

Australia Post workers voice growing discontent

Our reporters
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Australia Post workers interviewed by the WSWs over the past two days expressed mounting frustration with the destruction of their conditions through enterprise agreements, and the role of the Rudd Labor government.

A Melbourne night shift mail sorter spoke of massive changes in the workplace over several decades. “The biggest change as far as mail goes, is technology—the machines. As far as the parcels side of the work, it is the use of contractors for deliveries. The volume increases have gone through the roof, but we’ve got less staff to do the actual work of sorting. The productivity increases are huge.

“Plus the procedures have increased in complexity. Now we do wine—and you have to be careful how you handle that. And we have to scan 60, 70, 80 percent of our parcels that have a barcode. Also we have to do a count, an accurate count, because the contractors get paid per article. It all takes time. We just haven’t got enough staff to do it in time, every night.

“You can’t get a decent forklift, you can’t get decent lifters, you can’t get decent anything. About 99 percent of the equipment is run down and inappropriate. We are making do with second-hand stuff that is 20 years old.

“Ninety percent of the processing side of things in Australia Post moves by night shift and afternoon shift. If they want to take away penalty rates, it is ridiculous. Without the penalty rates, it is a low basic wage to start with.”

The mail sorter reflected on how the Fair Work Australia (FWA) legislation and tribunal had been used

against postal workers. “With Fair Work Australia the legal hoops you have to jump through just to have a stopwork meeting! No-one listens to you. You’re treated like a moron.”

Asked to comment on Communications Electrical Plumbing Union’s acceptance of this entire framework, he said: “The ACTU [Australian Council of Trade Unions] has accepted it. That’s the way the unions stay together, so they won’t be marginalised. And that is why management is so smug.”

As for the Rudd government, it was “Howard Mark II, or Fraser Mark II would be closer to the mark. It is sad. It is the same in America, with the Republicans and the Democrats. It is the same in Britain with the Conservatives and Labour and Liberal. These parties are so close together now; they are just fine tuning the differences.”

Rob, a Sydney western suburbs postal worker, told the WSWs: “We are tired of being bullied and it’s got to the point where we are not going to take it anymore. We ended the industrial action before Christmas but that doesn’t mean that it’s over. We have no choice but to keep fighting and if that means we’re in conflict with the FWA and the Rudd government, then so be it.”

Trevor Attwood, from Sydney’s St Leonards Delivery Facility, has worked for Australia Post for 23 years, mainly as a postman. He said: “I’ve seen many changes in the past 15 years, particularly through the introduction of contractors. You have contractors employing workers, who are low-skilled and who come and go and get miserable pay. This has affected parcel delivery, which isn’t as good as it used to be.

“I can’t do the quality of work that I used to. Not because I don’t want to but because of the time pressure and computerised productivity targets. They won’t let you argue with the computerised system and all the mistakes it makes. It’s set in stone. If you argue, the managers pick on you and treat you like a troublemaker.

“We started to go down with the introduction of EBAs which began under [Labor prime minister] Keating. Since then we’ve given up more and more things. It’s got to the point where it’s not about money but basic conditions that are going backwards. The attitude of Australia Post involves a bigger political picture and by that I mean they want to wipe out the unions altogether.”

Attwood said Australia Post had used the Fair Work legislation to three times block postal workers from even voting to take industrial action. “Up until September we weren’t allowed to strike at all. It has become very dictatorial and there is no democracy in the workplace. It’s like it or lump it.

“That this is happening under Labor just makes clear that this is not a Labor Party but a government that looks after big business. I’ve thought that for about 20 years but it’s got worse and in the elections I feel that I don’t have anyone to vote for that will represent me.”

One Sydney western suburbs postal worker said: “Management keeps saying that we have to sacrifice and increase productivity because of the global financial crisis and yet we are going backwards. We are not asking for anything unusual or outrageous, just our basic right to a reasonable wage and decent conditions.”

Another Sydney postal worker John Linsey said: “It’s not about pay. It’s about job security and conditions. They are trying to casualise our work force.... They just bring things in and it’s just a culture of bullying by management.

“I think it started with John Howard and WorkChoices but also I believe that after Labor got in

power, they didn’t do enough for us. They let us down to be honest,” he said.



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