

# Royal Mail workers speak on USO pilots: “They have already started to gut the mail service”

Our correspondents  
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Postal workers have continued to speak up against the “USO reform” pilots being rolled out by Royal Mail at 37 delivery offices across the UK from February to May with the full collaboration of 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.

The Postal Workers Rank and File Committee (PWRFC) statement “Oppose the USO pilots imposed by CWU and Royal Mail!” has been distributed in the hundreds at some of the targeted offices over the past fortnight, in addition to those covered in London and Hull .

Campaign teams visited offices selected for participation in the pilots at Antrim, Ballymena (Northern Ireland), Preston in the north-west of England, and Nottingham and Coventry in the Midlands.

Postal workers shared their opinions and welcomed information from the PWRFC and *World Socialist Web Site* challenging the company’s cost-cutting agenda and exposing the CWU’s PR campaign with Royal Mail and regulator Ofcom.

At **Nottingham North** delivery office on February 1, workers finishing their shift wound down windows to take leaflets, while those on foot stopped to talk and give their verdict on the pilots.

A senior postal worker said they had a briefing on the pilot, conducted jointly by the CWU and management, presenting the pilots as a “done deal” that would begin in March. They were told the “Optimised Delivery Model” would mean three delivery workers having to cover four duties, hiking up already impossible workloads.

The worker explained: “So, you are losing a postman,

that is one in four jobs threatened right there”. The CWU’s claim that any final agreement will “safeguard jobs” was a whitewash.

Another delivery worker agreed with the PWRFC statement that the pilot’s imposition was “a bureaucratic stitch-up” which should be rejected.

“We only had a management-union briefing. There has been no workplace meeting with us organised by the CWU, it is very undemocratic. I’ll have a read of your leaflet”. Responding to claims that the pilot scheme would improve quality of service, his colleague added: “They have already started to gut the mail service.”

At **Coventry North** delivery office on February 8, there was a large take-up of the leaflet alongside a model resolution drafted by the PWRFC calling for workplace meetings to halt the imposition of the pilot scheme.

There was widespread criticism of the company’s industrial-scale breaches of the USO which had opened the floodgates to the USO’s formal dismantling. No briefings or workplace meetings had been called to discuss the pilots, which workers have been told will begin at the delivery office in May.

One commented, “They have been prioritising parcels over mail and deliberately overpriced letters”. His colleague added, “I’ve done a walk where the customers told me they have not seen any mail all week” Another worker responded, “The union are just doing management’s job for them.”

A young worker employed on inferior pay and conditions thanks to the CWU’s sellout national agreement with Royal Mail in 2023 stated, “I am getting paid around £300 less a month than those on the old contracts”. He said around half the 200-odd workforce were now employed on sub-standard contracts and that long-standing postal workers also felt “they had been

done over by the union” on pay.

Having helped introduce a two-tier workforce, CWU Assistant General Secretary Martin Walsh has the front to justify “USO reform” by claiming it will “equalise” pay, terms and conditions of new entrants! But the CWU’s “Framework Agreement” with EP Group speaks only of “incremental steps over an agreed period of time”

A postal worker who overheard the discussion joined in. He said the year-long dispute in 2022-23 had been “a waste of time” because the CWU had given Royal Mail everything it wanted.

Campaigners replied that workers across Royal Mail had shown their determination to fight through 18-days of strike action. But the dispute showed how the CWU bureaucracy is fully embedded with the company. The central lesson was that the rank-and-file must dismantle the bureaucracy and take back control.

Internationally, postal workers are facing the same assault on jobs and conditions by corporate oligarchs and governments using the same playbook. Workers agreed with the need for a co-ordinated fightback, with some deciding to subscribe to the PWRFC Newsletter to find out more, share information and counteract the isolation being enforced by the CWU.

Delivery workers going in and coming out of the yard stopped their vans to take leaflets. There was interest in socialist politics and organising a rebellion by the rank-and-file. As one worker commented:

“People have got to wake up and see what’s happening around them. We need to organise, we need to organise internationally, that’s the only way it’s going to get done”. He parodied the claim that workers are helpless against the corporations, pointing to the social power of the working class worldwide: “‘what can I do, I’m only one person’, said someone in a group of 7 billion.”

Postal workers at all 37 delivery units are in the firing line of the company’s war on the USO. But workers at 1,200 delivery offices across the UK are being lined up for gig economy working practices and mass job losses that will be launched after the pilots have been judged a “success”.

The WSWs has also received dozens of write-ins from postal workers who are not part of the pilot scheme, but who have slammed the CWU’s collusion with management in creating the necessary “facts on the ground” for dismantling the mail service.

**West Midlands:** “Utter shambles. No confidence in the management or the CWU. Staff being blamed for not delivering letters, walks too big, parcels are now essential

items, staff harassed, threatened to be removed from walks due to non- completion. CWU, non-existent. No regular meetings, both local or national. Withdrawal of overtime, if any becomes available not fairly shared. Work has become a horrible, nasty place to attend, resulting in high sick. Managers urging staff to return, daily harassing members who are under a sick note. I am fed up with the corporate beast, beating its staff. Last month, our employers thought we were saviours due to the Christmas upheaval and heroic attitude. Now we are no better than employees of the Victorian era. Disillusioned by the ineffective CWU.”

**North-west England:** “In my office there are rounds not covered everyday so they can prioritise parcels so this [USO reform pilots] makes no sense at all.”

**Scotland:** “Workloads are being increased. Nothing has been told to employees as we are kept increasingly in the dark about major changes. We have been told to “deal with it” really. The CWU have not addressed anything with members, and I feel are actively working against us. There is an overtime ban (by management) in some places leaving workloads unmanageable. I feel this is to encourage unpaid work. Where I work, the vans have fallen into disrepair and we work with satellite management with a manager whose workload is far too large. We have only seen them in our office twice in 3 years. It’s just not good enough. How far has Royal Mail fallen. I’m looking for other employment.”

The PWRFC has issued a renewed call for workplace meetings to halt the USO pilots that will usher in gig economy conditions. A model resolution has been drafted demanding the immediate resignation of the CWU postal executive for their collusion with the company, and rank-and-file leadership to address longstanding grievances over impossible workloads, low pay, management bullying and the wrecking of the mail service.

*To order copies of the model resolution for your workplace, or for help organising a workplace meeting, get in touch with the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee [rmpw.rfc@gmail.com](mailto:rmpw.rfc@gmail.com)*



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**