

Royal Mail workers at Mount Pleasant speak on CWU-Royal Mail “negotiators agreement”

Our reporters
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Postal workers at the Mount Pleasant Mail Centre—Royal Mail’s central distribution hub and sorting office in central London—spoke with reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* this week about the negotiators’ agreement between the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and Royal Mail’s billionaire owners, Daniel Kretinsky’s EP Group.

The agreement was reached after months of closed-door talks and is aimed at driving forward a massive restructuring of the company demanded by EP Group investors. Co-authored by CWU leaders Dave Ward and Martin Walsh, it is being put to a ballot by CWU members May 11-29.

During a shift change last week, copies of a statement issued by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) calling for a No vote were taken up by delivery workers. It provoked wide-ranging discussion, and there was interest in a Zoom meeting on May 17 called by the PWRFC to organise the campaign for a “No” vote and to build a rank-and-file fightback.

Postal workers at Mt Pleasant immediately recognised that the agreement is intended to implement “reform” of the Universal Service Obligation (USO)—pro-business jargon for dismantling the mail service. Its centrepiece is the overhaul of postal workers’ terms and conditions under the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM), which is geared to increased parcel-delivery workloads and aims to convert Royal Mail into a low-wage courier service.

Mount Pleasant is one of 35 delivery offices that took part in a pilot scheme launched in March last year to “trial” the ODM. The scheme was agreed by Walsh and company executives, with workers having no say. In February, after mass opposition erupted, union members at the pilot sites were balloted and voted 96 per cent to reject the ODM. The negotiators’ agreement being put to members this month accepts a repackaged version, DM26, which will enshrine increased workloads and job cuts,

with three delivery workers doing the work of four.

The toll on workers via ODM

Contrary to the claims by CWU officials that they were taking a responsible position in trialling ODM and “monitoring fatigue”, a postie explained:

“When I look across the floor, colleagues are limping, worn out, stressed—physically broken. These used to be fit as fiddles. Look at them now.”

Describing the erosion of pay for both “legacy” workers and new entrants, he added: “We get meagre wage increases and have to wait months for money that’s ours. I feel sorry for younger workers—cleaners are on more than new recruits. We all pay the same bills; we should be on the same rate.”

Pointing to the company headquarters, where CWU officials are in constant discussion with management, he said: “Them lot upstairs are not interested in us, it’s how much profit they can make.”

Support for removing sell-out bureaucrats

Another worker pointed to the collusion of the CWU with management and its record of sellouts, “Same old s***—nothing changes. We’ve had strikes before and things only get worse.”

On the deal itself, he added, “I didn’t expect anything different. I’ll be voting No.”

Other postal workers who had not yet seen the contents of the negotiators’ agreement said they appreciated the

PWRFC's work in cutting through the "corporate jargon" used by CWU officials. They speak from the same script as the company and act as business partners rather than defending the interests of postal workers and CWU members.

As one worker taking the leaflet stated: "Workers need to be independent and not lied to by the union. I support this—I'll take a look."

As the PWRFC statement calling for a No vote states: "Rejection alone is not enough. Opposition must be mobilised, demanding the removal of Ward, Walsh and the entire CWU Postal Executive who serve as Royal Mail's enforcers."

One worker said, "There's a strong case for that—they keep selling us out." Another added, "They should be removed—they're diabolical." A third asked, "£15 a month in union dues—where does it go? We don't get anything out of it."

Opposition to low pay and toxic environment

Workers also explained that their concerns over pay erosion have been ignored by CWU officials. One said, "I'm baffled—when I do overtime, my hourly rate goes down. The CWU won't answer. I want to read more about this rank-and-file organisation."

The CWU's stonewalling over pay is part of its broader collusion with the company in enforcing wage restraint, tying pay to ramped up exploitation. As the PWRFC statement explains:

"Section 4 of the agreement, 'Pay 2026', presents the payment of 3 percent ahead of updated CPI figures through to April as a supposed act of generosity to avoid "delay" for postal workers. This is risible. It states that the extra money workers are entitled to—based on increased CPI—will only be "considered for payment following the successful deployment of the USO reform". Walsh has spent months gaslighting postal workers, denying the CWU's three-year pay deal would be linked to restructuring. It would be a "no-strings" deal. These claims have been exposed as lies. The agreement means pay increases in the second year will be contingent on meeting company targets for job destruction and increased workloads as part of USO reform"

Agency workers, who will not have voting rights over the agreement but will be affected by its outcome, also

spoke out. One said, "It didn't take long to see how badly posties and agency staff are treated – the atmosphere is s****"

Workers agreed with the need for a wider struggle not confined to one industry or country. One postie explained, "I witnessed the march of the miners in Turkey for pay. When they entered the city [Ankara] from the mines, Erdogan treated them as trouble-causers and criminals and arrested many. It is Erdogan and his government that are the criminals, not the workers. What we need here is the solidarity of the workers."

Another postie, who expressed some confidence in their local union rep, was interested in how a rank-and-file committee could enable workers to take charge, "How can the rank-and-file do what's being proposed? How will it work? Sorting out pay differences has to be a priority."

WSWS reporters explained that workers can seize the initiative by establishing rank-and-file committees in every delivery office and mail centre, transferring decision-making power from the union apparatus to workers themselves, based on a fighting strategy to defend jobs, pay, and the mail service.

They pointed out the demands put forward by the PWRFC to conduct this struggle:

- Disband the 35 pilot schemes and fully expose their impact on workers' health and job losses
- Reject ODM Mark II and all workload intensification
- Equal pay for equal work, with immediate levelling up for new entrants
- End Royal Mail's breach of its USO obligations and defend a reliable public mail service

Postal workers are not simply involved in a contract battle; they face a political struggle against the Starmer government, which rubber-stamped the takeover of Royal Mail by EP Group as one of its first acts following the July 2024 general election.

The PWRFC urges Royal Mail workers to attend its online meeting on May 17 and to take forward the fight for rank-and-file control against the CWU's unaccountable bureaucracy, opening up a genuine path of struggle in alliance with postal and logistics workers across Europe and internationally.



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