

# Postal workers prove their strength

by Alice M.

**Countless bosses' tricks and the state's oppressive legal devices did not work for Australia Post in intimidating and bullying postal workers and their union, the Communication Workers Union, to give up their 3 year long fight to defend workers' pay and conditions.**

On the contrary, it only served to expose even more the true intentions of Australia Post Corporation's top bosses, and strengthened the resolve and discipline of postal workers to fight for an EBA that protects shift penalties, job security and safety. The six months of intense struggle, that often required rapid changes in tactics midway, demonstrated the great power and discipline of the organised working class.

## Australia Post bosses enlist Fair Work Australia

Three times in two months, Australia Post's expensive lawyers scurried to Fair Work Australia demanding that it cancel postal workers' right to vote in a ballot for industrial action. Predictably, this only made workers more determined to take industrial action. When the ballot was finally held in late November, more than 80 percent of union members voted for industrial action. It was an exceptionally strong result given that Australia Post workers are spread across all corners of Australia, in metropolitan

cities, regional, rural and far flung remote areas of the country.

As soon as the ballot results were declared, it didn't take long to organise a wide range of long awaited national industrial action that involved full and partial stoppages and a myriad of creative bans. Different forms of industrial action ensured most workers participated and the bosses were kept confused. Well attended protest rallies were held in most major cities and regional centres.

Australia Post Corporation's top management was in full swing, threatening workers against taking any industrial action. Workers were even threatened with a loss of full day's pay for a limited 15 minute ban or withdrawal of labour for 2-3 hours. Many workers responded by taking their own initiative and deciding to go on strike for the whole day instead!

## Action in Victoria

In Victoria, a week of bans led to co-ordinated 24 hour rolling strikes, starting with Australia Post drivers, followed by workers at the 3 large mail and parcels processing centres and delivery centres. Between 90-95 percent of Australia Post workers in the 3 processing centres at Melbourne Parcel Facility, Dandenong Letter Centre and Melbourne Gateway Facility at Tullamarine Airport, went on strike.

For more than 24 hours, no mail



went in or out, with strong picket lines held by postal workers and community supporters stopping dozens of management-driven Australia Post trucks and vans from entering or leaving the processing and delivery centres. The united action by postal workers brought mail in Victoria to a standstill, with 18 million unprocessed letters and half a million parcels banked up, and no mail sorted for delivery. The three large mail processing centres and many delivery centres were virtually emptied of all activity, except for a handful of desperate managers and a sprinkle of casuals struggling to do the work of more than 5,000 striking workers. Many striking workers were not put off by the 40 degree heat and set up well attended and lively picket lines outside their workplaces. In less than a week of strike and industrial action, more than 140 new and enthusiastic workers joined the union in Victoria.

Management was shell shocked by

postal workers' strong and extensive support for the strike. Their contempt for Australia Post workers deluded them into believing their own spin that their interchangeable tactics of threats one day and sweet talk another would either intimidate or trick most workers not to strike.

## Lessons of working class discipline and unity

As industrial action unfolded and expanded postal workers grew in confidence and pride at the power, and the possibilities, of their collective strength in the workplace. The social conditions of labour at the point of production and the endless experiences tussling with the boss over working conditions and rights, instils in workers the class consciousness of the necessity for discipline, unity and the power of collective action. Workers experience in the workplace repeatedly asserts the truth that working people can progress their conditions mainly through collective action on the job and as a whole class. Repeated experience teaches that co-option by the bosses, back-room deals that exclude rank and file workers and legal manoeuvrings alone will not secure conditions for the workers, even temporarily. Many postal workers have a healthy cynicism of Australia Post Corporation's propaganda claims as common interests between the corporation and its workers.

The actions of Australia Post workers demonstrated the enormous capacity for unity and discipline of the organised working class. The mass action revealed the truth about capitalist relations of production, where profit (surplus value) is created by the labour of thousands of workers but is appropriated by the tiny rich minority who are the ruling class. In Australia Post's case, the profits created by workers are used by the state to facilitate efficient operations of the capitalist economy. Cuts to wages and conditions of postal workers shifts capital to improve and service the operations of big business profiteering as a whole.

# Teachers stand up to damaging league tables

by Nick G.

**Teachers around the nation are set to do battle with the federal Government over a controversial new website launched at the end of January.**

The website reports on school achievements in national numeracy and literacy (NAPLAN) tests. Behind the use of the NAPLAN data is an attack on the right of Australians to high quality public education in their own community.

Essentially the government is saying "We have put the old arguments about rich schools and poor schools behind us by doing everything possible to leave the choice of schools up to the parents".

Driving this retreat from high quality public education for all is the public comparison of school NAPLAN results. Gillard has said that the new *My School* website will allow "like school" comparisons. In her words, there won't be a comparison between "the most

elite schools on Sydney's north shore on the top and the most disadvantaged schools in outback Northern Territory on the bottom." What she often fails to point out is that every school will be compared with its twenty closest schools, within which there will obviously be various inequalities which will encourage parents, in Kevin Rudd's words, "to vote with their feet."

In addition, the monopoly media, which rarely defends public education and generally pushes privatisation in every arena, will use the *My School* website to construct its own 'league tables' of school comparison. Gillard oscillates between denying that *My School* data can be used in this way, and praising the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* for the league tables it constructed out of last year's NAPLAN results when they were released by the Queensland government!

"The issue for teachers is not the tests," says South Australian AEU President Correna Haythorpe. "We

test students every day. The issue for us is the misuse of test data which was never designed for the comparison of schools. The Government must bring in measures to stop league tables."

Teachers point to the marketing of "teach to the test" materials in schools and bookshops as confirmation of fears that there will be an British-style narrowing of the curriculum and lack of balance in learning.

Capitalism does not concern itself with what a child gets out of education beyond ensuring that skills essential for productivity growth are drilled into the young.

The government's neo-liberal marketisation of education must be stopped. Each community must be provided with public education of the highest standard, with a balanced curriculum. 'League tables', with their potential to demoralise students, mislead parents and limit the access to high quality public education. They must be stopped.