

Victimised Royal Mail worker speaks out: “More than 30 years of service ended in 20 seconds!”

Our correspondent
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Des, a long-serving delivery worker for Royal Mail in Chester-Le-Street County Durham, in the north-east of England, spoke with the World Socialist Web Site about his victimisation. He was sacked by the company on trumped-up charges last year and abandoned by the Communication Workers Union (CWU).

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) has received reports from Royal Mail workers across the UK about managers taking disciplinary action against them for being unable to complete their deliveries on the pretext of “intentional delay of mail”. Workloads have been ramped-up because of the largest cost-cutting revisions in Royal Mail history during 2022-3, in line with last year’s pro-company agreement endorsed by the CWU to enforce mass job losses and the tearing up of terms and conditions.

Royal Mail is making delivery workers the scapegoat for the rundown of the mail service, while the company prioritises parcels over letters in violation of its statutory legal requirements under the Universal Service Obligation. This new norm has become the basis for institutionalised management bullying to embed a two-tier workforce, with new entrants brought in on inferior pay and conditions while long-serving postal workers on “legacy” terms are driven out.

The PWRFC welcomes all those who want to take part in a fightback against the collusion of the CWU bureaucracy with Royal Mail. CWU officials led by Dave Ward are currently colluding with the take-over bid by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky, backed by the Labour government, to facilitate a further race-to-the-bottom by transforming the mail service into a 24/7 parcel courier company run exclusively for private equity investors’ profit.

I worked for Royal Mail for 31 years and had a spotless record before I was dismissed on June 8, 2023, for “intentional delay of mail”, which is totally untrue. It was a trumped-up charge and the entire conduct procedure was a disgrace.

There was a lad who was also sacked with me, Ross, my CDV partner (van share) who had only been with Royal Mail for 18 months. This happened while the national dispute was

still taking place. I had taken part in all the days of strike action.

I came back from a long weekend on Tuesday, May 9, the same day Ross returned from a two-week holiday. There was a load of “door-to-doors” (commercial flyers) which had piled up because our shared duty had not been fully covered.

I got all the mail in both frames first thing in the morning. Ross did not start until 9 a.m. The manager came around and said, “Where are the door-to-doors?” I explained to him I was going to take a tray out and put them behind my bundles. He wanted them all put in the frames. This was done by two members of staff and the manager who was sniggering. I informed him we would not get finished on time, but he said, “Oh no, you will get it done!” On three occasions I informed him I would be bringing back mail before I left the office to go on delivery.

At our office it was the common practice (not policy) to ring the manager by 1 p.m. if you were unable to complete your delivery. The manager rang my CDV partner at 1.10 p.m., who informed him of what I had already said, that we would be bringing mail back. I had a family commitment that day and could not work over my contracted hours as I had done so many times in the past just to complete the workload.

We took the mail back with the two bags and the manager collared me and asked why we had not done our lapsing (additional work added to the existing duties of postal workers by dividing up other walks). He had removed 15 minutes of lapsing for us to do half the door-to-doors on a busy day, especially as it was the day after the King’s Coronation Bank Holiday. He spoke to me out of sight of the CCTV behind a door (a conversation he would later deny took place).

I placed the two mail bags on my bench, which was the accepted practice in terms of dropped bags, and left at my time, 2.40 p.m. My workplace union rep returned to the office just after 3 p.m. and they were still there. He was my main witness. This is all verified by CCTV.

When I came in the next morning, I spoke to the assistant manager about the mail left from the day before and the fact the bags were now on the floor. He told me he did not know

anything about this, which immediately set off alarm bells for me. I asked him what he wanted me to do, and he said, just take the mail out the bags and put them in the frame and out on delivery, which I did. Then manager came out and started to take photographs of the frames and empty bags on the floor. He also rang my CDV partner when we were on delivery at 1pm who explained that I had already informed the assistant manager we'd be bringing two bags of mail back.

When I was leaving work, I was approached by both the managers who said, "When were you going to tell us you had two bags left?" I was taken aback and explained I had already informed them this was the case.

The next morning, May 11, when I came in the manager pulled me up and said, "We are going to have an interview with you". I was given a large brown envelope with a letter and allowed an hour and a half to prepare with my union rep. The interview lasted up to 2 hours, and I was told it was a fact-finding so I was not allowed to ask any questions.

I was taken off my duty to work in the office for around four weeks and told that I could not speak to anyone, which restricted my ability to ask for any witnesses over what had occurred with the managers.

My case was then passed up the line to a manager from outside the delivery office as the conduct manager and I was appointed a CWU area rep to present me. I was initially told by the union area rep this would probably go no further, but I was then taken into a conduct meeting on May 18 with this manager who behaved like a real henchman.

At no time during the fact finding or the conduct meeting was the accusation made that I had hid two bags of mail. This was only made later, based on interviews with the delivery office manager and the assistant manager which were not conducted until May 30 and 31. I received copies of their statements on June 3.

Instead of having the right to reply to these accusations in a further conduct meeting, the conduct manager came down to the delivery office on June 8 and called me into a meeting where I was sacked for gross misconduct for "intentional delay of mail." More than 30 years of service was ended in 20 seconds. Ross was dismissed 30 minutes later.

There was nothing independent about the later Appeal meeting on June 30. A Royal Mail manager was brought in from outside who showed no impartiality, he discounted the evidence of my witnesses and totally backed up the local managers. I received notification on August 5 that my appeal had failed.

To get any kind of closure I made an application for an Employment Tribunal (ET), but Ross was unable to bring an ET because he did not qualify for unfair dismissal as you need to be employed for two years. The accusation of "hiding the mail" was fundamental to my sacking according to the conduct manager, and yet Royal Mail's solicitors chose to miss this out of their defence paperwork. This silence speaks volumes.

My CWU branch secretary went on long-term sick from August, but I only found out at the end of October as nothing was happening. I had a tribunal date for February. My wife Pauline, who was in my corner all the way, had to do everything to meet the deadlines. Pauline had spoken to Tony Rupa, CWU Head of Legal Services, who said they had no idea about my case. UnionLine (legal support for CWU and GMB members) said I didn't have above a 50 percent chance of winning and would not take it on, so Pauline asked for it to be reviewed.

The CWU put her on to an ET panellist, Robert Wood. He told Pauline it was a very strong case but then just over a week later it wasn't. He basically rehashed Royal Mail's position that I had not told the manager the bags were there on my return. Also, that even though I worked in a partnership of two I should have spoken to the boss at 1pm as well as my CDV partner. He said I would be torn apart at the ET and made to pay costs. There was no mention of management withholding their cooked-up "evidence" about the two allegedly hidden bags of mail. Wood had also previously said he believed Royal Mail were ready to settle and he could possibly negotiate a payment of £10,000. But I was not going to accept such a low-ball offer to deny me the right to clear my name and expose my frame-up by management.

The only reason I dropped my ET case in early January was due to lack of CWU support and being threatened with costs. I have since learnt it is under 1 percent of cases where costs are awarded against the claimant in an employment tribunal case. Basically, I feel I was conned by the CWU.

What got me is that I'd been paying union subs since day one of joining Royal Mail, but CWU officials were not interested in my case and standing up for members against management.



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