

SEP (Australia) online public meeting

The Coles Smeaton Grange struggle: The next stage for the working class

5 March 2021

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) is holding an online public meeting on Sunday, March 14, at 2 p.m. (AEDT), to discuss the crucial political lessons of the protracted struggle by Coles workers at the company's Smeaton Grange warehouse in southwestern Sydney. To register for the event, which will be held on Zoom, [click here](#).

On February 27, the United Workers Union (UWU) rammed through a sell-out agreement which provides for the closure of Smeaton Grange, the destruction of all of the jobs there, and the miserly wage and redundancy provisions that the company wanted. A majority of workers only voted "yes" after being forced to vote on the same agreement up to eleven times. Subjected to a more than three-month lockout by Coles, they were isolated by the UWU, and literally starved out by a union that boasts of more than \$300 million in assets but refused to provide a cent in strike pay.

The struggle at Smeaton Grange, one of the longest disputes in recent decades, was a significant turning point in the class struggle in Australia. For some 14 weeks, the 350 workers there heroically held out against one of the largest companies in Australia, and registered their opposition to the attempts of the UWU to sabotage their struggle and to impose the company demands. This reflects a growing mood of opposition among workers, and anticipates a rebellion against the corrupt, corporatised entities that call themselves unions.

The forced return to work on management terms is undoubtedly a blow. But the struggle is far from over. The sell-out only brings to an end the first stage of the fight at Smeaton Grange, and more broadly, against a sweeping restructure by Coles involving plans to close five warehouses and destroy over 2,000 jobs. The

corporate offensive, and the growing hostility to it, is not limited to one company. Woolworths, Coles' chief competitor, is carrying out an identical overhaul involving the shutdown of three facilities and the axing of more than 1,300 positions.

The onslaught in the warehousing industry is the sharpest expression of a broader economic restructuring being imposed by the federal government with Labor Party and union support on behalf of the financial elite they all serve.

As is the case internationally, the ruling class wants to impose the cost of a deepening economic crisis onto the working class and seeks to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic to accelerate longstanding plans for a sweeping, pro-business restructuring of workplace relations and economic life in the interests of the billionaires and the major corporations.

As workers are propelled into struggle against this agenda, it is essential that they draw the lessons of their past experiences, including what has taken place at Smeaton Grange.

At the meeting, SEP speakers will review the Smeaton Grange dispute and its broader context. They will raise the need for workers everywhere to begin developing their own organisations of struggle, including independent rank-and-file committees, to combat union attempts to impose further betrayals.

Speakers will also point to the need for a new political perspective, directed against the capitalist system, which offers workers only a future of mass unemployment, poverty, war and authoritarianism.

We invite all workers, young people and defenders of social and democratic rights to attend and participate in the discussion.

Details:

Sunday, March 14, 2 p.m. (AEDT),
registration:
https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Kng632VtQYaLwH0FFkiSmA



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact