

Royal Mail worker speaks on CWU-Labour government collusion with EP group takeover of Royal Mail: “They are partners in crime”

Our correspondent
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The *World Socialist Web Site* had the following conversation with a Royal Mail delivery worker in Scotland who is a member of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC). Their name has been withheld to protect against victimisation.

The discussion focussed on the experience of postal workers on the ground and the devastation of jobs, terms and conditions resulting from the pro-company agreement last July. This cemented the partnership of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) Postal Executive with Royal Mail, ending the year-long national dispute to pave the way for a brutal restructuring agenda over the past year.

It serves as a reply to the fraudulent performance by CWU General Secretary Dave Ward at the Labour Party conference this week. His speech was an attempt to falsify the record and suggest that the union was in a fight against the “stitch up” of Royal Mail by its current business leaders and the regulator Ofcom.

The Labour Party conference passed the CWU motion on “Critical UK Infrastructure – The Future of Royal Mail”. This claims that the Starmer government will guarantee “stronger contractual obligations” to protect jobs and the mail service and prevent asset stripping by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky and his private equity firm EP Group in the £3.5 billion takeover of the Royal Mail (and parent company International Distribution Services).

These worthless assurances aim to neutralise the opposition of postal workers to the next phase in the race to the bottom. This is why the meetings over the past months on the takeover have been held in private by Kretinsky and EP Group, the CWU and the Labour Party—which before taking office signalled its in-principle support for the buyout.

The CWU’s call for a “new business and ownership model” under the sole ownership of EP Group is in line with Labour government’s pledge to be the “most pro-business in history”. It preserves the privileged status of the CWU bureaucracy as corporate enforcer using the building blocks of the sellout agreement to transform the mail service into an Amazon-style parcel business with sweatshop conditions to match.

Postal workers in Scotland on delivery have been among the worst affected by the later start and finishing times of up to 90 minutes since June this year. What has been the impact?

At our delivery office the finishing time averaged out at around 2pm during the week and just after 1pm on a Saturday. The CWU also agreed to longer hours in the High Period of Christmas to 39 hours a week, so you are looking at around 3.30pm or 4pm on weekdays when you get back to the delivery office and you still have work to complete and around 2.40pm on a Saturday if you don’t take a break.

Many people with young children took this job because it allowed them to pick them up from school. That has gone now. Your job is delivering parcels, that is what the CWU means when it talks about “growing the business”. You have no life outside of work including on Saturdays when in the past you could meet up with friends and family and socialise. Every day is a constant battle to complete your work. You cannot say what time you will finish; they have added about 15 percent to the workload. It is like the gig economy.

This is a stark reminder of what the CWU signed away in its agreement with Royal Mail. It is only set to get worse, from what we hear. What starts out as rumours becomes a fact. It is a softening-up exercise by the union and management. So many people are looking to leave, and new entrants are being treated even worse as part of the two-tier workforce. Royal Mail is burning through staff. On top of the lesser pay and terms they have to work Sunday as mandatory. But now at local level they are being told they cannot take a day off during the week but can work Sunday as overtime, as if this is some great favour to make some extra pay! The new entrants have been leaving because they cannot believe the stress and workloads.

Martin Walsh was elected CWU (postal) deputy general secretary with just 10 percent of the vote last November. That is what postal workers thought of his defence of the sellout agreement, but he claimed the CWU would “re-connect” with members in the workplace.

That is one of the biggest lies he has told. To call themselves

the “communication union” is a sick joke. The CWU is “re-connecting” with members by drip feeding the company line, leaving them even more stressed about their future.

Walsh held a meeting with the CWU reps in Scotland a few weeks ago in Perth. There was no workplace report back at our delivery office. The CWU rep has just told us bits and pieces as individuals about information which is critical to our wellbeing in the workplace.

There is nothing in writing. We are being told that the “My Performance” App to monitor individual productivity as part of the agreement will now be moved from the PDA (hand-held trackers) to our mobile phones through the “Royal Mail People App.” This intrusive company app is what we now have use to order new uniform, sort out annual leave, days off and even to view our pay slip. If you want a printed pay slip you now need to make an individual request. It is not uncommon to be underpaid for the hours you work, so you need to check it. There is no human contact anymore with HR or a manager on these issues. We are only a hop, skip and a jump away from the platforms gig economy workers use.

We are facing walks that will increase from around 4 hours 15 minutes to 5 hours plus per day. We have been told that Saturdays will only be for parcels and First Class and everything else will be carried over to the Monday, Tuesday. This is being planned for early next year and has been tied in with the Kretinsky take-over. The CWU is just echoing management talking points.

Ward at the Labour Party spoke about defending the USO. What has been the role of the CWU regarding the deliberate rundown of the mail service?

It was only the members who have tried to keep the service going in a losing battle to try and ensure people get their important mail, like hospital appointments. This is in the face of the union selling us down the river. The USO is just a term the CWU throws around. Now they are talking about suspending a large part of the mail on Saturday. We were the ones saying throughout the dispute the company was coming for the mail service. The members have never received a reply from the CWU about action to prevent management prioritising parcels over mail, in violation of the USO obligation. The union hierarchy talk about protecting the USO, but they don't give a damn and allowed postal workers to be victimised by management. With the deal last year the CWU took the first chance they got to throw away the service for a parcel delivery network. They cannot talk to the ordinary members about defending the USO, that is garbage. When Walsh talks about any “growth” in the service it is increased parcel delivery between 2 to 6pm. That is a massive clue about what they think about the USO. They are singing from the same hymn sheet as Royal Mail-IDS. How demoralising is that for postal workers looking for a way to defend their jobs, conditions and the mail service?

What do you think of the CWU's role with Labour in the

Kretinsky take-over?

The CWU are in cahoots with the Labour government, waving through this take-over. That is the mood music. I see them as partners in crime and there is no hope of anything good coming out of this. It will be worse for the workers. I've heard Labour saying they will not discourage investment—this is how they are presenting the takeover by a billionaire asset stripper. From Rachel Reeves on down they are entirely pro-business. That tells you all you need to know and is bad news for us, whatever so-called provisos are agreed with Kretinsky on the takeover.

As for Ward claiming to be some great opponent of privatisation, what a farce! When we were preparing to strike over two years ago to defend our terms and conditions, we were told by the CWU that we had to think of the shareholders, that Royal Mail was not a service but a private company. Who comes first in any PLC? It is the shareholders and their dividends. That was always the priority for the CWU, and it has got worse.

We have a large TV in our canteen which churns out company propaganda via its news channel RMTV. It is like 1984. It constantly flashes up the share price to enforce the message this is what matters. It is not subliminal, it is in your face.

I encourage all postal workers to get involved with the Post Workers Rank-and-File Committee. You have a chance to hear from Royal Mail workers across the country to get support and find out there are many others who feel the same way and want to fight. Anyone looking for a voice will find it in the committee, you will be more than welcome.

At our last Zoom meeting we had greetings from the Canada Post Rank-and-File Committee and the level of exploitation they face. This made a big impression and brought home how postal workers are in the same fight. It will be a big realisation for people—it was for me. It is not just in the UK; other rich and developed countries are treating their workers like dirt because the unions in every country have fallen into line with the employers and governments.

It is a global problem which needs a global solution. We need to stick together as brothers and sisters all over the world



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