

Royal Mail workers in Scotland speak against USO pilots: “The CWU is trying to dress this up”

Tony Robson
10 March 2025

Royal Mail workers at Newton Mearns and Cumbernauld delivery offices in Scotland have spoken out against the “USO reform” pilot scheme being implemented at their workplace.

Delivery workers told *World Socialist Web Site* reporting teams last week that they were facing impossible workloads.

Jointly implemented by Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union (CWU), the pilots are trialling an “Optimised Delivery Model” aimed at dismantling the Universal Service Obligation (USO). This follows USO reform proposals announced by Ofcom in January.

Ofcom’s recommendations are for downgrading the frequency and speed of mail deliveries. The regulator has dismissed the USO requirement for mail deliveries six-days-a-week to 32 million UK households as an “unfair financial burden” on the company.

The “reform” of the USO is set to deliver £300 million worth of cuts via job destruction and changes to work practices in support of a parcel-led business under new owners EP Group led by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky.

Workers at Newton Mearns and Cumbernauld are being pushed into the first phase of the pilot scheme that will soon cover 37 delivery units across the UK.

Newton Mearns, 7 miles southwest of Glasgow city centre, employs around 30 postal staff. It is the only delivery office in the pilot scheme to have gone live from the last week in February.

The choice of such a small delivery office to launch the pilots is telling. It is being used as a test site for measures aimed at restructuring the mail service nationally, across 1,200 delivery units. The staggered

implementation of the pilot scheme across 37 delivery offices from the end of March to the middle of May is designed to minimise adverse publicity from the inevitable disruption.

A CWU *Live* event in February saw Tony Bouch, CWU Outdoor Secretary, claim that members at pilot sites in Scotland had been well briefed and were “engaged” in the process by union reps.

But postal workers were never consulted, let alone balloted, over the CWU’s adoption of Royal Mail’s “Optimised Delivery Model” that will slash the mail service and overhaul working practices.

Instead, the CWU has conducted workplace polls on new duty patterns, with the pilots portrayed as giving workers additional Saturdays off. At both Newton Mearns and Cumbernauld, staff voted for the two Saturdays off every five weeks. But the new duty pattern means longer working hours on weekdays and hiked up workloads. Extra Saturdays are a Trojan horse being used to enforce a new benchmark of exploitation.

At Newton Mearns last Thursday, fallout from the pilot was evident. The narrow road leading up to the office was congested as delivery drivers returned to the yard. Drivers said they had been unable to complete their duties based on the new route coverage model, which included tracked packets and mail.

Failures were occurring even though the delivery office had its full complement of staff, plus an additional one or two workers. A far cry from the chronic understaffing which prevails at delivery offices across the UK.

As for the CWU’s claim that workers had been fully briefed by the CWU, a postie explained: ‘The main grievance everyone has is the lack of clarity. The

walkers are being hit hardest but we have now been informed they will only be rotated (with driving duties) every five weeks. That is meant to deal with fatigue! This was not what we were led to believe at the start of the pilot, that the rotation would be weekly.'

At **Cumbernauld delivery office** the pilot is earmarked to go live from March 17. On Wednesday, the mood among postal workers was one of anger and foreboding, "I hate everything about this pilot", one worker said as he rushed in and took a leaflet. The general sentiment was that the CWU is untrustworthy and part of management, with workers treated as fodder and moved around from their duties, "The union rep does the rotas, that tells you something," added the postie.

Another postal worker spoke about conditions at the office and the need for a broader fightback, "It's a shambles. The office is not clearing even before the pilot begins. Duties are not covered when people are off. Tracked parcels are prioritised over letters by managers. We get told to take mail out and ring the manager later if we are unable to complete. We are never told to bring back parcels, only letters.

"The 2023 agreement [between management and union to end a long-standing dispute] was a total sellout, we are working later and later and heading towards 6 p.m. We were not consulted about this pilot, only the vote on duty patterns. The majority voted for two in five Saturdays off, which is an improvement, but it does not make up for longer hours in the week and added work.

"The CWU is trying to dress this up. The new entrants are struggling to get their entitled meal breaks, which are unpaid. I've been following what has been happening in the America. [US President Donald] Trump and [oligarch Elon] Musk are gutting everything. I think Kretinsky is cut from the same cloth. Look at Netherlands Post, which he has a major share in, they are in big trouble. He will gut the mail service and asset strip. I agree this is an international issue".

WSWS reporters distributed copies of a Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee statement, "Call workplace meetings at Royal Mail delivery offices to oppose the USO pilots". There was strong interest in the statement, with several workers signing up to receive the PWRFC newsletter.

Baird Street delivery office in Glasgow (G1-5), which is not part of the USO pilots, workers reported the de facto rundown of the mail service with widespread failures and chronic understaffing. The exodus of senior posties, forced out through impossible workloads, victimisation and bullying, meant the office was short by around 20 staff, roughly a quarter of the requirement.

Many issues came up in discussion. One worker asked how the mail service could be defended when similar attacks on the USO were taking place across Europe? He responded positively to the call by the PWRFC for a global fightback linking workers in the post and logistics sector across Europe and North America against oligarchs and corporate vultures engaged in a looting spree across society.

During the last fortnight, hundreds of statements by the PWRFC and WSWS articles have been distributed at delivery offices in the pilot scheme, including Stockton-on-Tees, Coventry North, Nottingham North, and North Finchley. Campaigns have also gone ahead at offices not included in the pilots including Manchester, Bootle, Leicester Meridian, Bradford North and Keighley.

The overriding sentiment is that the CWU stands on the side of management, not postal workers. WSWS reporters have encountered widespread support for a rank-and-file fightback to oppose Royal Mail's corporate looting and gutting of the mail service.

Do you have any information about the USO reform pilots? Share your views by completing the form below. Subscribe here to the PWRFC newsletter.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact