

Vote NO! For a rank-and-file fightback at Royal Mail!

Statement by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee
29 June 2023

Dear brothers and sisters,

A No vote is essential to defeat the “Business Recovery, Growth and Transformation Agreement” negotiated behind our backs by Communication Workers Union (CWU) officials Dave Ward and Andy Furey in alliance with Royal Mail.

The agreement rubber-stamps all the brutal revisions to terms and conditions imposed by Royal Mail over the past year. It is the biggest attack on postal workers in history.

The CWU’s statement recommending a Yes vote states, “We have reversed all their original proposals”. This is a lie; every red line has been crossed. Unless overturned, the agreement will entrench Amazon-style conditions: later start and finish times and longer hours in Winter as part of “24/7 parcel network”, introduction of “pay per parcel”, the gutting of sick pay, further “reduced headcount”, a two-tier workforce and massively ramped-up workloads imposed through brutal performance management.

All of this will be policed by union-management collaboration at every level. The agreement and recent Joint Statement empower union-management committees embracing every level of the CWU, from top officials to local reps who will enforce the attacks against us. This includes the Joint Working Group, Joint National Quality of Service Steering Group, National Productivity Working Group and Local Pipeline Working Groups (LPWG) based in each Mail Centre catchment area.

On Monday, the CWU wrote to all reps directing them to work with managers “to deploy revisions” using a 35-point “checklist” and “resource calculator” aimed at boosting “productivity” and “target performance”.

This dispute has brought postal workers face to face with the CWU’s transformation into an arm of Royal Mail management.

Postal workers’ determination to fight was never in doubt. Our first ballot for strike action over improved pay,

on June 28, 2022, delivered a 97.6 percent strike vote. Our second ballot over conditions delivered a 98.7 percent strike vote. 18 days of strike action followed, between August and December. A renewed mandate for action was delivered in February.

Since the negotiators’ agreement was announced on April 21, we have been in open conflict with the CWU’s unaccountable bureaucracy.

Ward, Furey and the postal executive have used their control of union resources to push a Yes vote “whatever it takes”. No methods are too dirty. Like mini-dictators, they twice “postponed” balloting in the face of a rank-and-file insurgency, using the time gained to stage a propaganda blitz to push their company agreement, get reps onside and berate and intimidate members.

The Postal Workers Rank and File Committee (PWRFC) denounces the CWU bureaucracy for its shameless attacks on the rights of the membership. Ward, Furey and their lapdog Chris Webb (£60,000-£70,000 annual salary) have denounced workers opposed to the deal as “reckless” and “delusional”, insisting a No vote will result in “self-destruction” due to Royal Mail’s “unprecedented financial difficulties”.

This dispute poses point blank the problem of leadership. When it comes to fighting the company, postal workers have proved their resolve and determination. All our strikes and pickets were solid.

But how do we fight the betrayal of our own leadership? How do we fight a union apparatus working hand in glove with the company, the Tory government, and Sir Keir Starmer’s Labour Party, which has privately backed CWU proposals to reduce the USO and which supports privatisation?

The PWRFC is providing the answer. We are advocating direct rank-and-file control of the dispute from the shopfloor to break the stranglehold of the CWU bureaucracy and overturn its pro-company agreement

with Royal Mail.

From the beginning of the dispute, Ward and Furey used our strikes as bargaining chips to convince Royal Mail that its plans for a massive revision to terms and conditions could only be achieved in partnership with the CWU bureaucracy. They opposed Royal Mail's attacks so long as they were "imposed" (i.e., without the CWU's help).

Now they have got what they wanted, their feet back under the table and a recognised position in policing a massive assault against the workforce. A No vote by itself will not change this.

At a meeting of the Postal Workers Say Vote NO group on Monday, their main speaker Andy Young insisted that "Dave Ward does have a Plan B". Young claimed if the agreement is rejected Ward will go back to Royal Mail and negotiate over "the worst aspects" of the deal, organising strikes if necessary. This is a fantasy. Ward's "plan B" will be to continue sabotaging our fight.

The CWU bureaucracy has enabled the company to impose its revisions, bully workers and suspend and sack reps and other members who speak out. Even before a single vote has been counted, the CWU is working with Royal Mail to impose the agreement, suppressing local strike votes under Rule 13 against revisions and workplace victimisation. They are functioning as strike-breakers.

Having starved members of strike pay, Ward and Furey are using financial hardship and the exhaustion created by their cynical mis-leadership to extract a Yes vote by default. A Yes vote under these circumstances lacks any legitimacy. There are also real concerns over the conduct of the ballot. Online voting has been sprung on members for the first time, with a ballot paper declaring "The Postal Executive recommends that you vote YES to the agreement"! How is this acceptable? And how will the CWU's hybrid voting system be scrutineered?

The first task facing workers following a No vote is the replacement of Ward, Furey and the CWU postal executive. The union's constitution provides no direct mechanism for members to recall the leadership, with a policy conference needing the support of 51 percent of branches. The CWU executive postponed this year's conference to ensure it takes place after the dispute is over.

Democratic accountability, the control of the union by its members and not bureaucrats, can only be secured by building rank-and-file committees at every delivery office and mail centre, returning power to the shopfloor.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee has advanced the following demands as the basis for resolving this dispute on terms favourable to postal workers not Royal Mail shareholders:

- 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!

Royal Mail's "financial difficulties" have been created by a management looting operation. The company took £1 billion in profit created by postal workers during the pandemic and squandered it on shareholders. Ward has the temerity to demand our "sacrifice" for the likes of billionaire shareholders such as Daniel Kretinsky and Blackrock Inc! The CWU's claptrap about "mutual interest solutions" is a road to destruction. Royal Mail must be taken over without compensation to the corporate parasites and run as a public service under the control of the workforce.

One year ago, Royal Mail workers stood at the head of a fightback by workers on the railways, docks, oil rigs, NHS and other key sectors. But every one of these struggles has come up against the same obstacle: trade unions working with corporate management, the Tory government and Labour to divide workers and enforce the dictates of the financial oligarchy.

It is time to turn the tide. The PWRFC is part of the International Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and is organising a coordinated fightback by postal and logistics workers across Europe and internationally to combat the dictates of global corporations and their endless race to the bottom. In calling for a No vote, we urge postal workers to prepare for the struggles to come by joining the PWRFC.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact