

CWU leader Dave Ward delivers more pro-company propaganda as rank-and-file anger grows at Royal Mail

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Attend the next meeting of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee on Sunday, September 24 at 7pm. Register here.

Communication Workers Union (CWU) General Secretary Dave Ward's interview on CWU Live was a fresh barrage of pro-company propaganda. The nearly hour-long event was an exercise in evasions and lies on behalf of the CWU bureaucracy, after it rammed through its sellout of the year-long struggle against Royal Mail (RM) this July.

The interview went out under the radar on a Sunday morning on September 10. It was first posted on YouTube where the comments section was disabled. Rank-and-file opposition to the CWU's miserable betrayal has flooded its social media accounts for weeks, with the union frequently deleting its own members' comments.

Once Ward's interview was posted on Facebook and X/Twitter, these feelings made themselves heard. One postal worker commented, "Unbelievable workloads, offices crashing all over the UK, posties off sick (injuries & stress) & leaving in droves... GREAT DEAL you delivered us..."

The Q&A session was led by Ward's trusted sidekick Chris Webb, CWU Head of Communications. Even within the highly staged managed event, some recognition had to be made of the anger felt by members towards the CWU leadership. Webb noted "criticism" that members felt abandoned and were having "lumps kicked out of them", with "a period of silence" from the union following the agreement.

Ward added insult to injury, replying that it had been "relentless for us [CWU officials] in terms of meetings with the company to try and get them to hold to the agreement." The CWU have not faced a reluctant management over their surrender terms, they have been 'relentlessly' implementing them together.

In addition to the overhaul of sick pay, the raft of attacks which have started to come on stream include: a longer working week of 39 hours in the High Peak; the integration of a single parcel network, with transfer of work from Parcelforce to delivery offices already failing on letters; and the use of tracking technology (PDA's) to discipline and sack postal workers as workloads are driven up.

Amazon-level exploitation is being overseen by CWU-RM Joint Working Groups, with the union bureaucracy completely integrated into management.

After dismissing the conditions confronting postal workers, Ward moved on to the priority issue company finances—using hackneyed phrases about shared interests. He repeated claims that Royal Mail faced a difficult financial situation, while adding that discussions with the company "require us to be a bit sensible about what we can say."

This tight-lipped approach to the company's business secrets shows how the union bureaucracy is in the back pocket of the executives and major shareholders. At a meeting held earlier in the year with investors by

International Distribution Services (IDS)—the parent company of Royal Mail—it was forecast that Royal Mail will return to profit over the next 12 months and into the future after reported losses for the year to May 2023 of £1 billion.

The CWU was described as "our union" by company executives. The Business Recovery, Transformation and Growth (BRTG) Agreement and the ending of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) six-day letter delivery service were touted as the basis for further rich pickings.

Ward promised he could be relied upon to face down postal workers' opposition to a new looting of wealth. Referring to the £600 million paid to shareholders last year, he stated, "they created the financial crisis when they gave all that money away" but scolded workers, "we've got to move on in our union, moving beyond blame" and "moaning about Royal Mail" to "find solutions for the company."

The mantra of "holding the company to the agreement"

Throughout the interview, Ward maintained that the main issue was to ensure Royal Mail was holding to the agreement. In fact, the BRTG agreement has been used as a springboard by Royal Mail to launch additional attacks inseparable from the brutal restructuring signed up to by the CWU.

Ward offered only handwringing over the redeployment pool set up at mail centres to speed the jobs cull, but only from the standpoint that this undermined the "headcount reduction" already agreed by the CWU—behind the fig leaf of no compulsory redundancies. Not so much an inch, the company was given a mile, and has taken another. In any case, Ward promised nothing that went beyond more "discussions" with the company, while displaced workers are left to fend for themselves.

Another example of what the CWU describes as "unagreed change" is the decision to reduce by half the opening hours of the 1,200 Customer Service Points nationally, as a step toward their final closure. Not a word on the subject from Ward.

The CWU allowed the company to implement 10,000 job losses over the past year even as its members were still in dispute, with mandated strike action throttled after December. The BRTG agreement, based on a two-tier system with new entrants employed on inferior terms, has acted as a spur to drive out the existing workforce as part of a de facto fire-and-rehire policy.

Ward welcomed the comments in support of the agreement by Mark Seidenberg, the recently installed chief executive of IDS. Underscoring how the bureaucracy views itself as a junior corporate partner, Ward's

most pressing concern was who Seidenberg would appoint as chief executive at Royal Mail to replace Simon Thompson.

Ward also spoke about the need to “look into Ofcom”, but the CWU has partnered with the regulator in its current review of the USO aimed at providing a rationale for ending Saturday mail delivery by Royal Mail.

For all of Ward’s company-speak about alternative ways to “grow the business”, and lip service paid to protecting a public service under the USO, he outlined nothing concrete. Whatever the CWU bureaucracy comes up with will serve as window dressing for Royal Mail’s brutal restructuring and run-down of the service in line with the BRTG agreement, based on “cost reduction”, “productivity” and “increased competitiveness.”

Falsifying the CWU’s record on privatisation and covering for Labour’s role

Webb and Ward presented the Labour Party as an ally of postal workers, but recognised they were on thin ice. Webb referred to a potential Labour government as being “more favourable to working people”, with Ward adding, “We would hope so.”

This political snow job required no small amount of evasive language by Ward on Labour’s role in the privatisation of Royal Mail and the sabotage of any fight against it by the CWU bureaucracy.

He squirmed, “Yes the company has been privatised and it was our union that made sure at that point, when we were unable to stop it, as all political parties were saying something about Royal Mail being a basket case and being needed to be privatised, we got it in legislation that the USO is there.”

This is a whitewash. The Blair Labour government introduced legislation in January 2006 which prepared the ground for privatisation, carving-up the network for private sector vultures to cherry-pick the most profitable operations.

When it came to the full privatisation of Royal Mail by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government in 2013, the so-called opposition by the CWU bureaucracy rested solely on its commitment to drive up profits. CWU General Secretary Billy Hayes stated, “Workers have embraced modernisation and helped increase profits by 60 percent.”

A strike over a three-year pay deal was blocked ahead of Royal Mail’s floatation on the stock market to ensure mass opposition from postal workers to the sell-off was sidelined.

Since then, the CWU bureaucracy has been relied upon to strangle every national dispute and enforce pro-company deals based on sub-standard pay increases, reduced pensions and increased flexibility and productivity, making it a cash cow for the major shareholders which now control over 50 percent of the company.

Ward spoke about having “very good conversations with Labour about the future of Royal Mail” none of which he cared to elaborate on. But everything postal workers need to know is shown by the public support Labour MP Darren Jones has provided for the BRTG agreement. The supposed saviour of postal workers has presented the sweatshop charter as a pro-worker deal.

As point man for Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer with the CWU bureaucracy in its sellout of the struggle of Royal Mail workers, he has been rewarded with a senior post in the shadow cabinet of ultra-Blairites, assisting Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves’ programme of austerity, low taxes for the rich and nothing for public services.

The CWU-Falconer Review conspiracy

The “update” and “insight” by Ward on the Falconer Review into victimised CWU reps and workers was a travesty.

Around five minutes was dedicated to the biggest frame-up in an industrial dispute in two generations, with around 400 sacked or suspended. Ward has already stated that only those “directly related to the dispute” would be reviewed, with just 200 cases referred to Falconer.

Webb commented that it was coming up to a year for some reps and that “there must be a couple of hundred workplaces that are missing their rep”. But he tried to break apart what should be a united front of workers against the company’s campaign of intimidation and bullying, saying there were “going to be some cases where there will be some difficulties over misconduct” and slashing the number of what he deemed worthy cases down to just “dozens and dozens of people sacked, suspended or disciplined who have done nothing, or next to nothing.”

Ward stated that the union had prepared a “substantial submission” to connect the cases: “we are opening up Lord Falconer to the reality that Royal Mail set up this Gold, Silver and Bronze Command.”

The idea that Lord Falconer would take the side of workers against an orchestrated management campaign of frame-ups against striking workers is an insult. The CWU has handed victimised workers over to the sole discretion of a trusted representative of the ruling class. His CV includes advising the National Coal Board during the 1984-5 miners’ strike. As a minister (later Lord Chancellor) in the Blair Labour government, he helped make the case for the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003.

It was quickly announced by Ward that the CWU had written to Falconer jointly with Royal Mail regarding an “alternative approach” which “highlights how bad some of the cases are.” He added, “I’d like to think now that Royal Mail will say we’ve got to get some of the people back to work.”

The Falconer Review is a stitch-up which the CWU bureaucracy cooked up at ACAS behind the backs of the membership. It is the spearhead of a campaign of management intimidation widely reported by postal workers but not mentioned even once by Ward.

A fight must be organised against the lies and censorship of the CWU apparatus, its sweatshop charter with Royal Mail and for a mass campaign for the unconditional and immediate reinstatement of all framed-up postal workers.

To discuss a strategy to take this forward, we encourage you to attend the next meeting of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee on Sunday, September 24 at 7pm. Register here.



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