

Martin Walsh doubles down on CWU partnership with Royal Mail over USO pilot reforms: “the principles work”

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6 April 2025

The *CWU Live* event last Thursday marked a new low point for the Communication Workers Union (CWU) leadership and its standing among members.

The online event coincided with the announcement the previous day that Royal Mail’s takeover by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky’s EP Group had passed its final regulatory hurdle, clearing the way for a buy-out of shareholders.

Greg Charles, CWU Branch Secretary London South-West (Postal), greeted the news as “a significant step forward”, echoing CWU leader Dave Ward’s description last year of Kretinsky’s takeover as a “fresh start”.

Martin Walsh, CWU Deputy General Secretary (Postal) sat stony-faced throughout the 45-minute Q&A session as he attempted the impossible: to persuade postal workers that a takeover by billionaire asset strippers would be mutually beneficial.

Walsh reported he had come from a meeting that morning with EP Group where they had “talked around how we would deploy our agreement reached in December”. This was the CWU’s “Framework Agreement” drawn-up with EP Group executives behind the backs of postal workers and endorsed unanimously by the union’s postal executive.

As part of its “Framework Agreement”, the CWU agreed to delay a pay award due this month for 130,000 postal workers, while officials negotiate with EP Group. The delay has workers sliding further into debt with household bills soaring from April 1.

The message from Walsh was that postal workers should be satisfied with “talks starting in two to three weeks” with a pay deal on the table “in late May or the first week in June” leading to an unspecified and

backdated “above inflation pay increase”.

None of this will compensate workers for the real terms pay cut of around 14 percent imposed as part of the 2023 sellout national agreement, which has edged postal workers closer to the minimum wage.

Walsh made clear that talks on pay and “resolving outstanding issues” would be conducted under an embargo while the takeover is completed. In other words, backbreaking workloads, management bullying, a forced exodus of staff, and failed deliveries, will continue across Royal Mail.

Responding to a question about “communicating further with members”, Walsh stated a “policy forum” of union reps would be held May 21-22, “where we hope to tell all our reps what the deal is on pay and Section 5 [“Resolving Outstanding Issues”]”. Members’ meetings would be held only after the takeover is completed “to get it [the deal] ratified.”

Section 5 is window dressing for an agreement that formalises a business partnership between Kretinsky and the CWU postal executive. It offers evasive promises to restore what the CWU already handed to Royal Mail in its last “groundbreaking agreement” in 2023, including brutal cuts to sickness benefits and a two-tier workforce.

But the Framework Agreement states in black-and-white that any “progress” for workers’ terms and conditions is dependent on delivering “USO reform”: the downgrading of the mail service and Amazon-style working practices, including removing fixed delivery duties, hiking-up call rates and slashing 1 in 4 jobs.

Walsh repeated the claim that USO reform pilots at 37 delivery offices were designed to “test assumptions”. But he also repeated the CWU’s

company mantra that the USO is “financially unsustainable”, twice citing Ofcom’s calls for USO reform (i.e., its dismantling). The regulator has rubberstamped a £300 million cost-cutting exercise across all 12,000 delivery units, which the CWU has already started enforcing.

While only three offices out of 37 have begun the pilots—Newton Mearns, Cumbernauld and Girvan—Walsh insisted “the principles work”.

In reality, the “Optimised Delivery Model” agreed with Royal Mail is based on longer weekday hours and call rates being driven-up by more than 30 percent.

Aware of the anger among postal workers, Walsh declared it would be “mad not to be testing this [Optimised Delivery Model] in a live environment”. He paid tribute to local workplace rep “Jason” at Newton Mearns, the first delivery office to go live six weeks ago. But Jason Perez posted a comment on the CWU’s Facebook page ahead of the event, demanding to know: “Why can’t the people of Newton Mearns (the first trial office) not get a face-to-face meeting with u? We have been live six weeks and our ideas could help to shape this USO change for the better.”

Notwithstanding Perez’s claim that USO reform can “work” for postal workers, the fact that CWU HQ has left its own rep out in the cold during the first pilot exposes all the official claims of “engagement” with members.

On March 22, Walsh posted a public statement attacking the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) and Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) for exposing the CWU’s bureaucratic methods at Cumbernauld delivery office to block scrutiny and opposition toward the pilot.

The shock-and-awe tactics used by the CWU and Royal Mail to enforce the USO pilot scheme are proving insufficient to quell growing suspicion and anger. Walsh revealed the only other pilots starting before the Easter holiday are Ballymena this week, and Antrim and Ayr next week, with the “next phase” (all other 31 units) not starting until May.

Walsh offered, “We’re going to produce communications on Monday, warts and all, to every member. What is working well, what can be improved and what are the challenges.”

Postal workers gave their response to Walsh’s company spin in comments left on YouTube, including:

“This does not sound real world, these pilots are unworkable they’re going to steamroll unrealistic scenarios on us.” Another commented: “Wow can’t believe what I’ve listened to on this podcast. The belief that the take over will be done by May and you’ll negotiating a pay deal then is laughable, so again a pay cut until September if then.”

The dismantling of the USO being spearheaded through the CWU-Royal Mail pilots must be defeated. This means organising on the shop floor and developing a network of rank-and-file committees to share information and counter the isolation tactics of the CWU bureaucracy.

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



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