

Cumbernauld delivery office: How the CWU is enforcing Royal Mail's USO reform pilots

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Underhand methods employed by Communication Workers Union (CWU) officials to impose "USO reform" pilots at 37 delivery units across the UK have been exposed by events at Cumbernauld, one of the targeted sites in Scotland.

The delivery office of around 40 staff is scheduled to become only the second unit to begin implementing the pilot scheme following Newton Mearns (also just outside Glasgow) three weeks ago.

Royal Mail's pilots are introducing an "Optimised Delivery Model" (ODM) that was agreed by the CWU in December. CWU Deputy General Secretary Martin Walsh signed an "Enablers Letter" in December, headlined: "Working together to create the right platform to introduce USO Reform".

The pilot scheme is a dress rehearsal for £300 million in cuts and mass job destruction via the dismantling of six-day-a-week letter deliveries to 32 million UK households. The scheme is being overseen by joint working groups of managers and union officials.

Workers at Cumbernauld say they have been included in the USO reform pilots without their consent. They are angered at CWU local and regional officials who have browbeaten and threatened workers to accept the pilots and Royal Mail's ODM.

Bureaucratic stitch-up at Cumbernauld

CWU members at Cumbernauld called for a workplace meeting in January after they learnt in December that their office was included in the pilot scheme.

A worker at Cumbernauld told WSWs: "Some of the members demanded a meeting to discuss their concerns. The rep dragged his feet, eventually agreed to hold a meeting at the end of the week, but then changed the proposed date".

A workplace meeting lobbied for by members was held on

Wednesday 22 January. But workers say the CWU workplace rep ensured the meeting was not advertised and the date was only confirmed that morning.

More than twenty postal staff were in attendance. Those who spoke said the new delivery model was "unworkable" and their present duties "unmanageable."

Tellingly, the CWU workplace rep blocked a motion to boycott the pilot, arguing that workers should address their grievances on an individual basis.

Another worker at Cumbernauld told WSWs: "A colleague proposed a motion to boycott the pilot. He said that Cumbernauld postal workers should not participate in a trial to lead a charge to eliminate jobs, dismantle the USO and increase workloads. His motion called for a no-confidence vote in CWU officials who have signed up to this without the consent of members. This received a seconder."

Those who were present say the CWU workplace rep suppressed the motion, insisting the meeting could not discuss it or put it to a vote. The rep claimed the motion would lead to his sacking by management!

The same worker said, "The motion put forward what the CWU should be doing if it was really addressing our concerns and standing up for our jobs and the mail service. What's the point of being in a union if we don't even have the right to debate or vote on a motion, or oppose attacks on our terms and conditions? Thousands of jobs are on the line across Royal Mail..."

Having blocked the motion, the CWU rep appealed to members that by taking part in the pilot, they could prove it was "unworkable." He claimed he was in contact with senior CWU officials about this, and that CWU Divisional Rep Tam Dewar, Outdoor Assistant Secretary Tony Bouch and Walsh would be invited to attend a joint union-management briefing about the pilot to be held at Cumbernauld.

That workplace "briefing" was held the following Tuesday, with a display of unity between management and CWU reps.

Another worker who was present told WSWs, "Once

again, there was no support [for the pilot], and a couple spoke in opposition to the changes. One colleague said it was ‘an Amazon type race to the bottom’.

“The rep said, ‘It’s not the members fault that Royal Mail gave away all the money to shareholders’, so basically there was no alternative.”

“The management representatives just agreed with the CWU, telling everyone: “your union has agreed [to the pilots].”

Workers say there was no clear explanation provided about the ODM and its impact on work practices. It was stated that delivery frames would be re-configured based on the reduced mail service and a new route coverage would proceed based on a revised start date moved back from February to March.

No senior CWU officials showed their face at the briefing. But it later transpired that one of those standing side-by-side with management was a CWU Divisional Rep. He did not introduce himself during the briefing, but went around the workplace afterwards telling postal staff that unless the pilot was accepted, they could be out of a job and the company would go bankrupt.

Following this browbeating exercise, the union moved to impose new duty patterns, promoted as a pathway to having additional Saturdays off. This has become a Trojan horse for dismantling the USO. While the CWU denied workers at Cumbernauld a vote on the pilots, they organised a workplace ballot in February offering three new delivery “options”, with the majority voting for two Saturdays off in five (the same as Newton Mearns).

This is what Bouch described as “engagement” with the membership, after his flying visit to pilot sites in Scotland more than three weeks ago.

Claims about “engagement” have been refuted by postal workers, as reported by WSWs. At Newton Mearns, delivery staff have reported widespread mail failures and impossible workloads, while their colleagues at Cumbernauld are facing the same even before the pilot goes live (the start date has been pushed back a third time, from March 17 to March 24).

The number of duty pattern “options” for the USO pilots has now been extended from three to seven following an Addendum to the terms of reference agreed between Walsh and Royal Mail executives. For the privilege of additional Saturdays off, it states the following “scenarios” may apply: “Longer working days, later finish times for full time and part time colleagues: less opportunities for part time to become full time and shorter rest periods in some weeks in the rota.”

The case for rank-and-file organisation

The pilot scheme is a rigged exercise between Royal Mail, Ofcom and CWU officials to rubber stamp £300 million of cost cutting to make thousands of jobs losses. Postal workers must take back control from the union apparatus based on a new leadership of trusted fighters on the shopfloor and a rank-and-file network to break the pro-company grip of the CWU bureaucracy.

The Postal Workers Rank and File Committee (PWRFC) has called for workplace meetings to halt the pilots and begin a fightback to resolve postal workers’ grievances: unmanageable workloads, unsafe working practices, a two-tier workforce, prioritisation of parcels over letters, and management bullying. This resistance must be extended across all 1,200 delivery offices.

Postal workers’ rights must take priority over billionaires like Daniel Kretinsky who are taking a wrecking ball to the USO. If the company’s owners are incapable of providing secure jobs and decent pay, then Royal Mail must be placed under public ownership, with the wealth created by postal workers used to improve the mail service, including pay, terms and conditions.

The Labour government’s abolition of NHS England, a DOGE-style assault targeting 30,000 jobs, is part of plans to destroy the NHS. Workers face a political fight against a Labour government and trade union bureaucracy that defends ruthlessly the interests of the financial oligarchy.

The fight at Royal Mail must reach out to post and logistics workers internationally who are facing a brutal wave of corporate restructuring and privatisation. Workers at United States Postal Service face 10,000 job losses in the next 30 days and the stepped-up plans for privatisation. US President Donald Trump is erecting a dictatorship via executive orders and police state repression alongside his fascist billionaire henchman Elon Musk to enforce job cuts among tens of thousands of federal workers.

The PWRFC in association with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is providing the basis 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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