CWU imposes historic betrayal of postal workers as Royal Mail agreement accepted

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What is your view on the ballot outcome and the CWU's betrayal of the year-long struggle of postal workers? Submit your response in the form below the article.

Communication Workers Union (CWU) officials have announced that their pro-company Business Recovery, Transformation and Growth Agreement with Royal Mail has been accepted by members, in a result that thousands of postal workers have branded a betrayal.

In a brief video livestream at 4.30pm this afternoon, CWU General Secretary Dave Ward and his Deputy Andy Furey announced the agreement had been overwhelmingly endorsed, with 75.84 percent voting Yes in a national postal and online ballot, and 24.16 percent voting No, with a turnout of 67.1 percent.

The vote brings to an end the determined year-long struggle by 115,000 Royal Mail workers for a cost-of-living pay rise and against company demands for a massive restructure of employment terms and conditions that were adopted in full by the CWU in April.

Ward, Furey and CWU Head of Communications Chris Webb delivered a sickening 12-minute presentation, hailing the ballot result as a victory for democracy and demanding that postal workers "come together" to implement the deal they had endorsed.

"We give you that right to vote," Ward declared arrogantly, "but we also have to honour the vote whatever the outcome."

Ward's depiction of the ballot as an exercise in democracy is a travesty. Since Christmas last year, the CWU has suppressed all demands for strike action. In February, Ward and Furey shelved a 96 percent renewed mandate for industrial action as they entered closed-door talks with Royal Mail.

In April, Ward and Furey announced their sellout agreement with Royal Mail, backed by the postal executive, which met a wave of rank-and-file anger. The CWU leadership responded with a war against the membership. They twice cancelled ballots on the agreement to forestall a No vote while systematically working to wear down resistance.

Ward, Furey and their lapdog Webb waged a vicious and targeted campaign against all those advocating a No vote. They were denounced as "reckless" and "deluded" "keyboard warriors" endangering the future of Royal Mail and its workforce.

Unable to mount any convincing case for their wretched deal, Ward insisted there was "no alternative" other than "mutual self-destruction". The CWU shut down every forum for members to oppose the deal, even cancelling their annual conference.

The ballot was finally launched after a Joint Statement by the CWU and Royal Mail on June 16. Ward and Furey lied through their teeth, claiming that hated revisions would now be pushed back. In fact, they had committed in their Joint Statement to begin implementing the negotiators' agreement, in addition to revisions, before a single vote was cast.

As balloting took place over the past three weeks, the CWU executive was busy issuing directives to their reps to work with local managers and enforce revisions and other productivity measures. Under these conditions, thousands of postal workers concluded the agreement was going ahead, and that a No vote would not defeat it.

Ward declared this afternoon, "If the company keep on doing exactly the same things they've been doing on quality of service, the USO, on revisions, productivity and all of that, it's going to end in disaster." But this disaster is already happening with the CWU's active participation.

While the bureaucracy worked furiously to push a Yes vote, offering a £900 increase to the lump sum (conditional on endorsing the deal) and preying on the financial distress facing members, the Yes vote is above all a vote of no-confidence in the CWU leadership.

The vast majority of those who voted "Yes" do not support the agreement's assault on their hard-won conditions and entitlements. But they did not see any way forward.

Those who voted "No" represent the most militant and

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principled section of workers. Under any other circumstances they would have been the basis for mobilising the entire membership in a struggle to defeat Royal Mail's attacks, but they were suppressed and savagely betrayed by the bureaucracy.

Ward made clear the CWU will press ahead immediately with implementing the agreement, "We want nothing more than to work together with the company." He and Furey pointed to the agreement's union-management committees and Joint Working Group, making clear that CWU "field representatives" will be briefed next week to begin implementation.

As the ballot results were being announced, the CWU's livestream chat filled with comments from thousands of angry members denouncing the bureaucracy. "That's bollocks shall be cancelling my union membership straight away I'm done", "how do members cancel subs?", "Where do I sign to leave the union?" and "Absolute shambles! No way it's that high! I've barely seen a post or spoke to anyone that's voting yes!!! New job search starts now", "not a single postie I know was voting yes. How do I stop my membership?"

Another worker commented, "What about the 90% who voted for strike action in Feb. A lot more than 75% and we were ignored". Others pointed to the same double-standard, "You also had the biggest mandate ever for IA [industrial action] ever... then sold us all out".

Faced with a flood of members announcing their resignation, the CWU began posting a standardised reply: "Leaving the union is exactly the wrong thing to do. The challenges we face now are huge. Holding RM to the deal, getting more Saturdays off, turning the company around. This won't be done by members leaving the CWU. The only organisation between you and the gig economy."

As many workers have noted, the agreement marks the imposition of a gig economy, enforced by the CWU bureaucracy.

At the end of the livestream, Webb judged that many of the 26,000 members listening in were "upset", and invited Ward to sum up and "deliver a message of unity".

Ward responded to those slamming the CWU's betrayal by scolding, "It won't achieve nothing [sic] other than to play into the hands of management". "Our job as a trade union," he continued, was to recognise that "change is necessary."

Neither Ward, Furey or Webb made a single reference to the more than 400 CWU reps and workers sacked, suspended and victimised during the dispute and hung out to dry by the Royal Mail-CWU agreement.

While the overall agreement was endorsed, a separate ballot of Royal Mail fleet workers on Appendix 4 of the agreement, which includes plans for expanded outsourcing and a massive attack on terms and conditions for new entrants, was defeated. Their vote indicates ongoing opposition by Royal Mail workers to the agreement's punishing overhaul of employment terms.

A member of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee who works in delivery told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "The ballot result today greenlights the worst attacks in the history of delivery workers. Regardless of the outcome we were always going to have to keep on organising and fighting. The result is not a resounding acceptance of the offer. Workers in delivery do not accept this programme of attack on their jobs.

"Workers voted yes because they had no other choice. They were coerced by the offer of a lump sum at a time of poverty, by the strong arm of union officials advising a Yes vote, by exclusion from the decisions of branches to back the offer and by the endless attacks in the workplace.

"Now is the time for all workers to double their efforts to stop the implementation of the deal. We can do this through rank-and-file postal workers' committees. Workers will need an alternative voice now to oppose the coming storm. The fightback begins today."

Another committee member stated, "This agreement will turn us into another Amazon. It's a form of industrial slavery with the company controlling our life. We will not have one outside of work with seasonal variations and later start and finish times—no friends or family.

"Ward says stick together, but the union are only sticking together with the company against us. This is why we need the rank-and-file committee. We should not be giving up anything. There is always money for the huge salaries of the executives and shareholders. The workers get nothing. We have to keep fighting."

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding a Zoom meeting on Sunday July 23 to discuss the outcome of the ballot and the way forward for postal workers. All rank-and-file workers are invited to register and attend.

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