

Rank-and-file meeting discusses fight against mass job losses and reduced mail service at Royal Mail

Our reporter
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The Zoom meeting of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) was held on Sunday to discuss its call to “Oppose Royal Mail’s Assault on the USO! Defeat CWU’s Collusion!” In the weeks prior to the online event hundreds of copies of the statement were distributed at delivery offices and mail centres.

World Socialist Web Site reporter Tony Robson opened the meeting, explaining Royal Mail’s plans submitted to regulator Ofcom to end six-day letter deliveries to 32 million UK households: “Royal Mail, Ofcom, the CWU, the Tory government and the Labour Party all insist that the provision of a mail service is ‘unsustainable’.

“There is no way any fight can be conducted if this is accepted. We say the greatest ‘inefficiency’ is the drain on resources caused by the billionaire owners of Royal Mail and parent company International Distribution Services who have no interest in providing a public service, only siphoning off greater profits on top of the £2 billion since privatisation.”

The company was not waiting on Ofcom’s findings: “The union has already agreed to trial the scaled-back delivery model even before it has been rubber-stamped by the regulator. This confirms what the Committee said about the rotten deal rammed through last July. It was to provide the optimum conditions for the restructuring planned on behalf of shareholders, centred on Super Hubs and automation geared to a 24/7 parcel network to compete with Amazon, with terms and conditions to match.”

Robson called for the building of rank-and-file committees at delivery offices and mail centres to coordinate a fightback, saying that postal workers’ conditions and the provision of a mail service must take precedence over shareholder profit.

In the discussion that followed, a statement from a

victimised rep was read out: “I am one of the 400 reps who were suspended or sacked during the year-long dispute. We were sold-out by the CWU [Communication Workers Union], while the Lord Falconer Review, cooked up at ACAS, rubber-stamped our mass victimisation. Many of us never returned and we have never had the disciplinarys against us expunged.

“Through the national agreement and subsequent joint statements, the CWU are labouring in the ‘spirit of goodwill’ and endeavouring to bring the reps into a management way of thinking. Yes, you heard me right; but do the victimised reps want to be managers’ assistants? I doubt it.”

The rep pointed to direct evidence of CWU collusion in implementing a reduced USO in violation of existing legislation: “In January, a Royal Mail/CWU Joint Statement was released to all levels of management and the union titled: ‘Working together to improve Quality of Service - Joint Statement’.

“One paragraph in the Joint Statement was an interesting read: ‘Where a delivery route or part of a route is not covered on any given day it must be covered the next working day to ensure any delay in delivery is a maximum of 1 day. To enact this process both parties need a plan as part of a weekly resourcing to ensure walks never fail x 2 days in a row’.

“Wow! Here we have an admission by Royal Mail that they are planning to fail the USO and introduce their own 3-day a week service. And as it’s a Joint Statement, it’s supported by the CWU.”

His remarks concluded, “This is not what we signed up for...we must stand up and demand that the CWU Executive resign as a bloc with immediate effect.” He appealed to “all those suffering today, instead of giving up, stand up and fight back.”

This sparked further discussion. A long-serving delivery worker explained, “We never had any post left over before privatisation, every frame was clear every day. They have taken all the good things out the job.

“I have no faith in the union: they sold us down the river, the company got everything it wanted. I can leave 6,7,8 bags of mail in a day. My manager will just say, ‘As long as you get those parcels clear’.

“The union says we are not supposed to be prioritising parcels but they do nothing. It seems to me they are designing it to fail, and the union is in cahoots with management. They are prioritising profit over the service. It’s all about sorting out the shareholders.”

In the online chat others agreed. A postal worker from Scotland explained, “On my current duty, every week for the last month, me and my van-share partner have had to do double mail and parcels even when the both of us work our days off during the week...”

“Listening to others tonight and the issues has been enlightening. It’s clear that Royal Mail staff are working in an environment that may be harmful to long-term health and staff feel so pressured they are falling ill. Living like this is harmful to the mental health of good decent people.”

A mail centre worker reported that 15 workers had been suspended at their workplace in the past two months, “We have no voice.”

Postal workers voiced support for building rank-and-file committees in their own workplaces: “It would certainly upset the CWU and their collusion with Royal Mail, if they knew masses of the workforce stood against their joint campaign.”

A worker from the US Postal Service in attendance added, “This is a great conversation. I’m from the US and the situation is the same. No info from the union. Punishing work conditions. I agree rank-and-file committees are the only answer!”

Tom Hall, a WSWS reporter from the United States, brought greetings to the meeting from sister rank-and-file committees at the US Postal Service and global logistics company UPS, which like the PRFC are affiliated to the International Workers Alliance for Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Hall said the attacks at Royal Mail are identical to those at the US Postal Service where workers are facing “Delivering for America”, a restructuring program that aims to eliminate 50,000 jobs and close 1,000 local post offices. Automated sorting machines are being used to “slash the workforce to the bone” with an eye to

privatisation.

At UPS, company executives have announced their “Network of the Future” closing 200 of the company’s 1,000 facilities in America and fully automating 400, to eliminate 80 percent of inside jobs. The Teamsters union enforced a sellout contract last year to help the company drive down costs.

Hall provided a first-hand account of the explosive political situation in the United States. He explained how peaceful student protests against the genocide in Gaza were facing unprecedented police violence and mass arrests by riot police; an operation being directed from the White House by President Joe Biden.

At the same time, the trade union bureaucracy was deepening its alliance with the Democrats and Republicans, the two parties of big business. Hall said Teamsters officials had met repeatedly with Biden at the White House and with Donald Trump in recent months, pledging to work with them and enforce labour discipline on the home front.

War abroad, Hall stressed, is always accompanied by a war against the working class at home: “They always say these wars are about democracy and human rights, but it never is. It’s about defending the profits of US imperialism, British imperialism, and securing raw materials, supply chains and markets against their rivals, and that is joined at the hip with defending profits at home.”

Hall invited those present to attend the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee meeting being held later that evening in the United States. He said they were preparing a statement (now published) appealing to the working class to come to the defence of students’ right to protest.

The meeting ended with an appeal to attend the May Day international online rally this Saturday at 8pm (British Summer Time).



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