

Coles staff and Australia Post rank-and-file committee issue call

The working class must come to the aid of the locked-out Smeaton Grange workers!

22 February 2021

A meeting on Sunday, involving Coles staff and members of the Australia Post rank-and-file committee, unanimously agreed to issue a call for the working class to come to the aid of 350 Coles workers who have been locked out of the company's Smeaton Grange warehouse in southwestern Sydney for more than three months. The meeting discussed the United Workers Union's attempts to force through a sell-out, and the need for the isolation imposed by the union to be broken through coordinated action by other sections of workers.

This meeting sends its solidarity to the Coles Smeaton Grange workers in Sydney, who have been locked out by the massive supermarket company for more than three months. By refusing to bow to management's demands in all that time, they have taken a heroic stand, not only on behalf of their own jobs and conditions, but those of the working class as a whole.

This struggle has now reached a turning point. The role of the United Workers Union (UWU) is crystal clear. It is to isolate the dispute, prevent action at any other Coles or Woolworths warehouse and starve the Smeaton Grange workers by refusing to provide strike pay, so they are forced to accept a sell-out deal. Once again, the UWU is trying to force through a rotten enterprise agreement that will result in the closure of the warehouse, the destruction of all the jobs, and the contemptuous pay and redundancy provisions put forward by Coles early in the dispute.

Workers cannot allow the union to force this through and keep the Smeaton Grange workers isolated! The working class everywhere must come to the defence of the locked-out workers and begin preparing concrete actions to strengthen their fight and break the isolation

being imposed by the UWU.

This is an elementary act of solidarity. But it is more than that, because what happens at Smeaton Grange will have huge consequences for workers everywhere, especially in the logistics and warehousing sectors.

Coles and the UWU want an "orderly closure," to set a blueprint for the shutdown of four other warehouses, including the Eastern Creek facility in Sydney, the plant in Goulburn and two warehouses in Brisbane. Woolworths is doing the same thing, with plans to shutter three facilities and slash thousands of jobs.

At Australia Post, workers are being hit with a restructure that has already made workloads intolerable and is aimed at preparing the way for privatisation. At Telstra, another 1,400 sackings have just been announced, on top of over 6,000 job cuts since 2018.

This program is driven by the dictates of the largest banks, the corporations and the governments that represent them. The aim is to make the working class pay for the crisis of capitalism and to use the pandemic to carry out an even greater pro-business restructuring of the economy. If Smeaton Grange falls, this agenda will only be stepped-up further.

But there is growing opposition from workers everywhere and a desire to fight back.

The unions are the chief obstacle. They function as an industrial police force of management, which represents the privileged bureaucrats that run the unions, not the workers they falsely claim to represent.

The past three months have demonstrated, yet again, that workers cannot mount a struggle in defence of their jobs and conditions within the straitjacket of the unions. The unions suppress any struggle by invoking the draconian and anti-strike provisions contained in Fair Work legislation. But these laws were put in place by

the last Labor government, with the full backing of the unions. The UWU and the other unions support the entire repressive framework of Fair Work, again demonstrating that the struggle to defend the Smeaton Grange workers must be taken out of the hands of the union and organised by workers independently.

As a first step, in coming to the assistance of our class brothers and sisters at Smeaton Grange, we call for a meeting of Coles, Woolworths, Australia Post and other warehousing and logistics workers, independent of the unions. Such a meeting can discuss the vital issues of strategy and perspective posed by the Smeaton Grange dispute, and concrete measures that can aid the workers, including financial assistance for them and a broader struggle throughout Coles operations.

We appeal to all workers who want to take part in this fight to register your interest in such a meeting with the Australia Post rank-and-file committees, publicise this call with your colleagues and families, and contact us today.



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