Form rank-and-file committees at Australia Post to fight union-management restructure!

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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The Socialist Equality Party urges workers at Australia Post (AP) to establish rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the trade unions, to organise a genuine industrial and political fight against the pro-business restructure of the postal service.

The experiences of this year show that if management, the unions and the government have their way, AP will be privatised, thousands more jobs will be destroyed, and conditions will be driven down to the same miserable level as in the "gig economy."

Since the beginning of the year, management, with the full backing of the federal government, has embarked on the most sweeping restructure of the postal service in decades. After years of job cuts, overseen by the Labor Party, the Liberal-Nationals and the unions, management is seeking to finish the job, that is, transform AP into a lucrative parcel delivery service, so that it can be sold off to multi-billion dollar corporations for the benefit of the financial oligarchy.

The COVID-19 pandemic is only the pretext. All the measures imposed this year under the banner of the "Alternative Delivery Model" (ADM)—including an end to daily letter deliveries, the redeployment of posties to the parcel sector and the creation of "floaters," who have no set job description and can be shunted from one area to another—were foreshadowed in secret reports to management by financial consultancy firms, written before the coronavirus crisis. Their immediate recommendations were to cut costs; the final destination was privatisation.

This agenda is completely incompatible with decent, full-time jobs and even the difficult working conditions of the past. AP is now directly competing with companies like Amazon, whose workers, employed by labour-hire companies, are casuals on the minimum wage, forced to do backbreaking labour with no rights.

Already posties are working 12-hour shifts and are unable to complete their beats. The use of casual and contract labour is increasing, and workers who have been on the job for decades are being forced out. The thousands of job cuts that were initially threatened by management are being achieved through attrition, but the imminent prospect of mass sackings remains.

There is seething opposition among AP workers to this program. The issue that must be discussed, and acted on, is how the restructure can be defeated.

In any struggle to defend their jobs and conditions, postal workers confront the unions as their enemies. The Communication Electrical and Plumbers Union (CEPU) and the Communications Workers Union (CWU) have confirmed by their own actions that they are industrial police forces of management.

Their aim has been to suppress anger among workers, block calls for any fight against the restructure and ensure that the ADM proceeds as quickly as possible.

The sordid manoeuvres of the CEPU and the CWU have the character of a conspiracy against the workers they falsely claim to represent. At the beginning of the year, they held closed-door meetings with senior ministers in the Liberal-National government, as it prepared regulatory changes to facilitate the ADM.

The union bureaucrats then worked with management to ensure that all AP staff stayed on the job, even as they were threatened with COVID-19 infection in the "first wave" of the pandemic. With posties complaining about a lack of basic safety measures, the unions kept workers in the dark about a spate of infections. Only recently, management, not the unions, revealed that more than 50 posties contracted the virus in the first months of the crisis.

When the ADM was introduced, the union officials

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peddled the lie that it would be temporary. They sought to prevent any democratic discussion among workers. In June, the CEPU and the CWU reported that they had signed an agreement with management for the roll-out of the ADM without workers having any say.

The deal includes a 12-month no-strike clause. In other words, it allows management to go on the offensive against jobs and conditions, but bans workers from fighting back.

As this agenda has encountered mounting opposition, the unions have resorted to outright intimidation.

Union officials have displayed unconcealed hostility to workers' calls for a struggle against the ADM and even for democratic, nationwide meetings of postal workers. They have slanderously denounced the *World Socialist Web Site* for spreading "misinformation," because it has provided workers with the truth, a platform to voice their concerns and discuss the issues they face, and an alternative to the wretched betrayals of the CEPU and the CWU.

In any struggle, workers are confronted by a united front of management, governments, with their police and courts, and the unions, which do everything they can to isolate and sabotage opposition.

On every occasion, union leaders try to intimidate workers by declaring that any actions they take, from strikes to protests and even work-to-rule campaigns, would be illegal.

In Australia, the laws that ban virtually all industrial action were introduced by Labor governments, from Hawke and Keating, to Rudd and Gillard. The trade unions fully supported all these provisions, including the last Labor government's Fair Work Australia legislation, which outlaws most strikes, allows for the victimisation of workers who take up a struggle and enables continuous pro-business restructuring.

The unions have not, and will not, challenge these draconian laws, because they agree with them, and so does Labor, the government, the media and the political establishment as a whole. All of them use the framework of the pro-business industrial legislation and the courts to keep workers isolated and to prevent any movement that would threaten their privileges.

This line-up is being driven by the crisis of the capitalist system. The working class all over the world is being made to pay for the deepest economic slump since the 1930s, to ensure the profits of big business.

But workers are beginning to fight back. In Britain, the US and elsewhere, autoworkers, bus drivers, teachers and others are forming rank-and-file committees to organise a struggle against the demands that they stay on the job amid a raging pandemic, enforced by the unions, and to oppose the attacks on their pay and conditions.

Workers at Australia Post should follow their lead and establish their own independent rank-and-file committees to defeat the restructure, prevent privatisation and ensure the social right to a full-time job with decent wages and conditions.

This is a political struggle against the government, Labor, the unions and corporations. It requires the unity of Australia Post workers across the country and a turn to broader sections of the working class who face the same big business onslaught.

A new political perspective is needed which rejects the dominance of corporate profit interests over every aspect of society.

The alternative is the fight for a workers' government and a socialist program. Australia Post must be placed under genuine public ownership and democratic workers' control along with all other utilities, the banks and the corporations. The workers, who produce all of the wealth, must run society, not a tiny capitalist oligarchy that is plunging the world into ever-greater crisis.

The Socialist Equality Party offers every assistance to workers who want to fight the restructure at Australia Post and form their own organisations of struggle.

Contact us at sep@sep.org.au

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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