

Postal workers oppose DM26 restructuring at Royal Mail: "We cannot trust anything the CWU says"

By our correspondent
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Postal workers have spoken to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the impact of DM26, Royal Mail's new delivery model, rolled out across 90 percent of its 1,250 delivery units since May. Their testimony exposes a service in collapse and a workforce driven to exhaustion by restructuring authorised by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) bureaucracy.

Dave Ward, general secretary of the CWU, and his deputy, Martin Walsh, have promoted DM26, a £250 million structural cost-cutting agenda. It reduces four delivery duties to three, ramps up workloads, and lays the groundwork for cutting one in four jobs.

After months of denial, Walsh finally admitted on October 7 that the service was "collapsing." But rather than face the membership, CWU officials entered crisis talks on Tuesday with Royal Mail's owner, billionaire Daniel Kretinsky's EP Group, to salvage DM26 and forestall rank-and-file demands to scrap it.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) has outlined a strategy to fight back. Its statement, "Royal Mail workers must take charge: scrap DM26, end the two-tier workforce!", calls on the 130,000-strong workforce to take control of the struggle and transfer power from the bureaucracy to the shop floor. It demands the abolition of gig-economy conditions and the two-tier workforce and opposes the profit-driven gutting of the mail service by EP Group's private equity investors.

The Labour government under Keir Starmer rubber-stamped Kretinsky's takeover of Royal Mail in December 2024—a policy continued seamlessly under Prime Minister Andy Burnham. Earlier this month, responding to a petition by more than 10,000 people calling for Royal Mail's renationalisation, the government stated it had "no current plans" to do so, claiming that "privatisation was necessary" for Royal Mail's survival.

The following accounts from delivery workers in London, the Midlands and Glasgow expose the reality of a mail service being destroyed through collusion with the CWU postal executive, showing the need for rank-and-file pushback.

London

Daniel, from a delivery office in north London, said: "We are in the third week of DM26. This is a small office of around 28 workers. Delivery spans have increased by nearly 20 percent: from 3 hours and 45 minutes to 4 hours and 25 minutes. DM26 was always an excuse to increase workloads. Some delivery workers are working up to half an hour longer a day to try to complete their duties. You're not meant to have a life outside work; it feels as though the company owns your body and soul.

"The cutting of four duties into three was always about slashing one in four jobs. The so-called 'savings' won't be reinvested in the service or passed on to workers.

"The CWU has been bought by the company. The union rep is working with management to push all of this through and is not listening to the workers they are meant to represent. While some walks are manageable, when there is a backlog of letters, we've been instructed to leave first-class letters behind to concentrate on tracked items [letters and parcels weighing up to 20 kg sent with tracking updates and specific delivery times.]

"Kretinsky wants to move away from letters to focus on parcels. If they concentrate on parcels, profits can be made quicker. If Royal Mail currently makes 40 percent of its revenue from letters, they can replace that with parcels to generate even greater profits. It's easy money for the company.

"The CWU said Kretinsky was the right person to take Royal Mail forward. They came up with DM26, and now they're trying to deny it. We cannot trust anything the CWU says.

"We need to set our own agenda for workers and the public, because billionaires don't care about either. We need an alternative, but the union isn't listening. I know most of my colleagues share this view.

"I will share the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee statement in a WhatsApp group with hundreds of my Royal Mail colleagues from different offices."

Midlands

Steve, from a delivery office in the South Midlands, said: "DM26 has been going for a few weeks now. At a briefing

by management with the CWU rep present, we were told it would mean a shortening of the workday by one hour, but since it was rolled out, we have been working later by up to half an hour.

“It does not matter how the CWU try and spin it; this is the reduction of four duties into three. We have to pick up the additional work, and this can involve parts of duties way off our routes with extra time spent driving and less time to complete the deliveries.

“The mail backs up. A customer told me they had made an order on eBay because they knew they would only get their letters if they arrived with a parcel. On some days we struggle to deliver tracked and parcels, let alone first or second-class mail.

“The silence and absence of other union leaders and the wider hierarchy are telling as well. They should be everywhere challenging this, but what could they say without looking very silly or embarrassed? They would no doubt face heavy challenges from their none-too-happy members.

“The same holds true of the two-tier workforce. The so-called pathway to equalisation has seen the CWU accept as a ‘first step’ a pay increase which leaves us conveniently just above the minimum wage. If you are on the 37-hour week, you only get paid for 35 hours because of the continued non-payment of your break.

“There is a growing recognition that there will not be a levelling up on this basis. There is a strategy to drive senior postal workers out with their legacy terms so the company will not have to match them. That is why it should be a joint struggle for equalisation now. The CWU are responsible for introducing this on behalf of the company and keeping divide-and-rule policy.”

Glasgow

George, from a delivery office in Glasgow and a member of the PWRFC, said: “The fact that 400 workers are quitting delivery every month is a disaster, but it has not appeared out of the blue. It is the direct result of extreme workloads and the two-tier workforce that CWU officials have enforced against us.

“Our office was one of the first of the 35 delivery units roped into the Optimised Delivery Model (ODM) ‘pilots’ a year and a half ago. We went from a delivery office that could function to one that failed.

“Walsh now speaks of a ‘collapse of the service’, but he has been an attack dog for the cost-cutting agenda. When he came to address us to roll out ODM, he told us there was no ‘Plan B’.

“That was after CWU members at a workplace meeting were denied the opportunity to discuss a motion that a colleague and I had proposed. It addressed staff concerns over ODM and opposed the job-slashing programme that would destroy conditions and lead to fatigue and stress. The motion was blocked by the local rep, who was in lockstep with the full-time officials. My co-workers made their feelings known, and their concerns were soon confirmed.

“Delivery spans increased from 4 hours and 15 minutes to over five hours and, on some occasions, to six hours. Workloads

became so unbearable that 10 long-serving posties in an office of just under 50 were forced out through ill-health retirement. Nine of them had more than 30 years’ service each.

“When delivery staff reported that they did not have enough time to complete their duties, management told us to prioritise parcels and tracked items over first-class letters. If the mail was taken out for delivery, even when it came back undelivered, management said the office had cleared.

“Walsh’s claims that there were safeguards against ‘unfair workloads’ and ‘fatigue’ were a fraud. Instead, we were offered the option of wearing a heart monitor supplied by a private medical company. We were shown our individual results, which showed spikes in our heart rates during delivery, but no report was published and no preventative measures taken.

“Both my colleague and I, who had tried to put the motion against ODM, have recently taken ill-health retirement because of a serious decline in our health brought about by the job. In my colleague’s case, this followed a heart attack while on delivery. The unsafe working conditions that caused this have been swept under the carpet by CWU officials and management.

“The office has now come under DM26, and the situation is worse. Delivery staff have been instructed to come into work 15 minutes early on Mondays, which are busier, to do ‘lapsing’—taking additional work from a duty that has been mothballed—even before starting on their own delivery route.

“The lesson from our experience is that the CWU cannot be relied upon. The bureaucracy is not on our side. From the ODM ‘pilots’ to DM26, every stage of this attack has been co-authored by our own union officials, sitting with management to supervise job cuts, workload increases and the two-tier workforce. When we tried to raise our concerns democratically, the rep and the full-time officials shut us down—not the company.

“That is why the fight cannot be left in their hands. We need rank-and-file committees in every delivery office, controlled by workers themselves. These committees must demand proper staffing levels, safe workloads and full equalisation of pay and terms for new entrants.

“They must link up workers across offices to expose the real impact of DM26 and coordinate resistance. They must also be prepared to remove officials who have acted as Royal Mail’s enforcers.”



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