

## Win for Kennon Auto Workers

by *Jim H. and Alice M.*

**For 20 days in the cold, wet and wintry month of July, Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union workers at Kennon Auto in Preston (Melbourne) were on strike over attempts by management to force an Enterprise Agreement that took away many basic rights and working conditions.**

In the end, against all odds, Kennon Auto workers' resilience not only won the reinstatement of workers' rights and conditions under a union agreement, but also improvements to their existing conditions in the new EBA.

Striking workers received wide support and solidarity from many unions, workers and the community. It was this wide support and solidarity on their 24 hour picket that helped Kennon Auto workers continue their battle. Despite oppressive WorkChoices/FairWork laws used against workers and unions, workers and their supporters creatively overcame the repressive legal impediments and won.

There's no doubt that the wide solidarity and mobilisation of the union movement was one of the decisive factors in these workers' victory. The sight of union officials, delegates and workers from other unions and industries and community members standing side by side on the picket with striking workers strengthened Kennon Auto workers' determination and weakened the bosses' power.

Unity of the union movement is critical to the success of workers' struggles. Unions develop unity in struggle.

Central to this is a class consciousness that takes a stance of the whole of the working class position, not just from the narrow interests of a particular workplace, trade or industry. Petty divisions can be put aside in order to meet the interests of all workers. This is the lesson.

Management of Kennon Auto tried to force workers to accept an EBA that abolished many of their previous rights and conditions.

Amongst these were lower wages for current workers and an even lower rate of pay for new starts; unlimited number of casuals and length of employment; imposition of flexible changes to working hours without consultation; sick leave only paid when employer considers the worker to have been sick enough, and in the case of injury the worker must see company nominated doctor.

The prolonged and successful industrial action forced management to drop their demands for inferior conditions in the EBA. This new union approved EBA includes \$1,000 back-pay and annual wage increases of 4%, 3% and 3%. There are also improvements in the redundancy package and a fair process of voting on the agreement – no longer will workers be individually directed into the boss's office to vote for an EBA with the manager standing over the voting worker.

Especially important was the central role played by the striking workers and their union. It was their

resolute determination to maintain the struggle, their ongoing unity and clear headedness about what was at stake and what had to be done, that was inspirational to all.

What a contrast there was between the attitude displayed by the striking workers in comparison to that shown by the employer, characterised by contempt for workers and a willingness to stop at nothing to satisfy their unbridled greed for profit.

Kennon had used a group of casual workers as a means to continue operations. However, this eventually ground to a halt as the disciplined and well organised picketers were able to totally stop deliveries.

Kennon is not a huge monopoly, but a medium sized company supplying interiors for Toyota, Mazda, Honda and Hyundai cars.

Companies like this are squeezed by the monopolies they supply. They should strive to get a better deal from the giant car suppliers instead of attacking the workers.

## Australia Post's miserable EBA angers workers

by *Alice M.*

**Australia Post workers and their union, the Communication Workers Union, know all about the hard and long road of struggle to secure an EBA that protects working conditions and ensures modest pay rises.**

Not much to ask for by any group of self-respecting workers who create the profits and operate an essential service in the economy.

But not according to Australia Post, Australia's biggest government business enterprise. After more than 3 years on and off negotiations and a new managing director who promised to respect the workers and deal co-operatively with the union, little has changed.

A stream of union submissions and deputations appealing to Labor government ministers to rein in the ruthless management of its own corporation have had no effect either.

In fact, Post management's relentless attack on its workers continues unchecked under the Labor government's own Fair Work Australia legislation. Australia Post management used Fair Work Australia to try and prevent workers taking industrial action and then used the same legislation to halt workers' action midway through a very successful strike before Christmas 2009.

And now Australia Post is trying to impose an EBA that no unionist genuinely dedicated to working people



could accept.

Shift penalties are a significant component of postal workers' wages as the base rate is so low. The new EBA does not provide any real protection of shift penalties. In the past 3 years, Post has managed to get out of paying shift penalties to new workers by starting them half an hour later on non-penalty shifts. This has created two classes of workers, working side by side on different rates of pay.

The EBA does not even protect current staff on penalty rates. Delivery staff are in danger of losing their penalty rates on transfer, or if they move from part-time to full-time or higher duties.

A miserable 1% annual pay rise over 3 years is an insult to hard working postal workers. There's also a bonus of additional annual 1% rises. But, before we get too excited about Australia Post's generosity, there are conditions. The 1% bonus is broken down into two half percentages. One half percent is tied to

94% 'delivery on time' performance targets. The second half percent is only paid if the volume of mail (letters and parcels) increases from the previous year. You don't need a Master's degree in "how to be a cunning boss" to work out that the second half percent is not achievable because of the rapid growth of email.

This all comes at a time of increased productivity by postal workers, speed-ups and greater exploitation.

### Individual agreements to undermine conditions

The deepest assault on postal workers is the flexibility clause in the new EBA that allows Post to strike individual agreements with workers, on a range of working conditions. These include overtime rates, penalty rates, leave loading, allowances and arrangements for when work is performed. Although the safety net prohibits lowering existing

conditions, the flexibility clause will introduce different conditions amongst the same group of workers and eventually be used to resist future improvements. Essentially, the flexibility clause means the hated AWAs from WorkChoices, now re-branded in the Fair Work Australia legislation, can open the gates for management to push for widespread use of individual arrangements to erode collective agreements.

Nevertheless, persistent action by the union and workers has secured some small achievements in the improvement of working conditions. Injured workers can no longer be forced to attend Australia Post's nominated doctors immediately after injury, a new OH&S agreement will be negotiated, and junior rates have been removed.

But the battle for decent pay increases, protection of shift penalty rates and protection of collective negotiations and agreements is still continuing. It's been a hard and long road, but Australia Post workers and the union will not give up their hard won conditions easily.

Many postal workers are deeply disturbed at their Federal leadership's refusal to continue to fight for adequate protection of current pay and conditions and are organising a "Vote No" campaign. They believe that the sign off on the draft EBA is more about "not rocking the boat" during the current election campaign and the pre-selection of a union officer into a safe Labor seat, than the achievement of a decent agreement.