

Australian teachers and postal workers support Pampas workers

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* is publishing statements of support for workers at the Pampas pastry and bread factory in Melbourne from rank-and-file committees of teachers and postal workers.

A four-week strike at Pampas was abruptly ended by the United Workers Union (UWU) leadership on December 16, with the union declaring a “historic win.” In fact, the proposed enterprise agreement would deliver a 4.5 percent nominal wage increase, a substantial pay cut compared to inflation, and well below the 8 percent initially demanded by workers or even the meagre 6 percent claim advanced by the union during the strike.

The ballot on the proposed agreement, which concludes next Tuesday, is being conducted in an entirely anti-democratic manner, with votes to be counted by union officials and management, who are equally determined to ram the deal through. Until early this week, most workers were kept completely in the dark about the details of the agreement.

The Socialist Equality Party urges Pampas workers to vote “no” to this sell-out deal and form a rank-and-file committee to take forward their fight for decent wages and conditions.

The Committee for Public Education—a rank-and-file committee of educators, school workers, parents and students across Australia—sends solidarity greetings to Pampas workers in your important struggle for decent pay, job permanency and better working conditions. We have followed your determined strike through the *World Socialist Web Site* and understand your fight has reached a critical turning point.

Recent experiences of public-school teachers across Australia have important lessons for your fight. To take just one example, in Victoria last year, the Australian

Education Union told educators it had achieved an “historic agreement” with the state Labor government on wages and conditions. In fact, the deal amounted to a monstrous betrayal, including a nominal wage rise of less than 2 percent per year over four years. Given escalating costs of living, this was a real wage cut even worse than that now being pushed on the Pampas workforce.

Educators are reaching breaking point due to intolerable workload, inadequate resources and an unprecedented staffing crisis, with thousands of teachers leaving the profession. Like labour-hire and casual workers at Pampas, many educators are employed on insecure short-term contracts.

Thousands of teachers regarded the agreement as a betrayal and actively opposed the deal. To ram the sell-out through, the union resorted to a series of anti-democratic measures involving a campaign of misinformation and bureaucratic censorship of members who spoke out and opposed the deal. The final ballot of all school staff employees was conducted by the Department of Education—the employer—with no independent oversight. Understandably, the announcement that the agreement narrowly passed was met with considerable skepticism by teachers regarding the bona fides of the vote.

Pampas workers need to approach the situation with these bitter lessons in mind. The experiences of thousands of teachers with the teachers’ union are not an aberration but the common experience of workers internationally. Independent oversight and monitoring of the vote by rank-and-file Pampas workers is critical.

New democratic, fighting, workers’ organisations need to be formed to break the straight-jacket of the unions who are working hand-in-glove with the companies. These rank-and-file committees will outline

the demands of workers, break out of the union-imposed isolation, and organise the necessary struggle, uniting and turning out to other sections of workers who face the same situation.

The Committee for Public Education stands in unity with Pampas workers in this key struggle and pledges to publicise your fight among educators throughout Australia.

Sue Phillips, National Convenor of the Committee for Public Education.

The following statement was endorsed unanimously by a meeting of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) calls on Pampas workers to vote “no” to the sell-out deal that has been presented to them by the United Workers Union (UWU) and Pampas.

We warn Pampas workers, the biggest obstacle you confront is the UWU bureaucracy, which is working hand-in-glove with management to impose real wage cuts that will only drive workers further into the ground.

At Australia Post (AP), the Communications Workers Union (CWU) conspired with management at the start of the pandemic in 2020 to impose sweeping changes under the banner of the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM).

The ADM effectively doubled the workload of postal workers overnight. Thousands of postal workers were forced out of AP due to the workload increase and management harassment. This also had a profound impact on the health and safety of posties, with many suffering mental health issues from the stress they endured, as well as an increase in injuries.

There was widespread opposition to the ADM among postal workers. But the CWU bureaucracy prevented any struggle against the restructure, enforcing a 12-month no-strike clause it had agreed to, behind the backs of workers, in a memorandum of understanding with management.

AP was eventually forced to abandon the ADM, but this was due to the fact it didn't meet the profit demands of the company and the government. The CWU continues to work closely with management on further restructuring operations to cut costs in a race to the bottom with gig economy delivery companies like

Amazon Flex.

The CWU also collaborated with management last year to impose a sub-inflationary 3 percent wage increase in the enterprise agreement they negotiated.

These experiences, like the ones you are going through with the UWU, show that the role of the union bureaucracies is to suppress workers' struggles and serve as an industrial police force for management.

We formed the PWRFC in opposition to these attacks on our conditions, and out of the recognition that we could only take our fight forward by building a rank-and-file committee to break the stranglehold of the union bureaucracy. We urge you to do the same and promise to provide all assistance possible in your fight to defeat this sell-out.



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