



Tom Hale, AMWU National Food Secretary

A message from Tom:

HOLDING THE LINE TO GROW OUR FOOD INDUSTRY'S PROMISE

Welcome to this special edition of AMWU News, especially for our members working in Food and Confectionary.

We're bringing to you stories and updates which show your union in action for your interests at work.

It's a time of both change and potential, as the dollar's recent fall opens up more lucrative opportunity for exports of clean and green Australian manufactured foods into the Asian and middle eastern market – great news for local workers and industry.

But we also must secure our own market against the threat of free but unfair trade agreements, the scare over imported food hygiene and the half-cooked reforms to labelling laws.

This should be a time when food manufacturing employers share in extra revenues generated off their workforce's productive efforts.

Instead, we're often fighting off efforts by some food multinationals to drive down wages and conditions.

They'd already sniffed the wind before the Productivity Commission urged winding back penalty rates for weekend retail and hospitality workers.

We'll keep fighting to ensure that Australian union members are treated fairly and with respect at work, and share in the benefits of a growing food industry. ■



Tom Hale, AMWU National Food Secretary

MCCAIN TRYING TO 'DO IT AGAIN'

AMWU members at McCain's in Tasmania are planning industrial action, which may begin within days. They are campaigning against the company's strategy of trying to wind back their conditions and take-home-pay.

The dispute at the potato chip processing plant in Smithton is coming to the crunch after all eligible votes from the workforce last week unanimously supported taking protected action.

Members are angry at McCain's refusal to negotiate any further on its position of a new enterprise deal of 3% rise over two years in exchange for trading away a variety of conditions – including reducing weekend penalty rates.

AMWU calculations show this would leave maintenance workers around \$91 a week worse off and our members in production at least \$72 a week worse off.

Tasmanian State Secretary John Short said members had voted for industrial action as a last resort, but were absolutely determined to protect the value of their take-home-pay.

"Workers would sooner the company came back to the table with a reasonable offer but that hasn't happened, so there's no way they are going backwards," he said.

"Members just want a new agreement which protects their families' standard of living and the conditions which have been part of the workplace here for 30 years."

The multinational food company is targeting a range of conditions including overtime pay, an allowance for night shift and weekend penalty rates.

But management's refusal to negotiate in good faith sees the Smithton plant facing action.

The company in the past year has

gained a contract to supply bagged chips (French fries) to Woolworths supermarkets on top of wholesale supplies for the fast-food market, meaning better productivity among its 75 workers around the wider range of products.

Output has rocketed from 54,000 tonnes last year to 80,000 tonnes this year.

"We want to see a profitable company but we want recognition for our part, which includes the penalty rate cost for leisure time we lose with our families by working weekends," a McCain members told AMWU News.

Workers also said the fall in the Australian dollar meant McCain's plant was now more competitive with imports, which should increase profitability.

They have been told by local management that the Smithton plant was one of the best performers worldwide for the North American multinational. ■

HUNGRY BABIES BRING BOOM FOR HEINZ



All set for set hours: AMWU members Chris Eddy, Felicity Cocks and Mark Thompson are among the 10 Heinz workers happy to be converted from casual to permanent.

AMWU members at the Heinz factory in Echuca are looking forward to a “baby bonus” after the company decided to meet booming demand for its infant food products by putting on more permanent workers and adding weekend shifts.

The happy news is that 10 new fulltime positions have been filled by experienced casual workers, with the extra production also meaning that management agreed to convert a further five casuals to permanent part-time.

Heinz is now running production on weekends, opening up penalty rate shifts up to double time for both Saturdays and a new Sunday evening start-up.

AMWU National Food Secretary Tom Hale visited the Echuca baby food factory a few weeks ago to assist with a smooth transition, with management agreeing to take on the new production workers from longest-serving casuals in accord with the existing agreement.

Eight of the new full time jobs are on

production and two are in maintenance. The new permanent part-timers have been casuals at Heinz for the nine months qualifying period, with Mr Hale predicting they could also be converted to full-time as early as Christmas.

New plastic pouch 120g packaging introduced about three years ago has become increasingly popular with parents of babies and infants, but demand has taken off since a cap and screw top replaced the tear-off type for fresh food-mix combos.

Union delegate Ray Clifford said production for domestic and export markets was busier than ever, with the extra jobs great for morale and extra shifts meaning more wages going back into the local community.

“The new full-time positions have been offered to casuals, in the past people had to wait quite a number of years to gain permanency but these jobs have become available for people after a few years,” he said.

“They’re over the moon about it, in fact everyone is really happy at the prospect of some extra work. When some places are struggling, it’s great to see us doing well.”

Felicity Cocks was thrilled to be among the casual workers chosen, relishing the certainty that permanent shifts will bring to family life.

“I’m in the filling department, I’ve worked two years casual and I’m fortunate to have secured a position – permanent days will be great for the family,” she said.

“It means not being called up for work at random times, or being sent home.” ■

**AMWU action has prevented Simplot at Ulverstone in Tasmania from making 10 employees redundant without going through proper process to ensure fairness. The Fair Work Commission has made a strong recommendation that Simplot halt the redundancies and have meaningful consultations.*