

# Royal Mail delivery worker explains: “The Communication Workers Union is facilitating a race to the bottom”

Our correspondent  
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*The World Socialist Web Site spoke with Ian, a member of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) in the south Midlands, England, about the decimation of conditions for frontline workers at Royal Mail delivery offices.*

*The interview was conducted prior to Wednesday’s announcement of Royal Mail proposals to reduce the delivery of second-class letters to alternate weekdays, cutting 1,000 jobs and making £300 million in “cost savings”, and the capitulatory response of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) which accepts the Universal Service Obligation’s (USO) gutting as part of the shift to a parcels-led business in the interest of shareholder profit.*

*On Tuesday, the CWU used its Facebook page to publish a message from Martin Seidenberg, CEO of International Distribution Services (Royal Mail’s parent company), welcoming Elma Gilthorpe as newly appointed chief executive of Royal Mail from May 1. It described the current Heathrow airport chief operating officer as a “seasoned executive” in “delivering major strategic change programmes whilst driving up performance.”*

*Published without comment by the CWU, it provoked derision from postal workers, with popular comments including: “Read the wording—impressive track record of delivering major strategic change programmes—or cost cutting. Whilst driving up performance—or less people more work.” The WSWs will be publishing a full response to the CWU’s deepening collusion with the company’s brutal restructuring agenda.*

**WSWS:** Royal Mail is implementing in April/June later start and finishing times at delivery offices, tearing up any work-life balance with 234 units worst impacted, particularly across Scotland. What is driving the changes to the network?

**Ian:** The units worst impacted is a result of Royal Mail taking planes out of the UK network. This is purely a cost-cutting exercise. Royal Mail does not own its planes, it piggybacks off other flights which is more expensive. Flights are eight times more costly than other transportation.

This is only Phase 1 of the network changes. They are moving to a 9-to-5 [window] for letters across delivery units through the next phases. The CWU claimed they pushed back

Royal Mail over its original demand for 3-hour-later start/finish times, but in reality the company doesn’t have the infrastructure in place at present. The new Super Hubs have been built with direct access for trains, but ending the flights will mean relaying mail on roads for now, so the areas like Scotland are hardest hit by this change in distribution methods across the UK.

Royal Mail was a company which did provide a work-life balance, particularly for younger families who needed to take and collect their children from school on 25-hour contracts, working 9.30 am until 2.30 pm. This is ending. For all delivery workers everything will revolve around work, and we’ll be cut off more from family, friends and any social life.

This is another way they can force people out of the job without having to pay redundancy and replace them with new entrants on inferior contracts. It is another version of what happened at P&O with “fire and rehire” when they sacked the workforce and brought in agency workers. It is a sneaky way of achieving the same aims. It will be 9-to-5 for letters. They want later times to compete in parcels with rivals like Amazon and DPD, with full-time posties on dedicated parcels routes working 1-8pm or 2-9pm.

**WSWS:** Martin Walsh, CWU deputy general secretary (postal), has stated there is a “new regime” at Royal Mail and claims that Seidenberg is committed to restoring Quality of Service (QoS). The PWRFC warned that January’s joint statement between Royal Mail and the CWU on QoS was to prepare a further “avalanche of revisions” (cost cutting). Is this the basis for the GeoRoute revisions at 24 units and Delivery 2.0 Trials over Indoor Method Changes at 21 units?

**Ian:** First of all, if they were concerned about QoS they would put their money where their mouth is and fully cover all the vacancies but that is not going to happen.

In the past six years the price of a first-class stamp has doubled to £1.35; that is another way to deliberately run down the Universal Service Obligation [USO] on six-day-a-week letter delivery at a fixed price across the UK. This will accelerate the decline in letters which has more than halved from 20 billion to 7 billion per year over the last 20 years.

Customers are paying for a service Royal Mail does not deliver as it is allowed to routinely break its statutory requirement under the USO. They want a three-day letter service.

There is no investment in people or vans. The PDAs (handheld tracker devices) crash—they are nothing more than an updated version of what ASDA had 16 years ago. The money they have invested in the two Super Hubs, worth the best part of a billion pounds, is about automation to cut jobs. They are dedicated to parcels which is not covered by QoS which applies to first-and second-class stamped mail.

The GeoRoute [routing software] is only as good as the data inputted by management in terms of calculating the time for making deliveries. But this is based on time between delivery points which doesn't take account of the terrain and other obstacles. It is based on the quickest not the realistic route. I know of cases where routes have been planned to send a van down a dead-end rather than taking an additional five minutes based on a viable route. This has been going on since 2017 and it will not change.

In terms of the Indoor Method Change revisions, this is about reducing the amount of time prepping the mail, so delivery workers spend more time out on expanded walks. They calculate to prep two frames (we work with a partner) takes 1 hours 42 minutes, but this is based on operating with 70 percent of mail volume for around 1100 to 1200 delivery points. But this goes out the window, say, with the local elections coming up and delivering voting cards which is working at 100 percent volume and to several people in the same household.

They also estimate you can walk at a speed of 6km an hour. You would have to be an Olympian to maintain that over five hours and they want to increase this by an additional half an hour.

**WSWS:** A major betrayal of the strike was acceptance of a two-tier workforce by the CWU with new entrants on inferior pay and terms. Royal Mail recruited 15,000 last year on this new benchmark. What do you say in response to Walsh stating the CWU is campaigning for an improvement for these workers?

**Ian:** The CWU has fully enabled this two-tier workforce. They are not going to establish equality though improving rights for new entrants. The terms and conditions of postal workers were downgraded through the agreement. New entrants get around £1.10 less an hour—£12.29 compared to £13.35—which increased by just 2 percent in April in line with the three-year below-inflation pay deal. On top of that, they don't get paid for the 40-minute meal relief. The CWU is now saying our paid meal relief is under review, which means it's under threat.

New entrants do not know what they are doing from one day to the next, literally. On a Monday they could be on letters from 6.30am for 6 hours and the next day moved to parcels in the afternoon from 1-7 pm. They are talking about making this more structured for two weeks. Poppycock! They never get a

Saturday off and are rostered on Sundays, having two days off in the week.

**WSWS:** The CWU joint statements and PR talk about “mutual interests” between the workforce and the company, how do you feel about this?

**Ian:** It's a race to the bottom which the CWU is facilitating. Whose “mutual interests”? Dave Ward [CWU leader] and his fat salary? Paying out the big dividends to the shareholders? There is no ethical investment by Royal Mail, it's all about profits.

The company is quite happy to allow the CWU to fix its problems. It does not act like a union and doesn't defend the workers they are meant to represent. The CWU has said nothing about the setting up of these new lockers for customers to send and collect their parcels. This has basically automated the jobs of postal workers at Customer Service Points out of existence. They have just set these up in Coventry this month, the first of 1,500 by the end of the year and 3,000 planned across the UK. How many jobs is this going to cost?

**WSWS:** Dave Ward is the front man for the Labour Party's “New Deal for Working People” promising to end the gig economy and “fire and rehire”. In light of the experience at Royal Mail, where Labour backed the CWU's pro-company agreement, what do you think about Labour's so-called commitment?

**Ian:** Dave Ward and the CWU Postal Executive signed us up for the gig-economy at Royal Mail and totally sold us down the river. It is like putting Dracula in charge of the blood bank.

I don't think Labour in government would be any different to the Conservatives, it is a Tory Party mark II. What did Blair do in power? He did not reverse any of the anti-strike legislation brought in by Thatcher. Starmer is so far to the right of Blair he is out of sight. We need a party for the working class and that is the same the world over. We are facing similar problems: we need a living wage to support our families and to have some humanity.

It is not just a problem at Royal Mail but the postal and logistics sector internationally and across all industries. They want to drive out labour costs in manual work through AI and automation for corporate greed and profit. My concern is for next generations, what future will they have?

It is the same thing fuelling the wars for control of resources and energy like in Gaza, we need to come together to stop this.



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