COVID-19 exposures at multiple Australia Post facilities in Sydney

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Workers at the Seven Hills Australia Post (AP) delivery facility learned on Tuesday morning that a co-worker had tested positive for COVID-19 and was self-isolating. Seven Hills is located in the Blacktown local government area (LGA), a major coronavirus hotspot in Western Sydney, New South Wales (NSW).

According to 2GB Radio's Ben Fordham, management told workers that the site had been deep-cleaned overnight, and that operations would continue as usual, without any requirement that workers undergo a COVID-19 test.

Fordham reported that the infected worker, a team leader, had recorded the positive test on Sunday, after working in the facility on Friday and Saturday. Around 100 workers who had also been present at the facility on those days had not been informed by management or NSW Health that they had been exposed to the virus.

The Communications Electrical Plumbers Union (CEPU) posted to Facebook on Tuesday night:

"IMPORTANT: The Union has met with management this afternoon and into this evening regarding the COVID exposure at Seven Hills delivery. To keep members up to date, a live webex meeting will take place tomorrow morning for those employed at the workplace and involving the national safety manager, state management and the Union. A link will be provided by Post prior to the meeting occurring.

"The Union's advice at this time is for all members employed at the facility to get a COVID test, despite zoning arrangements."

In other words, the union did not demand the immediate shut down of the site, or even mandatory testing of all workers. Instead, its response to the concern and anger of workers was to co-host a damage control meeting with management.

The CEPU has not provided any further information about the incident to AP workers outside of Seven Hills, in a deliberate move to keep workers in the dark and ensure the continued operation of all AP facilities to maintain profits.

Despite the official silence, workers have told the *World Socialist Web Site* that COVID-19 cases have also emerged at other AP facilities.

In early August, one employee at the Alexandria delivery facility in Sydney tested positive but management and the union have kept it quiet. The employee works in the separate front post office but had used the main facility's lunchroom and toilet. These were closed for a day for "deep cleaning" and close contacts were told to go home and get tested. Although these areas are shared by all workers at the facility, most were not informed, there was no order that all staff be tested and self-isolate and the depot was not closed.

On multiple separate occasions in recent weeks, workers at the Kingsgrove delivery facility were told to get tested and self-isolate for 14 days because they were close contacts of a confirmed case or had visited an affected site.

These exposures, undoubtedly only a small fraction of the total across all AP facilities, are the direct result of the CEPU's recent demand that its members be exempted from NSW stay-at-home orders and forced to keep working in hotspot areas.

On July 20, the WSWS published an article documenting the intervention of several unions to force their members to continue working despite the outbreak of the deadly Delta variant of COVID-19 in Sydney.

The article stated: "Without even a pretence of concern for the health or safety of their members, the immediate response of the trade unions covering the impacted industries was to join with business leaders in lobbying the NSW government for exemptions to the public health orders."

The article continued:

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> The Communications Electrical Plumbers Union (CEPU) posted to Facebook on Saturday [July 17]: "We are currently engaging with Australia Post to understand the impacts of the reviewed public health orders announced by the NSW Government today—on operations and the extent of the ability for members living in affected areas to engage in meaningful work."
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> Late Saturday night, the CEPU, having "engaged with Australia Post at the highest levels throughout the day," told its members: "The NSW Government has now authorised for people working in the freight, logistics, postal, courier or delivery services industries to travel outside the affected LGAs, if required for work purposes."

As cases approach 400 a day in NSW, postal workers now confront the daily threat of infection and possible death due to the high risk of exposure. AP and the CEPU have done nothing to organise for staff and members to be vaccinated on-site.

Although the national vaccine roll-out strategy was unveiled in January, it was only on July 5 that the union finally wrote a letter to Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt asking for postal workers to receive vaccine priority.

COVID-19 testing facilities have been established at some larger delivery facilities but some in the affected LGAs, including Kingsgrove, in Canterbury-Bankstown, have no testing setup. The primary purpose of on-site testing is not to ensure the safety of workers but to minimise disruption to AP operations from mandatory periodic testing.

AP is experiencing another massive increase in parcel growth. Online shopping grew 32 percent over the 2020–21 financial year, and these volumes are growing yet again due to another boom in online shopping fuelled by the latest lockdowns. AP and the CEPU are working together to ensure that the health of workers does not interfere with this opportunity for the company to increase its profits.

Postal workers are being placed in harm's way in order to satisfy the profit interests of AP and the government. This is being done with the direct collusion of the union as it offers up AP workers to the altar of corporate profit even if it means their health and safety is placed in jeopardy.

Over the past four decades the unions have become completely corporatised. These organisations in no way represent the interests of the working class, they have become transformed into the political and industrial policemen of the bosses.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) demands that all workers must be informed immediately when cases are detected at their workplace. If an outbreak is reported, *all* workers at the facility must be tested and allowed to self-isolate at home—with no loss of pay—until tests show a negative result.

Once test results are in, and the entire workplace has been deep cleaned, the facility must only be reopened based on an informed, scientific and democratic appraisal by workers that it is safe to do so.

Pre-emptive COVID-19 testing must be made available at all AP sites for all workers. Any workers who return a positive result or are deemed close contacts must self-isolate and be given all the necessary material and medical support to ensure a full recovery.

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. Postal workers must be issued with medical-grade personal protection equipment while in depots and doing deliveries.

The interests of workers must come before the profits of AP and the complete subordination of workers' health and safety by the unions to the corporate interests of management.

The PWRFC urges workers at Seven Hills and other AP facilities not to entrust their fate to management and the union any longer. Instead, postal workers should contact the PWRFC today.

Postal workers must unite throughout all facilities and workplaces to stop the spread of this deadly virus. The CEPU, along with all the unions, have made clear that they will not do this and are instead concerned with maintaining production and keeping workers on the job even if it directly impacts their health and safety.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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