

Reject CWU's repackaged sell-out at Royal Mail Fleet

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In a three-sentence statement released May 2, the Communications Workers Union (CWU) Postal Executive announced it had reached an agreement with Royal Mail for members in Fleet, the company's maintenance division.

Fleet employs around 1,000 vehicle technicians at a network of 110 workshops across the UK.

The statement read: "BREAKING: The CWU Postal Executive has unanimously endorsed a national agreement on Royal Mail Fleet. Full details will be shared with members tomorrow and we will set out a communications plan and ballot timetable. Thank you for your support and patience. Solidarity." It announces the latest sellout by the CWU.

CWU members in Fleet voted down Appendix 4 of the pro-company Business, Recovery, Transformation & Growth (BRT&G) agreement last July with its sub-inflation pay award, introduction of longer hours and weekend work and plans for further outsourcing. The CWU postal executive led by General Secretary Dave Ward got the rest of the pro-company agreement over the line at Royal Mail by resorting to every trick in the bureaucratic playbook, promising that their surrender offered workers some protection when it has set into motion a bonfire of jobs, terms and conditions.

For rejecting the CWU's sellout, Fleet members have been left hung out to dry for the best part of a year. CWU social media accounts have been inundated by Fleet workers requesting updates on the talks over revised proposals, which were ignored as the bureaucracy met behind closed doors with the company.

If the revised agreement included any genuine improvement on what was rejected by Fleet workers, the CWU would have held a press briefing and shouted from the rooftops. But they have learnt from the

experience of last April, when grandstanding over the "negotiators agreement" on the BRT&G agreement provoked a backlash as soon as the contents of the surrender terms were available.

This time CWU HQ is instead drip feeding information to spin the deal with the same intention of bleeding out anticipated opposition.

CWU Deputy General Secretary (Postal) Martin Walsh issued a statement the day after the postal executive announcement purporting to outline the "key elements of the agreement" for Fleet.

While not setting out a timeline, he declared, "We are confident that this agreement represents a major step forward from previous positions and will be recommending that members vote yes in the forthcoming ratification ballot."

CWU officials are working hand in glove with management, with Nick Dunn, National Distribution and Fleet Director stating, "We are pleased that the agreement is being put to a vote with the recommendation to accept. The CWU will announce the ballot dates in due course."

Even the edited highlights presented by Walsh reveal that the "tough negotiations" have seen the CWU bending over backwards for Royal Mail executives to foist real-term pay cuts, a lengthening of work hours and rostered Saturday working on Fleet workers.

The statement cites a nominal pay rise of 7.15 percent backdated from April 2023 to March 2024 following "through to all allowances". This is lower than the 8.7 percent already rejected for the same period and is part of a sub-inflation pay award over the next three years. Like the BRT&G agreement across Royal Mail, it accepts the 2 percent imposed by Royal Mail for 2022-3 at the start of the national dispute. A further 2 percent is conditional on accepting rostered Saturday

working and a derisory one-off payment of £500 depends on accepting all the strings in the agreement.

For Fleet workers on a 34.5 hour contracted week, this will be increased to 37 hours. The extension of the working week is also being used to dress up the miserly pay award. Walsh states, “The combination of the pay and hours uplift will increase basic pay by £85.72 per week.”

But, “For members seeking family friendly working, caring responsibilities, maybe retiring soon or another legitimate reason—there will be an option to apply to remain on 34.5 hours”, meaning only a 6 percent pay increase.

Fleet staff will be rostered to work one in four Saturdays with the “incentive” of a £50 bonus.

Walsh cited an average figure of £2466 (pro-rata) for the backdated 2023-4 award, conscious that Fleet workers have only received a meagre 2 percent rise back in 2022 during a raging cost of living crisis—when Fleet and over 100,000 of their Royal Mail co-workers lost up to 18 days’ pay during national stoppages with no strike pay from the CWU.

Fleet workers took to the CWU Facebook page to challenge Walsh, noting that there are no arrears for overtime or Scheduled Attendance payouts from April 2023 to March 2024,

One comment read, “Just found out we won’t be getting overtime backdated which made up nearly half my earnings. That’s disgusting. Pathetic on the union part.”

Others challenged Walsh:

“Why did you get people to say why they voted no last time and not listen? Weekend work still there and increasing our working weekly hours, I’ll let you know before we even brief its a No from me.”

And, “I can’t actually believe what I’m reading. Words cannot even come close to describing what myself and hundreds of other will be feeling now. Everyone else had full backdated pay so why not us. Smoke and mirrors basic pay 85 (pound) per week increase... Who in their right mind would endorse this!!!!???? Let’s vote. It’s a NO from me and I’m sure it will be a NO from them.”

A Fleet worker stood up for new entrants on worse terms and pointed to how weekend working had been bulldozed through at his depot:

“No mention of Sundays? 5 over 7 has now been

implemented at our workshop for new contract 39.5 hour guys, they hate it by the way 06:00 – 14:24 and guys on 34.5 hour contract have to do the same even though it is voluntary overtime for them.”

The contract states that new entrants will work one in three Saturday and Sundays. Walsh had doubled down in his favoured position of pleading poverty on behalf of the Royal Mail shareholders, writing, “The vast majority gain by increasing basic pay to 7.15%. In any pay talk there is only so much money in any agreement and you either decide to improve basic pay for everyone or reduce the percentage pay rise and flow it through to overtime/SA which a minority gain from.”

The absurd claims of Walsh heading up a CWU campaign to “reconnect with members” was refuted by the other management talking points he promoted. The deputy general secretary elected last December with just one tenth of the eligible vote, a verdict on this full-throated defence of pro-company agreement and commitment to reducing the Universal Service Obligation (USO) to five-days and transform the business into a 24/7 parcel network.

Regarding weekend working overturning any work-life balance he stated, “Unfortunately with an ageing fleet, working [sic] being brought back from being outsourced and proposed new USO option dependent on more vans Saturdays will be an agenda regardless of if there is a pay deal.”

The Post Workers Rank-and-File Committee encourages Fleet workers to share their experiences and expose the rotten agreement. Opposition must be unified in a fightback against the brutal restructuring across the workforce via the BRT&G agreement and dismantling of USO and mass job losses through automation.



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