

Canada Post workers overwhelmingly authorize strike

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Some 50,000 workers at Canada Post voted overwhelmingly to authorize strike action, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) announced Monday. The vote sets the stage for job action as soon as Sunday, November 3.

Workers in both the Urban Operations unit and the Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers (RSMC) units voted by over 95 percent to strike, making clear their determination to fight back after years of concessions. The Crown corporation is pushing forward with plans for restructuring and deploying new technology to reduce workers to the position of precariously employed, low-wage gig workers like those at Amazon and highly exploitative for-profit courier services. Workers must seize control of the implementation of these new technologies, which could be used to lighten the workloads for all postal workers with no loss of pay.

Workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the strike vote expressed a desire to fight for better wages and conditions, while placing no confidence in the CUPW bureaucracy.

Kelly, an RSMC from Ontario, explained, “Postal workers voted strongly in favour of striking, because we know our worth as employees. Striking gives us a better position to advocate for ourselves. In no other company do you work more years to make less money (i.e., restructures), or have your pensions cut while the higher ups still receive their bonuses.”

Another RSMC in Ontario, Daniel, noted, “Why are we going on strike? Well let me tell you. I’ve been an RSMC for almost 10 years now, and I’ve seen it all. It’s not surprising to me that Canada Post is going after our Defined Benefit Pension Plan, health benefits and wages. Their offer of a less than 12 percent raise over 4 years is a real slap in the face.”

Linda, a retired postal worker who is now a contract employee working out of the same depot she retired from said: “It’s crazy over here! I can’t even afford to enjoy my retirement! I’m 63 years old, and I have to deliver oversized parcels all over town just to make ends meet. I have to clock in and out for gosh sake, and I always get blamed for vehicle breakdowns.

“I helped shut down the Toronto airport in 1991, laid down on the ground and everything, and when they kicked us out of the airport, we moved on to Purolator, and we shut them down

too, but I won’t join the picket line this year. Things have really changed. The union’s not looking out for us anymore.”

Although postal workers will be in a legal strike position this weekend, the CUPW bureaucracy has said nothing about if and when they will sanction job action, let alone a nationwide strike. The union’s announcement of the strike authorization reiterated that they would only take action, “if there is no progress at the bargaining table.” This vague formulation leaves everything up to the union bureaucrats, who have close corporatist ties to Canada Post management and the Trudeau Liberal government. All they need to do to avert a strike is to claim that talks are moving forward or that the “atmosphere” at the bargaining table has improved to postpone strike action indefinitely. They would prefer to impose a last minute sellout ahead of the busy holiday season in November and December, but this would prove risky due to the level of opposition among the rank and file.

Postal workers must take the union’s statements as a warning that the CUPW bureaucracy is determined to avert, and if that proves impossible, limit worker job action. Above all, they are determined to prevent the postal workers’ struggle becoming the spearhead of a broader working-class mobilization against the dismantling of public services, ever-worsening working conditions and the state attack on workers’ right to strike and bargain collectively.

Talks between the union and Canada Post have been dragged out for nearly a year in more than a hundred bargaining sessions with no progress in the interest of workers. Meanwhile, the previous contracts expired on December 31, 2023, for Urban and January 31, 2024, for RSMC workers.

A strike would bring Canada Post workers into a headlong confrontation not only with management and the CUPW apparatus, but with the union-backed government of Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

While there is no doubt the Liberals are prepared to use back-to-work legislation, as they did in 2018, or other bureaucratic maneuvers to outlaw strike action as has been done to rail workers, CUPW has said nothing about how it would fight government intervention.

As with postal services around the world, including the United States, UK and Australia, Canada Post is determined to

make workers pay for mounting losses from shifts in the character of letter mail and parcel delivery. The Crown corporation, which is publicly controlled and overseen by the federal government but reliant on funding from the sale of postal products, announced in May that it had posted a pre-tax loss of \$748 million in 2023 and expected significant losses to continue. These sums are dwarfed by the tens of billions of dollars the Trudeau government has allotted to supporting the NATO-instigated war with Russia over Ukraine and rearming the Canadian Armed Forces to join US-led wars around the world.

The fact of the matter is that Canada Post, together with all public services across Canada, have been systematically starved of funds for decades. A sustained class war agenda of austerity for all public services, implemented by whatever government has held power, has driven Canada Post into its crisis.

Board chair André Hudon warned in August that post office's financial situation is "unsustainable" and that the national mail service is at a "critical juncture." He told those assembled at the annual general meeting, "Significant change is urgently needed to preserve Canada Post's delivery network, which is vital because it's the only delivery network built to serve all Canadians." In short, this means that management is demanding massive concessions through the "Amazonification" of its operations and is intent on placing the burden squarely on the backs of the workers.

Throughout the talks, CUPW President Jan Simpson has repeatedly offered collaboration with management in achieving what she terms "success." In the statement announcing the strike vote, Simpson declared, "We recognize the challenges our employer is facing, and our goal is not to simply make demands, but to work together toward solutions that support the long-term success of our public post office while addressing the real struggles our members face daily."

Simpson's measure of "success" is shared by Canada Post management. Both agree that the Crown corporation must be run as profit-making concern, with workers' interests subordinated to this.

The latest offer from Canada Post presented Wednesday includes an insulting 11.5 percent wage increase over four years, less than 2.9 percent per year, following years which saw the worst surge in inflation in over four decades. Workers across Canada confront a prohibitive cost of living, with the average monthly rent approaching \$2,200 and the cost of a home mortgage out of reach for most. Meanwhile food prices have surged almost 23 percent since 2020.

The most recent offer from CUPW, put forward on October 7, called for a 12.65 percent wage increase in the first year of the contract and 4.5 percent in the second year. The offer called for further talks on subsequent wage increases over the remainder of the contract. However, even this would do little to make up for the dramatic erosion of workers' living standards over the last four years, leaving workers trading water with an open-

ended contract.

The union has also continued to push for the institution of postal banking, senior check-ins and the establishment of an e-commerce platform to compete with Amazon as supposed solutions to Canada Post's financial crisis.

In contrast to the CUPW bureaucracy, the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) published a statement in September calling for workers to vote overwhelmingly to authorize a strike and to prepare for a political struggle against the corporatist alliance between Canada Post management, CUPW, and the Liberal government. The PWRFC decisively rejects that Canada Post be run as a profit-making concern, and insists instead that postal workers must appeal to the entire working class to join a counter-offensive in defence of all public services, and against capitalist austerity and war.

The PWRFC was established earlier this year to organize postal workers independently of and in opposition to the CUPW bureaucracy, which has been complicit in decades of concessions and repeatedly sabotaged militant struggles. The Committee explained:

We declare no confidence in the CUPW leadership, which called the strike vote as nothing more than a negotiating tactic and as a means to quell what it knows is seething opposition among rank-and-file postal workers to management's sweeping concessions demands. We openly declare that our fight is above all political and must be directed against the Liberal government, which is a close political ally of CUPW and backs Canada Post management's attacks on us.

The WSWS encourages all Canada Post workers to join the PWRFC in order to prepare a genuine struggle and place contract talks in the hands of the rank and file. All those who are interested should fill out the form below.



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