

Postal workers at Mount Pleasant oppose CWU Framework Agreement with Kretinsky's takeover of Royal Mail

“Ward is talking nonsense; they want to gut everything we’ve ever had”

Our reporters
5 January 2025

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC)’s next online meeting is taking place today (Sunday, January 5) at 7p.m. Register here to discuss the takeover and its implications and a strategy to fight it.

A World Socialist Web Site reporting team campaigned on Friday at the Mount Pleasant mail centre in London for the online meeting on Sunday of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, “For a rank-and-file fightback against Kretinsky takeover and defence of the mail service.”

The WSWS article “The CWU ‘framework agreement’ backs Kretinsky’s Royal Mail takeover” was distributed as a leaflet, taken by scores of workers who stopped to speak and give their opinions. Hundreds of leaflets were also distributed at delivery offices in Manchester, Leeds, Keighley, Sheffield, Rotherham, Leicester, Winton and Bournemouth.

At Mount Pleasant, the article’s assessment of the Communication Workers Union (CWU)’s corporatist pact with billionaire Daniel Kretinsky—rubber-stamped by the Labour government—prompted a wide discussion.

Automation and job losses

Royal Mail has been installing more automated machines for sorting parcels and letters in mail centres across the country to augment the role of its two

Superhubs in Warrington and Daventry, in a bid to slash more jobs—what the company and union call “headcount reduction.” This process is set to intensify under the ownership of Kretinsky and his private equity firm EP Group.

A worker raised this, referring to the experience of Amazon workers. Pointing to a news story on his phone he said, “Look at that AI (Artificial Intelligence)! Three robots have wiped out 350 jobs at Amazon. This is the future at Royal Mail. I live in London and everything I earn goes to paying the rent.”

Kretinsky takeover, asset stripping and pension theft

Many workers expressed outrage over the open embrace of the takeover by CWU general secretary Dave Ward, and particularly the union’s gaslighting that it would be anything other than a brutal restructuring to gouge out more profits for the super-rich private equity investors.

One worker pointed to the CWU’s decade-long collaboration with the privatisation of Royal Mail, warning that the Kretinsky takeover would take the plundering of profits even further: “The union already collaborated with part privatisation twelve years ago. Kretinsky—it’s Thatcherism. He’ll asset strip the company. Why is the union telling us otherwise?”

A postal worker discussing the leaflet with the campaign team said, “What you’ve written on pensions,

I've been saying the same thing to my colleagues. If these people take over, they're going to nick our pensions." The agreement allows Kretinsky to help himself to half of the £1 billion pension surplus, as long as it is invested in the Royal Mail side of the business of parent company International Distribution Services.

Another worker added, "Why have they sold Royal Mail so cheap? They are going to sell off all the land. We've been discussing this in the depot: why so cheap? Labour is in on it too. Starmer isn't a Labour man—he's a multi-millionaire, worse than the Tories. I was just saying to my colleagues in there maybe we should we give Reform and Farage a chance?"

The team explained that Nigel Farage, leader of the right-wing Reform UK party, is a City banker turned political demagogue. He has a vested interest in deflecting social anger over inequality into scapegoating immigrants and whipping up national divisions. After the discussion the worker said he would read the WSWS and consider this position.

Royal Mail is turning workers into factory fodder squeezed for profits, with one worker asking, "What can we do? It's all about dividends and share owners? EP Group will have the biggest bonanza they have ever had with all the assets they can sell. It's the nature of capitalism. If they don't get their dividends, they then put more pressure on us workers. Nothing is like it was. You could approach management, now you can't."

"I agree with you but how do we beat this, how do we get over this? We need to be in a position where we can strike and everything stops, like on the underground or the railway."

This raises the lessons of trade union bureaucracy's betrayal of the 2022-23 strike wave against the Conservative government, in which millions of workers came forward to fight decades of real-terms pay cuts and demands for further restructuring on behalf of corporate profits.

The strikes on the railways and at Royal Mail were in the forefront of this action, but the CWU under Dave Ward and the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, led by Mick Lynch, kept these on the leash of selective stoppages—to wear down workers, not to bring the employers and government to their knees.

Workers who voted emphatically for industrial action had no say in deciding the action they would take, and no oversight over negotiations, which ended in sellout deals cooked up behind closed doors. The strikes were called off to make way for a Labour government backed by big

business to continue the attacks on the working class that could no longer be entrusted to the Tories. The union leaders' partnership with the right-wing Labour government and big business is clear in Kretinsky's takeover at Royal Mail.

Any worker seeking to change the union and make it more accountable by taking a post as a local rep is being disabused of this notion. A long-serving postal worker explained to the campaign team that when he spoke up for workers, trying to represent members' demands, he was told to shut up and stop raising these issues by other CWU officials.

The essential role of the union apparatus is to police opposition to the gig economy conditions it has enabled in partnership with Royal Mail management

A worker explained: "It's just intimidation. We are being targeted with supernumerary randomly. They make your life a nightmare: as a supernumerary you're here, there and everywhere—doing up to three times the work. It's a nightmare working here. I'm against Kretinsky; it's asset stripping and privatisation. Give him time and he'll start selling Royal Mail property. I'm concerned the union supports this. I'll read your leaflet and if I agree I'll be in touch."

Another senior postie of many decades had spent a number of years on supernumerary, where workers have to accept total flexibility in their shift patterns without a fixed duty. He said, "Kretinsky is privatisation plain and simple. Ward is talking nonsense. They want to gut everything we've ever had. I'd like to leave, but the wages are so low everywhere. I'm with you on this. Thanks for opposing it. I'm interested in your meeting."

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