Make 2026 the start of a fightback at Royal Mail against CWU collusion with EP Group and Starmer government

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee
27 January 2026

We have endured a particularly brutal Christmas, dominated by the ongoing collapse of the letters service—the result of thousands of job losses and chronic understaffing—while punishing workloads have been pushed to extremes amid a holiday surge in parcels.

Royal Mail acknowledged delays in mail delivery to 142 postcodes across the UK in the week before Christmas. This does not tell the full story. The New Year opened with delays of two weeks rife across the country, and in Wolverhampton in the West Midlands, up to six weeks—"postal deserts" where vital mail—medical appointments, legal documents, and bills—goes missing.

The official response has been the expected whitewash. Royal Mail blamed staff sickness, resourcing and "other local factors", while repeating the discredited claim that more profitable parcels were not being prioritised over letters.

In Wolverhampton, a company spokesman even tried to justify this on safety grounds with parcels "taking up far more space than letters" and blocking walkways. So, on top of impossible workloads, our workplace is inherently unsafe. Not only trip hazards but obstacles impeding an evacuation in the case of an emergency.

As a colleague explained on social media: "This year has been particularly bad, less staff and about 30% more parcels than last year across the board. We are exhausted, frustrated, overworked and underpaid. So I'm personally sorry you didn't get your mail, but like hell am I going to work myself to the bone for a company that cares about money over the people and its staff."

EP Group's takeover

This points to the fact this chaos is not accidental. It is the direct outcome of billionaire Daniel Kretinsky's EP Group takeover completed last May.

The £3.6 billion acquisition sailed through with the Starmer government's rubber stamp via its Deed of Undertaking in December 2024, tied to the Framework Agreement signed by Communication Workers Union (CWU) leaders Dave Ward and Martin Walsh with EP Group: agreed in private and followed by the fanfare of "a fresh start."

A PR exercise was crafted welcoming EP Group as a long-time investor committed to the six-day Universal Service Obligation (USO) and First-Class letters. This was to deflect our objections that the takeover was an asset-stripping operation designed to intensify the managed decline of the mail service and convert Royal Mail into a low-wage parcel courier network.

Kretinsky paid lip service to the USO as the regulator Ofcom readied the reduction of letter delivery to alternate weekdays for all non-First-Class mail and watering down of delivery targets for all letters—formally approved last July.

CWU officials acted as industrial enforcers to trailblaze the sweatshop conditions accompanying the downgraded mail service, working through the union's agreement to trial the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM)—based on extended delivery spans and parcel-driven workloads as letters are gutted.

Since February 2025 this has been "piloted" at 35 units as a downpayment on USO "reform" to be rolled out across all 1,250 delivery units nationally. Our committee has been a watchdog for postal workers, exposing the brutal conditions on the pilots and advocating a unified pushback.

We have opposed the manufacturing of consent by Walsh and Ward. After agreeing to the Framework Agreement with the Starmer government and Kretinsky, Ward, Walsh and the executive put it to a members' ballot more than half a year later, packaged as part of the three-year pay deal. The so-called "reset" claimed it secured "stability" based on a pay award tied to the lower CPI inflation rate—another real-terms pay cut.

The result in August witnessed mass abstention, securing the Yes vote of just one in three members. Even this depended on pledges—described as Part 2 of the Framework Agreement—to resolve "outstanding issues."

Most significant was the promise of an equalisation pathway for new entrants on inferior pay and terms, now unceremoniously ditched. Despite the CWU conceding that qualification could take three years, deadlines to agree a deal with the company in September and December were broken.

The CWU's "update"

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This deceit has played out as we were kept in the dark. Walsh, Ward and other national executive officials finally issued a Letter to Branches (LTB) on January 20, risibly described as an "update." The hallmark of the rambling 1,700-word salad is the authors' refusal to take responsibility for their "groundbreaking agreement."

The centre of the gaslighting operation is the claim that agreements have not been "honoured." But, stripped of the worthless promises, this is what Walsh & Co agreed. The downgrading of the mail service and sweatshop conditions were baked into the 12-page Framework Agreement, couched in the pro-business language of USO "reform."

The LTB makes clear the CWU apparatus remains in lockstep with the company: "The CWU is totally committed to introducing USO Reform in every workplace because we recognise the changing dynamics of the market, the commercial realities facing the business and the fact that Royal Mail now operates in a permanently changed world of communications."

Even as Royal Mail moves to executive action to impose ODM nationally, this will not be resisted by CWU officials. Instead, they will retreat into closed-door meetings for weeks to promote an alternative that constitutes no opposition at all.

The LTB refers to a "constructive counter proposal" to "provide the company with significant savings." This has not been drawn up in consultation with members. The so-called "heavy and light option" accepts that we can absorb extra work through 12 percent productivity increases to eliminate more jobs—demonstrating that they are indifferent to the reality of our already unsafe and crippling workloads.

The CWU has justified every attack on jobs and increase to workloads since privatisation in 2013 as "modernisation." Far from being opposed to automation and AI, we recognise these technologies can be used to reduce the working week and make our job safer—but only if workers begin to assert their priorities and demand control of how it is used.

We have been here before with the sellout agreement of July 2023. This was engineered after CWU leaders broke the national strike and co-authored with Royal Mail executives a pro-company deal launching a scorched-earth policy against jobs, pay and conditions. They were central to imposing a two-tier workforce and slashing sick pay.

The central lesson is opposition cannot remain unorganised, especially when the stakes are even higher. In the LTB, the CWU echoes company threats that the "financial position is deteriorating", that compulsory redundancies cannot be ruled out, and that even the derisory three-year pay deal is at risk.

For a rank-and-file movement against the CWU-Kretinsky-Labour alliance

The CWU's actions flow from their collusion with the Starmer government and call for a three-way meeting including EP Group, peddling claims of protection through Labour's "golden share in Royal Mail for the first time since privatisation."

This £1 share says everything about the sham regulation embodied in the Deed of Undertaking, including granting EP Group the right to break up Royal Mail or GLS after three years. The criteria for asset stripping ("wealth extraction") was set at the rock bottom benchmark of meeting the delivery performance based on 2023–24 figures, one of the past three years in which Royal Mail has systematically breached its legal duties.

What is really involved is a joint effort to discipline us on behalf of the corporate oligarchy, tied in to Labour's agenda of austerity and public service cuts—to satisfy international creditors and divert resources towards the military. The CWU's mantra of challenging the company's ethos—"our business to run"—is used to justify their involvement, promoted to the boardroom as part of "new governance" and serving as junior partners to management.

Workers can put a stop to this by asserting what is right and necessary against the profit interest of the private-equity billionaires at EP Group, represented jointly by the union apparatus and the government. We appeal to you to help expand the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) to make this possible.

Organising from the shop floor—establishing independent committees in delivery offices and mail centres, and throughout distribution and Parcelforce—is essential. These committees must advance clear demands: no executive impositions, no USO "reform", an end to two-tier pay and conditions, defence of a fully funded daily universal mail service, and opposition to all job cuts and workload intensification.

Postal workers are far from powerless. Our power lies not in partnership with EP Group or appeals to the Starmer government, but in the conscious, organised mobilisation of more than 100,000 postal workers. Above all, the struggle must be politically oriented, linking postal workers in the UK with postal and logistics workers internationally facing the same attacks and privatisation drives.

This is the fight the PWRFC is taking up as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

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