

Workers kept in dark at Royal Mail USO pilot sites: “We ask questions... they don’t tell us anything”

Our reporters
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One thing is clear from the “USO reform” pilots being rolled out by Royal Mail at 37 delivery offices across the UK: they are being imposed behind workers’ backs in a joint enterprise by the Communication Workers Union, Daniel Kretinsky’s EP Group and the Labour government.

The Universal Service Obligation (USO) is the statutory requirement for Royal Mail to deliver letters to every address in the UK, six days a week, at a uniform price, and parcels five days a week.

The Postal Workers Rank and File Committee (PWRFC) statement “Oppose the USO pilots imposed by CWU and Royal Mail!” has exposed the brutal corporate agenda behind the pilot scheme. It is being distributed at pilot sites in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

World Socialist Web Site reporting teams have visited offices at Cardiff, Darlington, Sheffield, Lytham St Anne’s and Craigavon in recent days. This follows reports from offices in London and Hull, and Ballymena, Preston, Nottingham and Coventry.

At **Cardiff Delivery Office and Mail Centre** around 60 copies of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee statement were distributed last Tuesday afternoon.

Especially among newer delivery staff, most knew nothing about the USO pilots. Others didn’t realise their own office was included in the pilot scheme. As of last Tuesday, CWU officials had called no meetings to inform their members.

One postie said he hadn’t received a pay raise for two years and despite being promised a raise to £13.50 an hour, he is still on £12.50, “This delivery office is a complete shambles. I don’t pay the union fees because

they’re useless, that £5 is better used on a coffee.”

He was disgusted by management bullying, citing managers’ refusal to approve colleagues’ time off due to stress. Another said new starters are dealt the worst jobs, with poorer terms and conditions.

Speaking about planned job cuts through USO reform, a worker said, “This has been coming for a long time, ever since the privatisation of Royal Mail”. He asked, “Have we even got a union?”

A senior postie described his colleagues’ anger over the CWU’s collusion with the company. Older workers were being pushed towards voluntary redundancies, while knowing the company won’t rehire, “90 percent are ready to leave because they’ve had enough.”

New machines had been installed at Cardiff Mail Centre costing millions, but these had not made their jobs any easier, “It has been the British distribution service for hundreds of years and now it’s being destroyed and turned into Amazon, a company that’s been around for only 30 years. The government allowed the cherry-picking of parts of Royal Mail to privatise it.”

At **Sheffield Pond Street Delivery Office** workers voiced their anger on Saturday over the USO pilots, “I think it’s disgusting. It’s a jobs cull and we shouldn’t have anything to do with it.”

Another said, “I know this is going to be more job losses. Pardon my French but they are pissing on us from a great height. They do whatever they want here. There is no USO. It’s illegal for them to block it, but they’re doing it anyway. They keep telling me to leave letters and take parcels out all the time. It’s supposed to be Royal Mail. It’s in the title. We’re supposed to be delivering letters, but they’re telling us not to.”

Another worker denounced the CWU's betrayal of the 2022-23 strike, saying workers' fight had been futile because "the company has done everything they want". A WSWS reporter said the PWRFC was fighting for a rank-and-file rebellion to drive out the CWU bureaucracy. The worker replied, "I will be there."

A worker familiar with the USO pilots said he thought they were going to introduce the trials in the summer, and agreed its aim is mass job destruction. He warned, "They're already trying sweeteners here and trying to say that we can have more Saturdays off." But this would mean longer weekday hours and increased workload.

At **Scunthorpe Delivery Office in Lincolnshire**, workers said they were being kept in the dark about the USO pilot there by both union and management, "We ask questions... they don't tell us anything".

A new starter said he was too scared to drink fluids on his round because there were no toilet facilities. After WSWS reporters explained how the destruction of the USO would worsen wages, terms and conditions and further destroy a vital public service, he firmly shook their hands.

WSWS reporters rejected the fatalism promoted by the CWU that "change is inevitable" and "there's nothing we can do about it", emphasising that the destruction of the USO could and must be opposed. Improvements in technology should be used to improve working conditions and the mail service, not line the pockets of asset-strippers.

At **Craigavon Delivery Office in Northern Ireland** workers stopped their vans to take leaflets. There are no union reps at Craigavon or Lurgan. They were victimised during the strike and hung out to dry by the CWU executive. One worker said, "We have been sold down the river by the union. The place is a shambles in there. No one knows what's going on, it's a disgrace." The mood among most workers who took the leaflet was militant with a postie saying they would pin it on the noticeboard.

At **Lytham St Annes**, a small delivery office in **Lancashire** with around 40 workers, 30 leaflets were circulated along with copies of a model resolution. It was clear the pilot is being introduced behind workers' backs. "Nobody knows anything, it's all up in the air

anyway," a delivery worker said.

One postie pulled out his medication, "I'm now taking medication for my feet because I can't continue at this pace anymore." Another worker took a bunch of leaflets inside.

At **Darlington Delivery Office in County Durham** there was confusion last Thursday over the pilot start date there, some saying March, others April, with workers complaining that the union tells them nothing.

There was a friendly response to the model resolution with around 80 copies taken. Generally, workers had a low opinion of the CWU and were not surprised to hear of their collaboration with management over the USO pilots, "The union are rubbish. They back down every time". Another responded to the resolution, "It's about time someone took a stand".

A distribution worker said he had heard "through the grapevine" that the distribution depot at Darlington would close and be transferred to Newcastle. He said the decision had reportedly been made at a joint union-management meeting in Newcastle yesterday. He was disgusted about this.

One worker said, "It's just like when they ended the strike in 2023. They said we're between a rock and a hard place. If we don't accept, it's going to bankrupt the company. If we do, then we suffer deteriorating work conditions".

WSWS reporters said the union's threats about bankruptcy were political blackmail aimed at ramming through company policy. If billionaires like Daniel Kretinsky won't protect the workforce and guarantee the mail service, they should be expropriated and Royal Mail placed under public ownership.

An angry driver slammed the sickness policy, "Three strikes and you are out." Even stress after a family bereavement were not taken into account and the CWU was doing nothing to defend workers against the callous and punitive approach by management.



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