

Reject union-management sellout at Australia Post! Form rank-and-file committees to fight for pay, conditions and oppose restructuring!

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee

9 July 2024

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) last week announced it had reached “in-principle agreement” with Australia Post on a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA).

The proposed deal, brokered in behind-closed-doors talks, would continue the cost-slashing “Post 26” operation already underway and likely mean further real wage cuts.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee urges Australia Post workers to reject this union-management deal. This must be the first step in a fight against the broader Labor and union-backed restructuring agenda which has been underway for years, and which was most sharply expressed in the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM).

Intensely hostile to such a struggle, the CWU bureaucracy is trying to ram this deal through in completely anti-democratic fashion. Since negotiations began in March, no mass meetings have been called and the union has sent members just five emails about the deal. No wage increase figure was even mentioned until the announcement last week presenting the deal as a *fait accompli*.

Postal workers cannot accept a deal being imposed behind their backs. Nationwide stop-work meetings must be held to allow all Australia Post employees to discuss their needs and develop a strategy to fight for them.

The offer contains nominal wage rises of 4 percent per annum, equal to the latest monthly inflation figure from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Unlike the previous EBA, there is no CPI guarantee, meaning there is every chance that pay will decline in comparison with official inflation, which itself drastically understates the extent of the cost-of-living crisis.

Prices are rising far more sharply for costs most directly affecting the working class. The price of petrol increased 9.3 percent in the past 12 months, while power bills rose by 6.5 percent and insurance soared 14 percent.

Since 2020, advertised rents have risen by 45 percent, while Australia Post wages have increased by just 15.84 percent. Mortgage repayments have skyrocketed with repeated interest rate rises by the Labor government-backed Reserve Bank of Australia.

For a mid-grade postal delivery officer at Australia Post, a 4 percent pay “rise” would amount to less than \$50 per week on top of the current base rate, as a result of the low wages enshrined in previous union-management deals. This will do nothing to change the existing situation in which posties are compelled to work regular overtime and “cuts” (covering part of another delivery round when the facility is short-staffed), just to keep up with basic living expenses.

Chief among the “key outcomes” promoted by the CWU bureaucracy is the claim of “NO TRADE-OFFS,” in other words, conditions won’t get any worse than they already are, as a result of previous union-management deals. This includes the Retraining, Redeployment and Redundancy (RRR) Agreement, as the CWU triumphantly announced in May. The fact that the union bureaucracy hailed this as a win is a sure sign that job cuts are on the way.

Even at face value, a deal that would (at best) have posties treading water is nothing to boast about. But the reality is that the biggest “trade-off” in the history of Australia Post—the “new delivery model”—has already been agreed to by the CWU leadership and is already being enforced by the union in close collaboration with management and the federal Labor government.

The new delivery model will cut letter delivery frequency in half, expand rounds by up to 50 percent and eliminate most walking beats. It is a central component of the “Post 26” restructuring operation, which is aimed at slashing labour costs by 17 percent by 2026. This is part of longstanding plans to transform Australia Post into a highly profitable parcel delivery business.

While the CWU claims to oppose privatisation, this restructuring, along with the changes in legislation the Labor party has enacted to end everyday delivery, are aimed at preparing Australia Post for full or partial privatisation in the future.

The union has played the lead role in implementing the new model from the outset, when it was CWU officials, not management, who first announced that it was being trialled. Keenly aware of lingering hostility among workers after the

ADM debacle in 2020, management and the union bureaucracy saw this as the best way of hosing down opposition to the new delivery model.

The CWU's ongoing commitment to the restructure was expressed in its announcement of the "in-principle agreement." In the July 4 email to workers CWU national president Shane Murphy wrote, "As part of the overall package, the CWU and Australia Post will continue working together to explore workplace flexibility options to enable a sustainable future workforce that continues to support the rapidly changing needs of Australia Post's customers."

The only thing management and the CWU leadership are concerned about "sustaining" is the profitability of Australia Post! This has been clear from the union's first words to workers about the EBA process in March, when it noted that initial meetings with management centred around "Australia Post's operational challenges and their forecasted financial outlook."

Workers' needs must not be subordinated to the interests of finance capital and the demand of the ruling class that the publicly owned postal service be operated as a profit-generating corporate enterprise.

Instead, we urge rank-and-file postal workers to formulate their own log of claims, based on their actual needs, not what the union bureaucrats or bosses say is "sustainable." As a starting point for this discussion, the PWRFC proposes these basic demands:

- Immediately increase all pay by 40 percent to lift base wages to an acceptable standard and end workers' reliance on constant overtime to make ends meet. Index wages to the current cost of living and introduce an automatic monthly cost of living adjustment to keep pace with rising expenses.

- No to the new delivery model! Return to everyday delivery on all rounds.

- One beat, one postie, with no expansion of beats! Where identified by workers, rounds must be reduced in size on the basis of finishing within rostered hours. Empty beats must be filled with new employees.

- No job cuts! All workers that have been laid off since the restructuring started—including in middle management—must be immediately reinstated with no loss of entitlements or pay.

- End the use of contractors as a second-tier workforce! All existing contractors must be offered full-time jobs with the same wages, conditions and rights as other permanent workers.

- Clean air in the workplace! AP must install proper ventilation, HEPA filtration and far-UVC germicidal lighting in all facilities to minimise the spread of COVID-19, flu and other respiratory illnesses among postal workers. Reinstate paid pandemic leave so workers have ample time to recover and are not under financial duress to work while possibly infectious.

- An additional 10 days of annual leave.

This is not an exhaustive list, but the PWRFC's initial contribution to what must be a democratic discussion involving

all postal workers across the country.

This is antithetical to the methods of the CWU leadership, as is demonstrated by its sudden announcement last week of an "in-principle agreement." Workers' fates must not be decided in backroom deals by bureaucrats!

To prevent this, Australia Post workers need to establish rank-and-file committees in every facility, democratically controlled by workers themselves. These must be politically and organisationally independent of the CWU, which functions as an arm of management, enforcing every cost-cutting demand issued by management and the federal government.

Through a network of such committees, Australia Post workers can develop demands based on their actual needs and a plan of action, including strikes, through which to fight for them.

The union-backed attack on workers at Australia Post is part of an assault on the conditions of postal workers internationally.

Amid a precipitous decline in letter mail, virtually all national postal services are engaged in ruthless cost-cutting operations as they increasingly compete with global distribution companies such as Amazon, FedEx and UPS for control of the lucrative parcel delivery business. Postal and other logistics workers, along with gig-economy delivery workers, are being pitched against each other in a race to the bottom as jobs, wages and conditions are slashed.

By linking up with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), Australia Post workers can connect with the growing number of workers globally who are taking up the fight against this onslaught.

This is by no means limited to the delivery sector. The entire working class is being forced to pay the price for the escalating crisis of global capitalism. In Australia, this is being spearheaded by Labor governments at the state and federal level which are slashing jobs, wages and social spending to fill the coffers of big business and the imperialist war machine.

The fight for real improvements to wages and conditions and against restructuring and privatisation at Australia Post must be part of a broader political and industrial struggle against this offensive and for a socialist perspective which rejects the dominance of corporate profit interests over every aspect of society.

Contact the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee today at auspostalworkers@gmail.com.



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