

Royal Mail rank-and-file meeting discusses fightback against management attacks and EP Group takeover

Our correspondent
17 September 2024

The UK Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) held a Zoom meeting on Sunday to discuss a strategy to fight back against the attacks by Royal Mail and takeover of the company, and parent group International Distribution Services (IDS), by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky and his private equity firm EP Group.

Royal Mail workers have been kept in the dark for months about the contents of the secret meetings held between Kretinsky, Communication Workers Union (CWU) leaders Dave Ward and Martin Walsh and the Labour government. This is to enable the £3.5 billion takeover using the drip feed of worthless assurances of protecting the workforce and postal service. Walsh in the most recent *CWU Live* broadcast last week, stated, “We obviously want to reach an agreement with Daniel.”

The PWRFC in its appeal for the meeting stated, “Royal Mail, EP Group and the CWU have a strategy, and are working with the Starmer government to implement it. The rank and file must develop a strategy to challenge this and fight back.”

The meeting was attended by postal workers from workplaces at Royal Mail Group including delivery offices, distribution centres and Parcelforce, who took part in the crucial discussion.

Tony Robson, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, explained that the PWRFC has produced a charge sheet against the CWU Postal Executive over their pro-company agreement enforced last July. This has led to mass job losses, gig economy-style working times, a two-tier workforce and management bullying to impose excessive workloads.

The CWU had brought on the “Armageddon” Ward claimed the rotten deal would prevent, a lie told only to cement the union bureaucracy as company partners and an integrated arm of management. This is the privileged status the CWU hierarchy seeks to maintain under an EP Group buy out. Through the sabotage of the 2022-3 national dispute and wrecking operation against worker’s rights and the postal service, the CWU has forfeited any claim to represent its members.

Robson stated, “This is the real face of corporatism which this committee was formed to fight. There is no shortage of

anger over exploitative conditions and the CWU sellout. We have taken up the challenge to translate these sentiments into an organised opposition to assert the will of the members against the pro-company union apparatus. This is a political fight to expose how the CWU is run like a dictatorship, not an organisation of workers, and to free the opposition against the corporate plundering based on taking forward a conscious fight against capitalism.”

The struggle at Royal Mail was placed within the context of the international upsurge of the class struggle against pandemic profiteering and mass sacrifice of lives, the brutal restructuring of the pro-company agreement and now the planned takeover by Kretinsky’s EP Group.

“The EP Group buyout is based on the building blocks provided by the CWU’s pro-company agreement with Royal Mail: the gig economy conditions, use of automation to destroy jobs and the destruction of the Universal Service Obligation. Through its 31 percent ownership of the Dutch postal service and the GLS parcel arm of IDS, his private equity firm aims to build the ‘Amazon of Europe’. This is why he has announced plans to invest £400 million to develop a network of drop boxes and delivery lockers to replace door-to-door delivery. There is nothing Kretinsky aims to carry out which is not already pursued by Royal Mail.”

Robson encouraged Royal Mail workers to turn to their real allies nationally and globally in the postal and logistics service and more widely in a unified fight by workers against the race to the bottom. The PWRFC as an affiliate of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is fighting to lay the foundations for the development of such a global movement.

In Britain the working class is on a collision course with the Labour government, the most-right wing and pro-business in history, and its agenda of austerity and war. The standing ovation given at the TUC to Starmer as he set off to parliament to cut the winter fuel allowances of around 10 million pensioners exposed how every union leader will operate in partnership with government and big business. This is to be formalised through the setting up of an Industrial Strategy

Council to boost productivity and competitiveness as strike action is suppressed.

“In Britain and around the world the working class is entering into decisive battles in postal, logistics, the docks and the car industry over how labour-saving technology such as automation, AI and the switch to electric vehicles has been weaponised by the corporate boardroom to throw thousands out of work and ramp up exploitation. The same technology can be used to reduce the burden of work and provide well-paid and secure jobs, but this means taking it out of the hands of the corporate oligarchy and placing it under workers’ democratic control to reorganise the economy on a socialist basis.”

Greetings were brought to the meeting from the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee at Canada Post by Daniel Berkley, which we are publishing in full. Around 55,000 postal workers at Canada Post are being balloted for strike action over new collective agreements. The CUPW bureaucracy is in a tripartite alliance with management and the Trudeau government to prevent any strike action by postal workers after agreeing an extension to the collective bargaining agreements for the past two years.

The development of the work of the IWA-RFC was welcomed by those on the call and led to a discussion about the common issues postal workers face in Canada and Britain, pushed to breaking point by impossible workloads and union reps who toe the company line.

James, a delivery worker in Scotland, wrote in the group chat: “Hypocrisy is rife. Just an example. PDA (handheld devices) was declared illegal in its use of tracking us. Now we have to use it to check our performance for that day, we are now spying on ourselves endorsed by the CWU. I was told yesterday this will become mandatory to be done every day.”

Adam, a delivery worker in Yorkshire, explained, “Our manager regularly tells us, take the tracked parcels, forget the mail. Sometimes there is weeks of mail left in the office. A week’s worth of untracked parcels, 3 or 4 sacks of parcels, not delivered because that doesn’t affect his bonus. NHS stuff in with the mail and untracked parcels, medication sometimes.”

Jim, from the Midlands Super Hub, commented, “I can confirm that the union sell out is clearly apparent at my workplace. We have hundreds of casual agency workers on daily basis across all shifts. The union agreement was meant to reduce, not increase agency workers. Our union reps do not question this with management, they are hardly ever seen on the shopfloor. The agency workers are treated badly, spoken to in a rude way and sometimes even shouted at when they are not performing to their so-called “standards”.

George, a delivery worker in Scotland, spoke in the discussion: “Martin Walsh at the TUC was telling lie after lie about opposing Royal Mail and conditions like a two-tier workforce. The CWU has agreed and implemented this; we are working next to guys who are on lesser pay and terms and work compulsory Sundays.

“The CWU is not our friend, they are our enemy working hand-in-hand with management. There was a meeting in Perth last Friday of reps only and we are getting information second hand that what is on the way is more work, increased delivery spans and pushing back times even later. The CWU are trying to pull a confidence trick that they are fighting to defend conditions, don’t let these guys fool you.”

Anthony, a Parcelforce delivery driver in London, said at his depot they were faced with disciplinary action because they could not complete their workloads. This was due to the impossible targets set by management which included collections. Managers would not listen, and drivers had turned to the CWU which had done nothing, “Why does the union agree to less hours and more work?”

Robson said this summed up the rotten pro-company agreement. The CWU had lied that “Uberisation” had been cancelled, and the ceiling on owner drivers employed at Parcelforce was dependent on “considering alternative solutions”—i.e., revisions based on less hours and more work. This was Appendix 3 of the agreement which the CWU started to implement with management “at pace” in May 2023, two months before members were even balloted on whether to accept the deal.

“The company relied on the CWU to enforce the agreement by trampling over the most basic rights of its own members. Postal workers are not in a sectional fight against one employer. This exploitation is rooted in a system based on profit, not providing a public service... A fight against this, and the regime of management intimidation, means a fight against the pro-company bureaucracy which defends company profits over workers’ rights; this fight can only be waged by organising the rank and file.”

A proposed motion was circulated as the basis to hold workplace meetings among postal workers to draw up a charter of grievances and demands to develop a unified fightback against management diktats and the unaccountable CWU bureaucracy, starting with a vote of no confidence in its pro-company agreement and support for the EP Group takeover.



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