

Labor government announces end of daily delivery at Australia Post

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The federal Labor government announced Wednesday it will remove the legislative requirement for Australia Post to provide everyday delivery of letters throughout the country, starting next year.

The change is part of longstanding restructuring plans, aimed at slashing costs and transforming the publicly owned mail service into a parcel delivery business, with the ultimate goal of full or partial privatisation.

Underscoring the central role of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) bureaucracy in imposing the restructure, CWU National Secretary Shane Murphy joined Australia Post CEO Paul Graham and Communications Minister Michelle Rowland for the announcement.

Murphy hailed the tripartite operation in an email to union members Wednesday morning: “The CWU is today welcoming the collaboration that has led to the development of a new way of working at Australia Post.”

Murphy continued, “These outcomes represent a completely different approach to previous failed attempts to ‘reform’ Australia Post by cutting jobs and services.”

Murphy was seeking to distance the latest restructuring moves from the disastrous and hated Alternative Delivery Model (ADM), introduced in 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to drive thousands of postal workers out and massively increase the workload of those who remained.

In fact, the management-government-union cost-cutting operation goes much further than the ADM. Delivery rounds will be expanded by as much as 50 percent, according to comments made by Murphy in February. Most walking rounds are likely to be eliminated, leaving workers with the choice of retraining on an Electric Delivery Vehicle (EDV), relocating if possible, or leaving the company.

In a joint press release, Rowland and Finance Minister Katy Gallagher outlined the objective of this “new way of working”: to “boost productivity,”—that is, to extract greater profit from the labour of postal workers—“increase the ‘focus on parcels, and improve long-term financial sustainability.’”

The reality is that this “sustainability,” i.e., increased

profits, will also come at the expense of the public, with letter delivery slashed to only every second day. The legislative change will allow Australia Post to adopt a new delivery model, under which letters will be delivered to half the addresses on a delivery round each day, with daily service retained for parcels and priority mail.

The new model was explicitly designed by management and the union leadership to fit within the parameters of “one postie, allocated to one round, delivering five-days per week.” The CWU bureaucracy are acutely aware that this is a red line for postal workers, who were immensely hostile to the disastrous ADM, in which they were assigned two rounds, delivering each on alternate days.

The only reason that this hostility was not expressed in industrial action by postal workers was that the union actively blocked it. Without consultation with workers, the bureaucracy signed a memorandum of understanding with management, agreeing to delay wage negotiations and preventing workers from legally taking strike action for 12 months.

But management and the CWU recognise that this was a narrow escape. Conscious of lingering anger among workers over the ADM, it was clearly decided that the union would take the leading role in introducing the new delivery model.

Workers first learned of the changes at workplace meetings in January and February, called by management but addressed solely by union officials.

The CWU has worked hand-in-hand with management all year to ensure that trials of the new model went smoothly. The objective was both to prevent opposition from workers and to add weight to Australia Post’s case that legislative reform was necessary.

Addressing workers at Kingsgrove, in southwest Sydney, Murphy adopted a phoney posture of skepticism, saying he didn’t think the new model would work, but that workers needed to “give it a go” in order to prove this.

But the “trial” of the new delivery model, first at Hornsby in northwest Sydney and then expanded to five other facilities, was never about what the change would mean for

workers. Its purpose was to gauge whether the new model would, unlike the ADM, deliver the profit increase demanded by management and the Labor government.

This was demonstrated by the fact that the CWU did not hold a single mass meeting at which workers around the country could discuss the new model with those who took part in the “trial,” which the bureaucracy kept shrouded in secrecy. Just two emails—totalling little more than two pages—were sent to members about the Hornsby trial, both of which were co-authored by management.

Even this limited communication proved revealing, however. While walking posties were told explicitly that they would not be affected by the new model, the Hornsby trial was expanded to include them, without a word of consultation with workers around the country.

The CWU had originally claimed that “no round under this proposed model will exceed rostered hours,” but the second email merely noted that “posties are covering their round in the usual amount of time.”

But the clearest statement of the union’s allegiance is the metric by which the CWU declared the trial a success: “an average increase of 20% more parcels delivered.” In other words, it proved the potential of the new model to boost profits.

Murphy’s email Wednesday presents an entirely falsified account of the behind-closed-doors trial process. He claims “real local posties have had a real say in shaping the future of our national delivery service.”

This supposed consultation has been carried out through the National Working Group, comprised of senior management and union bureaucrats, and Local Working Groups [LWGs] at the trial locations.

As the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee has explained, these groups are “corporatist mechanisms designed to dupe workers into believing they have a say in the running of AP.”

The real purpose is to provide management and the union with a pretext under which to claim that restructuring measures aimed at slashing jobs and maximising profit were in fact demanded by “rank-and-file” workers in the LWGs.

This was on stark display in what can only be accurately described as an Australia Post propaganda video, produced by management and shared on social media by the CWU last Saturday. While the union claimed the video illustrated “genuine consultation with workers,” it in fact predominately features the Nepean facility manager, as well as a team leader, who declares that customers “don’t really want their mail every day.”

The secretive trial process and the CWU bureaucracy’s unequivocal celebration of Labor’s announcement have the same aim: to hose down opposition among workers to the

largest restructuring operation in Australia Post’s history.

Australia Post workers should reject the CWU’s praise of the new model. If it is really so great for posties, then why hasn’t the union called a mass meeting at which workers from the trial sites could relate their experiences to workers around the country and answer questions in an open forum?

The answer is that the CWU bureaucracy, like all the other unions, does not represent the interests of workers, but those of management and the Labor government, to which the union has the closest of ties.

Australia Post workers are up against a united front of Labor, the CWU and management, who are all seeking to ramp up “productivity,” including by increasing the size of delivery rounds and loading workers up with an ever-growing number of parcels, as part of a drive towards eventual privatisation.

This poses the need for postal 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, Australia Post workers will be joining in an international struggle. United States Postal Service workers recently formed the USPS Rank-and-File Committee, to fight against the “Delivering for America” restructuring operation, aimed at slashing jobs, closing thousands of post offices and forcing tens of thousands of rural mail carriers onto exploitative gig-economy conditions.

As part of this global fight, a group of Australia Post 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