

UK postal worker: “Royal Mail are getting what they want and the Communication Workers Union is allowing it—the union really is useless”

5 May 2020

The following letter was sent by a postal worker to the Socialist Equality Party in the UK. It is in response to the Communication Workers Union claiming to have forced Royal Mail Group (RMG) to back down from plans to end permanently Saturday deliveries, which would cost 20,000 jobs.

Last Wednesday RMG announced plans to scrap Saturday letter deliveries from May 2. In less than 48 hours, having threatened strike action, the CWU announced its retreat via a video conference featuring General Secretary Dave Ward and his deputy, Terry Pullinger. The CWU claimed that the union had “secured correspondence ... that this is now definitely only a temporary change” and there “will be no job losses.”

When we heard Royal Mail had announced it had suspended Saturday letter deliveries, there was lots of outrage. The feeling was that the CWU would finally have to call a strike as we had a successful ballot already and we haven't been happy with how things have been for a long time anyway.

The CWU have always made out that Saturday deliveries is a red line that can't be crossed. But once again, nothing. The CWU have refused to take action. Royal Mail are getting what they want and the CWU is allowing it. The union really is useless. There is still anger and no one I talk to has any confidence now in the CWU.

The CWU have said they believe Royal Mail is telling the truth about dropping the threat to end Saturday deliveries. But we don't. We have known from day one that Royal Mail have done nothing to help any of us. They have been trying to keep business

as normal because all they want is profit. They really don't care about us.

We have watched over the years how our conditions and jobs have been attacked and there is a lot of worry about our futures in Royal Mail. I have a family to support and a house to pay for. I worry a lot that I won't be able to do so further down the line. And it's not like there's anywhere else I can go to, especially not one where I would get an income I can live on.

Now Royal Mail are all of a sudden cancelling Saturday letter deliveries saying it is to help us, after they have refused to take any suggestions from workers of ways to honestly reduce the pressure on us—like stopping the door to doors [unaddressed mail].

Royal Mail and Rico Back are blatantly using COVID-19 to get rid of Saturday deliveries, to reduce the service to 5 days from 6 days as they have been wanting to do for a while now. And this is only going to put more pressure on us for the 5 remaining days. It is disgusting that Rico is using COVID-19 to get what he wants. We are all aware of what he did to workers at GLS (General Logistics Systems) in Germany. We are now having to change our duty shifts to accommodate Royal Mail's demands. And we know that when Saturday deliveries are dropped permanently there will be lots of jobs gone.

There is growing anger because of everything we have had to put up with and we know it's going to get worse and we don't get any support from Royal Mail or the union. And now with the lockdown, we're still at work getting angry with none of the normal outlets to relax.

A lot of guys at the office are starting to think. I work

on the machines that sort letters and we're worried our specific jobs will be quick to go, particularly because those duties have extra allowances because of the demands of the work and the shift times. Everything is being focused on packets, which is where the profit is. Even though letter deliveries are gone for Saturdays, packets are still being done. So Royal Mail are restructuring everything. And it is a complete shambles, as delivery staff are being made to sort when they don't know what they are doing.

I am having to sort packets where they're cutting back on the letter deliveries and I don't know what I'm doing. I have also heard that managers of different offices are sending work back and forth with each refusing to do it, so some places there's not much work to do and at others too much to do. We are all getting under one another's feet.

Strangely enough there are lots of casuals in, some who are just there with nothing really to do and we are wondering why—especially as it is taking work away from permanent staff. They have also stopped any of us doing overtime in the office. We think this is because there will be a strike at some point in whatever way it comes, and Royal Mail have been preparing for this. The CWU have given them enough time to do so. Although we know things are not right, we are all worried about what to do and for how long we can keep going on strike because a lot of us don't get enough income to save much because we can't get overtime. There are a few guys told me they can't afford to strike for more than one or two days. And this is also because we know the CWU won't support or help us.

A lot of us know that any changes that have taken place to help us workers isn't from Royal Mail or the CWU. It is because guys in other offices have decided themselves to walk out, to force changes especially over health and safety concerns. Everyone is asking where is the union in all this? The union says it opposes this and this needs to be done, but it hasn't organised anything.

After 5 weeks we finally have enough of the blue surgical gloves and sanitiser, for example. But it's taken 5 weeks to get there, and mostly because of pressure by workers forcing things themselves. Quite a few guys had to supply their own equipment to begin with. Some are even now still providing their own gloves that are more durable because the blue gloves

are useless for deliveries and just keep breaking.

I saw the other day a company had dropped off boxes of masks for us. These were quickly packed away by managers. We have asked where they have gone and the managers are saying they don't know. So the masks have suddenly disappeared. The only people wearing masks are those who got their own.

On the sorting areas there are markings to keep us 2 metres apart, but when you go to the delivery frames that are closely packed and down tiny aisles we are still at the same distance as normal there—which is to say really close to one another. Nothing has been changed there, which makes any other changes pointless. On our top floor we are told we have to go on a one-way system to avoid contact, but on the floor where most people are it's still the same as normal.

We had two confirmed cases of COVID-19 recently in my office. One got a test after a relative in their household got sick. The test came back positive. But after getting tested he still had to come into the office to prove to managers that the test was positive. Only then was he told to go home and self-isolate.

After this a team was brought in to fumigate the area where they had been likely working. But nothing had been stopped until it was fumigated. They came in at night, but it was done while the night shift was still working on the machines in the same open space, so the guys were likely breathing in the spray. I asked them why they didn't refuse but they didn't feel sure doing so and were worried they would get in trouble. But that's because they haven't got any confidence the union will support them. It's just really not good for us. I think the CWU isn't going to do anything.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>