

Postal workers speak on USO pilots at Royal Mail: “There is only one way it’s going, it’s Amazon, and it will be all about parcels”

Our reporters
26 January 2025

Postal workers at some of the 37 UK delivery offices targeted by the “USO reform” pilot scheme at Royal Mail have been speaking this past week about the trials to begin in February. Workers voiced opposition to the restructuring plan to impose gig economy working conditions and slash jobs, and in many cases explained they had been kept in the dark by the Communication Workers Union (CWU).

The Universal Service Obligation (USO) is the statutory requirement for Royal Mail to deliver letters to every address in the UK, six days a week, at a uniform price, and parcels five days a week.

World Socialist Web Site reporting teams circulated the statement of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC), which makes the following call:

Collective opposition must be organised against the bureaucratic imposition of the ‘USO reform’ pilots by the Communication Workers Union hierarchy and Royal Mail management at 37 delivery offices across the UK.

The pilot delivery offices are a testing ground for mass job destruction, increased workloads and the gutting of the mail service to be rolled out across 1,200 delivery offices nationally.

We appeal to our brothers and sisters at the 37 targeted delivery offices and all other postal workers: “Stand together! Hands off our jobs, conditions and the mail service!”

Postal workers at **Mount Pleasant delivery office in central London** on Tuesday were scathing about how the USO pilot was being implemented over their heads by the

CWU working in lockstep with management.

A postie said, “It’s coming in February. There have been no management meetings, no union meetings, nothing. It’s typical of this place—when changes are made, they do not talk to us, it’s just imposed.”

This was echoed by a colleague: “We have not been told a dicky bird about changes to the USO. What happens at this depot is senior union officials tell the locals what to do, and they just do it. No one comes to us. We know where it’s all going—it’s Amazon.”

Workers have not swallowed the CWU-Royal Mail line that the pilots are based merely on a “reform” of the USO, rather than dismantling the mail service as part of the £3.5 billion takeover by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky—to implement mass job losses and EP Group’s strategy for a parcel-led business to compete with Amazon, Evri and UPS.

The Amazon model being adopted by Royal Mail was a recurring theme.

“Thank you for getting involved and fighting for us, the workers. There is only one way it’s going, it’s obvious—it’s Amazon, and it will be all about parcels. I will definitely read the leaflet,” another worker commented.

Workers’ anger over how they were being treated with contempt by CWU officials was clear, as well as a desire to find out more about a perspective to fight back:

“We know USO changes are being trialled here. The union here are not worth a s***; they are just yes men. I’d like to say more, but I don’t know what’s involved. I need to be more informed. Thanks for this; the first bit of info I have had on this is from you, so thanks again.”

Another postie added, “Is this your latest leaflet? We have to fight this. I agree with your demand. Thanks for the information—no one else is telling us what these

changes could mean. We have heard nothing about the USO changes.”

At **Stoke Newington delivery office in east London** on Friday, postal workers also spoke about the secrecy maintained by the CWU and Royal Mail over the pilot, saying they had only heard “rumours”. In response to finding out the delivery office was one of the 37 offices selected for trials of the cost-cutting agenda, a worker, taking a bunch of leaflets to share, said, “I knew there was something going on, that they are using it to destroy. I’ll read this.”

The underhand way in which the pilots were being introduced was linked, by another worker, to the methods used by the CWU bureaucracy to veto strike action during the 2022-3 national dispute:

“We have heard nothing. When we had the 18 days of strikes two weeks before Christmas (in 2022) we said to the union that it was an ideal opportunity to go on all-out strike that would hurt the company. The union said ‘No you can’t do that,’ and stopped it. I’ll discuss this with my colleagues.” The sellout agreement in July 2023 tearing up terms and conditions was to feed workers into the clutches of Kretinsky.

The leaflet was warmly received at **Malmo Road delivery office in Hull, East Yorkshire** by postal workers who had just come out of a briefing held jointly by management and the union on the USO pilot.

A worker taking the leaflet said there was no opportunity to vote and the CWU official at the meeting told them, “You have to embrace change.” The worker explained that the models of working under the pilot they had been shown meant gutting the mail service with second-class letters relegated to every other day (during the week), so parcels could be maximised, further hiking up workloads.

The divide between the rank-and-file and the union bureaucracy was summed up by a worker who took the leaflet stating, “Oh, so you are on our side then,” after it was explained the PWRFC statement was against the treachery of the CWU.

The CWU’s “embrace” of overhauling workers’ remaining rights and the entrenchment of gig economy working conditions is being implemented on the back of driving workers out of the job, particularly longstanding posties described by management as having “legacy” terms. Workers were angered by how openly the union worked “hand in glove” with management, with some cancelling their CWU membership and others saying they are looking for alternative employment.

This makes it even more urgent that the rank and file assert their collective will against the undemocratic stitch-up by the CWU-Royal Mail to strongarm them into the pilots. Martin Walsh, CWU deputy general secretary (postal)—who signed the “USO Pilot Terms of Reference” and accompanying “Enablers Letter” with Royal Mail—has stated openly the real aim of the so-called “reform” of the mail service: “Clearly, the USO changes are designed to make money.”

In opposition to the CWU leaders’ support for profit gouging aimed at an additional £300 million “cost savings” per year, the PWRFC statement proposes a strategy for postal workers to mount a fightback:

Postal workers must put a stop to these plans! Emergency meetings should be convened at all affected sites to countermand the CWU hierarchy, reject participation in the pilot schemes, and outline key demands for the protection of jobs, terms and conditions, and the defence of the USO. An appeal for support should be made to workers across Royal Mail, including at Parcelforce and GLS, and to workers at Amazon, UPS and Evri to oppose the race-to-the-bottom.

To defeat the alliance of Kretinsky, the CWU and the Starmer government we need to turn to our allies in the postal and logistics sector across Europe, Canada, and the US, who are facing the same coordinated attack by corporate and state-owned carriers using AI and other forms of automation to slash jobs and boost profits. Automation should be used to improve working conditions not to line the pockets of billionaire investors.

Is the pilot scheme being operated at your workplace? Get in touch to organise a fightback. We appeal to all Royal Mail workers to help distribute this statement.



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