Reject CWU/Labour government whitewash of Royal Mail crisis: for rank-and-file opposition to corporate collusion

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee
23 February 2026

We call on our colleagues to reject the whitewash being prepared by Communication Workers Union (CWU) General Secretary Dave Ward and his deputy Martin Walsh through the parliamentary committee headed by Labour MP Liam Byrne into the crisis at Royal Mail.

The surprise within ruling circles over the collapse of the mail service during Christmas and into the New Year is feigned.

Public anger must not be diverted, nor our independent organisation blocked against renewed attacks on jobs, terms and conditions and the crippling workloads imposed by those responsible for a wrecking operation.

Ward and Walsh stated in their February 18 message to Royal Mail Group members: “this is a serious investigation by the government”. They note Byrne has written as chair of the Business and Trade Select Committee to Royal Mail’s CEO “and outlined the quality-of-service crisis and given two weeks to answer questions regarding the service, including whether the company is prioritising parcels over letters.”

Who do they think they are kidding?

The CWU greenlighted this new stage in Royal Mail’s dismantling with the agreements they co-authored with the Starmer government to install billionaire Daniel Kretinksy’s EP Group as sole owners in the £3.6 billion takeover last May. They even lectured us on the need to “accept the reality of privatisation.”

They worked to stifle our opposition, claiming the downgrade of the six-day letter service was a “reform” of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) when it was a staging post in Royal Mail’s conversion to a low-wage parcel operation modelled on Amazon.

The Starmer government’s Deed of Undertaking with Kretinsky endorsed “value extraction”, e.g., asset stripping. It set a deliberately low benchmark of meeting or improving delivery performance in 2023-4—a year in which around a quarter of First Class letters did not arrive on time. Industrial-scale breaches of the statutory delivery targets have continued to the present day.

The regulator, Ofcom, agreed the downgrading of the USO last July to alternate weekday delivery for all letters other than First Class and watered-down delivery targets overall, backing cost-cutting of up to £425 million through the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM).

Ward and Walsh claim EP Group have not “honoured” its undertakings when they were party to this scorched earth policy. It was codified in their 12-page Framework Agreement signed with EP Group in December 2024, a companion to Labour’s Deed of Undertaking.

Walsh rubber-stamped the ODM “pilots” at 35 offices from February last year, cutting duties from four to three, lengthening delivery spans to five hours or more and imposing heavier parcel-orientated walks. Across the remaining 97 percent of delivery units, this has been mirrored by the de facto collapse of the mail service, chronic understaffing and impossible workloads. Every attempt to demand CWU officials oppose this has been rebuffed.

Now we are told to participate in an “investigation” headed by the same government the CWU apparatus has worked with to enforce EP Group restructuring.

No to a whitewash Part II

Our colleagues have recalled the 2023 parliamentary committee headed by Labour MP Darren Jones that led nowhere. Jones used the two hearings in January and February that year to grandstand against then Royal Mail chief executive Simon Thompson over parcel prioritisation, management surveillance and denial of sick pay.

Postal workers’ testimony was used to stage this political theatre while the CWU leadership demobilised the first national dispute since privatisation. Ward and the postal executive acted as strike-breakers by vetoing a renewed mandate for action after 18 days of stoppages to hatch a sellout deal at ACAS in April, pushed through in July.

Thompson received a £700,000 golden handshake to step down while the attacks he headed up were implemented in full:

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real-terms pay cuts, as well as cuts to jobs, sick pay and implementing a two-tier workforce based on inferior pay and terms for new entrants. Jones was paraded as a hero by CWU officials at the national briefing launching the "negotiators agreement."

The Starmer government is now going further than its Conservative predecessor in dismantling the postal service on behalf of the corporate oligarchy typified by Kretinsky. Jones has served as Starmer's trusted head kicker, elevated to the position of the Prime Minister's Chief Secretary.

The way forward

The lesson is clear: we need a strategy independent of Labour and the entire political establishment to which the CWU bureaucracy is joined at the hip. Independent workplace organisation must transfer power to the rank and file from the unaccountable pro-company bureaucracy.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee was formed in April 2023 to oppose the CWU's sellout and has a principled record of struggle against the union bureaucracy and the consequences of its betrayal: providing a voice for opposition against victimisations, unsafe working conditions, the two-tier workforce and ODM. We appeal to our colleagues to expand this fight.

Our allies are not the Starmer government or its industrial enforcers in the CWU apparatus, but other workers being driven into struggle against the destruction of public services and the National Health Service to ensure big business profits and diverting billions for military spending.

The company is going to war on postal workers with its January 29 declaration that it will unilaterally roll out the ODM nationally across all 1,250 units. The response of Walsh has been to scuttle into closed-door meetings with management for a month, triggered by the dispute resolution process. We are denied any oversight; his February 10 one-minute video "update" stated the intention to find an agreement by "both sides" with comments disabled on Facebook in anticipation of angry responses to another surrender.

Censorship has become routine as the CWU claims to speak for us, while silencing our voice.

We are told a "tri-partite meeting" between the CWU, EP Group and the government took place on February 16, attended by company representatives and Labour's Business Secretary. It outlined four weeks of intensive negotiations "on USO reform, equalisation of terms and conditions and full implementation of the agreement reached between EP Group and Royal Mail" overseen by the Starmer government. Ward and Walsh claim this is to "influence the future in a positive way".

There is nothing "positive" in what Walsh is seeking to enforce through his "Heavy and Light" version of ODM. This has not been drawn up in consultation with members, let alone agreed. It does not spell the end of ODM but its repackaging: reducing duties from eight to six to deliver a first wave of £150 million in cost-cutting, with a further 120 pilots planned by April.

The "equalisation pathway" for new entrants now paid barely above the minimum wage proposes a three-year qualification period, with incremental gains funded through USO "reform" cost-cutting: job losses, increased workloads and the gutting of the mail service.

We reject the calls for "unity" behind this agenda and the prattle about aligning the interests of "all stakeholders". Our interests and those of the public are incompatible with the biggest plundering operation in more than a decade of privatisation.

We call for a boycott of the sham parliamentary investigation and collaboration with the Starmer government. Our long list of grievances must be drawn up to launch a genuine mobilisation in the workplace in unity against the tri-partite alliance of the CWU apparatus, EP Group and the Starmer government.

Ward and Walsh must be removed by an opposition prepared from below with clear red lines. The PWRFC proposes 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

• 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 breaches of the USO. The public has a right to a dependable mail service

Help build the PWRFC: the fightback begins with telling the truth—and organising collectively to act on it!

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