

CWU instructs reps to enforce Royal Mail's brutal revisions: the IR Framework in action

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Before a single vote has been counted on whether to accept the “Business Recovery, Transformation and Growth Agreement” between Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union (CWU), the union’s postal executive is working to enforce the company’s brutal revisions to jobs, terms and conditions.

In a letter to members on June 28, “Royal Mail Group Ballot – Use Your Vote”, CWU General Secretary Dave Ward and Deputy Andy Furey declared they had been right to suspend the May 17 postal ballot, saying they had used the time “to put maximum pressure on Royal Mail to act on failed revisions, quality of service issues and USO [Universal Service Obligation] failures.”

Ward and Furey have insisted that their Joint Statement with Royal Mail on June 16 provided the basis to reverse the company’s “failed” revisions, based on its reaffirmation of section 2.5 of the negotiators’ agreement which states:

“Future revision activity will involve the restoration of joint working in all functions in line with current national agreements including the IR Framework. Revisions will be based on efficient, fair, and achievable workload. RMG and CWU recognise that this is an essential step in fostering improved relationships in the workplace and delivering the aims and objectives of this agreement.”

This has nothing to do with protecting postal workers. The agreement’s IR framework was established at ACAS under the direction of former Trades Union Congress president and former ACAS chair Sir Brendan Barber. Under Barber’s direction, secret talks were concluded between Royal Mail and the CWU which resulted in the negotiators’ agreement, the biggest attack on postal workers in history.

Barber’s involvement reflected the determination of the British state—backed by the Tories and Labour—to inflict a defeat on postal workers, driven by their fears over the eruption of a general strike. The *sole purpose* of the IR framework is to uphold and enforce the April 17 agreement and block the development of a rank-and-file insurgency.

Having extracted a pledge to restore “joint working”, the CWU is moving to enforce the company’s brutal dictates against postal workers. This is the meaning of a slew of directives issued by Ward, Furey and the CWU postal executive to local branches and reps over the past week.

June 26: Reps directed to participate in revisions

Signed by CWU Assistant Secretary Mark Baulch, a June 26 letter to

branches directed CWU reps to participate in “resourcing meetings” at “all delivery units”, instructing them to work with managers to complete a “Quality of Service and Resourcing Checklist”. Baulch advised that the 35-point checklist had been agreed by the CWU and Royal Mail in the Joint Statement, and “should be used to develop an understanding of the root causes impacting Quality of Services, USO and the actions required to restore on target performance.”

Postal workers already know the “root cause” of the mass failures in service delivery: the rapacious drive for profit by Royal Mail executives who have torn up working conditions and forced thousands of staff to leave as part of company plans to establish a low-wage parcel business to compete with Amazon.

The “check list” and accompanying instructions from the CWU postal executive show how local reps are being incorporated into management. They are being tasked with policing “target performance” outlined in the negotiators’ agreement and Joint Statement. This explains why 400 workplace reps and other postal workers have been sacked, suspended and victimised. Only those prepared to toe the line will be retained under the CWU-Royal Mail agreement.

The union-management check list is divided into three parts. Section 1, item 1) asks, “Is the office work plan effectively managed to ensure all mail receives its due delivery?” The checklist makes clear that postal workers will be held responsible for service failures, with CWU reps overseeing a raft of productivity indicators.

Section 2, point 14 of the check list asks: “Are the number of annual leave slots aligned to workload... using the Calendarisation tool as a guide?” This means annual leave entitlements over the summer holiday period will be massively curtailed. Current holiday allocation methods will be overridden based on “workload”, with point 13 asking whether the local annual leave plan is “reviewed in February after people have purchased additional annual leave?”

The final check list section is headlined “Quality of Service - Productivity Checklist” and includes point 3) “Are weekly resourcing meetings used to review and discuss reported WIPWH (Weighted Items Per Work Hour) productivity?” and point 4) “Is the purpose of the Resource Calculator jointly understood and used at the weekly resourcing meeting to review WIPWH (Weighted Items Per Work Hour) local productivity against forecasted traffic and the outlined target WIPWH Productivity?”

Baulch’s accompanying letter states, “It is essential that sufficient release time is set aside for both the COM/s [manager] and CWU Rep to jointly complete this exercise. Where a unit has no CWU representative, the appropriate Area Representative will complete this exercise with the COM/s. The joint review is to be completed by July 7.”

Royal Mail’s “huddle brief”

Emboldened by their Joint Statement with the CWU, Royal Mail convened “huddles” at mail centres last week. Managers distributed a “Huddle Brief” titled, “Joint activity on revision post implementation review (PIR) and mail centre supernumerary and surplus”.

Its first section is headed “What we have agreed with the CWU” and begins, “We hope you have seen the joint statement that was communicated on 16 June”. It explains, “The joint statement said that RM and the CWU will carry out a full joint post implementation review (PIR) in the plants, which will ensure the realignment revision outputs are properly aligned to workload, achieving work plan, quality of service targets, and efficiency performance.”

The document outlines the fate of “supernumerary” workers, i.e., those deemed “surplus” due to Royal Mail’s scorched earth policy. It states, “Following the conclusion of the PIR, we will together [with the CWU] carry out an exceptional duty selection process for any surplus or supernumerary employee to pick into any newly revised vacant duties within the duty set.

“...colleagues who have not obtained a permanent duty, have several choices, which include: 1) taking a role elsewhere within Royal Mail; 2) voluntary redundancy, where offered; 3) or becoming part of the redeployment program.” Those facing redeployment will be offered “retraining” and “wellbeing support” including “limited mental health consultations”.

June 29: CWU instructs compliance with customer service point reductions

In a letter to branches on June 29, “Royal Mail’s Customer Service Points (CSPs) – Further Reduction In Opening Times”, Baulch confirmed that postal workers across a range of indoor functions will be subject to forced redeployment and “voluntary” redundancy as a result of Royal Mail’s escalated plan to reduce hours at CSPs (such as parcel collection offices) as it implements its plans for automatic redelivery.

Baulch revealed, “some two weeks ago Royal Mail outlined its further opening time reduction plans which they claimed needed to be retained in ‘Commercial Confidence’” (which Ward and company kept from members). He explained, “In summary, CSPs will have a maximum opening time of 4-hours (8 am to 10 am and 4 pm to 6 pm weekday) with most units only being open for 2-hours (8 am to 10 am weekday); 4-hours Saturday, and with all CSPs being closed on Sunday.”

Baulch stated hypocritically, “we fundamentally disagree with the approach taken by Royal Mail and the sheer level and scale of the plans now earmarked”, but confirmed forced redeployments and redundancy arrangements would apply in line with “the existing MTSF Agreement as set out within sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.3 of the RMG/CWU Business Recovery, Transformation and Growth Negotiators’ Agreement.”

June 29: CWU tries to cover its tracks

Davie Robertson, CWU Assistant Secretary, issued a follow-up letter to branches later that day, “Mail Centre Revision PIR Activity”, marked “For the URGENT attention of all”.

His letter was a blatant effort to conceal the CWU executive’s endorsement of company revisions, including those resulting in postal workers being deemed “surplus” to requirements.

Robertson’s letter began with the astonishing paragraph, “Branches and

representatives will be aware that PIR activity should have commenced in Mail Centres in line with the Para 9, Section 2.5 of the negotiators agreement, the relevant Joint Statement”. In other words, it is irrelevant to the CWU executive whether workers vote for the agreement or not! The postal executive is already implementing it with management.

Robertson sought to answer, “communications from the field” (i.e., protests from postal workers) over the CWU’s treatment of “supernumerary” workers. He wrote, “For absolute clarity, the department have not agreed to the business’ redeployment pool programme”. The union’s Joint Statement with Royal Mail, he added, made “clear that discussions in respect of outstanding issues relating to supernumeraries and surplus employees would take place at the end of the PIR and review process”.

In reality, the Joint Statement agreed that “joint activity for managing the PIR and supernumerary resolution will take place in line with the IR Framework and be scheduled to be completed by the 7th July 2023. In line with the above process, the local parties are encouraged to jointly consider and agree pragmatic and mutual interest solutions.”

The shameless lies and subterfuge did not end there. Robertson also addressed concerns over a “PIR Template” spreadsheet for joint sign off on revision activity, sent out by the company. He stated that while the union “did not initially have any issues with the document it has been brought to our attention that some representatives are uncomfortable with the wording of the document and data contained, or omitted.”

Unfortunately for postal workers, the “Guidelines and Quality and Resourcing Checklists (Annexes C, D & E) to support the PIR activity” which Robertson directed reps to use instead are based on the same pro-company agenda. Robertson admits as much, adding, “It had been our intention to communicate the documents yesterday but due to the above issues we had advised the business that we did not believe that they would be well received in the field.”

What a devastating portrait of the CWU. Their “intention” had been to circulate documents to help with company revisions, but they feared a backlash from postal workers so “advised the business” on the best way to proceed. It is a union fully integrated with Royal Mail’s corporate boardroom and the capitalist state.

Conclusion: Tea & biscuits on July 25

As the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee warned, the CWU’s Joint Statement with Royal Mail amounted to de facto implementation of the negotiators’ agreement.

This has now been confirmed in spades. In a letter to branches on July 3, headlined “Royal Mail Group: National Briefing – Tuesday 25th July 2023”, Dave Ward and Andy Furey announced, “A National Briefing will be held on Tuesday 25th July 2023 in relation to the Business Recovery, Transformation & Growth Agreement and next steps.”

Have the CWU executive been informed by Civica about the likely outcome of the ballot? Or are Ward and Furey signalling that their negotiator’s agreement will be imposed regardless of the ballot’s outcome?

The day-long briefing will be held at The Queen’s Hotel in Leeds, “All branches are requested to make this a priority engagement”. Tea and coffee will be available from 10.30am, Ward and Furey advise. It is not clear whether this generous offer is extended to any of the hundreds of reps suspended and sacked during the year-long dispute.

The need for rank-and-file organisation could not be clearer. The WWSWS urges all workers who want to launch a fightback and break the grip of the CWU’s unaccountable bureaucracy to contact the Postal

Workers Rank-and-File Committee and register to attend its next Zoom meeting on Sunday July 9, 7pm.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact