

Postal workers oppose CWU-Labour government collusion with Kretinsky Royal Mail takeover

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27 November 2024

The *World Socialist Web Site* has received emails from postal workers across Royal Mail Group in response to the article, “Communication Workers Union embraces Kretinsky’s takeover of Royal Mail.”

CWU leaders Dave Ward and Martin Walsh have for months spun the private talks they have held with billionaire Daniel Kretinsky, his private equity firm EP Group, and the Labour government as the means to scrutinise and help shape the £3.5 billion buy-out.

However, last Wednesday a statement was issued by Ward and Walsh declaring that the takeover was a done deal even before the bid has been officially cleared by the Labour government through its review under the National Security Investment Act. Their inside knowledge underscores how the CWU bureaucracy has been taken into the strictest confidence of EP Group and the Starmer government and is relied on to block any opposition by Royal Mail workers whose jobs and conditions face destruction by asset strippers and equity investors.

After stringing postal workers along, the CWU leaders are now demanding they get behind their “engagement policy”. Ward packaged the takeover as a “fresh start” at the CWU Live event held last Thursday.

The 8-point framework agreement touted by the CWU as a bargaining position with EP Group is a threadbare promissory note baring the hallmarks of being vetted by Kretinsky in the private talks. The “restoration” of Quality of Service makes no reference to the Universal Service Obligation (USO) which has been gutted through the collusion of the CWU with Royal Mail to prioritise more profitable parcels over letters. The other points are promises of jam tomorrow: an above inflation pay increase, a better work-life

balance and reducing the gap between pay and conditions of the two-tier workforce.

The WSWWS article challenged the notion that Ward and Walsh had any right to speak about defending jobs, terms and conditions having sacrificed these on the altar of profit in their sellout agreement last July. The bonfire of terms and conditions and increased automation to destroy thousands of jobs have been the building blocks for Kretinsky’s takeover. With his 27.5 percent majority stake of Royal Mail and parent company International Distribution Services, the corporate oligarch has already benefited from the services of the CWU bureaucracy.

Comments from postal workers show the pent-up opposition and potential to unite Royal Mail workers, old and new, against the exploitative working conditions the CWU bureaucracy has enforced in partnership with Royal Mail and which would be intensified under EP Group ownership.

A long service postal worker of more than three decades said in response to Ward’s comments about moving on from the last years dispute, “It’s ok for Dave Ward to give advice, where has he been after accepting the last bad deal?”

Another longstanding Royal Mail worker at its Parcelforce division in Scotland said that workers at his depot had no confidence in Ward and any of the national and local union officials:

“The majority of people I speak to have no faith in the CWU whether its local or national and I have seen some eye-opening stuff. There is a huge degree of animosity. We were sold down the river after 18 days at the gate [on strike], it’s no surprise we are getting turned over. You can’t even distinguish between the

useless union reps and the obnoxious managers.”

A new Royal Mail delivery worker in the Midlands was unimpressed by Walsh’s promises to negotiate “equalisation of terms and conditions of new entrants”, after the CWU agreed the two-tier workforce in the first place. He reported how the shifts of new starters could be changed from one day to the next without notice:

“The conditions are worse than any zero-hour contract I’ve been on before. I completely agree with the article. If I had one last breath, I’d shout join a union! But I really don’t see the point in paying money to the CWU. They just seem to be like how HR departments have become, administrators of bad practice. I’m glad to see with the rank-and-file committee there is some organised resistance.”

Another postie in Hampshire wrote: “Conditions are disgraceful, managers are all bullies, overpaid and can’t do their jobs! This is Royal Mail not Amazon. It’s the exploitation of hard workers.”

The slashing of what Royal Mail described as “legacy” benefits was central to the Business, Recovery and Transformation Plan co-authored between Royal Mail executives and the CWU. This took Amazon as the benchmark, notorious for gig economy conditions. No amount of propaganda from the CWU Postal Executive will convince Royal Mail workers that their pro-company agreement “mitigated” the worst attacks demanded by the company. The only response the union bureaucracy has is to suppress the voices of opposition and collude with the company in scapegoating postal workers for being unable to complete unmanageable workloads. The Postal Workers Rank and File Committee (PWRFC) has exposed this in the video interview with victimised delivery worker Des Beach, which has attracted widespread interest and solidarity.

The understaffing at delivery offices was another major source of grievance as one postie wrote, “Shetland Royal Mail is woefully understaffed due to better pay and conditions easily available elsewhere on the Islands.”

The local CWU has reported that, as of June this year, 15 of the 48 posts at Royal Mail in Shetland were vacant and the attrition rate of 35 percent year on year meant that more than a third of the local workforce is leaving employment within a year.

The starting rate of £12.54 per hour is not just a

problem in the Shetlands, it is only £1.10 more than the National Living Wage (minimum wage for those 21 years and over). In addition, new entrants are not paid for their 40-minute meal break and they do not receive the “functional supplement” worth up to £30 a week. This was all part of the pro-company deal backed by the CWU.

The problem of understaffing is set to intensify, with Royal Mail’s proposals to reduce mail delivery to every other weekday for letters other than First Class. Walsh stated at the CWU Live event last Thursday that the modelling for the planned reduction of mail delivery green lighted for implementation next year by the regulator Ofcom could mean up to 7,000 job losses. He justified this on the pretext that the company had said “only” 1,000 would be redundancies and 6,000 would be through “natural wastage” and, in comments showing how the CWU was singing from the same hymn sheet as Royal Mail added, “Clearly the USO changes is designed to make money.”

The PWRFC been warning since May that a Labour government would rubber stamp the Kretinsky takeover and the CWU postal executive would ensure a smooth transition.

There is major disaffection with the CWU bureaucracy among postal workers, but this must take an organised form in the workplace and be united across the Royal Mail network.

The slavish defence of profits by the CWU’s pro-company apparatus under Royal Mail-IDS or EP Group must be answered by postal workers drawing up their own non-negotiable demands in defence of jobs, terms and conditions and a public mail service.

We encourage all Royal Mail workers who see the urgency of such an independent strategy to contact the PWRFC.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact