

Message of solidarity to UPS workers from Royal Mail workers in Britain

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (UK)
30 June 2023

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File-Committee (PWRFC) in Britain sends its warmest solidarity to our 340,000 brothers and sisters at UPS in America in your fight against brutal restructuring and a substandard pay contract. We are engaged in a similar battle against Royal Mail.

Your determination has been demonstrated in a strike authorisation vote of 97 percent, but the International Brotherhood of Teamsters are keeping you on the job overriding your mandate while they continue closed door talks with the company.

During our year-long dispute with Royal Mail we have encountered the same sabotage on a non-stop basis by the leadership of the Communication Workers Union (CWU). We have learnt through bitter experience that our fight is not just against the company but the union bureaucracy. This is why we came together to establish a rank-and-file committee and launch the fight to take back control of our dispute.

Between August and December, 115,000 postal workers took 18 days of national strike action, the first in a decade since privatisation. Our strike was solid.

From the start, the CWU prevented all-out strike action in favour of staggered stoppages dragging out the dispute. This was justified on the grounds it would cause us less hardship as days lost would be spread across our pay checks. We never received a penny of strike pay, with our dues used instead to finance an apparatus headed by CWU General Secretary Dave Ward on a salary of \$178,000 plus expenses and perks. We manned the pickets during the Summer and Winter months amid the worst cost of living crisis in generations. We defied a strike-breaking operation by the company using managers and agency workers. Some 400 CWU reps and members were suspended or sacked on trumped-up charges, including for using the word “scab” on the picket line and social media!

Our determination alone has not proved enough. Since the start of the year, the CWU prevented *any* further action allowing our working conditions to be trampled. We have effectively been in dispute with the union longer than the strike action against Royal Mail over the CWU’s unaccountability to members and its naked collaboration with management.

The CWU allowed our two strike mandates to run down and vetoed a 96 percent mandate to renew the strike in mid-February. This was in favour of “intensive talks”, like those promoted by the Teamsters with UPS.

We advise you not to take the rhetoric of Teamster President Sean O’Brien as good coin. We heard similar hot air from Ward and company: “Enough is enough”, “Don’t accept less”, “Win the (strike) ballot, win the dispute.”

Behind our backs, the CWU agreed a joint statement with the company in March over “revisions”—cost cutting to hike up productivity with delivery workers walking 15 miles a day and hundreds of extra calls added to delivery rounds. They have gutted Royal Mail’s statutory commitment to ensure mail delivery 6 days a week, with more profitable parcels prioritised. In the process, the company has already implemented 10,000 job losses with many more to come. The CWU claims it is protecting jobs based on no “compulsory redundancies”. But there is nothing voluntary about senior colleagues being driven out through impossible workloads and management bullying. This has been conducted on the cheap, through reduced voluntary redundancy terms and ill health retirement payments agreed by the CWU.

The PWRFC was formed in April by postal workers seeking to break the grip of this unaccountable bureaucracy and establish rank-and-file control of the dispute. Our stand was confirmed within days.

On April 21, the CWU announced its rotten pro-company agreement with Royal Mail negotiated behind

our backs. The agreement crosses every red line. It introduces “flexible working” with later start and finish times based on a 24/7 parcel delivery service that ends any life-work balance. It cuts our sick pay and introduces a two-tier workforce with new entrants on inferior terms and conditions including mandatory Sunday working with no premium, and a longer working week.

The agreement met with outrage, with thousands of postal workers demanding it be thrown out. The CWU bureaucrats responded with a war against the membership, twice cancelling postal ballots to forestall a No vote and waging a propaganda blitz aimed at silencing and intimidating critics. They denounced workers opposed to the deal as “reckless” and “delusional”, insisting that workers have to “sacrifice” due to the “financial difficulties” facing Royal Mail’s shareholders.

On June 16, the CWU finally announced a postal ballot on their deal, based on a “CWU-Royal Mail Joint Statement”. They claimed, “We have reversed all their original proposals”. This is a lie. The Joint Statement marks the further integration of the CWU with Royal Mail, with the union’s national executive through to local reps in joint union-management committees and working groups driving up company profitability through our exploitation.

The entire union is being transformed before workers’ eyes. Meetings between union reps and managers are already underway at mail centres and delivery offices with revisions to our terms and conditions and job cuts being enforced before a single vote is even counted.

Meanwhile, the 400 reps and workers suspended during the strikes have been hung out to dry. Their fate will be decided by a union-backed “review” headed by Lord Falconer who advised the National Coal Board during the 1984-85 miners’ strike and who was later appointed Lord Chancellor by the despised former Labour Party Prime Minister Tony Blair. Only reps who are prepared to act like managers will be tolerated.

Our committee is calling for a No vote to throw out the CWU’s surrender document. But voting No will not resolve the central task we face of removing this entrenched bureaucracy which functions as an arm of management.

Our committee has already brought together postal workers from across the separate divisions including delivery offices, mail centres and Parcelforce. Our statements and articles exposing the dirty tricks of CWU officials have been read by tens of thousands of postal workers. We would encourage you to make full use of the

World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) as hundreds of postal workers have here to break the wall of silence imposed by the company and CWU head office.

The CWU has tried to smear our committee and publicly attacked WSWS for “over-influencing” workers in the dispute. They are terrified of workers knowing the truth and having an alternative. Their most recent attack on WSWS backfired, with postal workers defending its coverage and denouncing Ward and his fellow officials for their lies and pro-company propaganda.

We believe the greatest strength of the PWRFC is that we are affiliated to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Royal Mail, like UPS, is a global corporation. They plan their strategy globally and employ an army of workers worldwide. Their worst fear is workers linking together across national borders to paralyze their plans.

It is time to end the decades-long race to the bottom and begin a unified fightback. Royal Mail is a subsidiary of International Distribution Services with its GLS arm employing an additional 22,000 workers in 40 countries outside the UK. UPS employs an even bigger army of 495,000 employees in 220 countries.

Whatever uniform we wear, or whether we receive our pay cheque in pounds or dollars, we are in the same fight. We need to forge the strongest links and unshackle our strength as a major battalion of the international working class.

We encourage you to build your own rank and file committees at UPS and join the fight to build the IWA-RFC. Your fight is our fight, and we will do everything in our power to support your struggle.



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