

Union announces in-principle enterprise agreement with Australia Post

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On July 12, the unions representing Australia Post (AP) workers announced that they had reached “in-principle” agreement with management over negotiations for a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA).

The Communications Electrical Plumbers Union (CEPU) has provided workers with only a brief summary of the proposed agreement, denying them the right to examine the document in full. Even the deliberately vague information provided by the union makes clear that the deal is a sell-out.

No mass meetings have been called at which workers can ask questions or raise criticisms of the agreement. Instead, the union is conducting “briefings” at individual AP facilities, isolating workers and preventing broader discussion of the terms of the deal.

The proposed EBA contains a miserly 3 percent per annum pay rise, well below the figure needed to keep up with the rising cost of living, especially given that AP workers did not receive a pay rise at all last year. The CEPU’s boast that 3 percent is double the national average serves only as an indictment of the role of all Australian unions in subordinating the interests of workers to the profit demands of big business.

Along with the EBA, management and the union have negotiated a terms of reference (TOR) document establishing the mechanism by which a new model to replace the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM) will be imposed.

The CEPU has previously promoted illusions among workers that conditions at AP would quickly “roll back” to what had been in place prior to the introduction of the ADM. It is clear from even the vague summary of the proposed EBA and TOR that what is being developed is not a return to the past, but a replacement for the failed ADM. The new model has the same objective as the ADM—the transformation of the company into a lucrative parcel delivery service in preparation for privatisation.

Even if it were possible, the return to the past promoted by the union would be anything but a win for AP workers. For years before the ADM, AP workers have suffered sub-inflationary wage rises, increasing use of casual and contract conditions and have been forced to rely on overtime payments and shift penalties to earn a living wage. All of these attacks have been enshrined in previous EBAs and enforced by the unions.

Despite this, the CEPU continues to employ the term “roll-back,” albeit in an increasingly cynical fashion, with last week’s announcement containing the heading: “Rolling-back to move forward: goodbye, ADM.” The union is clearly attempting to blind workers to the reality of the EBA and the new model by appealing to their hatred of the ADM.

As the union admits, the proposed TOR “sets the framework for the development and implementation of a new model,” and for the setting-up of local working groups (LWGs) and a national working group (NWG).

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned: “The establishment of these groups is an attempt by the union to integrate layers of workers in corporatist mechanisms tasked with carrying out the demands of government and management for a major restructuring of Australia Post.”

Most of the CEPU’s claimed “key outcomes” in the proposed EBA are either the retention of conditions from the current rotten agreement, or “joint reviews,” which will further integrate the union into future attacks on workers.

AP workers may well ask why the CEPU lists as “key outcomes” the restoration of several conditions, including Sunday overtime shifts for van drivers, “temporarily” taken away “as part of COVID arrangements,” when the union has so emphatically promoted the conception that these would automatically “roll back” with the end of the ADM.

Notably, with Sydney, Australia’s most populous city,

in the grips of a major outbreak of the Delta variant of COVID-19, the union's statement about the proposed EBA and TOR does not contain a single word about health and safety measures to protect AP workers from the coronavirus.

The CEPU's utter disregard for the safety of its members was sharply expressed over the weekend. In the hours following the announcement on Saturday of heightened COVID-19 restrictions in southwest Sydney, the CEPU joined forces with AP management to lobby the New South Wales government to exempt postal workers, forcing them to continue working in life-threatening conditions.

Despite being required to work throughout the pandemic, postal workers have not been given priority in Australia's shambolic vaccine roll-out. At least 50 AP workers were infected with COVID-19 last year, but the CEPU has made no demand of management that workers be urgently offered vaccinations.

The proposed agreement comes after the CEPU and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with management last July pledging to delay EBA negotiations, ostensibly due to the coronavirus pandemic. The MOU also included a 12-month ban on industrial action by AP workers, which remains in place until August 9.

On July 1, the Tasmanian branch of the CEPU issued a warning to residents of the state that they could expect service disruptions as a result of forthcoming stoppages by postal workers. The workers have demanded that the union conduct a vote on industrial action in preparation for the lifting of the strike ban next month.

The union's continuing support for the anti-democratic strike ban is expressed in the fact that the call for industrial action in Tasmania has been hidden from AP workers in the rest of the country. The union has not informed its members directly or posted on its web site or national Facebook page. This can only be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to prevent any similar demands being raised by postal workers elsewhere.

It is no coincidence that news of the "in-principle" agreement has suddenly emerged in the wake of the demand for industrial action by the Tasmanian workers. Management and the CEPU are clearly attempting to ram through a sell-out deal before the strike ban elapses in less than three weeks.

Workers around the world are increasingly becoming conscious that every negotiation or dispute brings them into conflict with both management and the union. In the

US alone, 4,600 workers at Volvo Trucks, Warrior Met Coal and Frito-Lay have recently taken strike action in defiance of the unions that claim to represent them, but which have actively sought to enforce rotten deals and suppress genuine opposition to the assault on their pay and conditions.

The situation confronting Australian workers, including at AP, is no different. Workers should reject the unions' campaign to ram through a sell-out deal based on vague information and unsubstantiated promises. The conduct of the CEPU and CPSU—enforcing the ADM, agreeing to a ban on strikes, and now deliberately misrepresenting the forthcoming new delivery model as a "roll-back" to a fictional rosy past—make clear that these rotten organisations do not represent workers.

It is for this reason that the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) was formed last year. The PWRFC is urging workers to vote "no" on the proposed EBA, and demands:

- All AP workers must be provided with a full copy of the proposed EBA and TOR and allowed ample time to read and discuss it prior to any vote.
- Vaccinations must immediately be made available to all AP workers, on company time and with no loss of income or sick leave if time is needed to recover from any side effects. No AP worker should be forced to work without having received at least one vaccine shot.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

AP workers and contractors, as well as all other delivery workers, are invited to contact the PWRFC to discuss this perspective.



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