

Call workplace meetings at Royal Mail delivery offices to oppose USO pilots!

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (UK)
9 February 2025

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) has drafted a model resolution (see below) for discussion and adoption at Royal Mail delivery offices and mail centres. The PWRFC is urging colleagues to convene workplace meetings to block the imposition of measures aimed at dismantling the Universal Service Obligation (USO) and destroying thousands more jobs.

The “USO reform” pilots at 37 delivery offices across Royal Mail must be opposed. Their aim is to lay the ground for a brutal wave of corporate restructuring under new owners EP Group, policed by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) bureaucracy.

CWU officials are overseeing a huge PR campaign to declare that “reform” of the USO is inevitable and that opposition to “change” is pointless.

The USO reform pilots, (starting February-May), were agreed by CWU Deputy General Secretary Martin Walsh and Royal Mail management in December. They are timed to coincide with Ofcom’s January 30 announcement to reduce letter delivery to alternate weekdays for Second Class and all mail other than First Class while downgrading quality of service targets across the board.

This was prepared through months of backroom talks between CWU officials, Ofcom, the Labour government and billionaire Daniel Kretinsky’s EP Group, aimed at locking-in the dismantling of the mail service before the £3.5 billion takeover goes through. Kretinsky has described the USO as a “death grip”, complaining it is “the strictest in Europe.”

Labour Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer rubber-stamped Kretinsky’s takeover, delivering on his pledge to head the most pro-business government in history. The government is relying on its partners in the CWU executive to suppress opposition among postal workers.

Walsh’s January 31 “update” on the USO pilot is a prime example of how this is being done. He stated: “Royal Mail argue that the USO’s spiralling costs prevent them from achieving quality of service targets.” This is a slap in the face for postal workers.

The CWU has repeatedly ignored demands by postal workers for action against the illegal boosting of parcels over letters, while helping to turn over the USO to Amazon as an outsourced service with crippling workloads for postal workers. Instead of challenging the company over its illegal actions, the CWU signed a joint statement with Royal Mail in January 2024 agreeing de

facto alternate day delivery for all letters due to chronic understaffing.

Backbreaking workloads and “performance management” have been employed as a strategy to drive thousands of senior delivery workers from the company.

Walsh’s “update” repeated Ofcom’s pro-corporate mantra that an overhaul of the mail service is required because of declining letter volumes since 2005, from 20 billion to 7 billion today. But fewer letters, combined with automation and AI, could be used to reduce the working week and lighten the physical demands of the job. Automation is being used instead to drive up exploitation against a workforce already downsized by tens of thousands.

Royal Mail has been allowed to trash its USO requirement while hiking up the price of first-class stamps to £1.65, an increase of 175 percent since privatisation.

Walsh cites the fact that Downstream Access now accounts for 70 percent of letters, meaning that Royal Mail is making less money from mail. But this is the result of back door privatisation introduced by the Labour government in January 2006. Operators such as Whistl and UK Mail (DHL) have been allowed to cherry pick the more profitable parts of bulk mail collection and distribution, while Royal Mail completes the more costly “final mile” delivery.

There was no suggestion by Walsh of ending this cannibalisation of the mail service. This is because the CWU postal executive fully accepts privatisation and is working in partnership with the Starmer government to facilitate Royal Mail’s takeover by private asset-strippers.

Walsh’s arguments for reforming the USO are based on profitability, not the interests of the public. His “update” had the temerity to cite Ofcom’s estimate that the USO “costs Royal Mail £300 million per year”. Are we supposed to offer them a box of tissues? The corporate raiders in control of Britain’s postal service regard the concept of a universal daily mail service as an imposition on their wealth.

Walsh’s update also warns members that the USO is being slashed in other countries—down to three days in Belgium. But instead of organising a fight across Europe to defeat this coordinated assault, he warns that if the USO pilots are not accepted, then worse change will be imposed from above. This corporate blackmail must be rejected!

The CWU’s comms in support of the USO pilots have provoked an outpouring of anger on social media. As one postie stated,

“Everything that comes from the CWU these days could be mistaken for a management brief”.

Colleagues have challenged the CWU’s pro-company messaging and are highlighting how the “Optimised Delivery Model” at their workplace will ramp up attacks on conditions and jobs. Changes under the pilot scheme will include:

- The first steps toward removing delivery workers from their fixed duty and having them work additional walks, e.g.: three delivery workers having to cover four walks.
- Increased working hours of 40 minutes Monday and Tuesday, and 22 minutes Tuesday to Friday.
- Increased workloads on all mail days, with call rates up from 58 to 78 percent.
- On Saturdays, when only First Class and parcels will be delivered, Walsh has stated that two delivery workers in vans might cover four walking duties.

Their aim is to ram through gig economy “flexibility”.

Walsh’s claims that postal workers’ fatigue would be “managed” through “fair workloads” under this sweatshop charter were met with derision:

- “What a waste of time the union should not have agreed to any of this. One minute they say no increase then you’re going over 2 walks.”
- “I truly think the company wants us to walk and walk till we drop or give up and crawl out so they can get new people in on inferior contracts”.
- “Posties are dropping like flies. Look at the sickness levels, ill health retirements, death on duty compared to 20 years ago. All for meeting targets and cost cutting and insatiable demand for profits. In the age of AI work life balance should be easier not harder”.
- “Sold us down the river again agreeing to this nonsense, you know it will lead to job losses. You are a disgrace of a union”.

The “briefings” being held at targeted delivery offices on the USO pilots are being jointly run by management and union reps to ram through the trials, presenting them as an accomplished fact while suppressing all opposition.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is encouraging the calling of workplace meetings so a *free and democratic* discussion can be held by those on the shopfloor and a collective course of action agreed. The PWRFC is circulating the following resolution at pilot sites, and calls for similar action at all delivery offices and mail centres:

This workplace meeting at [insert name of delivery office] opposes the CWU’s enforcement of the “USO reform” pilot scheme aimed at attacking our working conditions and further dismantling the USO.

These plans have been drawn up behind our backs by CWU Deputy General Secretary Martin Walsh with Royal Mail management.

We will not be used as guinea pigs for Kretinsky’s plans to slash thousands of jobs and extend our already punishing workloads by walks of up to six hours, in a wrecking operation against the mail service.

We call for joint opposition at all 37 delivery offices

targeted for this scorched earth policy.

By embracing Kretinsky’s takeover and signing agreements to dismantle the USO, Dave Ward, Martin Walsh and the entire postal executive have forfeited any claim to represent us. They should resign immediately.

The rank-and-file must determine what is in our best interests, not paid union officials on full time release who act as company yes-men.

It is high time our grievances were resolved: unmanageable workloads, unsafe working practices, a two-tier workforce, the prioritisation of parcels over letters and management harassment forcing our colleagues out the door.

This starts with drawing a red line against the imposition of the USO pilots: Hands off our jobs, conditions and the mail service.

The conditions exist for a globally co-ordinated fightback. Postal workers at **La Poste** in France took strike action January 30 against a similar gutting of the mail service to alternate day delivery. In Germany, 170,000 workers at **Deutsche Post** have begun warning strikes over a new national pay agreement.

Last December, a month-long national contract strike by 55,000 **Canada Post** workers was banned by the Trudeau government, which is preparing the carrier for privatisation. In America, a confrontation is brewing against Trump’s plans to privatise **USPS** after years of Amazon-style restructuring.

In every country the unions are using the full weight of the bureaucracy to shackle postal workers to the demands of the governments and the corporate oligarchy they represent.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, in association with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is laying the groundwork for a globally coordinated fightback. We urge postal workers to get in touch, subscribe to our newsletter and organise a rank-and-file group at your workplace.



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