

Royal Mail workers in Sheffield expose reasons for mail delays amid CWU-backed restructuring

 Our reporters

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Last Saturday campaigners from the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) spoke with workers outside the Woodseats delivery office, Sheffield, distributing copies of the WSWS article, “Communication Workers Union’s Martin Walsh opposes call for rank-and-file fightback at Royal Mail.”

The article was a reply to Communication Workers Union (CWU) Deputy General Secretary Martin Walsh, who denounced the PWRFC’s call—shared widely on social media—to make 2026 the year of a fightback by Royal Mail workers against the ongoing dismantling of the mail service.

The PWRFC statement documented a brutal Christmas period marked by the continuing breakdown of the mail service. Profitable parcel traffic was prioritised through punishing workloads imposed on understaffed delivery offices, following thousands of job cuts. Vital letters—including hospital appointment notifications, bank cards and legal documents—have been delayed for weeks.

Residents in the Nether Edge and Sharrow areas of Sheffield reported that while parcels and tracked items continued to arrive, ordinary letters had not been delivered since Christmas. Local press reports cited widespread complaints over mounting backlogs.

Royal Mail claimed that the disruption was due to a “temporary build up” caused by extreme weather and high sickness rates”, adding that “during this period, we prioritised the safety of our staff and were unable to deliver to addresses” and claiming “at no point has there been four weeks’ worth of mail in the office.” It told the *Sheffield Star*: “We use overtime where it is necessary, and it has not been stopped.”

Posties at the Woodseats delivery office dismissed these claims. Their names have been changed for protection against victimisation. They described how overtime has

effectively been banned under what management calls a “budget squeeze,” while workloads have become unmanageable. Staff turnover and sickness levels are high, and parcels are systematically prioritised over letters.

Several workers pointed to the connection between the takeover of Royal Mail by billionaire Daniel Kretinsky and the regulator’s downgrading of the Universal Service Obligation (USO), which mandates six-day-a-week letter delivery.

John, who has worked at Royal Mail for more than twenty years, explained that although management avoids using the term “overtime ban,” the outcome is the same.

“They call it a ‘budget squeeze’. And basically, the squeeze will allow so many hours, and this doesn’t cover contracted hours. So, this means you can’t do any overtime. That’s what was causing the delay in the post. You’ve got people on 18-hour contracts, 24-hour contracts and they just can’t do the work in that time.

“It means there is a point in time when you surrender, because everybody’s got a backlog.”

He described the corrosive impact on morale and retention:

“People are leaving. Yeah, it’s high turnover. This goes back a few years now, to when the two-tier workforce was imposed. You’ve got people starting on different pay and conditions while they are doing the same job. Why would you stay?”

When it was pointed out that the CWU oversaw the imposition of two-tier contracts, John replied: “I don’t really know what the unions do in there anymore. They don’t seem to be on our side anymore.”

He voiced deep concerns over the company’s direction under Kretinsky:

“I’m worried because I’ve been here a long time. I was

here before privatisation. Everything has changed over this period. I happily worked every day, but it has just sunk. It's just piles and piles of letters and everything is about prioritising first class and parcels.

"For people who have hospital appointments, parking fines, all important stuff. It's all second class.

"It has loosened up a bit, with some people getting overtime so people are trying their best to clear it, but I think the company are deliberately creating problems. It's some sort of malicious plan, just break Royal Mail so they can fully privatise it. I mean, they talked about these trials that they've done at the 35 delivery offices. The union are saying that they're not backing the Optimum Delivery Method. The union have said they have a 'Heavy and Light' plan."

John was unclear what the CWU's Heavy and Light proposal entails but agreed that closed-door negotiations between the union and management could be used to impose the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM)—jobs losses and impossible productivity targets—by stealth. He said the trials should never have been allowed to proceed.

Asked about the formation of independent rank-and-file committees to take democratic control over working conditions and oppose the restructuring, he responded: "I'll have a good read. Who will lead that?"

Campaigners explained that such committees must be led by workers themselves.

"Harry", a weekend worker employed on an inferior part-time contract and not a union member, also described deteriorating conditions. He has worked at the office for three years:

"Basically the mail is building up. The mail isn't really prioritised. We get a lot of complaints from customers of mail being delivered three weeks late, sometimes four weeks late.

"This is because they are putting so much focus on the parcels, because that's where the competition is. There isn't really another company that delivers letters. So, there's no competition there. They just leave that as the last priority. When mail is building up, this obviously affects morale, I know many people that have left because they were put on under so much stress.

"The day-to-day workload is just impossible to finish in the shift time. If people want to stay an extra hour or two to deliver people's mail, they can't because they've banned overtime."

Harry explained that he is not in the union as a part-time worker. "I can understand that the full timers are frustrated and the full-time staff should campaign for

more strikes because I think that's where it's most effective."

Campaigners discussed the CWU's role in shutting down previous strike action and imposing the pro-company agreement which was a bonfire of terms and conditions. They emphasised that any renewed industrial action should unite all postal workers and must be determined by the rank-and-file and based on drawing up workers own red lines against the collusion of the CWU with the Starmer government's dismantling the mail service to guarantee the profits of its business partner Kretinsky.

Harry said he was not fully aware of the history of privatisation and the union's collaboration with management but would read further. He had once hoped to secure a permanent career at Royal Mail, but like many younger and part-time staff; "We are treating this job as a temporary job. After seeing how things are building up and they are expecting more?

"We used to have people coming in early in the morning. They would sort out the parcels. So, they would get stuff done before everybody came in. Because they've banned overtime, people cannot come in early in the morning.

"I think there's more employees that have much more to lose from these changes than I do. Some people been here for 10, 20 years. I think it's their voices that should be heard."

The experiences at Woodseats are not exceptional. They are the product of a restructuring drive, facilitated by the CWU bureaucracy, aimed at transforming Royal Mail into a parcels-focused logistics operation while dismantling the Universal Service Obligation through its Framework Agreement with Kretinsky's EP Group.

The PWRFC calls on all postal workers to share their experiences and join the fight for independent rank-and-file organisation to defend jobs, pay, and the mail service itself.



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