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Postal workers' strike (Britain): Solidarity for as long as it takes

Friday 2 September 2022 (Date first published: 27 August 2022).

Terry Conway reports on the biggest strike of the summer so far, as over 115,000 CWU members take action over the pitiful wage increase made by their employer Royal Mail.

Friday 26 July saw the biggest strike yet of this summer of struggle when over 115,000 postal workers took action to demand a pay rise that covers the current cost of living crisis. Further strikes will take place on Wednesday 31 August, Thursday 8 September and Friday 9 September.

This follows the CWU's recent ballot for strike action by postal workers, which saw members vote by 97.6% on a 77% turnout to take action. The union points out that this was the biggest mandate for strike action reached since the implementation of the 2016 Trade Union Act. It's the first national strike on the post for twelve years in a sector where is a tradition of local unofficial action.

Rather than negotiate with the union, the management of Royal Mail Group decided to impose a 2% pay rise on its employees through executive action, those same employees who were given key worker status at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even worse, management is claiming – and too much of the right wing media are repeating – that they have offered 5.5 per cent. On the one hand, even if it were true it wouldn't meet the real costs workers are facing with inflation.

On the other hand, it's a blatant lie. It's true that they have made an offer of 1.5 per cent but that is strictly conditional on postal workers agreeing to changes which would rip up their terms and conditions. This is reminiscent of what is happening in other industries – notably transport – bosses are raking in huge profits for themselves and shareholders while trying to force even the most organised sections of the working class to work in even more exploitative conditions. This is the context in which the CWU ran a second ballot to enter into a formal dispute with management over terms and conditions. Members voted by 98.7% on a 72.2% turnout.

As CWU General Secretary Dave Ward said

“When Royal Mail bosses are raking in £758 million in profit and shareholders pocketing in excess of £400 million, our members won't accept pleas of poverty from the company. Postal workers won't meekly accept their living standards being hammered by greedy business leaders who are completely out of touch with modern Britain. They are sick of corporate failure getting rewarded again and again.”

The fact that the other major section of the union in telecoms is engaged in a very similar battle against an imposed pay award – this time a flat rate of £1500 which again represents a real terms

pay cut -sees the union campaigning together - and indeed both sections will be out together on the postal worker's next strike day of August 31. And a smaller group of the union's members, working for Post Office counters, face even more intransigent management who imposed a pay freeze for 2021-22 and a completely inadequate offer of 3% plus a one-off payment of £500 for 2022/23. They were on strike on Friday as they have been several times already this summer.

Like many other workers battling this summer for adequate pay settlements to beat inflation CWU members and officials on the post seem prepared for a long fight. As well as hundreds of local picket lines at delivery offices across the country from early morning, the London division of the CWU called a midday rally outside Mount Pleasant sorting office near Kings Cross.

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Hundreds of CWU members from across London joined significant contingents from the RMT and UCU and a number of other trade unions and supporters from the left to listen to a series of speakers. Mark Dolan from London CWU introduced London divisional rep Mark Palfrey and Barry Jennings from Anglia CWU, Jo Grady from UCU, Mick Lynch from RMT and CWU's General Secretary and former postal worker Dave Ward.



Barry Jennings from Anglia CWU

Predictably, it was the latter two speeches that were the most significant, focusing as they did on the wider political context. The RMT General Secretary, as Dolan said, scarcely needed introduction given both the inspiration the unions strikes have given to many across the summer, but just as importantly Lynch's own ability to explain their case calmly and clearly in the face of a [hostile media](#). At last there was a voice that understood the real fear and anger that millions are feeling as we are faced with galloping inflation hitting both heating and eating.



Mick Lynch of the RMT

At the Mount, Lynch's focus was to congratulate those unions in the current dispute to defend living standards in the face of this offensive – naming not only CWU, UCU and RMT, all on the platform, but also Unite and GMB. He centred on the fact that so many had discovered – or rediscovered – the power of solidarity on picket lines up and down the country over recent months. He talked about the need to shift the balance of power in favour of workers and argued that in order to do this we need more from all unions; for the coordination of this struggle. Over the weekend it became clear that this question of coordination will be a topic of debate at the forthcoming TUC Congress. This call which was met by overwhelming applause from participants who know there are unlikely to be many quick victories here.

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Ward, as the final speaker, took the discussion further. Like other CWU speakers, he called out Royal Mail Chief executive Simon Thompson for his and the rest of the board's myth-making as well as talking about the role postal workers played during the pandemic and how they and other key workers were now being slapped in the face.



CWU's General Secretary and former postal worker Dave Ward

But as well as organising strong industrial action across all the industries the CWU organises in, the union has been central to launching the [Enough is Enough](#) campaign. Following its very successful launch in London, the campaign has [major events](#) planned in Manchester and Liverpool in the next week. As well as [demanding](#) real pay rises, the campaign is also fighting around slashing energy prices, ending food poverty and decent housing for all – that are key ways working class living standards are currently being massively undercut – and demanding serious taxation of the rich to pay for it. And as well as the CWU it involves community organisations such as [Acorn](#) (which describes itself as a mass membership organisation and network of low-income people organising for a fairer deal for our communities), [Fans supporting foodbanks](#), [the right to food campaign](#), the magazine [Tribune](#), together with left Labour MPs [Zara Sultana](#) and [Ian Byrne](#).

Ward concluded his speech by telling the crowd that following these rallies the campaign will be issuing a call for action. On the day when the energy price cap, already at unbearable levels was raised by a further 80 per cent from October 1 from £1,971 to £3,549 for the average household on a typical default tariff, such a promise of positive ways to focus anger and despair over the crisis was welcome and hopefully will link up with the energy being generated in many local initiatives to bring people together as well as the [Don't pay campaign](#) and [Cost of living Action](#). That was certainly the mood of the rally as many went on to dance to the sound system (and I ducked out as the flares being set off make it impossible for me to breathe properly).

Terry Conway

P.S.

- Anti*Capitalist Resistance. 27 Aug 2022:
<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/the-crisis-is-only-just-beginning/>