

# National Postal Workers Day: A stage-managed CWU event to cover up collaboration with Royal Mail and EP Group

**Tony Robson**  
**19 December 2025**

The Communications Workers Union's (CWU) National Postal Workers Day, held on December 15, was a cynical public-relations exercise. It was not aimed at defending postal workers, but at shielding the union apparatus from mounting anger over its collusion in the destruction of jobs, conditions and the Universal Service Obligation (USO).

Headed by General Secretary Dave Ward and his deputy Martin Walsh, the social-media stunt was designed to obscure the leadership's responsibility for Royal Mail's wrecking operation under billionaire owner Daniel Ketinsky's EP Group, backed by the Starmer Labour government.

The annual event was timed this year for Christmas. The degraded spectacle included Walsh posing with a CWU poster declaring, "A postie is for life, not just for Christmas", an insulting reprise of the RSPCA's appeal not to abandon unwanted pets.

Ward, Walsh and the CWU postal executive have worked with Royal Mail to try and sever the bond between the public and their postal worker. They have trashed the USO, repeating the business mantra that it constitutes an "unfair financial burden." This has given Royal Mail free licence—minus token financial penalties—to breach statutory mail delivery targets on an industrial scale for three years.

The damage this has inflicted has led to missed medical appointments for thousands, posing risks to patient safety and costing the National Health Service (NHS) an estimated £1 million a year. This dismantling was rewarded by the regulator Ofcom in July, which downgraded the USO to alternate weekday delivery for all mail other than First Class—in time for Ketinsky's takeover in May.

Postal workers were told to print glossy posters, pose for photographs, and help get #PostalWorkersDay trending. This received pushback from postal workers on the CWU Facebook page:

•“My whole office will have between 3-7 days’ mail that day. Still prioritising parcels over mail and yet ANOTHER Christmas that is one huge embarrassing mess.”

•“We had two local union reps come to our office on Wednesday, which was probably our busiest day yet. They were walking around asking how we are? I felt this was a right kick in the balls tbh!!! They could see we had packets and mail as far as the eye can see.”

•“CWU seem to have given up answering everyone's concerns. Very quiet. The line between management & union is smudged, you can't tell the difference now, they all stand around doing nothing.”

## From strike betrayal to hashtag “activism”

More than two years after CWU leaders engineered the sellout of the national strike—imposing a two-tier workforce and helping Royal Mail force through Amazon-style terms—postal workers are told the way forward lies in writing to MPs and appealing to the Starmer government facilitating the attacks of big business. The pro-company agreement slashed sick pay, imposed flexible seasonal hours and entrenched parcel prioritisation.

A year on from hailing its “groundbreaking” Framework Agreement with EP Group—bound up with Labour's Deed of Undertakings rubber-stamping Ketinsky's £3.6 billion takeover—the CWU claims National Postal Workers Day will “apply pressure” to honour the deal!

The 12-page Framework Agreement delivered everything EP Group demanded: downgrading the mail service, gig-economy conditions and punishing workloads wrapped up in the pro-business jargon of “USO reform.”

Ward and Walsh rammed the agreement through in an August ballot tied to a supposed pay sweetener—a three-year deal below RPI inflation and endorsed by only a third of members as discontent took the form of mass abstention.

Ketinsky has predictably walked away from the pledges used to sell it, including commitments to reverse on an incremental basis the two-tier workforce described as Part 2 of the Framework Agreement.

The CWU posters produced for National Postal Workers Day were designed to draw in some participation by postal workers, but the photo-ops at just over 20 workplaces were a staged-managed affair to keep a lid on real opposition: collective action, workplace meetings to organise resistance to the profit-driven restructuring to defend jobs, terms and safety.

## The fraud of “equalisation”

One poster read, “End two tier working – Equalisation Now.” But two-tier working was jointly negotiated, signed and promoted by Ward, Walsh and the postal executive as part of the July 2023 sellout. The deal slashed starting pay to near minimum-wage levels, made Sunday working mandatory and stripped new entrants of hard-won protections. This incentivised management to drive out thousands of “legacy” workers.

The CWU’s proposed “equalisation pathway” requires new entrants to endure inferior pay and terms for three years before parity. With half of starters leaving within a year and over 27,000 quitting since late 2022, most will never qualify. The first step was meant to be agreed in September, with an agreement in December. Neither has materialised.

## Optimised Delivery Model: From enforcement to damage control

Another poster read, “No to ODM” (Optimised Delivery Model).

ODM was jointly prepared by Royal Mail executives, Walsh and Divisional Reps in December and rolled out through 35 pilots without any vote or consultation with members. The model collapses duties, forcing three workers to do the work of four, extending walks to five hours or more and increasing call rates by up to 30 percent.

Royal Mail workers warned that ODM was unworkable and unsafe, but CWU officials dismissed opposition. They promoted Ofcom’s regulatory cover for cost-cutting of hundreds of millions in “efficiency savings”—money earmarked for EP Group, not service restoration.

Only after widespread anger and operational breakdown did Ward and Walsh begin posturing as critics. Their “sensible alternatives” amount to ODM Mark II: “heavy and light” delivery models, productivity hikes exceeding 10 percent on already impossible workloads and thousands more job cuts as ODM is rolled out to all 1,250 delivery units in the New Year.

## CWU bureaucracy: EP Group incorporated

The CWU’s proposal for appeals to MPs, parliamentary briefings and a future Westminster event as the means of defending postal workers is political gaslighting.

This is from a union leadership fully integrated into the corporate-state apparatus overseeing Royal Mail’s restructuring. Under the Framework Agreement, CWU officials have secured formal roles in governance structures, including an advisory position in the corporate boardroom.

Ward and Walsh operate as junior partners of EP Group and reliable allies of the Starmer government. Their refrain—that privatisation is an unchangeable reality—is used to suffocate opposition to a legacy of disaster and ensure further wealth redistribution to the corporate oligarchy while the union bureaucracy functions as an industrial police force.

## Media stunts vs workers’ resistance

The focus on posters and photoshoots is an attempt to control the narrative and falsify the record. This mirrors the CWU’s letter-writing campaign to MPs, marketed as “having your say” while excluding any challenge to the union apparatus and its collaboration with EP Group. Despite heavy promotion, only 16,000 postal workers have sent the email scripted by Ward and Walsh, laying bare the disenfranchisement of 130,000 Royal Mail workers.

Postal workers do not need “recognition”. They need an industrial and political strategy to defeat the conversion of the postal service into a low-wage, 24/7 parcel network.

This requires breaking from the pro-company CWU apparatus and transferring power to the shop floor through democratically controlled rank-and-file committees. Only independent organisations can defend jobs, abolish two-tier working, scrap ODM and save the mail service.

This perspective is advanced by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC), which provides the framework for postal workers to link their struggle with broader opposition to austerity, privatisation and corporate plunder—uniting with NHS, transport, postal and logistics workers in Britain and internationally facing the same onslaught.

The PWRFC was founded in April 2023 against the sellout of the national strike and has exposed the twists and turns of the CWU bureaucracy through to the EP Group takeover. The Starmer government, EP Group and the CWU apparatus have their strategy; it is time postal workers had their own to shape the fight ahead.



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