

Royal Mail workers condemn CWU leader Dave Ward's CBE honour as reward for betrayal

Tony Robson
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The awarding of a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) to Communication Workers Union (CWU) General Secretary Dave Ward has provoked widespread derision and anger from Royal Mail workers.

The honour, to be conferred by King Charles III, is viewed by postal workers as a badge of shame for services rendered to the political establishment—the betrayal of the 2022–23 national dispute and collusion with the Labour government in facilitating billionaire Daniel Kretinsky's EP Group takeover of Royal Mail via its £3.6 billion acquisition.

The announcement of Ward's CBE came within a fortnight of EP Group completing its takeover of Royal Mail and parent company, IDS.

The class interest animating Ward's mantra about a "fresh start" under EP Group and postal workers having to "accept the reality of privatisation" has been laid bare as he receives his accolade approved by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, with Kretinsky embraced as a business partner of the Labour government.

Ward is one of three union leaders to receive a gong in the King's Birthday Honours last Friday. Dr. Patrick Roach, the retired general secretary of the teachers' union NASUWT was made a CBE, and Sue Fearn, deputy general secretary of the civil servants union Prospect, was made an OBE (Officer for the Order of the British Empire). They join a roll call of union bureaucrats to receive the ritual approval of the British ruling class. This includes the knighted former general secretary of the Trades Union Congress Sir Brendan Barber, (brought in directly through the state arbitration service ACAS to enforce the sellout deal against Royal Mail workers in 2023).

The latest three awards are bestowed by a Labour government reviled for its complicity in Israel's genocide in Gaza and for conspiring in war against Russia and Iran. Enforcing labour discipline to fund rearmament by gutting spending for welfare and the National Health Service is the domestic corollary of this warmongering.

Though Ward receives no title, the CBE's trappings of hierarchy and establishment recognition reveal the political and social gulf between union leaders feted in ruling circles who are held in contempt by the workers they are meant to represent.

The CWU posted an announcement on Ward's CBE Saturday evening on its Facebook and X accounts, expecting a welcoming

response to its "Congratulations Dave" message "for services to the trade unions." It backfired spectacularly, triggering a deluge of angry responses:

"Awarded a medal, for making union members' jobs harder not getting them a fair rise, agreeing that 3 employees work the job of 4. And for not much more than minimum wage."

"For delivering Royal Mail on a plate into privatisation... Arise Sir Dave."

"Absolute fraud... At least all the donations to the Labour Party paid off, scumbag."

The fraud of Labour's New Deal

In a short puff piece to PA news, Ward linked his award to Labour's New Deal, claiming it recognised "our union's work" on the Employment Rights Bill (ERB). But the ERB is riddled with business-friendly loopholes, delayed until at least 2026 as it receives more heavy vetting before it reaches the statute books. Ward's frontman role should ring alarm bells for every worker.

The Labour government's real attitude to workers' rights has been shown in its response to the Birmingham bin workers' strike. Since beginning an all-out strike on March 11, 350 workers opposing jobs losses and 25 percent pay cuts have faced repression from Starmer's flagship local council. This includes the use of agency scab labour and coordinated strikebreaking with central government and other local councils, and Public Order Act and High Court injunctions to disperse pickets under threat of fines or imprisonment. Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner—celebrated by union leaders as the sympathetic ear in the Labour cabinet—has spearheaded the strike-busting and fire and rehire operation.

Ward as a poster boy for corporatism

Ward was the architect of the pro-company agreement that ended Royal Mail workers' first national strike in over a decade. This

was a capitulation via ACAS after the union leadership blocked a renewed strike mandate of 96 percent in February 2023. Secret talks with Royal Mail executives produced the April “Negotiators Agreement,” paving the way for thousands of job losses, slashing sick pay, creating a two-tier workforce, and allowing brutal workloads. It was finally accepted in July only after opposition was systematically stifled by the bureaucracy.

As part of that betrayal, in December 2022, the CWU and Ward diverted a national demonstration of postal workers held in Parliament Square into a march on Buckingham Palace declaring it necessary to “defend a service” for “the nation.”

As the WSWs noted, “The union bureaucracy’s nationalism and servility before the capitalist state was epitomised by its march to Buckingham Palace to plead for the support of King Charles, the widely despised monarch and epitome of wealth and class privilege.

“Outside the palace gates, Ward pointed to a large mock-up postcard which included a silhouette of the crowned head of Charles next to the CWU’s logo above the slogan ‘Stand By Your Post.’ Ward said, ‘Changing governance of the company,’ is ‘something that we will deliver at some point... We’re going to deliver a special postcard to the King of the UK, the King of Britain. It says, ‘King Charles the nation’s posties need your support.’”

The April 2023 agreement prepared the ground for a wrecking operation against postal workers and the service, with the union bureaucracy integrated into an arm of management.

In December, Ward, his deputy Martin Walsh, and the postal union executive agreed a Framework Agreement with EP Group without a vote from members. This was tied directly to Starmer’s rubber-stamping the takeover through its “Deed of Undertaking.” The threadbare nature of the “binding commitments” to protect the postal service is exposed by the fact that Kretinsky can carry out “value extraction”—asset stripping—by only maintaining Royal Mail’s current performance on Quality of Service. For a third year in a row Royal Mail abysmally failed its statutory targets for delivering letters.

The Framework Agreement aims to formalise and accelerate the dismantling of the mail service into a low-cost parcel logistics operator. The CWU has worked hand in glove with Royal Mail, EP Group and Ofcom on the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM), which slashes letter delivery to alternate weekdays for letters other than First Class and imposes gig economy working conditions—no fixed duties, longer hours, heavier workloads. This is to implement £300 million of cost savings—profits to be raked in by EP Group.

Walsh made an agreement with Royal Mail to implement the ODM by rolling it out at 37 pilot units from February. CWU HQ has blocked any oversight of the detrimental impact on members to be imposed across all 1,200 delivery offices. In response to opposition Walsh has threatened that unless the ODM is accepted a 3-day or 4-day Universal Service Obligation will be imposed.

Ward and Walsh took it upon themselves to defer the pay award due to Royal Mail workers in April to tie it into negotiations on the Framework Agreement. This is a desperate attempt to provide a sweetener. After a 14 percent real-terms pay cut since 2022, any rise to basic wage will be held down to promote productivity

linked bonuses based “on local targets.” After declaring its “ground breaking” agreement with Kretinsky seven months ago, the CWU has stated it will take between three to six months following the takeover to reach a settlement.

The rank-and-file response to Ward’s betrayal

Ward’s CBE should be met with a vote of no confidence as the beginning of an organised fightback against the next stage of brutal restructuring the CWU is working to enforce as partners of Kretinsky. This is the fight being taken up by the **Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC)**.

A successful fight means unshackling the opposition to the drastic redistribution of wealth in favour of the oligarchy represented by Kretinsky’s EP Group, and the creation of democratic organisations which restore power to the shopfloor as part of a co-ordinated network of resistance across Royal Mail. Postal workers should fight for:

- **An inflation-busting, no-strings pay rise to recover lost wages.**
- **An end to the two-tier workforce—equal pay and conditions are non-negotiable.**
- **Rejection of performance-linked pay and management surveillance.**
- **Defence of the Universal Service Obligation as a public service and social right.**
- **Workers’ control over new technology—to shorten hours and improve safety, not destroy jobs.**

This is an international fight. USPS and Canada Post workers also face privatisation, with union leaders acting as corporate and government enablers. The PWRFC is affiliated with the **International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC)**, building a global counteroffensive of postal and logistics workers.



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