

Australia Post workers oppose union's collaboration with management over new enterprise agreement

Postal Workers Rank-And-File Committee
14 April 2021

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee warns postal workers that, behind their backs, the Communication Electrical and Plumbers Union (CEPU) is working closely with Australia Post to impose a new enterprise agreement that will intensify the unbearable workloads, pay cuts and restructuring contained in the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM).

For all the union's phony claims to now oppose the hated ADM—which it helped the management inflict on workers last year—the union has been involved in backroom talks with Australia Post's executive group for months on how to suppress workers' opposition to the ADM or a new version of it.

Buried away on page 14 of the CEPU submission to the current Senate committee inquiry into Australia Post, the union informs the senators: "In February, the union was invited to meet with the executive group responsible for the delivery operations in an effort to find common ground in order to resolve outstanding employee grievances and improve services whilst still delivering a sustainable operating model."

Any "sustainable operating model" will be one designed to keep boosting Australia Post's revenues and profits. These have soared via the ADM and its accelerated shift to parcel delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic, at the direct expense of workers' conditions, health and livelihoods.

The submission says no agreements have yet been reached, but holds out the prospect that if the union sees "results from consultation" it would support an extension to the government regulations underpinning the ADM, which are scheduled to end in June. Those regulations allowed Australia Post to drop daily mail deliveries and shunt posties into parcel delivery.

CEPU boasts how closely its officials and workplace delegates are working with the management at local, state and national levels. "Despite the contention over temporary reform and its introduction, the union and its members has

continued to engage genuinely, meaningfully, and significantly, with management," it states.

A warning also must be taken from the submission's profuse support for ousted Australia Post chief Christine Holgate, with whom the union signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) last year to impose a 12-month ban on industrial action in order to enforce the shift to the ADM.

While claiming to oppose the Liberal-National Coalition government's secretive plans, outlined by the Boston Consulting Group, for further privatisation of postal services and the destruction of more than 8,000 jobs, the CEPU will seek to work just as loyally with Holgate's replacement, ex-Woolworths chief supply chain officer Paul Graham, to police equivalent cost-cutting and profit results.

The CEPU's "genuine," meaningful" and "significant" engagement with management is code for intensifying the closed-door talks and partnership it formed with Holgate and the government last year, resulting in the no-strike MoU, signed on July 7.

Anticipating mass opposition to the introduction of the ADM, the union imposed the no-strike agreement, effectively blocking all independent action from postal workers against the biggest attack on their conditions in 40 years.

Fully aware of workers' hostility, the union did not discuss the MoU at any meetings with workers before signing it. The MoU committed the union to "co-operating with Australia Post to ensure the successful implementation" of the ADM, including by "encouraging employees to operate new and different modes of delivery based on business requirements."

In other words, the CEPU agreed to stop workers from opposing attacks, such as 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.

As a result, posties are now often working long shifts and are still unable to complete their delivery rounds, known as

beats. The use of casual and contract labour is increasing, and workers who have been on the job for decades are being forced out by over-work, resulting in the thousands of job cuts that management wants.

In order to fight this ongoing offensive, the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee calls on postal workers to reject the entire enterprise bargaining straitjacket and anti-strike laws that the unions have enforced against the working class since the unions' Accords with the Hawke and Keating Labor governments in the 1980s and 1990s.

We urge our fellow workers to join the rank-and-file committee, which is completely independent of CEPU, to advance the demands needed to defend the jobs and basic rights of postal workers. These demands include:

- The immediate ending of the ADM and all attempts to impose a new version of it.
- No to privatisation. The government's Boston Consulting Group secret report and its recommendations must be made fully public.
- All fixed term contract workers and casuals must be given full-time positions.
- Increase full-time staff to deal with extra parcels and reduce the workload on existing staff.
- One beat, one postie. Recast beats on the basis of finishing within rostered hours. Rank-and-file committees must be established to plan and control the organisation of beats and other aspects of production.
- 10 percent wage increases per year, with absolutely NO trade offs. Postal workers must receive a living wage to meet the escalating cost of living.
- End the unaddressed mail service (UMS) of junk mail.
- All statistical information about the level of accidents and mental health issues as a result of the ADM to be reported to the workers. Rank-and-file committees must be elected, independent of management and the unions, to organise and fight for the protection of workers' health and safety. These committees will give regular reports to the workers and make the necessary recommendations.
- Workers whose health has been affected must be paid their full wage, including overtime, until they make a full recovery and can carry out their regular duties, with no management harassment.
- Stop the surveillance of postal workers, and end the ban on public comments by Australia Post staff to expose management practices. Free speech is a democratic right.
- Increase annual leave by two weeks. Return the Authorised Holiday to the Christmas period, as previously established.
- End the gravy train for top executives. All executives to be paid the same rate as team leaders.
- Australia Post must be transformed into a genuine public

utility, under real public ownership and the democratic control of the working class, to meet the needs of society, including the basic social right to a secure and affordable postal service.

We call on workers to build and expand our committee to discuss and prepare for the full mobilisation of all postal workers in a campaign of mass industrial and political action to fight for these and other agreed demands.

In advancing these demands, postal workers will face the opposition of not just the management, the government and big business, but also the CEPU and the Labor Party, which endorsed the ADM and MoU.

As the Socialist Equality Party explained last year in a statement calling for the building of a postal workers rank-and-file committee: "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."

We urge postal workers to unite with other sections of workers, such as warehouse and health workers, teachers and transport workers, who face similar restructuring and attacks on their conditions in the worsening global pandemic.

We call for the building of rank-and-file committees in every industry to unify the working class in the fight for a workers' government that will place all the major industries and banks under genuine public ownership and the democratic control of the working class.

To discuss this struggle and how to get involved, contact the Postal Workers Rank-And-File Committee at auspostalworkers@gmail.com.



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