

# CWU BALLOT: VOTE 'YES' - AND PREPARE TO FIGHT

*What we do now will determine whether we have jobs and a postal service in the future. We need a big yes vote to launch the fight of our lives.*

**T**he CWU strike ballot has landed, and Royal Mail bosses are blitzing us with propaganda about how they want to reach agreement with the union. Their latest mailing – coming on top of a slew of slick social media videos, Colleague updates and Courier – has taken the spin to new laughable heights: “We value our relationship with the CWU” and want to reach an agreement, and how they “understand our colleagues’ loyalty to the CWU, and respect it.”

Some highly paid consultant has been hired to write all this and confuse people, but most posties will know this propaganda doesn't contain a shred of truth.

## No Respect

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If they respect us as CWU members, why was their response to an historic 97% vote in favour of strike action – a massive rejection of their plans – to go to court and get it blocked last November? They have told CWU negotiators that it doesn't matter what the result is this time, they will find a reason to go to the courts to seek an injunction regardless, to try to stop us exercising our democratic right to withdraw our labour. So much for respect.

If they value their relationship to our union, why did they hire union-busting CEO Rico Back in 2018, and rip up the Four Pillars Agreement in 2019 – the CWU didn't even hear about their alternative Journey 2024 five year plan until it was announced in the media last

May!

Then when the long-promised negotiations came in January this year, the first thing Royal Mail managers did was to announce executive action in scores of offices and that they would be proceeding with their plan, with or without the union. And they say they want an agreement...

Now the pressure of the ballot has forced them to make a pay offer. Typically, this was leaked in a video on a Friday night after “forgetting” to mention it in a meeting with the union! Few posties will be fooled by this desperate tactic, and even fewer after they read the small print: first we have to sign up to their plans, agree a bonfire of many of the agreements that protect us, achieve massive cuts and jobs losses – and we might get a below-inflation pay rise.

Rico & Co. don't want an agreement, they aim to impose their plans, and bust our union so they can sweep away the agreements that protect our terms and conditions, as well as tens of thousands of jobs.

***That's why we need a massive yes vote, as the start of a determined battle to force them to retreat from their plans.***

And that's why rank and file reps and activists in the delivery offices, mail centres, RDCs and Parcelforce depots are working all out to get a massive yes vote once again, with the gate meeting on Thursday 5 March as a start.

It's important to do that - we can't be complacent and need to make sure people don't take a yes vote for granted,

and that we achieve the 50% voting threshold that the Tory anti-union laws require. Royal Mail is calculating that by spending hundreds of thousands of pounds on propaganda it will make a few waver.

But even with a 100% yes vote, there is almost zero chance that Rico's hatchet men will negotiate - it will take determined strike action to force them to drop these plans.

Looking ahead, mass meetings of postal workers can be organised during the ballot period, to discuss what form any action should take, how to build the strongest picket lines possible, how to buddy up strong offices with those less organised, and what the response should be in case another injunction succeeds. These meetings should elect strike committees of the best activists and reps from the offices to carry forward the action.

The CWU has run a strong campaign that has exposed Royal Mail bosses, fired up the members and made an irrefutable case for why this is “the fight of our lives”, and why we need to stand up and fight. But now the dynamo of the dispute needs to shift downwards to the grassroots of the union. We need to get organised from below, at the shopfloor and the local level, to keep the campaign solid and take any action necessary to win. It will be the rank and file who drive this strike to victory.

What we do now will determine whether we have jobs and a postal service in the future – vote yes and prepare for the fight of our lives.

# ON A 'JOURNEY' TO DOWNSIZE OUR TERMS AND CONDITIONS

*Rico Back pioneered gig-economy working conditions. If Royal Mail bosses break the union, their promises will be worthless - but we can win.*

The ink was barely dry on the Four Pillars agreement when Rico Back was hired from Royal Mail's European arm GLS as CEO back in June 2018. This signalled the end of Royal Mail's support for the agreement, barely three months in. The Four Pillars was forced out of them by the threat of massive strike action, but Royal Mail bosses never accepted it, and immediately began to organise against it.

Back's appointment signals a sea change in Royal Mail's history, the chickens of the 2013 privatisation finally coming home to roost. GLS was a European network of relatively small parcel operations run on what we would now call the gig economy - the use of fake self-employment contracts, outsourcing to smaller, equally dodgy companies for further flexibility, low pay, long hours, no benefits, no union. The CWU has translated a documentary that exposes this "modern day slave labour."

Now Rico Back, leader of what was originally a marginal bolt-on to boost profits at Royal Mail Group has been catapulted to the top of the mother company, with the task of turning it inside out, downsizing it and busting the union to convert it into a GLS-style operation, and unleash the profits for shareholders on the backs of workers' wages, conditions and jobs.

If you read between the lines of Royal Mail's latest mailing to members, it confirms what the CWU has been warning us about Back's plan:

## Tens of thousands of job losses

Start with cutting 8000 out of 58,000 duties, by taking oversized parcels off deliveries and delivering them with a separate operation in the afternoon. This means allowing the letters delivery to decline, so there is a steady loss of jobs.

It also means that the promise that all these changes will "secure the USO"

ring hollow. In fact it is an open secret that Royal Mail hopes the Tories will oblige and cut the USO six day delivery obligation (up for review this year) - every day cut from the USO means up to 20,000 jobs going.

Royal Mail's "promise" to "maintain current voluntary redundancy terms" or redeploy everyone, and so avoid compulsory redundancies, just can't be true if the USO is cut - tellingly, they refuse again and again to commit to the six day USO.

## Hike workload and Big Brother bossing

Automation will slash jobs in mail centres and delivery offices further, while hiking the outdoor delivery span as indoor work decreases - the Four Pillars Agreement's shorter working week (SWW) was meant in part to absorb these cuts to indoor work due to automation and avoid huge outdoor spans which will cripple many posties.

Electronic clock in and out cards allow Royal Mail to monitor people leaving the shopfloor in mail centres (and possibly delivery offices) to go to the toilet, get a quick vape or a cuppa, check whether they paid you OT or get your rain gear.

Meanwhile they are bringing in a new resourcing programme that will combine PDA and swipe card data to change resourcing plans seasonally or even more often, disrupting or eliminating duties, binning popular shift patterns that give staff more days off, and eliminating overtime - hitting part-timers hardest.

Their claims to want "fairer workloads" is a nice way to justify "annual revisions" that rip out hours and hike everyone's workload.

## Two tier workforce and union busting

The shorter working week was also

intended to eliminate the two-tier workforce that had developed since 2003, with part-timers and full-time staff on the same pension and converging at the 35 hour week in 2023.

Royal Mail refused to take another hour off last October, but now with the ballot on, they are trying to save face by vaguely saying they might do it if they can afford it in the future (unlikely without big cuts to pay).

The Four Pillars barred zero hours contracts full stop, the current promise of "no zero hours contracts for permanent staff" just means they will use temps or hire new starters on zero hours contracts, and create an even greater divide in the workforce, undermining current part-timers too.

Royal Mail wants to change the industrial relations framework so after token disagreement by the union they can just go ahead and impose whatever changes they want in the future - the last protection of workers in the workplace.

## Promises, promises

Royal Mail claims they support the USO, that we won't "join the gig economy", or outsource "core operational units". But they won't commit to the 6 day USO, they already run the gig economy in Europe and in London with their e-courier self-employed workforce, and they will decide what is and isn't a core unit in their future plans - certainly scores of delivery offices and many mail centres will close or be flogged off.

In a way, it doesn't matter what they promise. Once they bust our union, they don't need to stick to anything they've said - there is no law that says they have to, and there won't be any force to stop them.

***That's where 120,000 postal workers come in, as the force that can stop them, now.***