

CWU electioneering for Labour: delivering the Starmer government's pro-business agenda against postal workers

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The pro-business agenda of Starmer's incoming Labour government was typified by its pre-election backing for Royal Mail's takeover by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky. Labour's Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds has worked closely with Communication Workers Union (CWU) officials led by Dave Ward, supporting their policy of "engagement" with Kretinsky's EP Group to block opposition from postal workers to its slash-and-burn agenda.

The takeover was placed on the back-burner during the general election. But Labour ruled out Royal Mail's return to public ownership and Reynolds gave in-principle agreement to the buy-out based on five-year contractual "undertakings" by Kretinsky that will be scrapped at the first opportunity. The "protections" for workers are worthless but have been embraced by Labour to sanctify a looting spree.

In addition to the billions that will be reaped by firms like Blackrock, UBS and Schrodgers, and an estimated £3 million payout to International Distributions Services (IDS) directors and former directors, the *Financial Times* reports, "Bankers and other advisers are expected to net up to £146mn in fees for assisting Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky's takeover bid... in a development that risks further antagonising postal workers at the former state-owned group."

The *Financial Times* fears that opposition by postal workers to the takeover could reignite anger in the wider working class and jeopardise plans by the ruling class for further pro-market restructuring at Royal Mail and elsewhere. Hence its reliance on the CWU and the Labour government.

Any claim that Labour will not rubber stamp the takeover is a lie. Chancellor Rachel Reeves has made clear Labour's top priority is to make Britain a "safe haven" for investors, reports the *Financial Times*. The paper's July 12 feature article on Reeves explained she has "set Labour on a pro-business path based on promises of 'stability' and fiscal discipline." She and Starmer have offered repeated praise for

Margaret Thatcher, making clear Labour will enforce corporate interests against the working class with an iron fist.

CWU's alliance with Labour

The CWU postal executive issued repeated calls for a Labour vote ahead of the July 4 general election. Its officials pulled out all stops, including letters to branches, emails and social media posts to get the vote out for Starmer. A "vote Labour" letter signed by Ward and Deputy General Secretary (Postal) Martin Walsh was sent to the home address of every CWU member. This whitewashed Labour's pro-business, anti-working-class policies, including Starmer's backing for genocide, imperialist militarism and war.

The CWU's "vote Labour" appeal referenced the Tories' "reign of shame", including "their handling of the pandemic, the dismantling of the NHS, the direct targeting of striking workers, thousands living on the streets and millions of families being pushed into in-work poverty," claiming "The only credible answer to that is Labour."

But every one of these Tory policies is backed by Labour. During the pandemic, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn (followed by Starmer) joined the Trades Union Congress in giving full support to Boris Johnson's herd immunity policies that killed more than 230,000 people. Labour's Health Secretary Wes Streeting is the champion of National Health Service privatisation, while Starmer has ruled out even basic measures to alleviate child poverty, such as removing the two-child cap on benefits.

Ward and Walsh claimed, "Our influence as a union is at the heart of the Labour manifesto. The CWU were the founders of the New Deal for Workers campaign and fought

for it to be adopted as one of Labour's key policies."

But Labour's pledge to end fire-and-rehire, "certain types" of zero hours contracts and its promise to repeal Minimum Service legislation will make little difference to millions of workers. The party is keeping all pre-existing anti-strike laws on the books, while "fire and rehire" in all but name will be achieved—as at Royal Mail—via company-union deals to rewrite terms, conditions and pay.

This is why Labour's New Deal is introducing sectoral-wide bargaining between unions and employers, starting with a pilot scheme in the social care sector, and measures to encourage union access to unorganised workplaces. The Labour government views the union bureaucracy as a key ally in suppressing industrial action and slashing pay and conditions.

Labour's vision for a "New Deal" is agreements like the one hatched at Royal Mail: a two-tier workforce with new entrants on inferior pay and benefits, and a bonfire of workers' rights, driving thousands of "legacy" workers out. This was the outcome welcomed last year by Labour MP Darren Jones, who was promoted during the dispute as the friend and saviour of postal workers.

"You think Labour will help?"

It was no surprise that Ward's electioneering generated no enthusiasm. On polling day, the CWU's Facebook page declared: "Make sure to get out and vote today, and vote for a New Deal for Workers!" But postal workers hit back with a stream of comments:

- Remember last time CWU told us how to vote it's really turned out well for us all within royal mail hey
- I certainly remember Blair and Brown government (Labour) trying to privatise Royal Mail
- You think Labour will help? Nope I don't think they'll lift a finger to help us.
- So next time we are in dispute with our private owners, might u be even less inclined to take meaningful action, so as not to annoy or belittle your labour buddies in power?
- Labour won't help us, they've said we won't be renationalised and they won't block the sell-off to Kretinsky

Bitter lessons have been drawn by workers who refuse to have the wool pulled over their eyes by union bureaucrats who have betrayed their every struggle. This points to a broader reality.

Labour's "landslide" election victory was achieved off the

back of mass anti-Tory sentiment, but the party's vote share was just 33.8 percent—the lowest on record for an incoming government.

At the same time, only 52 percent of the voting-age population turned out to vote, the lowest since universal suffrage was granted in 1928. This speaks to enormous political alienation and hostility to Labour's pro-capitalist program. That such a hated right-wing figure as Starmer has been placed in power is due entirely to the role of the trade union bureaucracy, in alliance with Labour "lefts" such as Jeremy Corbyn. The Corbynites have worked to shackle workers to the Labour Party and prevent any socialist challenge to Starmer's pro-war, pro-austerity program.

During the 2022-23 strike wave that encompassed 2 million workers at its height, Dave Ward and Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union General Secretary Mick Lynch became figureheads for the Enough is Enough campaign. They worked to head off calls for a general strike that would have brought the working class into direct conflict with a Tory government in turmoil and with Starmer's efforts to form a Labour government "in the national interest." Lynch criticised Starmer's attacks on striking workers, while holding out the prospect for his redemption if he would only "come off the fence."

Once the strike wave was betrayed, Enough is Enough was mothballed and Lynch's militant posturing was replaced by cringeworthy endorsements of Labour. On the eve of the general election, Lynch declared: "I support getting rid of this government and I'm a realist—the only government we're going to get as an alternative will be led by Keir Starmer, so people have to deal with that, people have got to grow up a bit in some senses."

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) opposes all such calls for unity with Starmer's right-wing Labour government. The alliance of the trade union bureaucracy with Starmer underscores the need to prepare an industrial and political fight in the working class to challenge the dictates of the corporate and financial oligarchy. We encourage postal workers to read and share the WSWs perspective "Build the socialist opposition to Starmer's right wing government" and help build the PWRFC.



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