

Australia Post and Communication Workers Union expand trial of new delivery model

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On July 27, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and Australia Post (AP) jointly informed workers that a new delivery model trial would be expanded to three additional facilities in New South Wales (NSW), Queensland and South Australia (SA), with locations in Victoria and Western Australia still to be announced.

The proposed new delivery model is part of Post 26, a major restructuring operation that threatens to destroy thousands of jobs at the postal service. Already, around 400 middle-management positions have been slashed, while AP subsidiary Decipha, which provides outsourced mailroom services for business customers, will close by 2025, destroying 321 jobs.

The memo is the latest demonstration that the union bureaucracy is acting on behalf of management to implement the new model, in an effort to preemptively shut down opposition to changes that will increase delivery workloads and force experienced posties out of full-time jobs.

Earlier this year, in meetings called by management, but addressed solely by union officials, members were told that, under the proposed model, delivery routes served by Electric Delivery Vehicles (EDVs), motorbikes and pushbikes would be expanded by as much as 50 percent. Ordinary letters and junk mail would be delivered to half the round on alternate days, while parcels, large letters and priority mail would continue to be delivered each day along the entire expanded route.

The first stage of trials was held at the Hornsby depot in Sydney's northwest. The CWU told workers in March that it would only be expanded after consultation with members, but the first mention that the Nepean (NSW), Brendale (Queensland) and Camden Park (SA) facilities would be involved was the July 27 notice.

Throughout the trial, the CWU bureaucracy has kept workers in the dark. At no point during the process has the union held mass meetings to discuss its progress and

what it means for workers. The union has sent members just two emails regarding the Hornsby trial, both co-authored by management.

The scant detail contained within these notices, which amount to little more than two pages in total, is nevertheless revealing.

While the initial proposal did not include walking posties, they have now been included as part of the trial. According to the joint statement, walking posties at Hornsby "requested" this. But this has implications for workers throughout the country, who had, until last week, been explicitly assured by the CWU that they would not be affected by the new model. This makes clear that the CWU leadership is working with AP management to incorporate all modes of delivery in the restructuring operation, behind the backs of workers.

Both emails triumphantly report "an average increase of 20% more parcels delivered," confirming that the aim of the new model is to deprioritise letters and transform AP into a parcel delivery service.

Ahead of the trial, the CWU claimed that "no round under this proposed model will exceed rostered hours," but the latest email notes only that "posties are covering their round in the usual amount of time."

The union and management are proceeding in this secretive fashion because they are sensitive to the hostility of postal workers towards yet another restructuring operation.

In April 2020, using the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext, AP introduced the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM), under which postal workers were assigned two rounds instead of one, delivered on alternate days. This virtually doubled posties' workload overnight, leading to an increase in injuries and mental health issues, and the exodus of thousands of workers.

This could not have been carried out without the total collaboration of the CWU, which went behind workers'

backs to sign a memorandum of understanding containing a 12-month no-strike clause, ensuring there could be no organised opposition to the hated ADM.

The CWU bureaucracy was eventually compelled by the anger of workers to posture as an opponent of the ADM, and claimed its demise as a union win. In fact, AP abandoned the ADM not because of any union campaign, but because it failed to deliver the demands of management for reduced costs and faster parcel delivery times.

Many AP workers have correctly identified the new delivery model as a renewed attack on their conditions, along precisely the same lines of the ADM, raising these concerns in recent “Our AP Way” management meetings.

But this opposition cannot go forward within the straitjacket of the CWU leadership, which has not organised even one mass meeting to discuss the new model. In fact, the union is playing the leading role in imposing the restructure, in an even more open fashion than it did with the ADM.

AP is publicly owned but run as a corporation, with highly paid executives and a board of directors tasked with maximising profits. Facing a decline in revenue from ordinary letter mail, the company is appealing to the federal Labor government to modify legislated Performance Standards, which require delivery to 98 percent of addresses five days per week.

This would enable even more sweeping changes than those currently being trialled, allowing AP to further shift its focus towards the lucrative parcel delivery business. Ultimately, this is directed at a full or partial sell-off of the postal service. While the federal government denies this, AP boss Paul Graham has declared that nothing is out of the question.

Labor is completely on board with AP’s plans to end everyday delivery, as part of the government’s broader agenda for productivity increases through intensified exploitation of the working class. Through its Postal Services Modernisation initiative, the federal government is working with Australia Post to ramp up “productivity,” including by increasing the size of delivery rounds and loading workers up with an ever-growing number of parcels.

This means that, in order to fight the deepening assault on their conditions, AP workers need to take up a fight, not just against management and the new delivery model, but in opposition to Labor and the drive towards privatisation. This is impossible under the leadership of the CWU bureaucracy, which serves as the enforcer of the

profit-driven demands of management and government.

This poses the need for AP workers to build new organisations of struggle, rank-and-file committees that are democratically controlled by workers themselves, in order to fight for their own interests.

In doing so, Australian postal workers will not be acting alone, but as part of a global fightback of postal and delivery workers against union-management-government attacks.

The British Communications Workers Union has worked with Royal Mail over the past year to ram through a new agreement, slashing the wages and conditions of postal workers, including the systematic undermining of the Universal Service Obligation, the equivalent to Australia’s Performance Standards.

The union’s moves—in line with those of the rest of the British union apparatus—to crush the Royal Mail struggle, met with major opposition. In order to build an organised rebellion against this betrayal, a group of Royal Mail workers formed a Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, whose statements and articles have been read hundreds of thousands of times, prompting hundreds of postal workers to contact the WSWS and join the fight.

A similar struggle is underway at United Parcel Service (UPS) in the US. More than 300 UPS workers attended a rank-and-file committee meeting last weekend, to discuss how to defeat a sellout union-management proposed agreement and take on the Teamsters union bureaucracy.

As part of this global fight, a group of AP workers formed the Australian Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee in 2021 to take forward the struggle against the ongoing restructuring operation and the total complicity of the CWU in the attacks on our jobs and conditions.

We urge postal and delivery workers in Australia to contact us today to discuss how you can join this fight.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact