

Oppose Local Working Groups at Australia Post!

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee
16 September 2021

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) urges postal workers to oppose the union-management establishment of Local Working Groups (LWGs) and the National Working Group (NWG) at Australia Post (AP). Instead, we call on workers to build the PWRFC in all facilities, to fight for the postal service to be reorganised according to the demands of workers, not company profits.

The new delivery model and LWGs are now being introduced to more AP facilities, after initially being set up at three test sites. In the hands of AP and the Communications Electrical and Plumbers Union (CEPU), the new model will mean a further assault on workers' conditions.

Management and the union have set out their framework for a new delivery model, to replace the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM) in Terms of Reference (TOR), signed during negotiations for the new enterprise agreement (EA).

The sell-out deal, featuring a 3 percent per annum pay “rise”—less than the official CPI increase over the last year—was rammed through late last month, after a unison campaign by AP and the CEPU for a “yes” vote.

According to the TOR, the new model will be implemented at the facility level by LWGs, under the oversight of the NWG, which will, in turn, be managed by a Steering Committee of senior management and union officials.

The PWRFC urges workers not to sign up to LWGs or the NWG, which are corporatist mechanisms designed to dupe workers into believing they have a say in the running of AP. Workers who join LWGs will be tapped by management and the unions, as sources of valuable on-the-job knowledge, which will then be used to recast beats, in the interest of minimising worker numbers and maximising profit.

Management and the union will then falsely claim that these changes were demanded by the rank and file in the LWGs, and therefore have the workers' stamp of approval. Workers must reject this attempt to pit one section of the workforce against another, and falsely implicate workers as the architects of attacks on the conditions of their class

brothers and sisters.

The unions promoted the establishment of similar corporatist mechanisms during the introduction of the ADM. In that case, management simply bypassed the LWGs and carried out the major restructuring, while the union told workers there was nothing it could do to fight the brutal conditions imposed.

The real orientation of the new delivery model is made clear in the TOR, which states in clause 3.2 that: “The NWG [National Working Group] will be responsible for developing a framework for delivery operations that: ... (c) provides Australia Post with ongoing sustainability, flexibility, profitability and service reliability; (d) meets the current and future needs of Australia Post and the Australian community; ... (g) provides Australia Post with the necessary framework to remain competitive in the markets in which it operates; (h) ensures that Australia Post can continue to invest and grow for the future.”

The TOR goes on to declare, in clause 3.3: “The Parties acknowledge that the needs of Australia Post, its customers and the community, will continue to evolve over time, particularly as letters continue to decline, and there will be an ongoing need to review the delivery model, from time to time, in accordance with changes to Australia Post's business, to ensure it meets community and customer expectations, as well as meeting the CSO [community service obligations]. The Parties commit to conducting a joint review on the delivery model, achieved under this TOR, no later than 18 months from execution of this TOR.”

In signing the TOR, the union has committed workers to an endless restructuring process, aimed at driving down costs and maximising profits, while transforming AP into a parcel delivery service, competing with gig-economy companies such as Amazon Flex and Uber. The new delivery model is not a “rollback,” as the CEPU has claimed, but a revised bid to satisfy these management demands following the failure of the ADM.

Far from fighting the ADM, the CEPU signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)—including a no-

strike clause—with then CEO Christine Holgate, which was a guarantee to management that the union would ram through the restructuring and suppress any opposition to it among workers. By signing the MOU, the CEPU also denied AP workers a pay rise in 2020.

Under the ADM, postal workers faced a doubling of their workloads. In response, the union told workers to “call rostered hours” and return what they couldn’t deliver.

In other words, workers were simply told to take personal responsibility for their health and safety if they felt they were being overworked. As Management and the union imposed the ADM, postal workers were atomised and hung out to dry.

The union bureaucracy is again working hand-in-hand with senior management to implement the new delivery model. The CEPU’s bluster about the incorporation of “rank and file workers” into the LWGs and NWG is designed to defuse the real anger and opposition that exists, among workers, to the betrayals by the unions, and their support for the implementation of the hated ADM.

Despite the CEPU’s claims of a post-ADM “rollback,” the new model will only increase the exploitation of postal workers. With the full support of the union, postal workers will be forced to deliver the full load of mail, unaddressed “junk” mail and parcels on their beats. Even prior to the introduction of the ADM, the burden on postal workers to meet these growing demands was overwhelming.

Postal workers must refuse to return to the past, when workers were loaded to the hilt and continuously forced to work long hours of overtime to complete their beats. Instead, rank-and-file committees must be formed to demand and implement a fair and proper recasting of beats.

This recasting must not be determined by management or the profit needs of AP. It must not be determined by what AP management thinks is acceptable. Recasting must prioritise the health and safety of workers, taking into account the current pandemic and lockdowns.

Mass hirings must be undertaken to fill vacant beats, due to the high number of resignations of postal workers while the ADM was in force. AP and the unions deliberately created the conditions to drive out older and more experienced postal workers, without having to fork out for voluntary redundancies.

The ADM had, at its core, the deliberate destruction of thousands of postal workers’ jobs. These plans have by no means been abandoned; privatisation of AP remains the aim of management and the federal government, and will be enforced by the union, just as it has done at Telstra.

All current casual and part-time workers must be offered full-time employment, and if former postal workers wish to return, they must be allowed to do so with no loss of

entitlements.

The PWRFC demands that all beats are filled, and that relief postal worker numbers are increased, to adequately cover for absent workers. AP workers must not be forced to shoulder the burden of the surge in parcel volume, during the escalating pandemic, while management pockets the increased revenue.

The PWRFC demands a limit of no more than 70 parcels per beat and that additional drivers be brought on as full-time employees, to deliver the remaining parcels.

Limits must also be placed on the volume of “junk” mail, and postal workers must be granted the right to suspend its delivery when conditions are unsafe, such as during outbreaks of COVID-19.

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.

This should be accompanied by an education campaign, conducted by appropriately qualified experts, to equip workers with the scientific understanding necessary to work safely during the pandemic, and to address any concerns they may have about the safety of the vaccines.

While critically important, vaccination is not a panacea or a justification for all other COVID-19 safety measures to be abandoned. Postal workers must be issued with medical-grade personal protective equipment, for use in depots and while doing deliveries.

These basic social rights can only be achieved through a rebellion against the CEPU, which functions as a police force of management. Workers should fight to build the PWRFC, a genuine organisation of rank-and-file workers, as the only means of sharing information, engaging in democratic discussion, and preparing the industrial and political action required to secure their demands.

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



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