

Australia Post restructuring will continue despite end of Alternative Delivery Model

Jim Franklin
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Australia Post (AP) told workers on May 26 it would not seek an extension of Temporary Regulatory Relief measures exempting the government-owned postal service from its obligation to provide daily letter delivery throughout the country.

The announcement means an official end to the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM) on June 30, which the Communications Electrical Plumbers Union (CEPU) has heralded as a victory for AP workers. The union declared: “Members have won this incredible achievement off the back of a dedicated campaign within our communities and in our parliament.”

In fact, postal workers have won nothing. The announcement is a clear indication of AP’s confidence that the union will continue to work closely with management to ram through permanent restructuring as part of negotiations for the next enterprise agreement (EA).

The CEPU’s claim that the end of the ADM represents an “incredibly positive step” should be seen for what it is, an attempt to blind workers to the attacks being prepared by management and the union.

The union has provided virtually no information to justify its assertions of victory. Postal workers must demand full details of what the CEPU officials have been discussing with management, what AP has been pushing for in the new agreement, and what the union has already agreed to. Workers should insist that they will not vote on any agreement, without these details and its full text.

This is all the more necessary, given the scale of the changes that have been introduced under the ADM, initiated in April, 2020. Some 2,000 posties were transferred to the company’s lucrative parcel delivery section, where they had to cover four beats, and 2,000 more became “floaters,” who could be shunted to any area of the business by management.

Postal workers now routinely face 12-hour-days and, in the manner of the gig economy, van drivers are subject to disciplinary action if they fail to deliver items in the precise order prescribed by an electronic “optimiser.”

The CEPU has given no indication of how these arrangements, which are already in place, are to be wound back or what is to replace them. It has not stated that it is fighting for an increase in staffing, an essential precondition for an end to gruelling overtime, which postal workers must demand. Nor has it said anything about the prospect of redundancies, even though thousands were threatened last year.

The ADM was not a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as

claimed by management and the union, but was in reality one step in a process of restructuring conceived well before the pandemic broke out. The central aim of these moves, recommended in a 2019 Boston Consulting Group review commissioned by the federal government, is to drastically reduce costs in AP’s declining letter delivery business and prepare the lucrative parcel delivery division for privatisation.

The recent senate inquiry has made clear that while ousted CEO Christine Holgate and AP board members disagreed over the precise details of the restructure, there is no section of the company’s management, or the Australian ruling class as a whole, that opposes the eventual privatisation of AP in one form or another.

Over the past 12 months, the union has demonstrated its full agreement with this agenda, enforcing the ADM in the face of widespread opposition. Behind the backs of workers, the union signed a “memorandum of understanding” last July, assuring management that it would enforce the restructure and that no industrial action would be carried out for 12 months.

The recent announcement has changed nothing. The union has made clear that a new delivery model will be a central component of the next EA, writing: “In our view, EBA10 can simply not be finalised without this forming part of the overall EBA10 package.”

The union wrote on May 26: “A future delivery model means a new way forward—great. But what is critically important at this stage is determining what kind of role our members can and should play in that important process.”

There is nothing “great” for postal workers about a different delivery model that will inevitably bring cuts to jobs and conditions. Any new or revised delivery model hatched between AP management and the union will be “great” only for the profits and future privatisation of AP.

On June 10, the CEPU told workers it was seeking to put members in the “driver’s seat in determining how any new model would be developed and implemented.”

Accepting the restructuring as an inevitability, and providing no details about how workers would be involved in its implementation, the union said there were just “a few outstanding matters of contention.” It was “overly confident” that agreement could be reached, “so that we can bury ADM once and for all.”

The reality is, the ADM was implemented with the support of the union while workers were simply forced to accept it. This must be a warning to workers, the door has been well and truly opened for

the process of restructuring and ultimate privatisation to proceed.

The June 10 update advanced no demands, but outlined several meagre “principles” that the new model must “address.”

The principles are: “One run per postie, delivering five days per week; The ongoing maintenance of traditional take-home pay components; Restoring entitlements and benefits lost across all workforce areas impacted by the temporary reform and COVID-19 changes; Sufficient resourcing, modelled around quality permanent jobs—and where that work offering can efficiently be modelled around full-time employment, this should always be the preferred method of engagement.” Given the union’s track record, workers would be making a grave mistake to think that the CEPU officials have any great commitment to these “principles.”

And even still, the final “principle” shows that the CEPU has no intention of opposing the increased use of casual and contract labour, as long as management deems it more “efficient” than providing secure full-time employment.

Nothing will be resolved in negotiations with management over the next EA. The union continues to fully support restructuring, albeit within the framework of the enterprise bargaining process. When the ADM was first announced last year, management declared that failure to accept would result in mass job cuts. The company’s calculations have not changed in the interim, meaning that any deal struck by the union will allow for job destruction, cost-cutting through the erosion of conditions, or both.

Workers should place no confidence in the CEPU and instead fight to build the Postal Workers Rank-And-File Committee (PWRFC). The PWRFC calls on the union to make public all details of discussions with AP management. Workers have a right to know the details of the negotiations and what delivery models are being discussed between AP management and the union.

In April the PWRFC wrote the following:

“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 the 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.”

Contact the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee at auspostalworkers@gmail.com.



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