

The crisis at Royal Mail: postal workers need a rank-and-file strategy to fightback

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A mobilisation of postal workers is posed directly against Royal Mail's new owners, billionaire Daniel Kretinsky's EP Group and renewed job losses, terms and conditions driven into the floor and the collapsing of the mail service.

This struggle requires a political fight against Communication Workers Union (CWU) leaders Dave Ward and Martin Walsh and their collusion with Kretinsky and the Starmer Labour government.

The disaster confronting postal workers flows directly from the Framework Agreement they signed behind closed doors with Kretinsky in December 2024. That deal was bound up with the Labour government's green light for the £3.6 billion takeover, secured through a Deed of Undertaking premised on "light-touch" regulation designed to enrich private equity billionaires.

More than a year after their "ground-breaking agreement," Walsh and Ward now act as spurned partners, claiming Kretinsky has not "honoured" his undertakings. But they told postal workers to leave everything in their capable hands having co-authored and vouched for a fraud: these are grounds enough to demand the entire CWU leadership be stood down and replaced.

Ward and Walsh have not been duped. They have been faithful retainers from day one having signed up to the wrecking operation now underway. This was the content of their 12-page Framework Agreement under the pro-business jargon of Universal Service Obligation (USO) "reform".

The regulator Ofcom last July rubber-stamped the downgrade of the six-day USO to alternate weekdays for letters, except First Class, and watered down delivery targets for all mail. The objectives were explicit: to implement up to £425 million worth of cost cutting.

Walsh sang from the same hymn sheet as Ofcom and Kretinsky, decrying the USO as an "unfair financial burden" in order to transfer hundreds of millions of pounds into EP Group's coffers. The first step was taken since privatisation to formally throw-off the mail service and speed up the conversion of Royal Mail into a low wage parcel courier network.

Royal Mail's multi-year breaches on statutory letter delivery targets increased over Christmas. A survey by Citizens Advice found delays had increased by 50 percent since 2024, impacting around 16 million people—29 percent of UK adults—who missed vital correspondence including medical appointments. The breakdown has continued into the New Year.

The CWU has not issued any statement. Postal workers across the country were left to rebuff the official Royal Mail whitewash, reporting how parcels were prioritised and overtime embargoed, leaving units drowning in a backlog of letters. Overtime has become a sticking plaster covering structural understaffing from job cuts, revisions, and worker burnout.

This is the reason for the CWU's guilty silence. As part of the downpayment with Kretinsky, Walsh agreed to "pilot" the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM) at 35 units from last February based on gig-economy practices and impossible productivity targets. This is the new workplace regime to accompany the downgrade of mail to recast Royal Mail as an Amazon-style parcel operator.

The pilots have been catastrophic. Fatigue and even the use of heart monitors to test how far delivery workers could be pushed, with all safety provisions such as limits on bags weights removed, has been a guarded secret thanks to CWU-management collusion. This has only been reported by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC). Walsh opposed its call for scrutiny and workplace organisation, denouncing the PWRFC and even workers having the right to vote at CWU meetings to protect their jobs and safety as tantamount to unofficial action.

The CWU packaged the Framework Agreement with last August's three-year below RPI inflation pay award. The only justification given by Walsh for the substandard deal was the fraudulent claim of a "no strings" agreement! The vote to accept was based on mass abstention, a reluctant majority amounting to one in three members.

This also depended on false promises in what was described as Part 2 of the Framework Agreement of

equalisation for new entrants on inferior pay and terms—a first step in September and a plan in December—both promises broken. Kretinsky is demanding Ward and Walsh deliver the full cost-cutting exercise they agreed to, with notice served by the company on January 29 it would proceed to roll out ODM across all 1,250 delivery units.

Walsh's false flag of opposition

Walsh has been forced to strike a pose of opposition based on a failure to agree on ODM, after lecturing workers that there was no alternative. The triggering of the month-long Dispute Resolution Process is the mechanism for convening fresh closed-door talks. In a one-minute CWU video "update" on February 10, Walsh reported that "both sides" were committed to finding an agreement with a "more formal briefing" towards the end of the month!

In a blatant act of censorship union headquarters disabled the comments section in anticipation of hostile responses to this fob-off. This was followed three days later by posting photographs of delivery workers at several pilot sites holding posters "The ODM is dead" and "We support our Union," again with comments blocked.

Contrary to the message that members were "having their say", nothing was reported of their views on the detrimental impact of the pilots or the CWU signing up to them in the first place. The ban on comments also meant workers outside the targeted sites were unable to post messages as they had before on how their units are being reconfigured along the lines of the "pilots".

Walsh's alternative "Heavy and Light" model he is seeking company approval for aims to repackage the ODM, not end it. This commits to increase workloads by 15 percent by reducing duties from eight to six (with a "review" of a seventh duty), in a pledge to deliver a first tranche of £150 million cost cutting with 120 extra pilots to start before the end of the financial year.

New entrants are thrown under the bus for a second time. The CWU's timeline for the equalisation pathway is three years for workers now receiving an hourly rate of £13.06, barely above the minimum wage. Any incremental gains would be funded not by Kretinsky but via job losses, increased workloads, and further gutting of the mail service.

The way forward

Postal workers must initiate the type of struggle the CWU apparatus blocks at every turn. A channel of resistance must be opened by those prepared to forge a new leadership. Decision making must be transferred to the shop floor and led by trusted militants to decide on a strategy based on direct rank-and-file control, uniting new entrants and delivery workers on the pilots and across the network. This must extend across Royal Mail Group to Mail Centres and include Parcelforce delivery workers facing brutal restructuring.

The PWRFC puts forward the following demands:

- Disband the pilots at the 35 delivery offices. Full disclosure of the wrecking operation and restoration of workers contracts
- Oppose executive action to impose ODM. Halt the reconfiguration of all delivery units now
- No to Walsh's ODM Mark II of intensified workloads and job cuts
- Equal pay for equal work. The immediate levelling up of new entrants on the basic pay and terms of legacy workers
- End Royal Mail's breach of its statutory duties on the USO. The public has a right to a dependable mail service

These demands are the opposite of what the CWU bureaucrats insist is realistic. Nothing has proved more unviable than their pro-company agreements. There is no support for the biggest looting operation in more than a decade of privatisation. What must be asserted are the rights of those that matter, the 130,000 workforce and the public, not the corporate oligarchy.

Taking up this fight would win support across the working class, coming into conflict not only with the Starmer government as a direct tool of big business, but with the wider trade union bureaucracy working to isolate and suppress struggles against austerity, the destruction of public services and attacks on workers' rights. Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, the fight at Royal Mail can be linked to struggles developing among logistics and postal workers internationally facing similar restructuring drives to slash jobs, increase exploitation and privatise mail services.



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