

Communication Workers Union agrees mass job cuts at Royal Mail processing centres

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A February 13 joint statement between Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union (CWU) headlined “Resolving Surplus and Displaced Employees in Processing” establishes a revamped redeployment pool that will be used to implement a wave of redundancies.

Since last year, Royal Mail has overseen a targeted campaign of job destruction at the mail centres (which process and sort mail for distribution) as part of its newly automated super hubs. The CWU is withholding information over the extent of job losses nationally, including those left “displaced”, spare, or “supernumerary” through endless cost-cutting revisions.

It has also maintained a guilty silence over the elimination of 10,000 jobs across Royal Mail (including 6,000 frontline staff in delivery and processing) announced last Autumn, implemented ahead of schedule. These were enforced through the CWU’s sabotage of strike action by over 100,000 postal workers in 2022-23.

The resulting CWU-Royal Mail “surrender document”— the Business Recovery Transformation and Growth Agreement (BRT&G)—contained an open-ended commitment to cut jobs, with repeated references to “headcount reduction” increased “productivity” and “cost-cutting.”

The CWU’s latest joint statement with Royal Mail on “surplus and displaced” workers makes not a single reference to job losses, but repeatedly invokes the Managing the Surplus Framework (MTSF). This is the industrial relations mechanism used by Royal Mail to downsize the workforce behind the fig leaf of “voluntary” redundancies.

Martin Walsh, Deputy General Secretary of the CWU, presented the joint statement as an

“improvement” for those in the redeployment pool established last June to drive hundreds of postal workers out of a job. This has been a coercive process, with those deemed “supernumerary” or “surplus” after cost cutting revisions, instructed that their “options” were: “1) taking a role elsewhere within Royal Mail; 2) voluntary redundancy, where offered; 3) or becoming part of the redeployment program.”

The CWU even agreed to slash voluntary redundancy payments from a top rate of two years down to nine months, allowing the company to cut jobs on the cheap.

The latest joint statement is full of slippery formulations meant to disguise job destruction and present an “improved situation” for displaced mail centre workers. But the very first point states:

“1. Fully displaced colleagues will join the redeployment programme but will no longer be required to leave their parent Mail Centre to attend. The Redeployment programme will be hosted in the plants. *Displaced colleagues will be supported to undertake the equivalent of two days of job search* and in the remaining three days they will be deployed on meaningful work.”

The CWU is trumpeting that surplus workers will no longer be redeployed to other mail centres. But this reprieve is being used to entrench the redeployment process. Those in the redeployment pool will be expected to look for alternative employment. The reference to “meaningful work” covers a multitude of sins, whereby management can deploy workers with complete “flexibility”.

Another crumb of comfort is in Point 2, which states that displaced workers can apply for vacancies within their own mail centre or “surrounding offices”. It is silent on how far workers will be expected to travel in their nomadic search for a vacancy.

Point 3 states: “Bump VRs [voluntary redundancy] in line with MTSF will be offered to existing Mail Centre staff. This will then allow displaced employees to pick up the resulting vacancy.” In other words, displaced workers will be offered a permanent duty on the condition that other mail centre colleagues have taken voluntary redundancy, ensuring the company achieves its job-slashing targets.

The statement adds, “It is further agreed that where major change occurs (Midland Superhub transition, further alignment activity and Network window changes) a duty resign in line with national agreements may take place. All displaced colleagues from the parent unit will be able to take part in this activity using their overall seniority.”

This makes clear that “opportunities” for displaced mail centre workers will be based on accepting the restructuring of the entire workforce to convert Royal Mail to a 24/7 parcel network. The job losses are part of the company’s strategy to employ newly automated Super Hubs in Warrington and Daventry to spearhead a massive jobs cull across the processing network.

Walsh emerged from backroom talks with management on February 13 to front a “CWU Live” update to members on the joint statement. He described the treatment of supernumerary and spare workers as “scandalous”, explaining how they had been moved “out of the office for two days” and told “they no longer worked for Royal Mail.” But the CWU postal executive is responsible for the redeployment process, having rammed through its BRT&G agreement based on barefaced lies that it safeguarded workers from executive action by management and the full scale of attacks demanded by the company.

Walsh conceded the latest joint statement does not “resolve it completely” (displacement for mail centre workers) but had “moved it along”. He complained the redeployment pool had developed a bad reputation as “a punitive measure”, but said the company was now adopting a “much more friendly” approach. Most companies operate a redeployment policy for “surplus” workers, he claimed.

Walsh did not provide any examples. But telecoms members of the CWU at BT Group have first-hand experience with the CWU’s “constructive approach” towards “resolving the surplus”. Last year, BT and the CWU announced 55,000 job cuts by 2030 (across the

company’s 130,000 global workforce). This follows the sellout of national strike action by 40,000 telecom workers in 2022, based on a below inflation pay deal recommended by the union to supposedly save jobs. BT Group chief executive Philip Jansen welcomed that deal, describing the CWU as “vital partners” in the drive to “reduce cost and improve efficiency.”

The same mass job destruction is coming at Royal Mail. This is the meaning of Walsh’s throwaway line, “With the [Universal Service Obligation] and other changes we are going to have less jobs in future.”

Walsh has already made clear the CWU’s support for dismantling the USO from a six-day to a five-day mail delivery service, stating it has “passed its sell by date”, echoing Royal Mail’s claims that it is not financially “sustainable” (i.e., does not deliver sufficient profits to shareholders).

The union-management conspiracy to destroy jobs and vandalise the mail service in pursuit of profit must be defeated. The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is calling for a fightback against the sellout national agreement and its architects in the CWU bureaucracy. We urge postal workers in the mail centres to get in touch.



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