

Royal Mail workers discuss opposing CWU's rotten pay award and agreements with billionaire Kretinsky

Our correspondent
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The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) held an online meeting Sunday, “After the ballot: the way forward for postal workers.” It followed the Communication Workers Union (CWU) ballot last month on its pay award and agreements with new Royal Mail owners, billionaire Daniel Kretinsky’s EP Group.

World Socialist Web Site writer Tony Robson started by refuting CWU General Secretary Dave Ward and Deputy General Secretary Martin Walsh’s claim of an “overwhelming endorsement.” The 79.5 to 20.5 percent acceptance was in fact based on a historic low turnout: 57 percent of CWU members did not return a vote and only one in three voted in favour.

“The CWU bureaucracy has no mandate. Postal workers were told to rubber-stamp a framework agreement already imposed eight months earlier by the CWU’s postal executive on behalf of Kretinsky. The agreement endorsed EP Group’s £3.6 billion takeover and has set into motion the dismantling the Universal Service Obligation (USO) and laid the groundwork for gig economy working practices through the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM), piloted in 35 offices between February and July.”

Postal workers had pushed back against the CWU’s claim that the three-year pay award is a “no strings deal,” pointing to crippling workloads and rundown of the mail service across the network, not only at the pilot offices.

Robson said, “Even before it has been received in workers’ pay packet, six months late, Year 1 at 4.2 percent has been largely wiped out by inflation with food inflation running at 4.5 percent. Those who voted in favour did so because they had no faith in CWU leaders fighting for any improvement, but the actions of Ward and Walsh have provoked further anger against their collusion with the Kretinsky.”

“The day after the ballot Ward and Walsh claimed the company was ‘failing to consult,’ but everything implemented with the gutting of the USO and backbreaking workloads was greenlighted in their framework agreement.

“The only thing being ‘optimised’ is rampant profiteering at postal workers’ expense. Under USO ‘reform,’ £300 million in annual cuts are planned, slashing thousands of jobs and

gutting the mail service. This was drawn up by the CWU bureaucracy, the Starmer government, Ofcom, and EP Group’s billionaire asset-strippers. Postal workers had no say.

“A week after the ballot Royal Mail announced a return to profit for the first time in three years, pre-tax £194 million, driven by a 6 percent rise in parcel volumes. Postal workers received a “thank you” message. The CWU’s pro-company agreement in 2023 brought in the biggest attack on Royal Mail workers’ terms and conditions in history after shareholder had pocketed £600 million. A 20 percent share of future profits promised which has never materialised. Now Ward & Co are peddling another bogus ‘profit-sharing’ scheme, this time with EP Group.”

Robson stressed that anger alone was not enough and must be turned into organised opposition: “The PWRFC has exposed the truth about the ODM pilots. They have been a dress rehearsal for a company-wide assault. Walsh attacked the committee in March for ‘interference.’ Why? Because we organised scrutiny and opposition. At targeted offices the reality was clear: gruelling spans, impossible workloads, and a failing mail service. None of this would have come to light without our committee.

“Walsh insisted there was no alternative to the ODM, saying it would be ‘mad’ not to test it in a live environment. Now the CWU admits it’s a disaster. Outdoor Assistant Secretary Tony Bouch says the CWU has submitted an alternative model. But members haven’t seen it—it’s being cooked up with management. Seven delivery workers will do the work of eight.”

Robson linked opposition to the downgrading of the mail service and gig economy work practices with the fight to overturn the two-tier workforce, brought in through the agreement of the CWU with Royal Mail in 2023 as part of the many red lines crossed to sellout the national strike. “Tens of thousands of younger workers remain trapped on inferior pay and conditions while longstanding posties have been driven out. The PWRFC insists on immediate equal pay and conditions for new entrants.”

In conclusion Robson stated, “The fight at Royal Mail is part

of the Starmer government's agenda against the entire working class. This is a pro-business government on steroids, including its £2 billion program of privatisation against the NHS.

"It has deployed military planners to organise strikebreaking operations against Birmingham refuse workers and criminalised opposition to its backing of the genocide in Gaza by arresting over a thousand peaceful protestors on trumped-up terror charges through the proscription of Palestine Action. Deepened austerity is combined with steep increases in military spending to fund an escalating war drive.

"The union bureaucracy's ability to head off confrontation cannot go on indefinitely. There is the basis for the development of a rank-and-file opposition that must be given a perspective and strategy to fight."

In discussion James, a worker in Scotland at one of the pilot offices, explained, "Union officials have been in our office with managers from all over the country, shaking their heads at the disaster. Parcels are still crazy busy. People are coming in early, staying late, even staff from other offices have been drafted in. No planning, no risk assessments. Health and safety completely ignored.

"We were told last week the current model isn't working, and Tony Bouch has a new scheme, but management insists the ODM is 'acceptable.' Many in our age group are walking away. Three or four colleagues have quit—no redundancy, no compensation. One told me, 'I can't do this anymore. I'm exhausted.' His joints were giving up. I met him later—he's the happiest I've seen him. He now delivers prescriptions one day a week. 'This is ten times better than Royal Mail. I don't care about the money.'"

Robson explained, "It is understandable why workers may feel they have no other option than to resign, particularly older workers whose bodies cannot withstand any further physical punishment... It is a microcosm of what is happening to the working class: legacy workers driven out and the next generation brought in on inferior terms. The rampant demands of the corporate oligarchy are completely unacceptable. EP Group and the sellout union bureaucrats must be defeated through a collective struggle of 130,000 postal workers."

Ray, a London delivery worker, said, "What's happening in the pilots is already taking place unofficially across London delivery offices. Experienced posties are leaving, not replaced, and the workload is increasing through 'absorption.' We are covering four, five, six extra duties a day. Offices that once ran superbly are a mess. New entrants are treated terribly, thrown in without training, and pushed onto Sunday shifts. Most last only two or three months.

"The union is endorsing all of this, even locally union officials talk and act like managers. Workers who resist are targeted, especially the most militant. You cannot take this on as individuals.

"The only opposition has come from the PWRFC. Its statements and the WSWs articles have exposed the union

bureaucracy's collusion at every twist and turn. They need to be properly studied. Building rank-and-file committees, nationally and internationally, is the only way to fight back."

Dave, who works for Parcelforce in London, said, "Parcelforce drivers have been taken off collections of parcels at Post Offices and this has been dumped on delivery workers at Royal Mail. This is not to lighten our work, we face similar revisions with post codes added to delivery routes and workloads increased from around 80/90 parcels a day to well over 100, rammed through by the CWU. The CWU bureaucracy will be getting its feet under of the corporate boardroom table with EP Group with this Advisory Committee to work together on cost cutting and maximising profits. Rank-and-file organisation is the only way to fight back."

Robson concluded the meeting by stressing the importance of the PWRFC's affiliation to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. Postal workers globally face the same capitalist playbook: automation and AI used to destroy jobs and intensify exploitation and turn over the mail services to prioritising profits.

In the United States, the union bureaucracy opposes any mobilisation of 600,000 postal workers against Trump's privatisation of USPS as part of his overall drive to erect a dictatorship on behalf of the oligarchy. In Canada, a national strike by 55,000 workers at Canada Post was outlawed by Trudeau's government last December. Last month workers rejected a sellout contract, but action has been suppressed by the union apparatus which forced them back to work last year. A week-long strike in mid-August by 17,000 postal workers in Sri Lanka was forced back to work by their union, with none of their 19 demands met as the army was deployed by the government. "These struggles show the necessity of building a globally coordinated fight against the oligarchy, its governments and their servants in the union bureaucracy."



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