

CWU's Martin Walsh wins endorsement at the TUC after Royal Mail betrayal

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The speech delivered by Communication Workers Union (CWU) deputy general secretary Martin Walsh at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) annual conference over the dire situation facing Royal Mail workers was entirely two-faced and underlined the cynical nature of the yearly coming-together of the union bureaucracy.

Walsh managed to cram in as much deceit and hypocrisy as was possible in his four-minute remarks on Monday, promoting the fraud that the CWU is engaged in a fight at Royal Mail to defend the postal service backed by “the trade union movement”.

No such mobilisation is taking place. The assembled bureaucrats went along with the play-acting, applauding at the required moments. They have a vested interest in covering each other's backs following the sellout agreements rammed through to demobilise the strike wave of 2022-3.

Walsh for his part is unable to make a public appearance before the CWU members he claims to represent without being slammed over the pro-company agreement enforced in July 2023 to end the year-long national dispute based on the devastation of jobs and a sweeping overturn of terms and conditions.

The fake solidarity on show for postal workers was in aid of Motion 22, which Walsh presented to the conference on behalf of the CWU under the heading, “Take over of Royal Mail”. This consisted of nothing more than empty phrases about “securing comprehensive protections” for the workforce regarding compulsory redundancies, franchising and outsourcing, and the break-up of the company by Daniel Kretinsky and his private equity firm EP Group.

Walsh and CWU general secretary Dave Ward have been engaged in closed-door talks with EP Group since June which they have described as “constructive”. The Labour government has signalled in-principle support for the buy-out. Any “undertakings” secured from the company are said purely to grease the wheels of the take-over and demobilise opposition among postal workers to a further brutal restructuring exercise.

Proving that not a word which passes his lips should be trusted, Walsh claimed that the among the assurances sought is a promise of “no two-tier workforce”. But this is precisely what has been implemented based on the pro-company agreement with Royal Mail last year!

The CWU Postal Executive unanimously endorsed a framework for new entrants to be hired on inferior pay and terms, based upon total work flexibility and mandatory Sunday working. The bid to entrench this has been based on driving out thousands of legacy workers whose own conditions were ripped up and who could no longer face the unmanageable workloads. This has all been carried out within the collective bargaining machinery, with the union apparatus sitting on the anger of postal workers now that its status as a junior corporate partner has been secured.

Walsh's falsification went unchallenged. It is doubly important to bury the truth of how the fight of over 100,000 Royal Mail workers was sabotaged since the Labour government is committed to using the union bureaucracy to suppress the class struggle and push through restructurings across the whole economy. Its commitment to expand sectoral bargaining beginning in the social care sector and to providing unions access to unorganised workplaces, is aimed at securing control over workers.

Ward has claimed credit for this policy of Labour's so-called New Deal for Working People, proving that its purpose is to replicate the services rendered by the CWU with its rotten deal with Royal Mail. In the same vein, the motion's call for “new ownership and government models” at Royal Mail and in other industries is about securing union leaders a seat at the table with executives and shareholders, serving as reliable enforcers of the corporate bottom line against the workforce—in keeping with Starmer's establishment of an Industrial Strategy Council.

The reference in the motion to a postal service “not solely focussed on shareholder pay outs” is another fraud. Walsh has demanded that workers sacrifice their terms and conditions to stave off company administration. This was after the Royal Mail (and parent company IDS) paid out

around £600 million to shareholders before announcing its brutal restructuring agenda. There has been no attempt to square the assertion that the company was a basket case with the fact it is eyed as a prized asset by Kretinsky.

Although Walsh paid lip service to the stricken postal service, the scorched-earth policy pursued by Royal Mail was generally referred to in the most muted fashion. He referred to the Ofcom regulator's "working hand in hand with the employer to turn a blind eye to Quality of Service across the UK," but this serves just as well as a description of the role performed by the CWU union bureaucracy.

The CWU has not opposed Ofcom, it engaged with its review published in January to consider a range of options to dismantle the Universal Service Obligation (USO), offering its own cost cutting proposals of a reduction to five days with the only proviso of a seven-day parcel service! Ward and Walsh have even offered to trial Royal Mail's own proposal to slash the mail service to alternate weekdays and no Saturday delivery other than for First Class items, threatening thousands of jobs. They have fully adopted the mantra that the USO is a financial burden.

As for turning a blind eye on the Quality of Service, the CWU produced a joint statement with Royal Mail back in January which agreed to a default position of mail delivery on alternate days—before Ofcom has agreed Royal Mail's proposals.

Royal Mail announced that for the first quarter of 2024 it had only reached 79.1 percent of its Quality of Service target for First Class letters, against the statutory requirement of 93 percent. And yet in October deliver the company announced a further hike in the price of First Class stamps October to £1.65, almost doubling the price from March 2022.

While Walsh described the Royal Mail board as "out of control", the CWU has fully colluded in what amounts to a wrecking operation carried out as an essential part of the pro-company 2023 agreement to transform Royal Mail into to a 24/7 parcel delivery service fit to compete with Amazon and other rivals.

Walsh concluded his remarks to applause as he tried to defend one of the biggest lies of all, that the CWU secured justice for those victimised by management in relation to the 2022-3 national dispute at Royal Mail: "During our last dispute Royal Mail sacked around 200 reps on trumped up charges. I ask you to show your appreciation and solidarity to CWU reps and members across the UK which saw hundreds of those returning in the biggest reversal of conduct code decisions in UK trade union history."

This is a travesty of the truth. The total number of sacked and suspended CWU reps and members was reported as 400; the number cited by Walsh refers to the mere half of these cases put through the grinder of the Lord Falconer review, in

a process organised via ACAS by the CWU and Royal Mail.

The trumped-up charges were never simply "reversed". A precondition for returning to work for those targeted was to accept a reduced charge remaining on their record and to forfeit the right to any Employment Tribunal to clear their name. This allowed Royal Mail to walk away scot-free from largest industrial frame-up since the 1984-5 Miners Strike. CWU leaders refused members' demand that the dispute not be ended before all the victimised were reinstated. Deferring their cases to the Falconer stitch up meant they had no contact with the workplace to mobilise a rejection of the rotten deal last July.

For all the references to Royal Mail's "union-busting" by Walsh, the truth is its sweatshop charter and victimisation of the most militant sections of postal workers could only be implemented with the assistance of the CWU acting to suppress the collective will of the membership. This is the real face of corporatism which the Postal Workers Rank-and-Committee (PWRFC) was formed to fight.

The PWRFC is now seeking to galvanise the opposition to the EP Group take-over supported by the CWU and Labour government, as part of a global fightback against the assault on jobs and terms and conditions conducted by the national carriers and giant logistics companies around the world.

Royal Mail workers can register here for the upcoming online Zoom meeting of the Postal Workers Rank-and-Committee on Sunday September 15 at 7 pm. You can hear reports from postal workers across Royal Mail and Parcelforce and send a delegation from your mail centre or delivery office to join the discussion.



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