

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee outlines fightback strategy on eve of ballot result on CWU-Royal Mail agreement

Our reporter
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The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) met Sunday on the eve of ballot results being announced over the sell-out deal negotiated by Communication Workers Union (CWU) leaders Dave Ward and Andy Furey with Royal Mail. The national ballot closes at 12pm Tuesday.

Tony Robson, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, gave the opening report which was followed by discussion from Royal Mail workers from delivery offices, mail centres and Parcelforce Worldwide.

Citing the PWRFC's statement calling for a No vote, Robson said the committee's call was linked to a rank-and-file fightback, "We also warned it is necessary to prepare for the next stage of the fight because, whichever way the vote goes, the confrontation between postal workers and the CWU bureaucracy is set to deepen."

The meeting reviewed the CWU's sabotage of the dispute. Robson quoted from letters issued to branches by CWU officials over the past fortnight instructing reps to work with managers to enforce company revisions aimed at completing Royal Mail's transformation into a 24/7 parcel led company to rival Amazon.

A worker posting in the Zoom chat gave voice to the anger felt over the CWU's betrayal, "As a postman for 35 years, as was my dad, my question is: if there is a Yes vote should I punch my dad in the face for all the conditions that he fought for just being thrown away? It would be less painful. Ward should go."

Others explained the devastating impact of Royal Mail's joint offensive. A message sent by a postal worker to the WSWs was read out: "I have worked for Royal Mail for 15 years and cannot believe what is happening. Full-scale bullying and harassment by managers, people with mental health issues are being targeted to push them over the edge so they'll walk away and can then be replaced with new starters on less pay. Workloads and duty sizes are unachievable. It's full scale slaughter.

"We've had one suicide this year. As a CWU member for

a lot of years and very close to my CWU reps we cannot believe how the CWU has hung us out to dry. Eighteen days of strikes we did for these people and then they royally shafted us. Ward and Furey and the muppet who is head of communications need to be sacked immediately... Rule 13 will be getting raised in our office shortly."

Several offices have voted for industrial action under Rule 13 of the CWU's constitution, seeking to fight local revisions and the victimisation and sacking of reps. But the CWU executive has blocked their action, part of deliberate efforts to ram through the negotiators' agreement with Royal Mail.

"Nothing surprises me anymore," was the comment of another worker. "No trust in the CWU after a bitter 18 days of action. Didn't take long for them to cozy up with their pals and get some of their nice deals done for their own benefit. Whose soul did they sell because it wasn't their own? It is sad seeing hard working postal workers totally bemused. The physical and mental strain, worked like dogs unless you are part of the friends and family crew. And if this great deal gets voted in, the changes will escalate, or a no vote and more strikes. How many reps will be hoping for that, standing with the members that they sold out?"

Robson said the Royal Mail dispute demonstrated a broader crisis of leadership facing the entire working class. "One year ago, Royal Mail workers stood at the head of a fightback by workers covering telecoms, railways, docks, oil rigs, the NHS and other key sectors. But every one of these strikes has been sold out based on rotten below-inflation pay deals and the imposition of massive attacks on jobs and conditions.

"The Sunak government has been able to enforce a 5 percent pay award on NHS workers in England because the million strong workforce was divided and demobilised by all the major unions: Unite, Unison, GMB and the RCN."

Across the Channel, workers in France had launched "the biggest wave of strikes and protests since 1968", with more

than 80 percent of the population against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms and millions demanding a general strike. But the trade unions had demobilised this movement, "preventing Macron's ousting" and insisting on "negotiations" with the president, even as he ordered brutal state repression against demonstrators.

Reporting the committee's letter of solidarity to UPS workers in the United States, Robson emphasised the importance of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. "The Teamsters union is blocking a 97 percent mandate by 340,000 UPS workers. Workers must take the initiative as part of a unified fight against the race to the bottom." Robson reported that a speaker from the US would be attending the next committee meeting to inform Royal Mail workers of the dispute.

Robson said, "The only viable 'Plan B' for defeating the CWU bureaucracy's joint conspiracy with the company and preventing the destruction of jobs, terms and conditions is that advanced by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Every available means to wage a fight by postal workers within the framework of the union has been shut down by the apparatus."

Another committee member and long-time postal worker explained, "We need to be aware that this is not an overnight change in the relationship between the employer and the CWU. It has been going on for years. We must not stop at the end of the vote. This is the beginning of a rank-and-file movement. The fact we exist and are here is enough to unsettle the bureaucrats."

The meeting unanimously adopted the following resolution calling for the construction of rank-and-file committees at every delivery office and mail centre to prepare for the struggles ahead:

The Postal Workers Rank and File Committee (PWRFC) reaffirms our total opposition to the CWU's pro-company negotiators' agreement with Royal Mail, which unleashes the biggest assault on postal workers in the company's 500-year history.

Dave Ward, Andy Furey and the CWU postal executive have shamelessly trampled on members' rights. Since their June 16 Joint Statement with Royal Mail, the CWU has been working with management to impose a new wave of company revisions.

Irrespective of the ballot outcome on Tuesday, Ward and Furey have made clear their agreement will be imposed. They have issued a slew of directives to CWU branches and reps instructing them to enforce "joint revisions" and other key

aspects of the Business Recovery, Growth and Transformation Agreement. Reps have been directed to work with managers to complete a productivity check list and to help identify workers deemed "surplus" to requirements."

Before workers' eyes, the union has been transformed into an arm of management.

From April through June the CWU bureaucracy rode a massive backlash from the rank-and-file. But they used their control over the union apparatus to push members back, cancelling ballots to prevent a No vote and conducting a propaganda blitz to politically intimidate workers, claiming that rejection would result in "mutual self-destruction".

If a No vote is registered in the face of this CWU-Royal Mail gang-up, the first order of business will be to force Ward, Furey and the postal executive from office.

The turn must be toward the construction of rank-and-file committees in every mail centre and delivery office. Committees run by and for workers must be established, returning decision-making to the shop floor and coordinating a planned fightback in defence of all jobs, terms and conditions.

This is an essential part of a broader struggle that must be waged by the entire working class against a Tory government that has legislated to ban strikes in essential services and against a Labour Party whose leader Sir Keir Starmer has announced the scrapping of calls for Royal Mail's nationalisation.

To find out more information about the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee and to get involved, please fill out the form below or email rmpw.rfc@gmail.com



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