

Australia Post meeting highlights corporatist role of Communication Workers Union

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On Tuesday, January 24, Australia Post (AP) workers at the Kingsgrove depot in inner-west Sydney were called in to a facility-wide meeting at which sweeping changes to delivery operations at the government-owned postal service were flagged.

While this was a company meeting at which state and depot managers were present, they did not speak except to introduce Shane Murphy, the national president of the Communication Workers Union (CWU). The top union bureaucrat spoke on their behalf to try to head off opposition among workers that management and the CWU leadership know is sure to develop.

Murphy outlined planned changes to the delivery model that will drastically increase the workload of postal workers and slash hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs.

The restructuring is necessary, Murphy declared, because the company confronts significant economic “headwinds” in the coming period. In other words, AP’s profits must be protected amid the intensifying global economic crisis, whatever the cost in jobs and conditions to workers. There could hardly be a clearer statement to illustrate that the CWU bureaucracy serves the interests of management, not workers.

Murphy explained that “beats” (delivery routes) served by Electric Delivery Vehicles (EDVs), motorbikes and pushbikes will be recast and expanded by up to 50 percent. Ordinary letters and junk mail will be delivered to half the beat on alternate days, while parcels, large letters and priority mail will continue to be delivered each day.

While Murphy claimed walking beats would not be affected, his only reason was that some such routes could not practically be delivered by any other means. This leaves the door wide open for the vast majority of walking postal workers, whose routes do not preclude

the use of EDVs, to be told “re-train or leave.”

Underscoring the trend towards elimination of walking beats, Murphy told workers that AP is testing new four-wheel EDVs with larger carrying capacity, meaning workers will soon be loaded up with even more parcels each day.

The CWU posted photos of last week’s meeting on Facebook, with the caption: “Great meeting with posties out at Kingsgrove delivery this morning.” This was intended to suggest that this was a meeting of workers, at which they could openly discuss the forthcoming changes, ask questions and raise other workplace issues.

But how could workers speak freely with their facility- and state-level bosses standing by? The truth is that it would hardly have made a difference if management had left the room. The form and content of this briefing demonstrated beyond any doubt that AP and the CWU bureaucracy speak with one voice.

In a phoney gesture intended to distance the union from the new model, Murphy claimed he doesn’t “think it will work,” but that it was incumbent upon workers to “give it a go.” It should be noted that his opposition was not that the model would result in the loss of jobs and working conditions, but that it might not deliver the productivity increases demanded by management.

According to Murphy, the new measures will be trialled for eight weeks at a single Sydney facility, although he did not specify which one. But the very fact that management and the union called a site-wide meeting to explain the changes shows that this is no mere experiment.

The truth is, AP and the CWU leadership have been discussing these plans behind closed doors for at least the past four months, as part of an “operational review”

ordered by the federal Labor government.

In October, the union warned in a note to members that that the company had proposed models that were “eerily similar” to the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM), a widely despised restructuring effort rammed through in 2020. The CWU declared, “this Union will oppose any attempt to introduce any delivery model that looks, sounds or even smells like the ADM.” Now, the union bureaucracy is not only not opposing, but promoting, a model with every one of these characteristics.

AP workers could well ask what the functional difference is between delivering two beats on alternate days under the ADM and delivering half of an expanded beat each day under the new model. While the recast routes may not be quite as large as the combined area of the two under the ADM, workers will now be expected to deliver parcels to the whole beat every day, without the aid of a dedicated van driver on every team.

The CWU bureaucracy postures as an opponent of the ADM because of the immense anger the model sparked among workers. But it could not have been implemented without the vital role played by the union leadership, which enforced a 12-month no-strike clause included in a memorandum of understanding it signed with AP, behind workers’ backs.

The ADM was not ended because of a campaign run by the union, but because it failed to deliver the cost reductions demanded by AP and the federal government. The latest plans, again being pushed by the CWU bureaucracy, are guided by precisely the same motives.

As with all of the changes implemented at Australia Post in recent years, the new model is directed at running down letter mail and transforming the postal service into a highly profitable parcel delivery business. Ultimately, this is aimed at full or partial privatisation of Australia Post.

The CWU leadership is fully prepared to enforce this, just as it did at Telstra, the formerly government-owned telecommunications service, resulting in the destruction of thousands of jobs.

Australia Post workers should oppose the latest restructuring plans, which can rightfully be described as ADM 2.0. But such opposition cannot possibly be organised within the framework of the CWU, which is

working in lockstep with management to impose the job- and condition-slashing measures.

The only way for AP workers to even have a democratic discussion about the new model, let alone organise to oppose it, is to take matters into their own hands. Rank-and-file committees must be formed in every depot, as the only means through which workers can have an open and frank conversation about working conditions, pay and the ongoing restructuring operation they confront.

Through these committees, linked through the national Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, AP workers can develop a plan to fight the union-management imposition of the new model and all other attacks on their conditions.



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