

Communication Workers Union's Martin Walsh attacks WSWS over opposition to “USO reform” pilots

Tony Robson
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During last Thursday’s *CWU Live* online event, Tony Bouch, Outdoor Assistant Secretary for the Communication Workers Union (CWU), was forced to acknowledge widespread opposition among postal workers to the “USO reform” pilots being jointly implemented by Royal Mail and the union bureaucracy.

Bouch spent the hour-long livestream batting off criticism from workers that the “Optimised Delivery Model” being trialled at 37 units—aimed at dismantling the Universal Service Obligation (USO)—means impossible workloads and a degraded mail service for the public.

Postal workers explained they were “fatigued and failing” and demanded answers from the CWU top table. Workers made clear that “USO reform” was already being implemented far beyond the 37 delivery offices targeted in the pilot scheme.

Bouch’s failed efforts to stem workers’ anger followed an attack just days earlier by CWU Deputy General Secretary (Postal) Martin Walsh on the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) and the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC).

On Saturday March 22, Walsh publicly attacked WSWS and supporters of the PWRFC over their role in exposing the pilots.

Walsh posted his tirade on the Royal Mail Chat website (royalmailchat.co.uk) in its News section. He was responding to a widely read WSWS article exposing the underhand methods employed by the CWU to close down opposition to the USO pilot at Cumbernauld delivery office in Scotland.

Headlined, Cumbernauld delivery office: How the CWU is enforcing Royal Mail’s USO reform pilots, the WSWS article was read by thousands of postal workers, clocking up a record number of views and comments on Royal Mail Chat.

The article reported efforts by workers at Cumbernauld to oppose the Optimised Delivery Model. The ODM means the break-up of fixed duties, introduction of flexible “route coverage” and increased call rates.

At a workplace meeting on January 22, delivery workers at Cumbernauld described the new working practices as “unworkable”. A CWU member tried to move a motion to oppose the pilot scheme as “detrimental to working conditions” and an open door to mass job destruction. He called for a vote of no-confidence in the CWU Postal Executive for its collusion in dismantling the USO. This motion was seconded.

But the CWU workplace rep blocked the motion from being voted on. He told members he was in contact with CWU Divisional Reps and national officials, including Walsh, who would visit the office.

The next week, workers at Cumbernauld were herded into a joint management-union “briefing” aimed at ramming through the pilot and intimidating opposition.

In his vitriolic reply to WSWS, posted on a Saturday morning, Walsh posed as an aggrieved defender of the CWU rep’s honour and reputation “disgracefully attacked in this article”.

Two-thirds of his statement amounted to a defence of the agreement he co-authored with Royal Mail to establish the USO pilot scheme. The conflation of legitimate criticism with “disgraceful attacks” is to defend the reps who obediently toe the line of the union executive rather than standing up for the rights of the members.

During his entire 500-word diatribe, Walsh was unable to refute a single fact reported by the WSWS. His reply confirms everything we have written about the CWU’s role as de facto business partners with Kretinsky, working as industrial policemen to force through the company’s attacks.

Our article, and the response it elicited on Royal Mail Chat, smoked-out Walsh in front of the members. He declared: “the current USO is no longer financially sustainable”.

No longer “sustainable” for who? Walsh and the CWU executive are crying poor on behalf of Daniel Kretinsky, who has a current net worth of more than £7 billion. The CWU has responded to Kretinsky’s EP Group takeover by abandoning even lip service to its own official policy of re-nationalisation, which they have rendered null and void.

If there is one takeaway from this episode, it is how panicked the CWU leadership becomes when they are faced with even a hint of organised opposition in the workplace.

Royal Mail’s shock-and-awe tactics, enforced by the CWU bureaucracy, are aimed at presenting USO “reform” as inevitable. But there is no support for the destruction of the USO among postal workers. Opposition on the shopfloor must be organised as part of a rank-and-file network to share information and counter the isolation and gaslighting tactics of the CWU bureaucracy which is joined at the hip with management.

On Sunday April 27 at 7 p.m., the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee will hold an online discussion about the USO pilots and its connection to the class war agenda being prepared by new owners EP Group, part of a new wave of attacks on post and logistics workers internationally. Register here to attend.

The full text of Walsh’s statement is posted on the Royal Mail Chat News feed and is copied beneath the reply below that was posted by a supporter of the PWRFC on March 23.

Reply to Martin Walsh:

There is nothing to retract from the *World Socialist Web Site's* report on developments at Cumbernauld delivery office, where opposition arose among CWU members to the USO pilot.

Martin Walsh's reply is a transparent damage limitation exercise to stem rank-and-file opposition to the Terms of Reference he co-signed with Royal Mail executives in December to ram through the pilot scheme at 37 delivery offices.

Unable to refute the factual account of the CWU's role at Cumbernauld, he resorts to lies. His assertion that the WSWS and the Post Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) are "calling for walks outs and rank and file disputes" is simply made up.

The PWRFC has called for workplace meetings so that CWU members can scrutinise Royal Mail's plans for "USO reform" and their impact on jobs, working practices and the mail service, and to agree collective action to halt these attacks.

The CWU postal executive is in so deep with management that members' exercising their basic democratic rights at a union meeting is equated with "unofficial action"!

Walsh's reply confirms the position of the CWU: they agree with Kretinsky, Ofcom and the Starmer Labour government that the USO is "financially unsustainable" and that workers must foot the bill.

Walsh states, "no one should be in any doubt that when an independent regulator says that the current USO is no longer financially sustainable that it will change".

His acknowledgment that Ofcom will proceed regardless of the pilot results, confirms the warnings made by the PWRFC that these trials are a fraud and the CWU executive will agree to anything.

Walsh's claim that the current pilots are "leverage" designed to ensure that "members will benefit" from USO reform, is bogus. As the WSWS article stated: "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."

Walsh's message is There Is No Alternative. It is the same argument Ward and Furey used to push through their "negotiators agreement" in April 2023, opening the floodgates to the biggest attack on postal workers' terms and conditions in Royal Mail history.

Walsh is in no position to lecture anyone about defending postal workers.

The facts are that workers at Cumbernauld were denied even the right to vote on a resolution opposing the USO reform pilot. The CWU is now seeking to intimidate and attack any member who pushes back against the CWU's pro-company agreements.

Postal workers should oppose the pile-on by Walsh against their colleagues at Cumbernauld and defend the democratic rights of all CWU members.

Walsh's ridicule of a survey that found 85 percent of respondents have no trust in the CWU leadership shows who really has their "head in the sand" and how out-of-touch, arrogant, and unaccountable these bureaucrats have become.

Statement by Martin Walsh attacking WSWS, Saturday March 22:

I will be in Cumbernauld meeting the members and supporting the local rep which has been disgracefully attacked in this article.

The CWU choose 34 out of the 37 pilot sites after consultation. There have been numerous members meetings and Tony Bouch has visited Cumbernauld and had a members meeting.

The problem is that your organisation has no responsibility at all and

are free to shout from the comfort of your anonymous positions.

However the CWU have to respond to the reality of the situation

1. Ofcom have said in their latest position that the USO is financially unsustainable and is losing Royal Mail over 300 million pounds per year.

2. Reducing just a Saturday would only save circa £50 million per year.

3. In their consultation paper they lay out that if it is not the Optimised Delivery Model then legislation will be required to move Royal Mail to a 3 or 4 day USO.

So the current status quo of the USO is not going to remain. It is currently not working as we all know in terms of quality.

The World wide Socialist Group are calling for walks outs and rank and file disputes. They have hardly any members.

Any walks outs they won't be in control off it will be the CWU who have to get the members a return to work solution.

For the record we are piloting the ODM in 37 sites to see if it achieves the overarching principles and will only reach an agreement on full USO development if the pilots achieve these overarching objectives.

Any final agreement on USO reform will be subject to an individual member ballot.

In terms of the Pilots only Newton Mearns have gone live. The issues with DTS and the Tops 2000 machine which was not deferring some Mail has now been reported as fixed.

Cumbernauld and Girvan are now planned to go live on 31st March.

However no one should be in any doubt that when an independent regulator says that the current USO is no longer financially sustainable that it will change.

The only options on the table are a speed of delivery option or 3 or 4 day USO which would mean job losses in every function on a much larger scale.

The CWU cannot afford and will not stick our head in the sand and allow USO reform to come in without either piloting it and shaping it so members will benefit from it.

Finally having Polls about having trust in the CWU where 380 people vote when we have 99 thousand members is not in any way a representation of our members thoughts.

I attend dozens of members meetings and the vast majority of them understand that change is going to come we have got to make that change the reset our members need in terms of workload, attendance patterns and restoring quality.

Following my attendance in Cumbernauld we will release a further communication including interviews with members within the unit.

The Truth will prevail.

I am fair game as I knew when I stood what I would face a local rep doing their best is not and we will support from any attack.

Register here to attend the April 27 Zoom meeting of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact