

Vote “no” to sellout union-management agreement at Australia Post!

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee
7 August 2024

Australia Post workers are now voting on a proposed enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) that would likely deliver real wage cuts over the next three years.

The deal, which is being promoted unequivocally by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) bureaucracy, would also serve as a rubber stamp for further attacks on jobs and conditions under the “new delivery model.”

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) urges workers to vote “no” to the sellout union-management deal. This must be the first step in a fight against Australia Post’s broader restructuring agenda, which is being carried out in concert with the Labor government and the CWU.

The main plank of the EBA offer is a paltry 4 percent per annum nominal increase to wages and allowances. This is scarcely higher than the current official inflation rate of 3.8 percent.

Unlike the previous agreement, there is no consumer price index (CPI) guarantee, meaning there is every chance that pay will decline in comparison with official inflation, which itself drastically understates the extent of the cost-of-living crisis.

Prices are rising far more sharply for costs most directly affecting the working class. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), living costs for “employee households” rose by 6.2 percent over the past year, primarily fuelled by much higher home mortgage payments and education costs.

For a mid-grade postal delivery officer at Australia Post, a 4 percent pay “rise” would amount to less than \$50 per week, as a result of the dire wages enshrined in previous union-management deals. This has also made many postal workers reliant on constant overtime just to pay the bills, a practice the union encourages as a substitute for a real struggle for higher wages.

Since the introduction of the new delivery model, overtime has been slashed in many facilities, leading to a massive cut in take-home pay. Some workers have told the PWRFC they have been forced to take on second jobs to make up the shortfall.

What this poses is that Australia Post workers need a pay rise far in excess of inflation, to reverse past losses, and lift wages to a level that provides a decent standard of living for posties and their families, based on working rostered hours.

Besides wages and related allowances, which would also

increase by 4 percent, the proposed deal contains no substantive gains in comparison with the 2021 agreement.

The CWU’s boast of “NO TRADE OFFS” is revealing. Even if this were true, and it is not, it would be an indictment of the union leadership. The union is in effect boasting that the increasingly difficult status quo will remain and it has not secured any improvements to conditions at all.

The CWU leadership is working hand-in-hand with management to ram the deal through behind workers’ backs in totally anti-democratic fashion. Not a single mass meeting has been held in the course of bargaining—the only input of workers in the process was a bogus online survey.

Now, the proposed agreement has been presented as a fait accompli, with workers given just seven days to peruse and consider the document before the ballot opened.

After declaring “in-principle” agreement with management on July 4, CWU officials embarked on a whirlwind tour of Australia Post facilities to spruik the deal.

The whole process was engineered to suppress any challenge to the proposed agreement. By confining meetings to separate facilities, the CWU bureaucracy sought to isolate any opposition to the deal—and the bureaucracy that brokered it—and prevent it from finding expression among broader layers of workers.

The CWU bureaucrats refuse to organise mass meetings because they are highly aware that such opposition exists, among postal workers and throughout the working class, and is growing as the cost-of-living crisis deepens.

Despite attempts to rewrite their record on the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM), the CWU leadership knows that many postal workers have not forgotten the union’s sordid role in that episode.

In 2020, Australia Post and the Liberal-National federal government used the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to set in motion longstanding plans to end everyday delivery. This immediately doubled the workload of posties and drove thousands of workers to resign.

Under conditions of immense hostility to the ADM, the CWU bureaucracy struck a back-room deal with management, freezing workers’ pay and imposing a 12-month strike ban, blocking any industrial campaign against the hated model.

Now, with the new delivery model, Australia Post, the federal Labor government and the CWU leadership are working in close collaboration to implement what could accurately be described as “ADM 2.0.”

The new model is part of the plan to transform Australia Post into a highly profitable parcel business. Letter delivery frequency has been halved to every second weekday, while larger items are still delivered daily.

The aim is for delivery rounds to be consolidated and expanded, with most walking beats eliminated, to allow for the reduction of staff levels necessary to deliver the cost savings demanded by management and the Labor government.

The company’s “Post 26” operation aims to slash labour costs by 17 percent between 2023 and 2026. This means that even the meagre 4 percent rise now on offer will have to be paid for several times over by workers, through cuts to jobs and conditions.

The CWU is telling workers to vote for a deal that would give Australia Post everything it wants, because the union bureaucracy is completely on board with these plans. Like all the corporatised trade unions, the CWU functions as an industrial police force of management, shutting down opposition to every attack on jobs, wages and conditions.

The task confronting postal workers is to build rank-and-file committees in every facility, to take the power back from the pro-company union leadership. Through a network of such committees, workers can discuss demands based on their actual needs and begin preparations to fight for them.

As a starting point for this discussion, the PWRFC proposes these basic demands:

- Immediately increase all pay by 40 percent to lift base wages to an acceptable standard and end workers’ reliance on constant overtime to make ends meet. Index wages to the current cost of living and introduce an automatic monthly cost of living adjustment to keep pace with rising expenses.
- No to the new delivery model! Return to everyday delivery on all rounds.
- One beat, one postie, with no expansion of beats! Where identified by workers, rounds must be reduced in size based on finishing within rostered hours. Empty beats must be filled with new employees.
- No job cuts! All workers that have been laid off since the restructuring started—including in middle management—must be immediately reinstated with no loss of entitlements or pay.
- End the use of contractors as a second-tier workforce! All existing contractors must be offered full-time jobs with the same wages, conditions and rights as other permanent workers.
- Clean air in the workplace! AP must install proper ventilation, HEPA filtration and far-UVC germicidal lighting in all facilities to minimise the spread of COVID-19, flu and other respiratory illnesses among postal workers. Reinstate paid pandemic leave so workers have ample time to recover and are not under financial duress to work while possibly infectious.

- An additional 10 days of annual leave.

Rank-and-file committees should reject all calls by the company and the union for sacrifice, or the lying claim that keeping Australia Post profitable will protect jobs and conditions. Workers’ needs must not be subordinated to the interests of finance capital and the demand of the ruling class that essential public services must turn a profit.

To defeat the “Post 26” restructuring operation and fight for improved wages and conditions, Australia Post workers will need to take up a political struggle against Labor, management and the union bureaucracy.

This must be seen as part of a struggle by broader sections of the working class, in Australia and internationally, including postal workers in Britain, Canada and the United States who are building their own rank-and-file committees to oppose similar attacks.

Everywhere, governments, with the assistance of the corporatised union bureaucracies, are seeking to impose massive cuts to conditions and jobs, to drive down the conditions of the working class, amid a deep-going crisis of world capitalism. The most basic rights that were the product of earlier struggles, including the eight-hour day and job permanency are under systematic assault. This new offensive comes on top of forty years of union-enforced wage stagnation and concessions in many sectors.

At Australia Post, this offensive poses the threat sooner or later of privatisation. Even prior to an outright sell-off, the drive is to force workers to compete with those in the gig economy, who have virtually no protections and are paid poverty-level wages, through ever greater corporatisation.

What is required is a fight for a new political perspective that rejects the dominance of corporate profit interests over every aspect of society.

This means taking up the struggle for a workers’ government and a socialist program. Australia Post must be placed under democratic workers’ control and ownership, along with the banks and major corporations.

We call on all postal workers to fight for this perspective, contact and join the PWRFC to begin this fight.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact