting between CWU reps and managers as “a brilliant Royal Mail sales pitch by Dave Ward, with McPherson [Chief Operations Officer for Royal Mail] nodding in approval... What I took out of the meeting was for office managers to continue with ‘save Royal Mail revision activity’ and for reps and members to forget what has taken place over the past 18 months and assist managers to get it done.”

A delivery worker from Scotland said the No vote remains strong at his workplace, but after Thursday’s Zoom, “anger had turned to resignation.” Worse conditions had already been implemented, including later start times forcing people to leave, “Ward and Furey know this. They are not offering support and fully expecting people to leave the industry.”

Robson emphasised that voting No was not enough. The problem of removing the union bureaucracy had to be tackled directly. This was the importance of the fight led by the PWRFC and its fight for rank-and-file committees on the shop floor. The grip of the bureaucratic apparatus had to be broken and the collective strength of postal workers organised and asserted over the financial dictatorship of hedge funds and other major shareholders.

The PWRFC is affiliated to the International Workers Alliance for Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Greetings to the meeting were delivered by Dietmar Gaisenkersting from the Postal and Public Sector Action Committees in Germany. His report showed how the fight at Royal Mail is part of a broader struggle by workers across Europe and internationally.

Gaisenkersting, a writer for the WSWS and a member of the Socialist Equality Party in Germany explained, “Workers in Europe have similar problems. They want to fight but are prevented from doing so by their trade union apparatuses and are subordinated to the corporations and the governments.”

In Germany, “powerful warning strikes” had erupted this year, including a 24-hour strike in March by 150,000 railway and public sector workers which had “paralysed the entire country”. Postal workers had struck several times for days and after negotiations between Verdi (United Services Union) and the postal service broke down, postal workers demanded indefinite action.

“Postal workers voted 86 percent in favour of a strike. But the union overruled this decision and immediately renewed negotiations. Within 48 hours, they had presented a repackaged deal that did not differ from the first one and put it through. It means serious cuts in real wages. Workers lost in the years from 2020 to 2025 around 30 to 40 percent, and some even 50 percent, of their purchasing power.”

In Germany, close cooperation by trade unions with the corporations and the government is highly developed. Gaisenkersting explained, “This cooperation is the main part of the German industrial relations system, it is regulated by law and known as “Mitbestimmung” or co-determination. Officially, co-determination refers to the equal participation of employees or their representatives, which means the unions. But in fact, it is the mechanism through which all attacks against the workers are currently enforced.”

Union bureaucrats were richly rewarded for imposing pay cuts on their members. The Verdi negotiator at Deutsche Post collected €250,000 euros a year from the union and an additional €250,000 from her seat on the supervisory board. In total 10 Verdi officials received more than 1 million euros from being on the supervisory board.

In conclusion he stated, “Our interests can only be asserted in confrontation with the union bureaucracy. It is clear from the discussion and comments here tonight that the union is on the side of the government and Royal Mail. In this sense we welcome that postal workers in Britain and in Germany go forward and build rank and file committees, and I think we should inform each other and develop our discussions.”

For more information about and to join the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, visit here.



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