

UK postal workers discuss fightback against gutting of Royal Mail and Kretinsky takeover

Our reporters
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The Postal Workers Rank and File Committee (PWRFC) held an online meeting Sunday titled: “Oppose CWU-Royal Mail “USO reform”: for a rank and file strategy”

The meeting was held in the countdown to the takeover of Royal Mail by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky, backed by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and the Starmer Labour government.

It brought together Royal Mail workers, including at its Parcelforce division and took vital contributions by postal workers from affiliated sections of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) in the United States and Canada.

The opening report by *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) reporter Tony Robson drew a balance sheet of the fight by the PWRFC against the “USO reform” pilots at 37 delivery offices, co-authored by CWU Deputy General Secretary Martin Walsh with Royal Mail in December.

The USO pilots are “trialling” Royal Mail’s “Optimised Delivery Model” (ODM) which removes fixed delivery duties, hikes up call rates and will slash one in four walks as a precursor to its rollout nationally to implement a £300 million cost cutting exercise.

The PWRFC has campaigned for postal workers to organise workplace meetings to scrutinise the contents of the pilots, and proposed a motion of opposition in defence of jobs, conditions and the mail service.

Robson said, “CWU leaders Ward and Walsh have told postal workers they “have to accept the reality of privatisation.

“What does this reality mean for postal workers? More than a decade of being rinsed by billionaire shareholders by £2 billion as the mail service is driven into the ground. With its Framework Agreement signed in December, the CWU and the Labour government have rubber-stamped an even more savage looting operation under Kretinsky.”

Despite Walsh telling postal workers to accept the Universal Service Obligation (USO) pilots, they are mired in crisis. From the original launch date in February the rollout has yet to include 30 delivery offices whose start date is mid-May.

Robson explained: “We have stripped away the worthless claims of ‘protection’ and ‘consultation’... In January, Ofcom [the regulator] announced its support for ‘USO reform’ to end six-day letter delivery for second class letters and water down quality-of-service targets for both first- and second-class mail, prioritising

parcels.

“Ofcom’s announcement was timed with Kretinsky’s Royal Mail takeover, and the start of the USO pilots in February: The aim is to tear up the USO, destroy jobs, terms and conditions, and transform Royal Mail into a parcels-led, Amazon-style operation.

“The campaign of the PWRFC triggered a public attack by Walsh on us and the WSWS for reporting on a workplace meeting in January at Cumbernauld delivery office in Scotland. CWU members had complained it was unworkable, but were stopped by the workplace union rep from taking a vote on a motion against co-option into the pilot—a week before it was launched at a joint union-management briefing.

“Our responses to Walsh have smoked out his position. He has doubled down on his threat that if USO ‘reform’ is not accepted, the only alternative is a three or-four-day mail delivery service. In other words, the pilots are a fraud and the CWU will defend nothing.”

“Walsh’s mantra that the USO is ‘financially unsustainable’ echoes entirely that of Kretinsky, with a personal fortune of £7 billion.

“The fight at Royal Mail is part of a wider assault on the working class, directed by the Starmer Labour government. The brutal strike-breaking operation against Birmingham’s bin workers—mobilising police, private security and even military planners—exposes the true character of Labour’s austerity agenda.”

The meeting discussed and passed a resolution in support of the 350 Birmingham bin workers against the isolation of their defiant stand against Labour’s strike-busting by Unite the union. Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham has agreed to enter arbitration talks at ACAS this Thursday, accepting the loss of the safety-critical role of Waste Recycling and Collection Officers drivers and loaders are fighting to defend.

Robson concluded: “There is no support for the dismantling of the USO among postal workers or the public, and disgust over yet another vital service being handed over to billionaire oligarchs and asset-strippers.

“This sentiment must be turned into active opposition through the development of a rank-and-file network uniting postal workers across delivery offices, mail centres and Parcelforce. Such committees must champion workers’ interests, not corporate profit, breaking the grip of the CWU bureaucracy.”

In the discussion a postal worker at Cumbernauld delivery office

reported on the impact of the USO pilot after a month.

“We have been told by management this is no longer a ‘pilot’, it’s here to stay.

“Workers are getting more stressed. The failures have been every day. The union rep kept a book in the office, and we log all the duties that were failing, and I counted on one week there were 22 failures. That ranged from a couple of loops to the complete duty. They’re streaming even the first-class letters to favour parcels.

“The office chose two in every five Saturdays off, but this has meant an increase in delivery time and the working day. The deliveries have gone from around four hours and 15, right up to five hours plus.

“Since this trial has started, three long-term posties have resigned, one on Thursday. He had 15 years’ service, and there was not a word said to the guy. They just let him walk out the door.

“Last week they sent in a private company to measure workers fatigue by wearing heart monitors, asking for volunteers... [The union rep] seemed stunned at the spikes in our heart rates. But the upshot of that was we were told the report back would not be until July when it will all be over.”

This exposes Walsh’s assurances that the CWU is holding Royal Mail to four “overarching principles”: improved quality of service, fair workloads with fatigue solutions, better attendance patterns and improved staff morale.

Dave, a Parcelforce worker in London, said USO reform is fuelling a restructuring of the division in line with creating a single parcel network across Royal Mail Group.

“I monitored my own steps, it worked out at over 18 miles a day, and this is while delivering boxes weighing up to 25 kg to 30 kg.

“The CWU fully supports minimising costs and maximising profits. This is the importance of the committee, bringing workers together against the divisions and isolation, acting as the watchdog of the rank-and-file to protect our interests not the profits of Kretinsky.”

The international nature of the fight was underscored by Ruth, a city letter carrier for over 20 years and member of the US Postal workers Rank-and-File Committee, who spoke about the fight against Trump and privatisation of the United States Postal Service.

“In 2020, Trump was not re-elected, he blamed the Postal Service, ‘we lost his ballots, we delayed his ballots’. Now he is re-elected, he wants to privatise the Postal Service and combine it with the Commerce Department. Basically they are going to end up taking our parcel deliveries.

“We went two and a half years without a contract. We got it back, it offered only 1.3 percent for the first year, 1.4 percent, and 1.5 percent the following years. Around 70 percent of our membership voted No. Meanwhile, news leaked that Postmaster General Louis DeJoy was stepping down. The reason for this: the government “efficiency” program—DOGE—was already in house.

“No union representative told us about this, we had to find out about this on our own. I asked the union, ‘are we going to protest this?’ They said, ‘Not until we get the word from up above’...

“Our union made a statement that they welcomed DOGE and

any ideas to make the mail ‘more efficient’—a total sellout. Obviously, you have the same thing going on at Royal Mail.

“The contract was voted down, it went to arbitration and was finalised, we got what was in the initial contract—another sellout. There is no fight against any of this, no protest. We are told just write to your congressman. Well, that’s not going to help do anything. I believe until the workers stand up against all this, nothing’s going to be done. They’re going to do the same as they’re doing with Royal Mail and in Germany. Everywhere the billionaires are going to get richer and us and a lot of people are going to lose their jobs and lose money.

“I went to a protest on the April 19 against Trump. I sent out like 20 messages, does anyone want to go, and within 5 minutes I had 10 people who were willing to. The union is not our answer anymore, and I believe the answer is the workers.”

Daniel Berkley, a mail carrier in Ontario and member of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee at Canada Post, explained, “The big-business interests who aim to cut our wages and cut our workforce use the same playbook as in Britain.

“Automation and AI, for example, could be used to make our jobs much easier, but the Canada Post Corporation, backed by the Liberal government and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers [CUPW], are adamant that these new technologies should be used to help the post office compete with Amazon and other gig-economy employers by cutting labour costs, instead of improving working conditions...

“The unions are working to isolate groups of workers from each other, even as many of us are in major contract battles, and all of us face similar attacks on our jobs. Our month-long strike was broken by the trade union-backed Liberal government in mid-December. The CUPW played an essential role in demobilising us and isolating us from broader sections of workers. The government, supported by the union, determined that negotiations throughout our strike had reached an impasse. They forced us back to work by reinterpreting a section of the Canada Labour Code to unilaterally ban our strike without so much as a vote in parliament.

“In Canada, the unions tell us to line up behind our Canadian bosses, who use Trump’s trade war as an excuse to further exploit us. The global tariff war, a precursor to a global military war, can only be ended by the international unification of workers’ struggles. We should be supporting the growing opposition to Trump in the American working class, not lining up with our own ruling classes based on reactionary nationalism.”

The meeting, centred on the fight for the international unity of the working class against government and corporate attacks and union betrayals, concluding with an appeal to attend the online May Day meeting this Saturday hosted by the WSWs and IWA-RFC.



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