

Postal worker exposes underhand dismantling of the USO: “Royal Mail, Ofcom and the CWU are involved in a major cover-up”

Our correspondent
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The following report has been submitted by a postal worker in Northern Ireland in support of the campaign by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) to oppose the imposition of “USO reform pilots” at 37 delivery offices across Royal Mail between February and May.

Terms of Reference for the pilots were drawn up by Communication Workers Union (CWU) Deputy General Secretary Martin Walsh with Royal Mail last December. The CWU is aligned with Royal Mail and regulator Ofcom’s recommendations that the current Universal Service Obligation (USO) providing mail to 32 million addresses across the UK is an “unfair financial burden.”

The pilots are “trialling” a £300 million cost-cutting agenda of mass job losses, increased delivery spans and a reduced USO model to prioritise more profitable parcels. Ofcom has approved this ahead of a consultation exercise that ends on April 10. Ofcom’s recommendations for dismantling the USO are the foundation for the “Optimised Delivery Model” being used in the pilots.

Rather than defending postal workers and the public interest, CWU General Secretary Dave Ward has welcomed as “a fresh start” its new partnership with billionaire Daniel Kretinsky’s EP Group and the Labour government.

While postal workers at 37 delivery offices are the immediate target of this undemocratic stitch-up, it is aimed at restructuring all 1,200 delivery offices across the UK.

A PWRFC model resolution being circulated at pilot sites states: “We will not be used as guinea pigs for Kretinsky’s plans to slash thousands of jobs, extend out already punishing workloads by walks up to 6 hours, in a wrecking operation against the mail service.”

The PWRFC’s warning that the pilots are the thin end

of the wedge has been confirmed by postal workers who are reporting on social media that their own delivery offices, while not formally part of the pilot scheme, are introducing key elements of the reduced delivery model in contravention of the existing USO.

The following report from a veteran postal worker discusses the situation at delivery offices in Northern Ireland.

With the 37 Delivery Offices having been selected and agreed for involvement in the pilot scheme, it was believed that all other offices would continue to operate the current Universal Service Obligation (USO).

However, postal staff throughout the CWU Northern Ireland West Branch have been reporting wholesale mail failures in delivery offices, with managers issuing instructions to prioritise tracked packets over mail and should you come under time restraint, to shuffle your mail and deliver the First Class. This spans a large region west of Lough Neagh, stretching from Craigavon to Derry.

Postal staff are reporting frustration and disappointment that they cannot complete their duties because of the heavy workload, and many take it personally that they cannot deliver the quality of service that the public are paying for. Postal staff are concerned that they are aligned to a service that is dishonest with the public by denying them the service that they pay for. Furthermore, they wish to know why their offices are not adhering with the USO when they are not included in the agreed 37 pilots scheme.

Some CWU reps and other postal staff have reported unagreed changes to the outdoor operation to their CWU peers, however, nothing comes of it and every day stays the same. Members are questioning the direction of the CWU and is it a case of “don’t rock the boat, let’s save

Royal Mail" and save our own positions.

Office reps and members feel so isolated and are continually fearful that if they protest too much that they will put their own jobs at risk. It's an awful work environment to attend each day. The rogue managers that Dave Ward said must go are all still in place and everything that was reported in 2022/23 is just the same, despite the CWU trying to make us believe that things are better.

This is an outcome of the sellout of the national dispute and the subsequent Lord Falconer (stitch-up) Review that whitewashed the vicious campaign by Royal Mail managers to rid the offices of CWU reps and weaken offices deemed a problem because of their militancy. Royal Mail's policy during that period was a huge success story: strong CWU reps are now gone or subdued, union membership is in decline and remaining local reps, members, and staff left vulnerable.

The CWU Postal Executive are intent on saving Royal Mail over supporting their quickly diminishing membership. Postal staff are so disillusioned, some have reported that our union officials have buried their heads in the sand with their "don't rock the boat" approach and believed that they had no choice but to have their concerns heard outside the delivery offices.

In January, postal staff at the delivery office in Derry took photographs as evidence of how USO mail was being left in frames at the end of each day. They approached their local representative of the Legislative Assembly, Pádraig Delargy (Sinn Féin) to intervene. He made a visit to the delivery office and met with senior management.

(Delargy was told by postal workers on his visit how letters were waiting for up to 9-10 days to be delivered. He told *Derry News* that Royal Mail "continues to prioritise parcels over letters with the result that many people are missing vital hospital appointment letters, financial information and other time bound and sensitive information." His call for a formal inquiry has been parked with Ofcom and the Consumer Council)

Martin Walsh posted a statement last week to say the trials are underway in 37 delivery offices. However, he is either hiding under a stone or lying to the members because the plain truth is delivery offices outside of the pilot scheme are continually reporting unagreed trialling, with managers' instruction to prioritise tracked parcels and First-Class letters. The members are asking Martin Walsh: is this unagreed position going to be challenged? And furthermore: are the 37 trial offices just a front to

conceal unagreed changes in all the other delivery offices? Royal Mail, Ofcom and the CWU are involved in a major cover-up.

I've noticed Dave Ward deliberately avoids the details of any agreement. It was the same with the sellout deal in 2023. Ward speaks about a "fresh start" as if Kretinsky is interested in maintaining a quality of service, or secure jobs and reasonable workloads for postal workers. The CWU is talking about delivery staff having more Saturdays off with USO reform, but what about Sunday working for parcel delivery? Their aim will be to make this part of the working week for all postal staff, not only new entrants.

Kretinsky is not interested in delivering letters. It's the Amazon model. You can see that with his plans to bring in parcel drop and collect boxes (an initial network of 20,000). The customer will just go to a location to key in their code, replacing door-to-door delivery. That is the end game, there won't be a mail service.

We need to look after the interests of postal workers and the public, not the profits of the shareholders. It is vital that information is shared by postal workers on the pilot scheme about how this impacts their working conditions and the mail service, to push back against the PR campaign by the CWU. This is an attack on the entire Royal Mail workforce who need to intervene by exposing how the USO is being violated daily and the public defrauded for a service they pay for but is not being provided.

Do you have information about USO violations and revisions at your workplace, or information about how the Optimised Delivery Model is affecting postal workers and the mail service at a pilot site? Send your feedback using the form below (your anonymity will be protected).



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