

Communication Worker Union's Martin Walsh opposes call for rank-and-file fightback at Royal Mail

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5 February 2026

The call by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) to make 2026 the year of a fightback by Royal Mail workers has provoked an attempted push back by Communication Worker Union (CWU) postal deputy general secretary Martin Walsh on social media.

This took place on the Royal Mail Chat.co.uk forum after the statement “Make 2026 the start of a fightback at Royal Mail against CWU collusion with EP Group and Starmer government” had received several hundred views since being posted to the site on January 27. The response by Walsh on January 30 was a six-word throwaway line: “This has not lasted well at all!”

The PWRFC statement reported on a brutal Christmas period marked by the continuing breakdown of the mail service, as profitable parcel deliveries were prioritised through punishing workloads imposed on staff in understaffed delivery offices following thousands of job losses.

Walsh's refusal to even address this reality typifies the unaccountability of the union bureaucracy. As the statement explained, the crisis pushing postal workers to breaking point is the direct result of last May's £3.6 billion takeover of Royal Mail by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky's EP Group, which became sole owner in order to gut the mail service and turn it into a low-wage parcel operation.

CWU General Secretary Dave Ward, his deputy Walsh and the CWU postal executive have acted as enforcers with their EP Group Framework Agreement signed with Kretinsky in December 2024. This was a companion piece to the Starmer Labour government's Deed of Undertaking with Kretinsky: based on lax regulation to allow restructuring and asset stripping to proceed. The regulator Ofcom cleared the decks with its approval last July to dismantle the six-day Universal Service Obligation (USO) with alternate weekday delivery for all mail other than First Class and reduced targets for all letters.

The PWRFC stated:

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 statement drew attention to the “update” from Walsh and the CWU executives on January 20 claiming their “groundbreaking agreement” had not been honoured when its essential content was to impose a corporate scorched earth policy, cloaked in the language of USO “reform”.

Walsh played a direct role in the downpayment of this with the Terms of Reference drawn up with Royal Mail to implement the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM) in December 2024. The ODM is based on gig economy work practices, collapsing four duties into three and increased delivery spans at 35 delivery units on the pretext these were “pilots”. The ODM has been an unmitigated disaster mired by mail service breakdown and crippling workloads.

Walsh has tried to keep a lid on this while the PWRFC has exposed the reality and argued for a unified fightback. The

day before his swipe against the PWRFC the company called time on the fraud that these were merely trials and triggered the one-month Dispute Resolution Process threatening executive action to impose the roll out of ODM across 1,250 offices nationally.

Walsh is now attempting to pull off the awkward pose of opposition to the threatened unilateral action and failure to agree on ODM. However, his loyalty to the cost cutting exercise is total with the continued commitment to “introduce USO reform at every workplace” based on the “dynamics of the market and commercial realities.” (CWU Letter to Branches, January 20, 2026)

This entirely excludes the independent standpoint of workers and is aimed at countering any genuine organised opposition as Walsh goes into damage limitation mode on behalf of the company.

Below we are publishing the reply by a PWRFC supporter to Walsh’s comment on Royal Mail Chat.

We encourage rank and file postal workers to extend this discussion not just on social media but within their workplaces away from management and their stooges in the CWU apparatus: in genuine and open forums where workers—union and non-union members—can draw up their red lines.

The CWU apparatus enforcing of the two-tier workforce is a particularly toxic part of its sellout deal in July 2023. Equal pay for equal work is not negotiable. There must be an immediate levelling up not a strung-out process over years which is paid for by postal workers through the cost cutting of hundreds of millions of pounds to be pocketed by Kretinsky and EP Group.

This must be fought for as part of the defence of every job and opposition to intensified and unsafe workloads. Such a struggle would find support in the working class coming into conflict with the Starmer government’s austerity and cuts across public services and dismantling of the National Health Service on behalf of big business to divert vital funding to waging wars.

Reply to Walsh:

Your comment implies that the PWRFC statement has been disproven by events over the past few days.

How exactly is this the case?

In fact, nothing has aged more badly than your pro-company agreements—first the Business Transformation Agreement, and then the Framework Agreement with EP Group—which have inflicted this disaster.

The statement summed up an experience that has become an everyday reality: chronic understaffing, unsafe workloads, the prioritisation of parcels, and the creation of postal deserts.

Who is meant to be taken in by your claim that the CWU leadership does not agree with the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM)? You agreed to impose this model foisted on 35 delivery units from early last year. You signed up to it with Royal Mail without any consent from the membership as part of the Framework Agreement with Kretinsky—preparatory to its national rollout.

It is worth recalling that the last time you challenged the PWRFC, in March last year, it was to oppose our “interference” with the trials. You equated members holding workplace meetings to scrutinise the content of the ODM and democratically agree a course of action to defend jobs and oppose unsafe workloads as some kind of unofficial action. This was while you cited Ofcom as the ultimate authority, insisted there was no alternative, and demanded that £300 million of cuts had to be made.

Do we really need to ask who has been vindicated by the operational breakdown and gig-economy conditions that have prevailed in the pilot sites? Yet in your Letter to Branches of January 29, even as the company threatens executive action to roll out ODM across all 1,250 delivery offices, you state that *“we will enter negotiations to try and persuade Royal Mail to adopt the heavy and light model which worked with a number of pilot sites during the peak.”*

What proof have you provided to members to substantiate this claim? Your “constructive counter proposal” is based on squeezing more productivity on top of already crippling workloads, paving the way for further job losses.

Your attacks on the PWRFC are made because it raises uncomfortable truths about USO “reform”, challenges your lack of accountability, and argues for power to be placed back where it belongs—in the hands of the rank and file—to wage a fight, not appease billionaire equity owners.



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