"The workloads are shattering": Doncaster postie speaks out against DM26 at Royal Mail

By our correspondent
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A postal worker at Royal Mail's Doncaster delivery office in South Yorkshire, England has spoken to the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) about the company's new delivery model DM26, to help lift the lid on its disastrous impact.

His name has been changed to "Ian" to protect him against victimisation. He is based at the Middle Bank office, with a workforce of around 350—one of the larger delivery units in the country.

Ian gave the interview following the distribution last Saturday of the statement by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC), "Royal Mail workers must take charge: Scrap DM26, end the two-tier workforce!" among delivery staff. The consensus on DM26 was clear from comments describing it as "unworkable" and "diabolical". Workers spoke of letters piling up and parcels being prioritised, as they struggled to complete their rounds.

The DM26 delivery model has been co-authored by Communication Workers Union (CWU) leaders Dave Ward and Martin Walsh in partnership with Royal Mail. It is based on their commitment to Royal Mail's billionaire owners, Daniel Kretinksy's EP Group, to implement £250 million in cost cutting.

While DM26 at other delivery offices involves reducing four delivery duties to three, in Doncaster six duties have been collapsed into five to achieve the same aim: eliminating thousands of jobs and intensifying workloads. DM26 has been operating at the Doncaster office for around 11 weeks.

WSWS: What has been the impact of DM26 on posties and the mail service?

Ian: Since it started, one in six delivery staff have been displaced from their duties. A postal worker with 30 years' service lost theirs. Management just said the duty needed to be split.

Seniority used to mean something. You put your time in, you've been on the gate, you've taken strike action and fought for things. You've had your arguments with management. That doesn't fit into the new model. They just want yes-men. They want to get rid of long-serving posties and replace them with new starters who are worried about losing their jobs if they speak up. But we should all be able to challenge management.

The workloads are shattering. They're causing backache and pain in people's shoulders, knees and legs. We've had young workers come in and, within six, 12 or 18 months, develop knee problems because of the weight we're carrying.

On the heavy duties its roughly 97 percent coverage of call points compared to 60 percent before DM26, which means you can add almost two hours on to the delivery spans which had been around five hours before.

I know people who are finishing at 7 p.m., to try to complete their duties. You're back in at 6 a.m. to do it all over again. It can't carry on like this.

They've introduced what you might call a nine-day fortnight, which I think works out at around 22 extra days off a year. Sounds fantastic, right? But that's Royal Mail and the union dangling a carrot, trying to sweeten everybody up. The workload between those days is too much.

We've got all these new starters coming into a delivery system that doesn't work. You can't get everything into the bags because the mail is too heavy.

We had a management briefing the other day and they said the amount of parcels coming through the door has reached the level we saw at Christmas 2023, and we're not even into the Christmas rush yet. We're scanning well over 200 parcels a day. I can't say for certain, but based on this increase in parcel traffic I think Royal Mail has taken on more work from other couriers for us to do the final mile.

As posties, you have to ask the question: what's the priority? We are told by management to start with parcels and see what mail we can get done at the end of the day. It's the worst-kept secret in Royal Mail.

When you're out on delivery, people are asking what has happened to their mail. It's got to the point where you advise them to put a letter inside a parcel to make sure it arrives within two days. It's so disheartening having to tell the public that. We fought to save the Universal Service.

It's funny how, in the two or three months leading up to DM26, there was no overtime at our delivery office. You were

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lucky to get half an hour. But as soon as it started, you could get as much overtime as you wanted. It's as though they know it's failing and are papering over the cracks.

We received our "incentive" payment for DM26. It was £3! Meanwhile, our wages are getting closer to the minimum wage with each passing year.

WSWS: Who do you hold responsible for DM26 and 400 delivery workers leaving since it was introduced?

Ian: I blame the CWU just as much as Royal Mail. We don't see Ward and Walsh going around the units. There have been all these secret meetings with management. I hold anyone responsible who sits across the table from management and agreed to bring in DM26.

They're cutting one in six jobs here. Just imagine how much profit Kretinsky is making overall from cutting duties. All they see are pound signs, but it's everyone else who pays the price: the public and us posties.

At a local level, the CWU workplace rep just walks around the shop floor and all you get is, "Just bring it back" if we can't complete our duties, or "What about your long weekend?" They're so relaxed about what we're being put through and the failure of the service.

It does go back to the agreement that sold out our strike. We didn't take 18 days of strike action to accept cuts to sick pay and a two-tier workforce. We're out in all weathers, in the heat and the cold. Why should you be penalised? You can't help getting sick.

During COVID, we stepped up to provide a service, but in our workplace, with 350 people, there were no protections against the virus spreading.

WSWS: What do you think about the PWRFC's call for a unified fight by new entrants and veteran postal workers for full equalisation and the scrapping of DM26?

Ian: New starters and long-serving members are doing the same job. We work side by side, so why shouldn't they get the same pay, paid meal breaks and delivery supplement? We all do the same work. There needs be a safe and fair workload for everyone.

You've got posties with 20 or 30 years' service, aged between 50 and 55. How are they supposed to run around with more than 200 parcels, plus mail, collections and special deliveries, and still take a break?

It makes me think: how much profit is enough? How much more can you strip out of Royal Mail? Since privatisation, it's all been for the benefits of the shareholders. None of it has been reinvested in the service, and now we've got Kretinsky in charge.

If we didn't come into work tomorrow, where would they be? There are 130,000 posties, we have the power. We can all see what a mess this is. Even an overtime ban would show that they cannot operate without us. We cannot afford to let things get any worse, we need to start engaging with each other.

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The PWRFC is urging postal workers to add to this testimony and that already gathered, to mobilise resistance from the shopfloor against the attempts to salvage DM26. Hundreds of the PWRFC statement calling on the rank and file to mobilise and demand the scrapping of DM26 have been distributed at delivery offices in Manchester, Bradford, Sheffield, Leicester and Mount Pleasant in London.

A young postal worker at Bradford South delivery office explained "It's just a ridiculous amount of parcels, a ridiculous amount of first class to do, and just a very heavy workload and longer days. I work loads of overtime. I've seen a lot of people leave. Even newcomers leaving after a couple of days."

At Pond Street delivery office in Sheffield a senior postal worker said, "Whenever we tell management the work is too much, they just say its part of the agreement with the union" .This was echoed by a colleague at Cheetham Hill in Manchester: "The union does not defend anything."

The CWU joint statement with management postponing further roll-out of DM26 until January is a damage-limitation exercise. DM26 is already deployed in all but around 100 of the Royal Mail's 1,280 delivery units. Even the "fixes" now being applied to failing offices amount to more pressure on workers—staff redeployed as a flexible workforce outside their own units, and overtime expanded. This is as Royal Mail ramps up parcel workloads through the Christmas peak in the profit driven gutting of the mail service.

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