

Coles Eastern Creek warehouse worker denounces union betrayal of locked-out workers

Our reporters
1 February 2021

Opposition is mounting amongst Coles supermarket distribution workers over the sell-out enterprise bargaining agreement concocted by the United Workers Union (UWU) and management at the Smeaton Grange facility in Sydney.

The Smeaton Grange workers, who have been locked out for two months by the company, have been isolated by the UWU, which has endorsed the destruction of hundreds of jobs at the facility and opposes any mobilisation of its 150,000-strong membership to defeat the company attack.

In early 2019, Coles, one of Australia's two largest supermarket chains, announced that it was investing \$950 million over the next five years building two new giant automated distribution centres. One will be at Redbank, Queensland and the other at Kemps Creek in western Sydney.

The new facilities will replace five existing warehouses already located outside the New South Wales and Queensland state capital. Along with the Smeaton Grange workers, hundreds of other Coles warehouse employees will lose their jobs.

George (not his real name) is a long-time warehouse worker and a permanent employee at Coles Eastern Creek distribution centre in western Sydney. He contacted the WSWs on the weekend to voice his anger over the union's collaboration with the company. The Eastern Creek facility employs almost 400 workers.

"I'm disgusted with what's happened at Smeaton Grange and what the union has done. These guys have hung out to dry by the company and the union," he said.

"Workers are starting to ask questions here about what's going on. Why is the union refusing to organise

national action to support these workers? Why isn't there a strike fund and why aren't we being told about what's going on?

"The union has 150,000 members but there's no strike fund and yet if you take into account the weekly dues it gets from members that's about \$2 million a week. The union can dig up all the excuses it likes but the only reason there's no strike fund is because the union is trying to wear down the Smeaton Grange workers and force them to accept the company offer.

"I agree with what you say on the WSWs, that the foundation of the fight should be defence of all jobs. I always believed that being in the union was to help the workers, but all I've seen in the past few years is corruption, neutralising all our complaints and keeping workers in the dark," George said.

"Coles has been preparing for this lockout for a long time. They've used COVID-19 and panic buying that happened in the supermarkets to set up pop-up distributions centres to overcome supply issues.

"The UWU knew all about these places and the violation of working conditions, safety rules and injuries going on there—they were given evidence by workers who risked their jobs. There should have been strike action over this but the union diffused the situation. Nothing was done and now these pop-up joints are being used to keep Coles operations going during the lockout.

"I've been watching this very closely because we're going to face the same thing here at Eastern Creek. There should be national action because if the Smeaton Grange workers are defeated then the company is going to hammer us and it won't be just at Coles but across the whole industry."



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