

Organise rank-and-file resistance to the CWU's pact with Kretinsky at Royal Mail

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (UK)
20 May 2025

The May 16 Communication Workers Union (CWU) Letter to Branches is another PR exercise defending backroom deals with Royal Mail and billionaire Daniel Kretinsky's EP Group, which completed its £3.6 billion buyout on April 30.

Signed by CWU Deputy General Secretary Martin Walsh and National Executive Chair Mick Kavanagh, the "Update on Pay, Section 5 and the USO" is the latest attempt to dress up corporate restructuring plans under the pro-business slogan of "USO reform."

The Universal Service Obligation (USO) is the statutory requirement for Royal Mail to deliver letters to every address in the UK, six days a week, at a uniform price, and parcels five days a week.

The letter states, "Over the last three weeks Royal Mail and the CWU have been in intensive and complex negotiations..." Let's be clear: this is not negotiation, but stage-managed surrender. CWU headquarters drip-feeds information to justify collusion with Royal Mail and EP Group before the CWU National Briefing on May 21-22 which has become a joint event staged with senior management.

The entire framework is undemocratic, aimed at excluding our interests and enforcing a corporatist straitjacket involving the CWU, Starmer's Labour government, and Kretinsky.

We've had no vote on the "Framework Agreement with EP Group" signed by Walsh and CWU General Secretary Dave Ward last December, endorsed by the postal executive. This was tied to Labour's "Deed of Undertakings" installing Kretinsky and his asset strippers as sole owners. We were told to accept "the reality of privatisation."

So-called "commitments" are window dressing, vaguely referencing a "long-term pay deal" and "reviews" of overtime and attendance. The April annual pay award was delayed until after the takeover—leaving us worse off.

Now, any miserly deal will be spun as a "fresh start" with Kretinsky.

The detailing of "what to expect" from the National Briefing makes clear what is to come: breach of our core rights, glorified wage theft, and deeper exploitation. The CWU boasts of rejecting "three separate pay offers, all of which were above inflation," yet offers no details. The rotten agreement two years ago meant a real-terms 14 percent pay cut. No reversal is offered. Basic pay is held down to justify what the letter describes as "performance incentive schemes based on local targets"—a recipe for divide and rule and more punishing workloads.

The regime envisaged is shown by the cynical reference to "a more supportive approach to My Performance—the App on our handheld devices for management surveillance of our every move. We reject cynical promises of a more humane approach. This blather was used to introduce it in the 2023 sellout agreement. It has since become known to us as the "electronic whip."

We don't buy promises of "ending chaos." Chaos was intentional, engineered by Royal Mail and facilitated by the CWU's betrayal of the 2022–23 strike, establishing an Amazon-style benchmark of exploitation. Walsh and Co agree with the regulator Ofcom that the mail service is the problem—not the sabotage they've helped to inflict.

At the delivery office in Shetland in Scotland, postal workers are working up to 70 hours weekly to cover a quarter of jobs left vacant due to staff bled out by low pay and overwork. Royal Mail skipped a local crisis meeting with the CWU rep and MPs—but is holed up with Walsh while delivery units are pushed to breaking point as they prepare deeper cuts.

One of the biggest lies is that the Framework will ensure job security. It's based on "headcount reduction." Walsh's claim of "only" 1,000 voluntary job losses hides the real figure: 6,000 roles slashed through "natural wastage," with permanently closed vacancies frontloaded

by agreement with management.

Under Section 5, vague talk of “equalisation” and “improvements in sick pay” doesn’t end the two-tier workforce or the slashed sick pay enshrined in the 2023 deal. Any tweaks are conditional on “USO reform”—the blueprint for deeper exploitation via the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM).

The December “Terms of Reference” enabled ODM pilots targeting 37 delivery offices—rolled out without member consent. Walsh has defended ODM with its scrapping of fixed duties, increased call rates, and extended working hours, against rising opposition from the frontline.

A veil of secrecy surrounds the handful of pilot sites which have gone live since February, and no update has been provided on the 31 offices earmarked for May. Walsh’s claims of “fair workloads” are refuted by grotesque practices agreed between the CWU and management of attaching heart monitors on workers in at least one delivery office to track “fatigue”—a test of how far we can be pushed. CWU has said nothing; only the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee has raised this.

The PWRFC called for workplace meetings to scrutinise ODM and pass motions opposing its rollout, to refuse to be coopted into the destruction of our jobs, safety and the mail service. Walsh’s attack on the PWRFC to defend the blocking of such a motion at Cumbernauld delivery office shows the bureaucracy’s alliance with management and fear of genuine workplace opposition.

We must demand the suspension of the pilots, to defend colleagues at the targeted sites, and stop a rubber-stamp deal with Kretinsky across 1,200 offices. We must inform and unite workers against the CWU apparatus that silences our voice and enforces corporate diktats.

The CWU National Briefing gives centre stage to Royal Mail executives—COO Alastair Cochrane and Transformation Director Jamie Stephenson—speaking on “resetting Employee Relations.” We want no part in this latest sweetheart deal.

We must prepare to fight for:

- An inflation-busting, no-strings pay rise to recover years of losses
- An end to the two-tier workforce—restore equal terms for all
- Rejection of performance-linked pay and ODM revisions
- Defence of the USO as a public service and social right
- Workers’ control over new technology—to shorten

hours and improve safety, not destroy jobs and risk life and limb

- Workplace meetings to raise grievances and organise—not management-union scripted briefings to silence us

CWU leaders will denounce this as “unrealistic”, because they speak for Royal Mail and EP Group and are not our genuine representatives. It’s their £300 million cuts “USO reform” that is unsustainable for the workers who built the mail service and for the public who depend on it. This is what needs prioritising, not the profits of financial oligarchs such as Kretinsky.

The PWRFC calls on all postal workers to join us in building a genuine fightback—democratically led, worker-controlled, and internationally connected.

The fight against the collusion of the CWU with Kretinsky mirrors the struggle of postal workers internationally. This includes the complicity of the union bureaucracy in the drive by the Trump dictatorship to privatise USPS, and at Canada Post, where a strike ban by the Liberal government was enforced last December in an ongoing attempt to push through a contract cutting real-term pay, reducing door-to-door mail delivery and extending casualisation.

Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, we can unite across borders. Postal workers everywhere face the same agenda: automation, overwork, layoffs, and surveillance, enforced by billionaire oligarchs and union bureaucracies. The way forward is building rank-and-file committees in Britain, the US and beyond—to defeat privatisation, defend public services, and take back control from those who serve capital, not the working class.



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