Royal Mail workers denounce stitch up of reps and members by the Communication Workers Union in Falconer Review

Tony Robson
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The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) agreed at its Zoom meeting on Sunday to continue publishing statements from members and supporters condemning the surrender terms the Communication Workers Union (CWU) is enforcing against victimised reps and members in line with the outcome of the Falconer Review.

CWU leaders Dave Ward and Andy Furey's joint November 10 statement declared that the Falconer Review had delivered justice," claiming "93.1 percent of the original decisions have been overturned".

This a lie. Only around 230 cases were referred to the Falconer Review out of around 400 reported dismissals and suspensions during the year long dispute at Royal Mail. The company is exonerated for mounting the largest industrial frame-up of workers in a dispute since the 1984-5 miners' strike. Those who were its victims must accept they were the guilty party in order to be reinstated or have suspensions and disciplinary charges short of dismissals lifted. In total just 21 dismissals were overturned in a direct ruling by Falconer and only in return for workers accepting reduced and expired disciplinary charges and waiving their right to an Employment Tribunal. This provides the "rationale" for a "collective approach" applying the same onerous preconditions for overturning 125 dismissals overall and 67 cases short of dismissal, including suspensions.

World Socialist Web Site articles exposing this betrayal, including statements from victimised reps, have attracted widespread interest for countering the CWU propaganda narrative. For months the PWRFC sounded the warning over the impending stitch up of the Falconer Review and campaigned among postal workers left in the dark. An estimated 200 workplaces were left without their reps as management and the CWU rammed through increased workloads and ran down the mail service to prioritise more profitable parcels. This is in line with the Business Recovery, Transformation and Growth Agreement (BRTGA) establishing a two-tier workforce based on Amazon-style sweat shop conditions. The Falconer Review is an integral part of the BRTG&A the CWU forced across the line in July to end the dispute.

The CWU leadership performed a volte-face on their promise of "no one left behind" as members demanded there should be no agreement without all victimised workers being reinstated. Leaving principled and militant reps out of workplace helped the CWU to implement its pro-company agreement. This was cooked up in secret talks instigated at the arbitration service ACAS to overrule the renewed strike mandate in February. Former Trades Union Congress General Secretary Brendan Barber was brought in as a point man for Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer to insert Lord Falconer to preside over a kangaroo court.

Ward and CWU officials are resorting to bureaucratic methods to silence opposition, with victimised reps and members prevented from directly speaking to the membership. The CWU and Royal Mail are insisting they must agree to sign the draconian terms and waiver their rights by December 1.

It is an obscenity that the livelihoods of fighters for the working class are threatened. Those who should face the axe are the pro-company bureaucracy responsible for the betrayal of those they were meant to represent.

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George from a delivery office in the Glasgow area

The purpose of the "surrender document" was two-fold in my opinion. Firstly, to maintain the status quo (Royal Mail's race to the bottom). Secondly, to nullify any dissent from ordinary union members. The former is happening before our eyes, the latter is in our hands.

No union executive should stand by and watch paid up members and reps being thrown to the wolves. Remember unity is strength.

To trust the outcome of a review by the New Labour Lord Falconer is embarrassing. A cursory glance for younger

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comrades, a Google search, tells you all you need to know about his track record. The writing was on the wall when Brendan Barber got the gig. He had been called on to enforce past sellouts at Royal Mail through ACAS talks.

Where we are today? I think it's important to send out a clear message; gathering evidence from around the country, that the rank-and-file are disgusted by the deal and betrayal of loyal union reps and members.

Ian from a delivery office in Greater Manchester

There is no justice at all for workers who were doing what they were asked to do. It was obvious that the method chosen by the CWU to seek redress was solely about limiting the number of tribunal claims. Ward stated that “no one would be left behind” and that was a lie.

We have had no trade union official above the shop steward speak to us about the awful review process. Workers know full well it does not deliver justice for those thrown out of the workplace. None of us have been taken in by the CWU's claims and should Ward ever show his face in our workplace he'd be challenged on his lie of no-one being left behind.

The rank-and-file committee was absolutely right to warn about the Mickey Mouse review. It was clear, even to the lay person, that the review was designed to limit the opportunities for workers to get justice.

The only forum telling the truth and giving a voice to the victims of the CWU review is the rank-and-file committee. The committee must continue to publicise what it uncovers about the victims of this injustice. The testimony recorded by the committee and communicated to workers provides a real record of the behaviour and treachery of the CWU.

It is crucial that there is a fight against the new ways of working and the rotten agreement. We can see the treatment of new workers and the lack of support for them from the CWU who want to recruit them purely so they can pay their subs. The CWU has no intention of organising and agitating for these new workers.

Workers are only as strong as the weakest workers. It is only a matter of time before all workers are treated like the new workers.

Gary from a delivery office in Yorkshire

For workers, this agreement is not worth the paper it’s written on, since Royal Mail management gets a “get out of jail free card” for its victimisation of workers during the dispute. Lord Falconer is the face of the class enemy. He is not in any sense “independent”, and nor should the fate of our comrades anyway have been left to a process outside the collective struggle of the dispute. The CWU bureaucracy claims that “the agreement is based on the principle of reconciliation”, but it is actually based on the principle of continued management domination.

“Reconciliation” is taken to mean “Royal Mail committing to apply the 2015 Conduct Code Agreement going forward,” in other words, doing what Royal Mail agreed to do in 2015 but still cannot be trusted to do. How much use is the 2015 agreement if Royal Mail continues to get away with flouting it?

One principle in the Conduct Code Agreement (from the ACAS guidance) is that matters be dealt with promptly, and yet we still see ordinary conduct cases drag on for months for no good reason. Incredibly, the CWU signed up to an agreement in 2015 which explicitly prevents a worker taking out a grievance against a manager regarding an ongoing conduct case for abusing the process. This itself is outside the ACAS guidance and leaves workers unable to challenge corporate injustice.

Jim from the Midlands Super Hub

We were not supposed to sign any agreement with Royal Mail and end the dispute without the all the victimised back at work. The CWU said “no one left behind” but they have hung the militants out to dry, the foot soldiers of the union which they are meant to protect. This is a disgrace of a union.

This is my main gripe. The victimised reps and members have had their livelihoods turned upside down and with no support or being kept in the loop by the CWU. They should not have to accept any guilt. This was always a management stitch-up.

The principled and militant reps are the ones we need in the workplace because they had the balls to stand up to the management. What we have now are just company Yes men. There is no interaction from the CWU with workers where I work.

They are allowing the company to have everything its own way. In the Super Hub the casualisation is growing with the number of agency staff employed getting closer to half the workforce of over 1,000. In delivery offices the CWU is allowing Royal Mail to run down the mail to prioritise parcels.

I been following the PWRFC for a long time and what you said about the Falconer Review not being independent has been proved right. There has been no other platform for the rank-and-file.

It is up to workers to take the next step forward. They cannot expect any backing from the CWU, which is on the side of the company.

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