

# CWU pushes through sellout deal at Royal Mail with record low vote

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**1 June 2026**

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) announced the result of the ballot on the “negotiators’ agreement” with Royal Mail and billionaire owner Daniel Kretinsky’s EP Group on May 29.

The voting was split into two ballots: one on the deployment of so-called Universal Service Obligation (USO) “reform”, and the other on the “equalisation” of pay and terms for new entrants. Both are tied to EP Group’s restructuring agenda, downgrading the mail service and entrenching gig-economy practices to turn Royal Mail into a low-cost parcel courier.

At the CWU Live broadcast on Friday at 5 p.m., General Secretary Dave Ward and Deputy General Secretary Martin Walsh announced that on USO deployment the Yes vote was 65.4 percent, with 34.6 percent voting No. On “equalisation”, 72.2 percent voted Yes and 27.8 percent voted No.

With a historic low turnout of 32 percent in both ballots, the Yes votes represent only around one in 5 members. This is not an endorsement—it is a de facto vote of no confidence in the CWU bureaucracy.

Ward dismissed the turnout as “disappointing”, claiming members “didn’t feel it was right to vote against the deal” because it secured jobs and Royal Mail’s future. Walsh opined that the problem was “trying to communicate effectively with all our members on why this change is better”.

Postal workers were scathing in the comments section of the broadcast on YouTube:

“67% of staff didn’t bother to vote that speaks volumes on confidence in the union.”—@robertboyle8827

“We had local and divisional saying we had to vote yes or we wouldn’t be in the room for further talks. completely oversold by these clowns.”—@garrypearson

“Constantly talking about supporting the business. Forgetting the people who they’re meant to represent.”—@westcountryblue6123

“All to keep a billionaire happy”—@leedegg698

The comments section was closed after the broadcast and the entire thread deleted!

The CWU leadership’s entire campaign was not based on a positive call for their agreement, but efforts to silence the opposition of postal workers which had dominated social media.

Many postal workers identified the alternative to the hated Optimised Delivery Model (ODM)—“DM26”—as a repackaging of the same slash-and-burn agenda. Under the agreement, delivery operations are driven by the same model of three delivery staff doing the work of four, intensifying workloads and posing mass redundancies. Whether the CWU’s “heavy and light” model or Royal Mail’s full optimisation, this remains unchanged.

For new entrants on near-minimum wage, “equalisation” amounts to a derisory uplift—described as a “first step”—of 1.75 percent (on top of 3 percent), with no review until January 2027. This keeps in place core inequalities, including unpaid meal breaks and non-payment of supplements for delivering business flyers. The miserly 3 percent uplift for all Royal Mail workers this year was held back from April, making it conditional on agreement to further USO “reform”—exposing the lie that the three-year award had “no strings” attached.

The pro-company character of the deal was epitomised by Walsh’s 10-point statement issued a week into the ballots, directed exclusively against a No vote. He lectured postal workers that, “There is no magic money tree” when it comes to secure employment, decent pay, or genuine parity for new entrants. But he has acknowledged that the DM26 model achieves £250 million in “cost reductions”, which will all flow directly into EP Group’s profits.

The CWU’s two-week campaign was a shakedown, demanding members accept its restructuring agenda or face worse. The threat cited by Walsh of “executive action” by Royal Mail if postal workers rejected the deal was to enforce company dictates, rather than call for any mobilisation of resistance.

Walsh was already collaborating with management to implement DM26 before members had a chance to deliver their verdict. A fortnight before the ballot result, the model went live at a delivery office in Manchester South East as the first of 240 units. The CWU apparatus’s only “engagement” has been with management through Steering Groups established to enforce DM26.

Ward and Walsh have not been in a dispute with the company, but with their own members.

## Organised rank-and-file opposition needed

At the CWU Live broadcast the most revealing comment came when Walsh said the deal had been accepted “because there was no organised opposition, only on social media.”

The entire union bureaucracy closed ranks against opposition from below. The full-time officials—the Area and Divisional reps—were relied upon to toe the line after the Postal Executive unanimously backed the pro-company agreement. These officials, on paid release by the company, did not organise workplace meetings where posties could scrutinise the deal. Instead, they kept a low profile to prevent the opposition gaining national traction. They enforced the fait accompli message: accept the CWU’s rotten deal or face executive action.

Walsh’s comment exposes the real state of relations at Royal Mail. The company relies on having the entire union apparatus in its back pocket, while the CWU bureaucracy depends on opposition among members finding no organised expression.

Organised resistance would shift the balance of forces in favour of a genuine struggle by the 130,000-strong workforce.

This was the perspective advanced by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC). Its call for a No vote was combined with calls for a vote of no confidence in Ward, Walsh and the Postal Executive. This was to begin the process of removing the entrenched pro-company bureaucracy to transfer power to where it belongs, on the shopfloor, to conduct a struggle under democratic control and formulate demands based on workers’ needs rather than corporate profitability.

This is posed with renewed urgency. A deal based on blackmail by the CWU bureaucracy and threats of executive action by the company has no legitimacy.

A significant section of postal workers withstood intimidation and voted No. The biggest misreading of the situation would be for those who showed this defiance to interpret the abstention rate as a product of “apathy” and assume that those who voted Yes are content. This would hand the bureaucracy an undeserved victory.

The implications of its rotten deal in the period ahead pose the need to unite every section of disenfranchised Royal Mail workers—“legacy” and new entrants, delivery and Mail Centre, distribution and Parcelforce workers.

The decisive question is developing a perspective and organised means through which the rank-and-file can break the grip of the privileged pro-company bureaucracy, typified by Ward on his £150,000 salary plus expenses, and with his MBE (Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) from the Starmer Labour government which waved through the £3.6 billion Kretinsky takeover.

Ward spoke at the CWU Live as Labour’s industrial enforcer. He once again peddled the fiction of rebuilding Royal Mail and improving the quality of service based on the “next steps” to be

taken with the Starmer government, stating:

“The report of the Business and Trade Select Committee and the recommendations they have made to the government are really important for the future. These recommendations have criticised Royal Mail, criticised Ofcom significantly.”

The Select Committee headed by Labour MP Liam Byrne has in fact only stated that Royal Mail is “committed to return performance back to the regulated targets by April 2027”. This is not a “commitment” but a free licence to continue to run the mail service into the ground for another year.

It exposes the crocodile tears shed by MPs at the Committee’s hearing in March over their constituents’ missing vital letters—medical appointments and legal documents—when they declared the current level of dysfunction, in which 220 million letters are forecast to be delivered late this year, “unacceptable”.

Royal Mail has breached its delivery targets yet again for the year up to March—delivering one in four First Class letters late, the tenth year in a row it has failed its legal duties for the “premium” letter service. The new “regulated targets” are the watered-down quality of service agreed by Ofcom in July 2025. They mean a further demotion of the mail through a reduced speed of delivery. First Class letters, rather than being delivered next day, can take three days and Second Class from three to five days based on a 99 percent target.

Freedom to gut the mail service, opposed by postal workers and the public alike, has been handed to Kretinsky on a plate by the CWU apparatus and the Starmer government.

The next steps at Royal Mail should not be decided by a discredited bureaucracy acting as an appendage of the government and its private equity partners. The initiative must be seized by postal workers who are committed to defending their livelihoods and the public service, not billionaire profits. This means building a network of rank-and-file committees to mount a coordinated fight across Royal Mail as part of a joint struggle by postal and logistics workers internationally facing identical attacks by a corporate and financial elite.



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