

Australian rank-and-file health workers support Pampas pastry workers

Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee
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The *World Socialist Web Site* is publishing a statement of support for workers at the Pampas pastry and bread factory in Melbourne from the Health Workers' Rank-and-File Committee.

A four-week strike at Pampas was ended by the United Workers Union (UWU) leadership on December 16, with the union declaring a “historic win.” In fact, the 4.5 percent nominal pay rise contained in the proposed enterprise agreement is a substantial wage cut in real terms and falls far short of the 8 percent initially demanded by workers.

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.

The Health Workers' Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC) extends our full support and solidarity to Pampas workers, in your struggle for decent wages and working conditions. Your fight is part of a growing wave of strikes and protests by workers across Australia and internationally.

Last year, in NSW, public sector nurses and midwives went on strike five times. Nurses are fighting against a real wage cut and for nurse-to-patient ratios, under conditions of crippling workloads and widespread staff shortages exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nurses are determined to fight, but their action has been isolated and limited by the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA), which has ended each strike without workers' demands being met.

Workers are beginning to recognise that to take forward their fight, they must organise independently of the union leadership. Last year at Lifehouse, a

Cancer treatment centre in Sydney, nurses wrote an open letter to the nurses' union, demanding that the union endorse a “no” vote on an enterprise agreement that would slash real wages, and do little to improve working conditions.

Nurses decisively voted down the Lifehouse agreement by 68 percent in September, but the union leadership has continued to work with management to impose a rotten deal. In December, the NSWNMA declared in an email that members had “won a pay rise” of 3 percent—the same offer that nurses had already rejected.

The HWRFC has supported the nurses' campaign for a “no” vote as an important first step toward breaking out of the stranglehold of the NSWNMA bureaucracy and taking matters into their own hands.

It is only through the formation of independent rank-and-file committees that workers can develop their own demands and initiatives based on what is actually needed, not what management and the union bureaucrats say is affordable, and link up their struggles with those of other workers.

We urge Pampas workers to vote “no” to the UWU-management agreement and form a rank-and-file committee to discuss and develop a campaign for secure jobs, a real wage increase and improved working conditions.

The HWRFC is ready to join you in this struggle and pledges to inform health workers widely about your fight and mobilise support for you.



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