

Interest in rank-and-file fightback at Royal Mail: Belfast, London, West Yorkshire

Our reporters
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Campaigns have been mounted at Royal Mail delivery offices and mail centres this week, distributing the statement by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee: “Oppose Royal Mail’s Assault on the USO! Defeat CWU’s Collusion!”

Sunday night’s meeting will discuss Royal Mail’s plans—backed by Ofcom—to officially end six-day-a-week mail delivery to 32 million households across the UK. The company has announced it plans to reduce second class and bulk mail deliveries to 2.5 days or 3 days from next April.

Royal Mail’s submission to Ofcom states that 7,000-9,000 delivery routes will be axed and thousands of jobs are threatened.

London

At Mount Pleasant sorting office in Farringdon, London, postal workers described back-breaking workloads. Those coming off shift were tired, stressed and fed up. But they stopped to take leaflets and expressed interest in Sunday’s Zoom meeting.

A delivery worker explained: “The main talk is about delivery services. On the floor our hours have been cut, staff halved, yet we are doing the same amount of work. I don’t think management even consult the CWU anymore. They just go ahead and make any changes they want. I’ve seen your leaflets before it’s about time there is an opposition.”

A group of drivers who deliver parcels to other Royal Mail offices said, “We see firsthand how bad things are at the delivery offices. The weight that can be carried has doubled. We deliver carpets and other large items. One postie has to load and deliver these parcels in small vans on their own.”

He took the rank-and-file appeal for Sunday’s meeting, “This is very interesting. There are other depots you’ll win support from. If you’re here for a while all the delivery walks are returning. I’m pleased to see this being done.”

He asked about the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, “How’s it come about? Is it happening across the country?” Members of the SEP explained how the committee was formed during last year’s dispute, after hundreds of postal workers wrote to the *World Socialist Web Site* supporting a fightback against the CWU’s pro-company agreement. The worker added, “So what’s happening in London is happening across the country, we can’t all be wrong can we?”

Among the issues discussed was the untimely death of postal worker Gorakh Singh, 54, who collapsed and died of heart attack outside The City Pride pub, last December. Flowers and cards were left by colleagues at the spot.

One colleague said, “I knew him. It’s happened to others on their way home from the depot. He’d been complaining of pains in his legs and arms for a while.”

Another explained, “We’re expected to lift boxes weighing 25-30kg or more on our own... It’s a two-man job. I’m 56, I’m not a young man anymore, and they don’t seem to care if we get injured.”

Other postal workers said, “I’ve seen piles and piles of post stacking up and I feel sorry for the people who aren’t getting it delivered but they (management) don’t care. People pay for the service and they deserve to have it delivered. I feel sorry for them (people who aren’t getting post delivered on time).”

Another added, “It’s bad what they’re doing. They’ve got rid of the morning shifts. There’s three positions where people have gone and they keep saying they’re going to replace them but they haven’t replaced them and we’re having to fill in instead.”

Northern Ireland

At Craigavon delivery office in County Armagh, members of the Socialist Equality Party met a warm response from

postal workers when they visited on Tuesday. Workers at Craigavon described impossible workloads and ongoing prioritisation of parcel delivery over letters.

A delivery worker who took a leaflet said, “If I could leave, I would”. Another said of the advertisement for Sunday’s Zoom meeting: “It’s about time someone was doing something”.

Craigavon’s two local reps suspended last year during the year-long industrial dispute have not returned to the depot and are reportedly on sick leave. The reps were victimised for opposing unagreed revisions and management bullying. Workers have told the *World Socialist Web Site* how the same managers who victimised the pair are still in place and they fear ongoing victimisation.

Leaflets were distributed at Mallusk Road, Newtownabbey depot to the north of Belfast, with some workers taking multiple copies for their colleagues. At East Belfast depot a postal worker commented, “We were out on Christmas Eve protesting and freezing, and for what? The union sold us out”. There is widespread anger toward Communication Workers Union officials over last year’s sellout agreement that lit a bonfire of terms and conditions, driving thousands of postal workers from their jobs.

West Yorkshire

Campaign teams have visited Wakefield and Bradford depots, with a postal worker from a nearby delivery office stopping to chat: “The rounds are too big and always getting bigger, completing on all but the quietest days is unachievable unless we’re willing to work over, otherwise we’re left with a big backlog that we have to tackle the next day. ‘Flex’ [extra mail loops and parcels] is added to all rounds every day now and sometimes takes an hour alone. If you take any care in your work or take care to drive safely it feels like you’re going to fall way behind.

“As a ‘spare’ [someone who doesn’t have their own regular walk], I might work hard to clear the round, and next day I find myself on a different round that has double the mail. We’re encouraged to focus on the parcels and leave the mail if we have to. Mail builds up and when it has to go out, it weighs a ton.

“Lots of people quitting the job recently, being replaced by new starters on part time contracts. It’s bad enough not knowing who you are going to be working with from day-to-day but now I am often working with people that have just started the job and have never done the round before and I am still expected to do the same amount of work.

“Managers are manipulative, intimidating and specifically target new starters that might feel like their job is at risk. Recently a new starter was called at 4pm, hours after he had finished, and was asked to come back out and deliver tracked parcels that he had missed.

“The scanners crash often. They’re falling to bits, and lots of them are buggy so you need to restart them—really stressful and embarrassing when you’re waiting on someone’s door step and they’re waiting for their parcel.

“Almost all vans are in bad condition, old, dirty, some probably not even road-legal, lots of the tyres are bare, side doors are broken on many vans, which means we don’t have easy access to parcels. Half of the vans are half as big as they need to be, so parcels have to be piled to the ceiling which means parcels will inevitably be missed, which means going out of our way to deliver later in the day.

“We have more responsibilities in the office now, so we’re getting out later and there’s more to forget. From arriving in the office, even as a part time worker that starts later, I have to sort mail, scan all my small parcels, scan large parcels, go through letter re-directions, pick up and sign for special deliveries, pick and box the mail for the duty I’m on, pick the mail for the ‘flex’ duty, pick up the collections box keys (sometimes two sets if there’s a box on the flex), load all mail and parcels into the van, do a full van check... all within about 40 minutes if I want to get out on time and have half a chance of finishing.”

We urge postal and logistics workers to attend the next online meeting of the PWRFC on Sunday April 28 at 7pm, “Oppose Royal Mail’s Assault on the USO! Defeat CWU’s Collusion”. Register here to attend.



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