

CWU leader Martin Walsh uses restricted consultation exercise to claim backing for restructuring at Royal Mail

Tony Robson
27 February 2026

Martin Walsh, postal deputy general secretary of the Communication Workers Union (CWU), has claimed a consultative ballot of members at the 35 delivery units used as the testing ground for Royal Mail's Optimised Delivery Model (ODM) has endorsed the union leadership's version of the restructuring agenda.

Walsh declared an “overwhelming” result, citing a 96.8 percent majority on a 75 percent turnout, stating that members had rejected ODM and supported the “union's proposal” in a CWU video on February 24.

As soon as it was posted on CWU Facebook, comments from postal workers challenged whether rejection of ODM by colleagues at the pilot offices amounted to endorsement of the “union's proposal”: the absorption of extra work through cutting of existing duties and jobs in the “Heavy and Light” (H&L) model.

A comment receiving over 70 likes asked pointedly: “So did you give those same members the option on their ballot to say no to the union's proposal as well? I wonder if you'd have had a similar result. 1 duty 1 postie, it works... tried and tested!!”

Another wrote: “It would be interesting to see the same ballot to the same people between the options of either the union's proposed delivery method and one man one job. ODM is hugely unpopular, but I wonder if you underestimate how unpopular the union's ideas are too?”

True to form, CWU headquarters refused to even answer these questions as their ruse unravelled.

Postal workers at one pilot office told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the ballot paper contained only a question on whether to reject ODM and did not include a separate option to endorse H&L as advocated by Walsh.

As a point of principle, any such vote should have included the 97 percent of delivery staff outside the pilots now in the crosshairs of the restructuring agenda.

The company, under new owners—billionaire Daniel Kretinsky's EP Group—demanded last month the rollout of

ODM from the “pilot” offices across all 1,250 delivery units nationally, claiming they have been a success. In truth, they have been marked by a collapse of the mail service and the exhaustion of postal workers due to impossible productivity targets geared to parcels.

Walsh has worked to block any mobilisation against the imposition of ODM and instead used the corporatist mechanism of a month-long dispute resolution process to disappear into closed-door meetings with management to seek approval for the H&L model.

As the comments from postal workers indicate, this accepts the ending of one duty to each worker, slashing jobs and intensifying workloads. Walsh has assured the company this will deliver a first wave of £150 million in cost-cutting, with a commitment to extend the pilots to an additional 120 delivery units before April.

The claim to be empowering postal workers on the pilots with a ballot is drenched in cynicism. They were co-opted into the ODM from last February—made a testbed for a company-wide scorched-earth strategy. Duties were reduced from four to three, delivery spans expanded to five hours or more, and workers removed from their walks to cover “core” and “combined” duties prioritising parcels.

This was in anticipation of the regulator Ofcom's downgrade of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) from six-day letter delivery to alternate weekdays for all but First-Class mail, rubber stamped last July.

Walsh had the front to acknowledge that members on the pilots “have been through a lot of hardship over the last 9 months.” But this was imposed under Terms of Reference drawn up by Walsh, CWU divisional representatives and Royal Mail in December 2024—an instalment of the Framework Agreement with EP Group signed by Walsh and CWU General Secretary Dave Ward, alongside the Labour government's Deed of Undertaking, to install Kretinsky.

The justification that ODM pilots were about “testing assumptions” exposes the CWU leadership as management

consultants. Any organisation defending workers would have opposed from the outset a plan to cut 25 percent of jobs and intensify workloads. Walsh was not a reluctant participant; he acted as an attack dog for Ofcom and EP Group, browbeating opposition and insisting there was no alternative.

The toll on workers has been concealed. Only the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) has exposed how staff were driven to quit, safety was bypassed and no limits placed on bag weights. Fatigue was monitored using heart monitors, with no published findings, as workers were pushed to exhaustion.

CWU South West and South Wales Divisional rep Ralph Ferrett blurted out on CWU Facebook the real concerns animating the apparatus:

“One of the many ways in which the ODM failed though was it didn’t save anything like the money they wished it would. Indeed many of the bigger units in the pilots (where most of their savings would come from if rolled out) ended up costing more than they were spending before the pilot activity.

“Part of our argument to Royal Mail/EP is that a real 175m a year is much more valuable than an imaginary saving of 350m that won’t work and will leave the company getting fined out of existence by OFCOM.”

CWU officials claim the H&L model preserves walk ownership and relations between posties and their regular customers. In fact, it embeds permanent workload increases, cutting eight duties to seven through “lapsing”—absorbing extra work from the duty cut into those remaining and reducing delivery routes. The seventh duty, under “ongoing review,” is already lined up for the next round of cuts.

Management pressure will intensify, with threats of gross misconduct for “wilful delay of the mail” over failure to complete First Class and Tracked items. This is while the company itself wilfully delays mail through repeated breaches of statutory delivery targets to prioritise parcels, fuelling the service collapse over Christmas and into the New Year.

This is the real face of USO “reform”: crafted for Kretinsky’s takeover of Royal Mail to entrench Amazon-style conditions and gut the mail service in favour of a low-wage courier network. Closed-door talks and government intervention aim to smother resistance through a “tri-partite” alliance between the CWU apparatus, EP Group and the Starmer government.

The announced parliamentary committee investigation into the crisis at Royal Mail will be a whitewash. The dismantling of the mail service and prioritisation of parcels is hardwired into the restructuring agenda agreed with Kretinsky.

This has no public support and is opposed by postal workers. Opposition capable of countering the corporate and political establishment must be organised from below:

As a first step, postal workers should demand that Walsh end all closed-door meetings with management and the Starmer government. There is no mandate for H&L.

A national ballot on ODM and H&L must be held for members to decide. This should be used as the opportunity to draw up at every workplace a list of grievances buried through management–union collusion. The focus must shift from maximising EP Group profits to restoring staffing levels, enforcing safety protocols and delivering the mail.

The critical issue is transferring decision-making from Walsh and Ward to the shop floor and committees led by trusted militants, uniting new entrants and delivery staff on the pilots and across the network, extending throughout Royal Mail Group, including Mail Centres and Parcelforce Worldwide workers also facing restructuring.

The demand for a national ballot for agreed forms of industrial action, up to a strike, must be raised, based on a strategy determined and controlled by the rank and file.

The PWRFC has proposed these red lines around which a struggle can be mobilised:

- 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. Immediate levelling up of new entrants to 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

The waging of such a struggle would win support beyond Royal Mail among millions of workers facing similar attacks on jobs, real-terms pay cuts and the dismantling of public services.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact