

# Agreement reached at Maltapost in wake of industrial action

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The Union of United Workers gave the go-ahead for industrial action at Malta's national postal services provider, Maltapost, after no agreement was reached regarding the measures proposed for the new collective agreement. The trade union instructed employees not to process any addressed or unaddressed door-to-door mail. Following a month of industrial action, including a day of total strike, both parties reached agreement and signed the new collective agreement.

## Background to dispute

The Public Entities Section of the Union of United Workers (Union Haddiema Maghqudin, UHM (<https://www.uhm.org.mt/home.aspx>)) informed the management of Maltapost (<http://www.maltapost.com/page.asp?p=7017&l=1>) that it disagreed with the measures proposed for the new collective agreement. The trade union requested an urgent meeting to discuss the management's proposals. Furthermore, UHM warned the company's management not to implement any measures without first reaching agreement. The union went on to say that it would take industrial action if any measures were implemented without any such agreement.

Postal delivery workers frequently complained to the union about the health hazards involved in their work due to heavy loads when distributing mail. On more than one occasion, UHM raised these complaints with Maltapost's management. However, no action was ever taken and management continued to increase the postal delivery workers' load, thus putting the employees at risk of being injured. While UHM repeatedly asked Maltapost's management to assess the health risk of the door-to-door work, such a risk assessment was never carried out. Since the company's management continued to follow its own agenda without consulting the trade union, UHM ordered industrial action for 15 May 2007. The union instructed employees not to process any addressed or unaddressed door-to-door deliveries.

## Threat of strike action

UHM's Public Entities Section held a conciliation meeting with Maltapost's management and the Director of the Department of Industrial and Employment Relations (DIER

([http://www.education.gov.mt/employment/ind\\_relations/departments](http://www.education.gov.mt/employment/ind_relations/departments)

[/department\\_industrial\\_relations.htm](#))), Noel Vella. However, no guarantee was given assuring the trade union that the work of postal delivery workers did not involve any health hazards. UHM officials therefore stated that the trade union would continue with the strike action until the company provided such a guarantee. Subsequent meetings with the company's management concerning the collective agreement, which expired three years ago (**MT0406101N** ([//www.eurofound.europa.eu/ga/ef/observatories/eurwork/articles/agreement-at-maltapost-after-industrial-action](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ga/ef/observatories/eurwork/articles/agreement-at-maltapost-after-industrial-action))), ended in deadlock.

The trade union issued an ultimatum to Maltapost, stating that if no agreement was reached by 17 May 2007, it would register an industrial dispute. Since this did not resolve the issue, UHM informed the director of DIER of the impending industrial action. A total strike was ordered on 25 May. UHM asked all employees to meet in front of Maltapost's head office in Marsa in southern Malta where top union officials addressed the workers. After several other attempts failed to result in an agreement with management, UHM stepped up its action and ordered employees not to deliver any registered mail.

UHM claimed that all Maltapost employees abided by their orders. Meanwhile, UHM accused the General Workers' Union (GWU (<http://www.gwu.org.mt>)) of distributing a letter to Maltapost employees, which was interfering with the discussions that were taking place. As the recognised trade union representing the majority of Maltapost employees, UHM emphasised that no matter what difficulties it may face, it will continue to strive for the best working conditions for its members.

At the same time, GWU asked Maltapost's management for recognition as, according to information held by the trade union, it claimed to represent the majority of Maltapost's employees. GWU claimed that management was not allowing the workers to discuss their issues with the trade union. Postal workers were warned that if they leave work to discuss things with GWU, this would impinge on their leave or wage. However, GWU reported that a number of workers, including several UHM members, informed GWU officials and representatives about their requests.

## **Agreement reached**

On 13 June 2007, UHM and Maltapost's management reached agreement on the provisions of the new collective agreement, which was subsequently signed by the bargaining parties. As a result, the postal services company returned to its normal operations. The trade union was satisfied with the package it negotiated for the workers. The new agreement provides for a number of new family-friendly measures, additional allowances, as well as a wage increase.

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