

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee meeting discusses a fighting strategy against the CWU-Royal Mail alliance

Our correspondent
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The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) held its first Zoom meeting for 2024 on Sunday, with workers attending from Royal Mail delivery offices, mail centres and Parcelforce.

Tony Robson, a writer for the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS), delivered the opening report, citing the committee's public reply to joint statements issued by Communication Workers Union (CWU) officials and Royal Mail on "Quality of Service" and on Seasonal Variation to the working day.

He explained, "The joint statements published on January 15 show what the CWU Postal Executive has been up to behind workers' backs, which Martin Walsh's letter to branches tried to conceal through smoke and mirrors."

Robson said the latest CWU-Royal Mail joint statements had locked in further "revision activity" on top of record revisions to terms and conditions implemented last year, which had collapsed six-day letter delivery and resulted in punishing workloads across 1,200 Royal Mail delivery offices.

In the meeting chat, a Parcelforce worker agreed, "After a recent revision the workload is impossible to achieve". His colleagues were facing "daily threats" from depot managers "who say your union agreed to an increase of productivity from 90 percent to 95 percent".

Robson recalled how an almost identical "joint statement" on Quality of Service was promoted by CWU officials last June. It was hailed as a breakthrough and used to restart balloting on the hated Business Recovery, Growth and Transformation Agreement (BRGTA). Ward and Furey's lies that their joint statement would protect workers from impossible workloads and bullying had been "exposed as a con". Enforced through lies and intimidation, the national agreement had "no legitimacy",

Robson said.

"More than six months later, the terms of the sell-out agreement are being implemented across all areas: impossible workloads to drive out existing staff and replace them with new starters on inferior terms; the slashing of jobs in mail centres; the ending of any work-life balance with seasonal hours and later start and finish times; the gutting of sick pay; and the re-victimisation of reps and members through the Falconer Review.

"Fleet workers have also been hung out to dry without any new contract after rejecting demands for further outsourcing and inferior terms for new entrants."

A delivery worker commented in the chat, "A two-tier workforce was one of the first things the CWU said would never happen... Funny how it's become the norm now and they don't have anything to say on the matter. It's an absolute disgrace. I'll never forgive the CWU for giving up the fight last year and coming up with this s*** sellout 'deal'."

Robson said the PWRFC was formed during the dispute "based on the recognition that no change was possible outside of a rank-and-file rebellion against the pro-company CWU apparatus. Our aim is to abolish this unaccountable bureaucracy and bring decision-making to the shop floor."

He rejected the CWU's insistence that workers' demands for decent pay and conditions were "unaffordable" and would push the company into bankruptcy: "Let's open the books and see where the hundreds of millions they have made off the backs of postal workers has been spent. We already know about the £600 million paid out to major shareholders before Royal Mail pleaded poverty.

"If Royal Mail cannot provide decent jobs or pay for its workforce or deliver a mail service that is fit for purpose,

it must be placed into public ownership under workers' control, using the profits expropriated from major shareholders to guarantee terms, conditions and pay and to uphold the USO."

Robson emphasised, "We totally oppose the efforts of Ward to promote the Labour Party and his claim that the election of a Labour government would be another fresh start for workers. This is being echoed by Mick Lynch in the RMT.

"The CWU is parading the likes of Darren Jones and Sir Keir Starmer as a positive change. The Labour Party has ruled out any re-nationalisation and is working with the CWU to reduce the USO to 5 days, in keeping with its pro-business and right-wing agenda. The hostility Labour showed to striking workers during the wave of industrial action from Summer 2022 is now being directed against the millions demonstrating against Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, which Starmer and the Sunak government are backing to the hilt."

In the discussion that followed, a postal worker from London ridiculed company claims about "unaffordability", recalling how Royal Mail had reported a "war chest" of £1.7 billion to take on the strike. "Afterwards they were pleading poverty, and the union are claiming they could go into administration. It's a farce. It's all lies, that is the problem!" He estimated that union dues from postal workers amounted to around £19 million per year, questioning why any of this should be funnelled into the coffers of the Labour Party and suggesting a boycott of dues over the CWU's collusion.

Committee members reported on conditions at their workplace. George, a delivery worker in Scotland, said staffing at his unit had been reduced by around 10 percent and asked if this reflected the situation UK-wide.

Ian, a delivery worker in the South Midlands, cited unconfirmed reports that 10,000 had left since the dispute and around 33 percent replaced based on new terms. He said the ratio between part-time and full-time workers was meant to be 75 versus 25 percent (according to an earlier national agreement) but was nearer 55 to 45 percent at his delivery office. Part-timers were being offered full-time hours but only on the terms for new entrants. "This has been brought up with the CWU, but they have been wishy-washy in their answer over whether this is legal and are sitting on their hands."

Anne, who works at a large mail centre near London, said the "supernumeraries" process was being used to implement mass redundancies. 130 jobs had been cut from her workplace (around 10 percent of the workforce),

with a further 30 deemed surplus and put in a redeployment pool agreed by the union. "The CWU is doing nothing for members, they just take our money. There is no justice. We need to raise our voice. How do they justify that many people leaving? Where is the money going? We are suffering in silence, no one is questioning management."

A Parcellforce worker asked, "Does going to ACAS [arbitration service] help employees going to dispute with employers, as the CWU is not helping?" A rep victimised during the dispute and subjected to the terms of the Falconer Review replied that ACAS had signed off on all aspects of the stitch-up of victimised reps, including denying their right to appeal through an Employment Tribunal (ET). He warned in relation to ETs, "Trust me, they are brutal. Everyone thinks they are on the side of employees. They are not."

A delivery worker from Scotland said he had been a member of the union for decades, but that it had refused any support for his case against victimisation, leaving him totally isolated. Robson thanked him for having the courage to share his case and explained that he was not alone.

A drafting committee was established to prepare a fighting programme for postal workers. Royal Mail workers in attendance volunteered to take part and postal workers are invited to submit information using the form below.

The meeting concluded with a call to attend public meetings being held by the Socialist Equality Party against the genocide in Gaza. Robson encouraged a wider distribution of the PWRFC resolution supporting the Palestinian trade unions' call for concrete solidarity action against the Israeli war machine and the major powers backing it, including the British government.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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