

The Communication Workers Union “live Q&A” without members: CWU backs Royal Mail job-slashing agenda

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An “Update on the USO—live Q&A with Dave Ward & Martin Walsh,” broadcast on the CWU (Communication Workers Union) Live YouTube channel last Wednesday, was a shambolic affair. Chris Webb, CWU Head of Communications, claimed the meeting allowed members “to have a say where the Universal Service operation goes.”

This defies satire. The event was broadcast at 3.30pm, with members only notified via a Letter to Branches emailed after midday.

On its Facebook group, the CWU stated: “We know many of you will be at work, so, as usual, this episode will be available on catch up, and we will be doing another live call in the evening soon,” with Webb later confirming it would be held “in a couple of weeks.”

From the CWU’s new media studio, General Secretary Dave Ward and Deputy General Secretary (Postal) Martin Walsh dedicated the entire session to spinning their acceptance that the Universal Service Obligation (USO) must “adapt to change” and “modernise”, working to block any fightback by postal workers against the company’s announced attack on the USO and thousands of jobs.

Those online were denied any input other than commenting in the chat. But during the one hour “Q&A” none of the members’ queries or criticisms were answered. Repeated questions about job losses were ignored, while chief censor Webb announced at the end of the meeting that all those who had posted comments were eligible for a free CWU T-shirt!

Rank and file postal workers were left seething. Comments on the CWU Live YouTube channel were 99 percent critical. They included:

- “So why is this fair, the delivery postman get

shafted again. Later starts, worse sick benefits, and all our walks get obliterated to satisfy the new USO. For 38 years I have been a delivery postman, and been a member all that time, yet we are now treated as second class members. Shame on all of you.”

- “2% pay rise how much you lot creamed off on expenses over last 2 years.”

- “The more of us long serving delivery staff leave by being demoralised, the more new contracts can be brought in. This only benefits the main shareholders not the service. Privatisation has failed.”

- “Royal Mail managed to find 750,000 pounds down the back of the settee to pay off Simon Thompson and then plead poverty. Give me a break.”

Ward’s opening statement to the meeting set the tone and was aimed at blocking any challenge: “Once again we are having to deal with the reality of change. I think we cannot face away from that. It’s one of our messages and has been for a long time.”

As the trusted mouthpiece of Martin Seidenberg, chief executive of Royal Mail parent company IDS, Ward lectured that the USO was “not sustainable”. Referring to the company’s “self-inflicted” financial problems—a polite term for £600 million worth of looting by major shareholders—Ward stated, “We have to address the reality of that irrespective of what we are feeling about the company.”

Ward sought to portray the CWU as a restraining hand against the options cited by Royal Mail and postal regulator Ofcom to reduce the USO to a three or four-day service. Ward claimed the CWU had “influenced the politicians, both the government and the Labour Party and obviously Royal Mail”.

The CWU has offered to help reduce the USO to five

days, alongside other cost-cutting measures, including reduced delivery speeds for second class mail.

Walsh chimed with Ward, making constant references to capturing “market share”. They made clear this meant speeding-up the transition from a mail service to a parcel carrier in line with the stated aim of the Business Recovery, Transformation and Growth Agreement it signed with the company in April 2023.

The real purpose of the online meeting was for CWU officials to offer their services in trialling Royal Mail’s “Optimised Model” for mail delivery, starting in Scotland “and other parts of the UK” without waiting on the outcome of Ofcom’s review. Ward declared the current “delivery model is broken”, but the CWU executive are joint partners in Royal Mail’s wrecking operation.

Over the past two years, the CWU leadership has helped push through the largest cost-cutting revisions in its history, collapsing the USO. The CWU vetoed postal workers’ strike mandate to enforce a sell-out deal. The proposed Optimised Model means First Class letters will continue to be delivered six days and parcels across seven days but “non-priority products” including Second Class and bulk business mail (bills and statements) will be delivered every other weekday. In its briefing to reps the CWU states the company is in fact seeking to cut 6,000 jobs through “net attrition” not the 1,000 officially cited.

Ward and Walsh had the front to cajole members to “get behind the union,” which is again marching in lock-step with the company.

During the meeting it was admitted that Royal Mail’s two-tier workforce—which the CWU established through its pro-company agreement—had enabled Royal Mail to recruit 15,000 new entrants on inferior pay and conditions. But 85 percent had left within a year, a massive rebuke to the gig economy conditions being enforced. Ward and Walsh presented this mass exodus as a retention problem not a social disaster inflicted on postal workers by the union’s pro-company agreement.

Walsh even defended the implementation of 10,000 redundancies last year because “we’re spreading less and less traffic over six days” adding in regard to the USO that he would “have preferred to see six [days] into five.”

He repeated the company’s lying claims that it would allow 40 percent of delivery staff to have Saturdays off.

Along with Ward, he asserted that new attendance patterns on a four-day basis would offer more weekends and weekdays off. This is a Trojan Horse for the Amazon model, forcing those in delivery to work later into the night, with Ward insisting that parcels would be delivered until 9pm.

Despite having excluded CWU members from any participation in the “Live Q&A” event, Ward and Walsh announced they had a mandate to draw up a “Statement of Principles” on terms and conditions to be presented at the CWU conference on April 21-25.

The last thing postal workers need is another pro-company joint statement from the authors of last year’s surrender document! A genuine statement of principles is needed to mobilise the rank-and-file and dismantle and replace the CWU’s unaccountable bureaucracy. A network of committees must be elected from the shop floor across every section of Royal Mail putting workers’ interests before the company’s profit grab that is destroying the mail service.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an online meeting on Sunday April 28 at 7 pm. It is open to all postal workers who want to discuss the way forward.



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