

Rank-and-file Zoom meeting discusses campaign for a No vote to defeat CWU's pro-company agreement with Royal Mail

Our correspondents

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The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) held a Zoom meeting on Sunday amid mounting opposition by workers to the “negotiators' agreement” between Communication Workers Union (CWU) leaders Dave Ward and Martin Walsh and Royal Mail owner Daniel Kretinsky's EP Group.

The deal sets out a brutal restructuring agenda. Postal workers' opposition has gone viral on social media, countering pro-company propaganda from union headquarters as part of a membership ballot running from 11 to 29 May.

At Sunday's meeting, WSWS industrial editor Tony Robson set out the basis of the PWRFC's call for a No vote. He explained, “The nine-page agreement is not about ‘USO reform,’ ‘modernisation’ or ‘a fresh start.’ It is shock therapy to guarantee £300 million of cost-cutting for EP Group to reap dividends. Every section of the 9-page document reeks of restructuring, job destruction, inequality and intensified exploitation.”

He said the CWU bureaucracy had cynically repackaged the hated Optimised Delivery Model (ODM), piloted at 35 delivery offices since March last year. The ODM had devastated the mail service and imposed exhausting workloads.

The new “DM26” model proposed by the CWU—a so-called “heavy and light model”—will see three delivery workers performing the work of four, slashing jobs by a quarter. The agreement also keeps new entrants on near-minimum wage levels, without paid meal breaks or payment for delivering business flyers, entrenching a two-tier workforce.

Robson stated: “Postal workers are confronting not simply another bad agreement, or a dispute over workloads and pay. This is a coordinated offensive by

billionaire oligarch Daniel Kretinsky, the Starmer government and the CWU apparatus itself. Dave Ward, Martin Walsh and the union bureaucracy are functioning as industrial enforcers. This is to destroy what remains of a public service and make Royal Mail a low-cost parcels and logistics operation run exclusively for profit.

“The central issue is who determines the outcome of this struggle: workers on the shop floor, or an unaccountable bureaucracy tied by a thousand threads to management and the Labour government? That is why the fight against this agreement must become a fight for rank-and-file control.”

Concluding his report, Robson discussed the political crisis of the Starmer government. Labour's vote had collapsed in council elections and in elections held in Scotland and Wales, leaving Starmer a “lame duck prime minister.” But mass anger in the working class against Labour's agenda of austerity, war and the assault on democratic rights was being stifled.

“The leaders of Britain's biggest trade unions have moved to block any challenge by the working class to the Starmer government's right-wing agenda of austerity and war,” Robson said. “The unions involved in the Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO), including Unite, UNISON, the GMB and CWU issued a communique on Tuesday night calling for an orderly transition to a new leader, aimed at facilitating a new right-wing government headed by Andy Burnham.”

Robson pointed to the struggles of post and logistics workers in Canada and the United States, emphasising the global character of the assault on conditions, pay and jobs, and the need for a globally coordinated

counter-offensive.

Following Robson's report, postal workers delivered powerful testimony exposing conditions at their delivery offices—information being concealed by the CWU. (The names of those who spoke have been changed to protect workers from victimisation.)

James explained: "We entered the [ODM] trial last April along with another 30-odd offices, and it's been an absolute disaster. Workers are exhausted. In reality, three posties are now doing four jobs. On Mondays and Tuesdays, you're carrying three days' mail, covering virtually every delivery point, doing door-to-doors, and working at 100 percent call rate all day. People are knackered. Family life and social life suffer. When you get home you can barely move."

He recalled, "Tony Bouch and Martin Walsh came to our office determined to impose ODM. We were told repeatedly there was 'no alternative' and 'no Plan B.'

"Around 10 workers have effectively been forced out through exhaustion and stress. One colleague suffered a major heart attack after warning management that the stress was going to kill him. Another staff member developed a heart condition and was pushed out after 30 years with a £14,000 payoff.

"We're hearing the same language over DM26, combined duties four into three to carry impossible workloads. That's why we need a resounding No vote, linked to a vote of no confidence in Ward, Walsh and the Postal Executive who imposed this against us."

He concluded, "There *is* a Plan B: one person, one delivery, decent workloads, equal pay and breaks for all workers, and a fight led by the rank and file against prioritising profits to destroy our health and jobs."

Alistair from the same workplace explained he had taken ill-health retirement after a recent heart attack on the job: "After more than three decades of long service, I am having to sever my ties with Royal Mail.

"I've had fights with the union basically since the day I started. The union never once protected me in any situation. I thought since being a young child that a union was there to protect workers, but I've been so disappointed in the CWU and the way they've acted. Not one member of the leadership contacted me to see how I was after my heart attack.

"I've voted No because this is about people's lives, which matter, not the profits being made for the people sitting in their chairs at the top. Royal Mail was a job I

loved when I first started, but the way they're treating people now is an absolute disgrace. We've got to start fighting back, and the rank-and-file is the only way to do it."

Lee from a London delivery office said that conditions were mirrored at non-pilot offices: "In our office, the changes tied to the three-in-four deliveries are already being introduced unofficially with the backing of the CWU bureaucracy. Walks are being cut, while reserves and rest-day covers are being declared surplus and sent anywhere across London. Workers face huge insecurity, with no negotiations and no union resistance.

"The pressure inside offices is immense. Staff are being worked to exhaustion, absences are soaring, and mental health problems caused by stress are becoming widespread.

"There is enormous hostility towards the union, which workers see as collaborating with management behind their backs. A No vote is necessary, but management and the CWU will try to impose these changes regardless, because profit is their priority. That is why we need to build up the rank-and-file to wage a political struggle for something different."

In response, Robson emphasised that Ward and Walsh are trying to blackmail postal workers into accepting a revised ODM, threatening that a No vote will see the company impose its plans via executive action. The CWU's threats reinforced the need for rank-and-file organisation and a vote of no confidence in the CWU leadership. He concluded by linking the dispute to broader international struggles against austerity, corporate dictatorship and war.

The meeting ended with an appeal to attend the public meetings organised by the Socialist Equality Party marking the centenary of the 1926 General Strike



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