

CWU's Martin Walsh's pro-company New Year's message receives angry put down from Royal Mail workers

Tony Robson
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On January 4, a New Year's message to members was delivered by Martin Walsh, Communication Workers Union (CWU) Deputy General Secretary (Postal), which went down like a lead balloon among Royal Mail workers.

Walsh explained that the union hierarchy would be starting 2024 holed up in further talks with senior management. He made vague promises to "reconnect" the CWU in the workplace and rebuild the union.

"We are going to start next Monday meeting the new management team in Royal Mail, trying to move the issues forward which count for you and which obviously moves the company and union forward."

This corporatist message of shared interests between the company and workers and deepened union-management collaboration drew angry comments from Royal Mail workers on the CWU Facebook page.

Postal workers made clear that the issues which "count" for them had been trampled underfoot by the CWU bureaucracy in foisting a sell-out agreement on them last July to bring an end to their year long fight. They drew attention to some of the new benchmarks of exploitation set by the pro-company Business, Recovery Transformation and Growth Agreement (BRTGA): a two-tier workforce with inferior terms for new starters, punishing workloads and the ending of any work-life balance as the mail service is transformed into a 24/7 parcel delivery network.

The comments included:

- "Reconnect my backside. The CWU are irrelevant as far as delivery staff are concerned the feeling of being stabbed in the back and the rug pulled from under our feet won't disappear because you're deciding to have a meeting."

- "Recruitment is a laugh, how do you want reps to approach new starters, with a view to getting them to join the union that sold out new starters terms and conditions?"

- "RM is not a service anymore it's a money grab 4 shareholders and board members. We are not Evri or Yodel but that is what they are doing to us."

- "What have we got to look forward to - later start times, later finish times more duties ripped out of the offices."

- A member of Fleet maintenance, a section of Royal Mail workers which voted down Appendix 4 of the BRTGA over increased outsourcing and inferior terms for new entrants, explained how they had been totally hung out to dry, a full half-year later: "Bit confused here, fleet never signed up for nothing and are still in dispute, we carried out all our instructions with industrial actions, and was led to

believe we wouldn't be left behind, we was."

The video from Walsh followed a one-line New Year message from the CWU three days earlier which read: "Happy New Year to all our brilliant members". This received a more concise rebuttal, with popular approval, "Members are good, leaders are a sellout."

New face, same CWU

Walsh has no standing among Royal Mail workers. He was elected CWU Deputy General Secretary (Postal) on November 30 with just 10 percent of the 107,000 eligible votes, over his fellow bureaucrat from the Postal Executive Carl Madden, who received just 3 percent.

The lack of a mandate is immaterial to Walsh. He stated in his acceptance video, "I'm talking on behalf of the members," before heaping praise on CWU General Secretary Dave Ward for doing a "magnificent job." Only a fortnight later, on the *LBC* radio show, Ward was inundated by phone-ins from postal workers taking him to task for his betrayal of their fight.

Walsh's "A Manifesto for Change" was a defence of the BRTGA. He absurdly claimed the only problem was "we served the agreement too cold onto the membership." This is a whitewash of the sabotage operation mounted to get the sellout over the line, including the Postal Executive's veto of the renewed strike mandate in mid-February, double postponement of the ballot to forestall a No vote over the deal and browbeating of postal workers to accept the sacrifice of jobs, terms and conditions.

Threats of administration have been repeated by Walsh, making clear that a further destruction of jobs—on top of the 10,000 redundancies last year and downward spiral of terms and conditions—is coming to make workers pay for the continued plundering of profits by shareholders at Royal Mail and parent company International Distribution Services (IDS).

In line with the CWU's commitment to Royal Mail executives to shelve what remains of any public service provided by the privatised utility—the six-day a week letter delivery Universal Service Obligation (USO)—Walsh declared, "The current Six Day USO is now past its sell by date." He added, "I believe if we agree a Monday to Friday USO, with a seven-day parcels and tracked model, we can start to build a sustainable and a better future for members."

A week after his election on December 8, in a *CWU Live* interview,

Walsh reported that he and Ward attended a meeting with management over their “view for the USO” (i.e., dismantling it) and had invited them to present their “slideshow” at a Postal Executive on December 19. He cited “commercial confidence” in refusing to provide any further information to members.

As Ward’s trusted sidekick, Walsh then appeared in another *CWU Live* video on December 11 to announce Grant McPherson and Zareena Brown, Royal Mail’s Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief People’s Officer, were to leave the company in early 2024.

In addition to the earlier resignation of former chief executive Simon Thompson, this was portrayed as some kind of victory, when every postal worker knows they will be moving on with the satisfaction of “mission accomplished” and thousands in golden handshakes—an expected £700,000 in Thompson’s case.

The Walsh/Ward double act also welcomed the two latest departures as an opportunity to work more closely with the chief executive of IDS, Martin Seidenberg, who the pro-Conservative *Telegraph* described as “a parcels man through and through” appointed to “oversee the death of letters.” Walsh described it as “Very welcome news. I hope it will signal a new start in industrial relations, that the CEO and his new team really want to work with the CWU.”

In trying to sell the idea of “real change” at the top, Ward spoke about McPherson “imposing revisions” and an “appalling quality of service”. The COO in fact thanked the CWU at a Town Hall meeting last June for delivering “the biggest revisions ever in the history of this business”. This cost-cutting exercise of removing duties and increasing workers’ delivery spans has further collapsed the USO.

Over the past year, CWU HQ has blocked all local strike action around the UK voted for under Rule 13 to fight revisions. Walsh and Ward shed crocodile tears over the retention crisis but reports of 1,000 postal workers quitting the job per month has been fuelled by the suppression of mandated action against increased workloads.

The Falconer Review stitch-up

The further integration of the union apparatus as an extension of the company takes place on the back of the treacherous official stitch-up of victimised union reps and CWU members through the Falconer Review, while the CWU conceals its rotten outcome from postal workers.

Only 200 or so cases of unfair dismissal and suspension were referred to the so-called “independent review” from 400 reported during the year-long dispute. Ward and Furey claimed on November 10 they had secured the right of over 100 sacked CWU members to return to work and boasted “93.1% of the original decisions have been overturned”. This was based upon the fraction of cases in which a direct ruling applied, with a Collective Agreement covering the vast majority.

From December 18 the CWU has hyped the return of sacked reps and members to the workplace through high-profile announcements and videos on its Facebook page. This has literally involved a handful of cases.

The gaslighting campaign by CWU headquarters was exposed by the contents of a letter to CWU branches from Ward and Walsh dated December 20. This made the admission that only 35 had returned, claiming this a “huge positive” and dismissing as “the remainder”

around 80 who have left accepting a financial settlement.

This debacle is entirely the making of CWU officials and the sell-out terms drawn up with Royal Mail. Those unfairly dismissed had the proverbial gun placed to the head and were told accept an admission of guilt based on a reduced disciplinary sanction—treated as time expired—and waive the right to an employment tribunal (ET). The same approach has been applied to the 67 cases short of dismissal: an acceptance of guilt by the victimised and waiver of rights to an ET, with 10 individuals also facing redeployment.

Royal Mail has been fully exonerated, with not a single manager held to account for the largest frame-up in an industrial dispute since the 1984-5 miners’ strike.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) have waged a consistent campaign to expose the Falconer Review as an official state frame-up organised via the arbitration service ACAS.

Ending the dispute with the victimised left behind was central to imposing the surrender terms of the BRTGA on the entire workforce. Among the most militant CWU reps and workers were exiled from the workplace and postal workers denied their elected representation. This state conspiracy was developed through the direct collaboration of the Labour Party with the right-wing Blairite grandee Lord Falconer placed in charge.

The PWRFC will continue to provide a platform for victimised reps and workers to uncover this conspiracy as part of the fight to oust the pro-company stooges sitting at the top table of the CWU. The opposition and unified action must be built from below, by Royal Mail workers not prepared to accept the so-called “sustainable model” of the CWU leadership—ripping out the USO and carrying on a race to the bottom as a parcel courier service to compete with Amazon and other rivals.

We will develop the fightback, uniting new entrants with established posties against the two-tier workforce, the slashing of jobs at Mail Centres as work is transferred to the Super Hubs, and unbearable workloads. We will expose the unsafe working conditions at the automated centres and every element of the CWU’s sweatshop charter in which the profits of the shareholders take precedent over workers’ rights and livelihoods.

Attend the next online meeting of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee on January 28 at 7 p.m.. Register here

Do you have information about conditions at your workplace? Share your views by submitting the form below. Submissions will be published anonymously.



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