

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee discusses campaign against mass victimisations at Royal Mail

Our reporter
26 September 2023

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) held its latest Zoom meeting on Sunday night to discuss the campaign it has launched based on last month's call to "Reinstate all victimised reps and postal workers! End the CWU-Lord Falconer conspiracy at Royal Mail!"

Those in attendance included victimised reps and workers from delivery offices, mail centres and Parcelforce Worldwide.

Tony Robson from the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) gave the opening report, calling out the shameful fact that 400 union reps and postal workers remain sacked or suspended following the year-long Royal Mail dispute the biggest frame-up of workers in an industrial dispute since the 1984-85 miners' strike.

In April, Communication Workers Union (CWU) General Secretary Dave Ward had claimed there would be no deal with Royal Mail until victimised reps were reinstated, stating: "The union leaves no one behind". But hundreds of reps and workers have been abandoned.

Robson said, "The call by our committee for a fightback has resonated at mail centres, delivery and sorting offices up and down the country." He cited WSWS coverage of campaigns in London, Manchester, Leeds, Hull and Sheffield, with hundreds of copies of the committee's statement warmly received.

"Postal workers described how they have been left in the dark by the CWU about their sacked reps, a situation affecting around 200 workplaces. They spoke about how the CWU's sellout agreement had violated the rights of *all* workers including the introduction of a two-tier workforce with new entrants on inferior terms to replace long standing postal workers, describing this

as 'a further step towards the gig-economy' and 'another version of P&O [ferries] fire and rehire.'"

The sacking of reps who had refused to toe the company line was fully in keeping with the CWU's pro-company agreement which has seen the total integration of the union bureaucracy with management through Joint Working Groups, enforcing sweatshop conditions against postal workers.

A Parcelforce delivery driver from London told the meeting, "The claim by the CWU that the agreement 'cancelled Uberisation' is a complete lie." Parcelforce drivers were being summoned to attend 1-2-1 meetings with management and forced to accept revised routes involving speeds ups, hiked workloads, and reduced pay. Owner drivers were being prioritised for the new routes, ensuring the company takes full advantage of their inferior pay and conditions, including pay-per-item.

He explained how a workplace meeting had been organised where a manager introduced a union full-time official who explained how new working practices would be introduced. Drivers were now being threatened by management over not meeting targets.

Robson said, "Any opposition which threatens to disrupt their agreement is being actively suppressed by the union apparatus."

He pointed to Ward's "CWU Live" interview on September 10 where he scolded postal workers to "stop moaning" about Royal Mail. He sought to silence criticism over the £600 million paid to shareholders last year, while promoting the CWU's spin about "mutual interest solutions" which amounts to brutal restructuring and dismantling of the Universal Service Obligation (USO).

A “progress report” delivered by Ward on the Falconer review of victimisations was a snow job. Robson explained, “The CWU has only made 200 referrals to Lord Falconer, around a half of all reported cases. Ward said a ‘substantial submission’ had been prepared regarding an orchestrated campaign of victimisation by senior management but the CWU had instead written a joint letter with Royal Mail to Falconer on ‘an alternative approach’ which highlighted ‘how bad some of the cases are’.”

“This heavily vetted approach is in line with the decision to appoint Lord Falconer with sole discretion over the fate of workers. Far from an impartial figure, he gave legal advice to the National Coal Board during the 1984-85 miners’ strike on banning flying pickets and how to recognise the scab Union of Democratic Miners.

“The Falconer Review was hatched at ACAS talks with Royal Mail and ex-Trades Union Congress boss Brendan Barber. The CWU worked behind the scenes with Labour to impose a contract which gave everything to the company to defeat the strike.”

A victimised CWU rep sacked last year on trumped up charges addressed the meeting. He is unable to even step foot on Royal Mail premises to speak to postal workers who elected him at his unit. He had been “completely blanked” by the CWU and the Falconer Review, with no information about his case.

He added, “I call this a battle against the CWU. Royal Mail is a business they are going to do everything to maximise profits, we know this. It is how we fightback against that.”

A discussion opened on the aims of the PWRFC in charting a way forward under conditions where postal workers confront the enormity of the CWU-inflicted betrayal. Robson and other speakers explained that the rank-and-file committee was not acting as a ginger group on Ward and company. The PWRFC was tackling head on the central issue: how to transform the disenfranchised majority into a powerful force for change, removing the unaccountable bureaucracy and prosecuting the class struggle, not appeasing the corporations.

The meeting discussed the need to expand and deepen the fight for the unconditional reinstatement of all victimised reps and workers as an integral part of the fight to mobilise the rank-and-file against the rotten pro-

company CWU-Royal Mail agreement.

Turning to the wider significance of the Royal Mail dispute, Robson reviewed how the Sunak government had confronted the largest strike movement since the 1980s. It was able to rely on the trade union and labour bureaucracy to knife over 100,000 postal workers in the back. The trade unions collectively oversaw a wave of sell-out agreements, suppressing workers’ struggles even as more draconian anti-strike legislation passed onto the statute books.

Robson spoke about the critical role of the International Workers Alliance of Rank- and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) in fighting to unify workers across different industry sectors and across national borders. Its work was expanding, including at UPS and at the United States Postal Service where workers are fighting the same agenda of brutal restructuring.

Tom Scripps, Assistant National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party, moved a motion in support of car workers in the United States whose 97 percent vote for all-out strike action is being blocked by the United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracy. The UAW is working with the Biden administration to prepare a sellout. In recognition that Royal Mail workers faced a similar line-up and as a mark of solidarity, a motion was adopted by the meeting which stated:

“The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee sends its solidarity to the 150,000 car workers in dispute with Ford, GM and Stellantis (the ‘Big Three’) in the United States. The committee acknowledges the global significance of this action. It notes the attempts being made by the United Autoworkers Union to sabotage the strike—as the Communication Workers Union did with our year-long struggle at Royal Mail—and sends its support to the fight of the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network to stop a sellout. In opposition to the attempts made to isolate the struggle by the union bureaucracy, we pledge to popularise the ‘Big Three’ strike among our friends and colleagues.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact