

E-BULLETIN Postal

#4 Friday, 8th June 2007

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EBA7 – strong reaction through member survey

In less than a week since its issue, nearly 1,000 CEPU members have sent back their member survey on EBA7.

Thank you for a fantastic response – we appreciate getting your views about an agreement that will shape your working conditions in the years ahead.

Members have spoken out strongly on the EBA7, with preliminary survey results showing strong disapproval of key aspects of Australia Post management's preferred EBA7 positions.

While it's early days, the overwhelming majority of members are saying:

- A 4% per annum pay increase does not reward employees for their contribution to Australia Post.
- It is not fair that people working alongside each other doing exactly the same work are paid up to \$105 a week less just because Australia Post is deliberately starting these employees 33 minutes later.
- We do not believe Australia Post will treat employees fairly and reasonably without access to arbitration.
- We believe full access to arbitration will provide greater protection for Postal workers.
- We believe that job security without clear legal clauses dealing with contracting out and franchising.
- We would consider taking protected industrial action to secure our rights at work.

Other comments members made included:

- "We cannot do the same job and not be paid the same wage."
- "Must have arbitration for all disputes."
- "Australia Post has dragged this out for too long and they need to be taken to task for doing so by the union and its members."
- "If the bosses can award themselves a big pay rise why isn't it good enough for the workers. Also need job security, especially in small regional workplaces."
- "It seems the only 'workchoice' you get is, sign here or go without."

Make sure you have your say!

Take a few moments to complete the survey and return it free of charge in the reply paid envelope. We will publish the results of the survey as they become available.

EBA7 – sticking together has delivered

As a result of the CEPU and CPSU working together during these EBA7 talks, and based on our members' overwhelming support, we have been able to secure through the negotiations the following improvements for members:

- an improved pay offer from Australia Post of 4% -- although member reaction in the EBA7 survey is suggesting members want a higher pay rate
- the \$500 bonus paid into superannuation (if members elect to do so). Combined with other government co-contribution schemes, this could potentially be doubled
- recognition of seniority as a factor in offering redundancies
- clauses on OH&S and tea breaks – previously refused by management
- some movement on Post's previous hardline on shift penalty rates and arbitration.

But the CEPU believes that at this stage the EBA is not good enough to recommend to members yet.

By filling out the survey, you send clear signal about what you want EBA7 to look like – and what you're prepared to do to see a better offer put on the table.

EBA7 – be part of our grassroots campaign

We also want to thank those members who have put their hand up to become an EBA7 activist.

These members want to join with our many union delegates be part of a grassroots campaign to spread the EBA7 message on Post work floors across the country.

Being an activist is simple – just contact your nearest state branch of the CEPU and tell them you want to be registered to receive information on the EBA7 campaign to distribute to your work mates.

Or email us at eba7@cepu.asn.au

It's an easy first step to making a difference in your workplace.

Selling Aussie Post to deal with climate change out of puff ... for now

A bizarre finance sector plan to sell Australia Post to help fund a national response to climate change has run out of puff, for now.

CommSec released a report stating: “Just like in the past with Telstra, Optus and Commonwealth Bank we don't believe the Government has a role in being in the parcels business or promotional mail”.

The Federal Government has said it has no plans to sell off Australia Post. However the CEPU has urged Australians to keep the pressure on the Federal Government to ensure it sticks to its position.

While the Federal Government has today said it has “no plans” to sell Australia Post, we need to make sure they don't embrace a change of heart after the election.

We think rural and regional Australians need to make sure their local MPs and candidates commit to vote against any Coalition plans to sell this national asset in the future.

Our union will be approaching these MPs and candidates calling on them to stand by their local communities who want to ensure their local postal service won't be sold off.

The story that sparked debate on Aust Post sale

The Commonwealth Bank's investment and broking arm, CommSec, launched their "climate quick fix" by releasing a report saying there is a solid case for the privatisation of Australia Post.

CommSec said the Federal Government could get up to \$7 billion from the sale, which it could use for major projects including water security and climate change.

But this isn't an idea to fix climate change. This is the classic Trojan Horse: tack on to an issue that is generating community heat already (climate change) to slip in another debate (Post privatisation). Want the proof? Read the following comments from Craig James:

- "At the very least, we believe the Government should begin community discussion on Australia Post's future."

Maybe Craig wasn't in the country a few years ago – but that debate was had. And the response to the community and union campaign "Hands Off Aussie Post" gave a resounding response in the debate on Australia Post's future.

The community said they weren't interested in any further deregulation of Australia Post.

If you're an Aussie Post worker the challenge is now clear – you need to voice your opinion to your local Federal MP or candidate. Labor, Liberal, National or Green. Politicians need to know that you think they should keep their hands off Aussie Post.

Australia Post asset management and inventory system

SAP is Australia Post's enterprise business package. M&ND uses the SAP Plant Maintenance (PM) and Materials Management (MM) modules to maintain it's fleet of Mail Processing Equipment and associated maintenance systems. It would appear that the current desk-based system is not sufficient and that Australia Post wants to implement a more effective Asset Management system to support its maintenance activities and inventory management.

Consequently a new program is planned to be implemented at eleven mail and parcel processing facilities around Australia. SAP PM and MM transactions will be made available on a handheld PDA. Technicians and some Process Leaders will be provided with a PDA to assist with their job function. The PDA will connect to SAP via wireless network to enable mobile data entry and transfer. This will free the user from having continually access desktop terminals for maintenance data entry. Additionally, bar-coding will be provided on the PDA to enable ease of data entry through the scanning of barcodes.

The new program has been trialled at Melbourne Parcel Facility (MPF) and has been approved for roll-out to NSW sites beginning at Sydney West Letters Facility at the end of this month. Proposed roll-out dates for subsequent sites are as follows:

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|---------|------------------------|-----|----|-----|------|
| NSW | SPF, HRMC, CMC | Jul | to | Aug | 2007 |
| VIC | DLC, MPF and HMC (Tas) | Sep | to | Nov | 2007 |
| QLD | UMC and NMC | Feb | to | Apr | 2008 |
| WA & SA | AMC and PMC | May | to | Jul | 2008 |

The transition process will involve a number of activities including pre-implementation briefings, workshops, training roll-out and mentoring and coaching. Prior to implementation, staff will be invited to undertake a survey which will assist in gauging site readiness. Training packages are being finalised.

Workwear uniform

Following representation from the CEPU, Australia Post has provided a copy of comments and suggestions from focus groups on the workwear uniform conducted around the States. Some of the comments and resulting changes to uniform specifications are as follows:

- Moleskin jeans – too hot during summer months. Proposed changes to specs include a lighter stretch fabric for summer months.
- Cargo pants – popular but a lighter fabric for summer. Length an issue for pants (too long/too short). Solution is to review of strength of standard sizing.
- Shorts – people keen to retain utility shorts. Australia Post proposing new longer shorts be made available. Ladies shorts proposed to be replaced with ¾ length cargo pants. However, shorts will be available to both males and females.
- Long sleeve and short sleeve shirts – Australia Post proposing to introduce a new Yakka Chambray shirt for males, but little support for this garment due to its high % of polyester.
- Long sleeve and short sleeve blouses – Australia Post proposing to replace current garments with Yakka poly cotton. Minimal support for these garments. Considered too hot.
- Polo top – three options continue with existing garment, replace garment with Yakka cotton high vis back micro mesh, or replace with Yakka Woolscience polo. Current garment considered too hot. Woolscience not popular. Cotton back polo preferred.

Australia Post advised it will forward written confirmation outlining changes to the workwear uniform range shortly. We will keep you advised.

Gimme a break ... or don't

Australians are being challenged as to whether they deserve the reputation of being laid back and holiday loving.

The seventh annual Vacation Deprivation Survey, taken in March and April, undermines the popular perception of the laid-back Aussie lifestyle, filled with beachside barbecues and beer.

It said 37 per cent of workers in Australia didn't use all of their annual leave in 2006/07, beating the United States, where the figure was 35 per cent.

“This is the transformed image of the bronzed Aussie to emerge from a new global survey on holidays that shows Australians rank last in the western world when it comes to taking their full leave allowance,” said the Sydney Morning Herald.

The Federal Government's own Tourism Australia authority released research last year which revealed work pressure was to blame for the nation's employees having accrued around 70 million days of annual leave.

Australian's receive the second-least number of holiday days each year, getting an average of just 18 days off. The only employees getting a worse deal are those in the US, who receive a mere 14 days each year.

The survey sponsor, on-line travel company Expedia, says the findings “explode” the myth that Australians are laid back and holiday loving.

The Herald also quotes Macquarie University occupational psychologist Dr Ben Searle who states evidence was emerging that working for extended periods without taking time off “to recharge” could lead to mental and social problems, “and in extreme cases even death”.

But in some cases employers are knocking back our member requests for leave – even if the employee gives two to three months notice of leave. Annual leave is an important condition and in recent EBA7 negotiations the CEPU pushed Australia Post management to introduce a system of accounting for why leave is knocked back. Not surprisingly, Post refused.

Safety Institute slams WorkChoices

The Safety Institute of Australia, Victorian Vice President has warned that “WorkChoices” is opening a Pandora’s Box of health problems from stress and high work loads. Kevin Jones says that WorkChoices is “the greatest threat to workers health since asbestos because it harms people from all walks of life in such an insidious way and millions of Australians are being exposed to its potentially devastating effects”. This, from a non profit conservative body that represents about 4,000 workplace safety professionals in government and the private sector nationwide.

Women worse off on AWAs: study

The National Foundation for Australian Women has just released a report finding that women employees are paid less than men under WorkChoices AWAs. The Foundation’s What Women Want report shows that the nation’s gender pay gap widened in the year to November 2006, with the biggest gap in Western Australia, the state with the highest rate of AWAs. Women’s average weekly full time earnings as a percentage of men’s was 75% in WA, compared to 84% nationally.

The report said the first significant deterioration in the relative pay of women in Western Australia coincided with the introduction of individual bargaining in that state, and the experience mirrored that of New Zealand under previous government laws.

In addition the report found that gender wage inequality was worse in part-time and casual employment, and AWAs were most common in the retail sector, where there has been little if any wage growth.

The report recommended the adoption of paid maternity leave rights, better auditing of wage data and provision of more information on workplace rights to employees.

Howard Government’s Workplace Laws to be examined by ILO for third year in a row

The Howard Government’s workplace laws will be examined at a hearing later this week into whether they comply with international labour standards.

A list of 25 alleged international labour rights offenders, including the Howard Government’s workplace laws, will be considered in Geneva by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a special agency of the United Nations that monitors labour standards.

Australia is a signatory to the international convention on fundamental labour rights.

According to the ACTU President Sharan Burrow: “Someone should be asking the Minister, Joe Hockey, why his Government’s workplace laws do not comply with international human rights to which it is a signatory?”

The ILO is taking the Howard Government to task because it is one of few governments among advanced countries whose workplace laws are alleged to breach freedom of association & the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.

These are fundamental human rights that are laid down in the 1998 ILO ‘Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights of Work’ that also include the elimination of forced labour, the abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Australian working families already know that the Howard Government’s IR laws are unfair and they now should know that the unfairness of the laws has not escaped international attention,” said Ms Burrow.

No cheap umpire for Howard’s “fairness test”

The ACTU has identified another problem with the Howard Government’s new “fairness test”, the process that is supposed to ensure that workers on AWAs aren’t disadvantaged. This time it’s the cost of challenging the “fairness” of the AWA.

Under the “fairness test”, the Government’s new Workplace Authority (formerly called the Office of Workplace Relations) is supposed to check all AWAs signed since May 7th to make sure they are “fair” and that employees are receiving appropriate compensation for any conditions (penalty rates, public holidays) they give up.

Legal advice obtained by the ACTU says that the only way an employee could challenge the decision of the Workplace Authority would be by going to the High Court – a step that would cost thousands of dollars.

The ACTU claims that anyone mounting such a challenge could expect to pay at least \$25,000 to get their day in court. How fair is that?

No clear criteria for “fairness”

The Government’s answer is that workers should simply accept the Workplace Authority’s decision. But in practice, those decisions are going to be highly subjective.

Under the “fairness test”, AWAs don’t have to be provide financial compensation for the loss of overtime payments, penalty rates, public holidays and other award entitlements. “Compensation” could take the form of free coffee at meal breaks, for instance (see story below). How is the Workplace Authority going to decide whether this is fair or not?

The other problem is the sheer number of AWAs that have to be looked at. These are now being registered at the rate of around 1,000 a day. Even with extra staff, how is the Workplace Authority going to make reasonable and considered judgements about the fairness of all these contracts?

Election ploy

There fact is that the Government doesn’t care whether or not there is a good answer to these questions. It is only interested in trying to convince voters that it is doing something about its unpopular workplace laws.

The “fairness test” is nothing but window dressing for the forthcoming election and will do nothing to stop the erosion of working conditions and living standards that is at the heart of the Howard Government’s agenda.