

CWU restructuring plan "DM26" unravels at Royal Mail

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Communication Workers Union (CWU) postal deputy general secretary Martin Walsh is in damage limitation mode as the disastrous results of the "DM26" delivery model at Royal Mail becomes impossible to conceal.

Walsh has broken nearly three months of silence since the restructuring plan was pushed through in the May ballot of CWU members at Royal Mail and DM26 began its rollout. A brief statement posted September 2 to the CWU Facebook page, "DM26 Update", presented the results as a success story citing an increase at delivery point coverage at deployed units from 91 percent to 98.2 percent.

Treated as secondary was an admission that "the most commonly reported issues" with DM26 are:

- "Excessive workloads and duties not currently achievable"
- "Insufficient staffing and resource shortages"
- "Increased parcel traffic and workloads"

This demolishes the claims made by Walsh that the model he authored and agreed with Royal Mail management and billionaire owner Daniel Kretinsky's EP Group would provide protection for postal workers. He marketed DM26 as a more worker-friendly version of Royal Mail's "Optimised Delivery Model" (ODM), foisted on 35 delivery units since last March with disastrous results. But DM26 retained the core slash-and-burn approach: making three delivery workers perform the work of four to make thousands of redundancies.

The claim of a "light and heavy" version was always a myth. The downgrade in the public service was to facilitate an expansion of parcels under Kretinsky's drive to convert Royal Mail into a low-wage courier network. DM26 is rooted in the changes to the Universal Service Obligation (USO) from six-day mail deliveries to alternate-day deliveries for letters other than first class, alongside watered-down delivery targets for all mail as greenlighted by regulator Ofcom last July.

This was the course set by the CWU apparatus alongside the Labour government, which installed Kretinsky's EP Group as sole owners of Royal Mail in the £3.6 billion takeover as one of its first acts after coming to office in July 2024.

The real content of USO "reform" was spelt out during the May ballot. Walsh penned a 10-point tirade against postal workers intending to vote No. "There is no magic money tree" when it comes to secure employment, decent pay, or genuine

parity for new entrants, he declared. This was after acknowledging DM26 would deliver £250 million in "cost reductions" that would flow into EP Group's profits.

The agreement was rammed through against a reluctant membership, with only a 32 percent turnout and a Yes vote representing only one in five members.

This de facto vote of no confidence in the CWU bureaucracy must now become an explicit one, based on restoring power to the shop floor. A rank-and-file rebellion is required against the pro-company apparatus that polices opposition to Amazon-style working practices and the dismantling of the mail service.

The CWU's cover-up

By August 8, DM26 had been deployed at 320 delivery offices—just over a quarter of Royal Mail's roughly 1,200 units. Walsh's public notice was preceded by a Letter to Branches on August 26 based on feedback from CWU representatives. Its language anticipated Walsh's cover-up, stating that 119 units were "operating broadly" in line with the plan.

But even this air brushed account acknowledged that 114 units had "operational problems affecting clearance and performance", while a further 87 offices provided no response.

The CWU's celebration of 98.2 percent delivery point coverage is based on data from Royal Mail. The union bureaucracy is assisting the manipulation of figures to disguise the crisis. Delivery point coverage does not equal clearing the mail. An address can receive some mail or parcels while substantial volumes remain undelivered. A delivery office can therefore record high coverage while workers are unable to complete their duties.

A 98.2 percent coverage can therefore be headlined alongside at least 114 offices reporting operational problems, unachievable duties and inadequate staffing.

The DM26 rollout is exposing the CWU's claim that 6,000 part-time workers would have the opportunity to move up to full-time employment. As of August 8, only 310 had been permanently moved from part-time to full-time. The CWU has

claimed that 1,585 workers had moved to full-time hours, but 1,275 of these were temporary.

The CWU insists the promised 6,000 opportunities remain on track. Yet after more than a quarter of the network has deployed DM26, only around 5 percent of the promised permanent full-time moves have materialised.

The CWU has also promoted new attendance patterns with additional Saturdays off as a better “work-life balance” under DM26. This provides no compensation for the back breaking workloads. As one postie on the *Courier Checker* website explained:

“I’m walking 4000 more steps a day and for an extra hour and a half all for one extra day off a month. We’re getting 200 plus parcels a day and the algorithm for the due mail is making even the light side heavy. CWU proving they’re just pen pushers like those at the top of Royal Mail. Modern slavery is still a thing it seems.”

CWU officials stifle opposition to DM26

CWU officials are working to stifle the opposition these conditions are provoking among postal workers. The CWU Bristol and District Amalgamated Branch announced on September 8 it had halted the rollout of DM26 throughout its area after reporting that the model had failed in every office where it was introduced.

A letter signed by Branch Secretary Adam Mancey and two CWU Divisional reps notes: “Units have failed immediately after implementation or within days, with duties overloaded, workloads not matching the model, and timings that simply do not reflect reality.”

All that was proposed was a “pause” of a minimum of one week, as they respectfully stated, “We remain hopeful the business can demonstrate that they are willing to fix the issues or have a credible plan to fix them.”

CWU Divisional reps for South West South Wales, under direction from their branches, also announced a halt to the deployment of DM26 at seven delivery units. But this was framed in terms of greater collaboration with the company to agree “reasonable fixes” to ensure this does not “unnecessarily delay the DM26 timetable”.

Postal workers cannot allow their opposition to be trapped within the union-management Regional Steering Committees established to enforce DM26.

What is required are not temporary localised fixes but a national mobilisation against the wrecking operation and the machinery used to oversee staff shortages, facilitate job cuts and impose crippling workloads.

Build the rank-and-file fightback

Rank-and-file committees are needed in every workplace to link up opposition and break down barriers imposed from above by the union apparatus. Walsh let slip after the May ballot result how it was possible to get the pro-company agreement over the line, stating there was “no organised opposition, only on social media.”

This is the real role of the union apparatus: preventing “organised opposition”. Postal workers must turn this admission into a call to organise from below and take control of their struggle.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) called for a No vote in the May ballot against the deal, using it as a vote of no confidence in Walsh, CWU General Secretary Dave Ward and the Postal Executive to remove the unaccountable bureaucracy.

The task now is to build a movement outside the union-management structures, transferring power to the shop floor. The struggle must be under democratic control, with demands based on workers’ needs rather than corporate profitability.

This means uniting new entrants kept on near-minimum pay levels by the CWU through its agreement with Kretinsky with veteran postal workers, preventing thousands more from being driven out through exhaustion and injury via ill-health retirement.

The next steps at Royal Mail must be determined by the collective struggle of 130,000 postal workers. It is not their demands for a living wage, equalisation for new entrants and safe workloads which are unsustainable, but the profit-gouging by equity billionaires of EP Group.

We urge all postal workers looking for a way forward to contact the PWRFC, write in with your accounts and open the lines of communication for a unified fightback.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact