

Stop CUPW's delaying tactics! Launch a working-class political struggle against Canada Post and the Trudeau government!

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (Canada)
3 November 2024

The following statement was issued by the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which was established earlier this year by workers at Canada Post to seize control of their contract struggle from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers' bureaucracy. The PWRFC will be holding a public meeting to discuss the way forward for postal workers Sunday, November 10 at 7pm Eastern Standard Time. You can register to attend here or contact the committee by filling out the form at the end of this article.

After our massive strike vote last month in favour of walking off the job, we should have been on picket lines as of Sunday, November 3. But the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) bureaucracy intervened once again to do what it does best: sabotage our struggle and continue conniving with management to ram concessions down our throats.

Rural and suburban mail carriers (RSMCs) have been working without a new contract for over 10 months, while urban postal operations (UPO) workers have done so for more than nine months. CUPW admits that it has held more than a hundred bargaining sessions with Canada Post management over almost a year, and that the company continues to demand new and sweeping concessions. Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon participated in the talks Thursday and said last week that the Trudeau government is "active in trying to facilitate" a new contract.

We all know that in plain language this means that the Trudeau government already has a back-to-work law drafted or has prepared some other bureaucratic manoeuvre to rob us of our legal right to strike and have a trusted big business representative dictate our contract through binding arbitration. We only need to look to the fate of West Coast dockworkers in the summer of 2023 and rail workers this year to see how the pro-war Liberal government tramples on our democratic rights to enforce the demands of the bosses. Those of us who were here in 2018 remember well how Trudeau criminalized rotating strikes to allow Canada Post to impose further concessions via arbitration. The CUPW under left-talking president Mike Palecek rolled over without a fight, while the Canadian Labour Congress kept us isolated from the rest of the working class.

We have no reason to believe that the CUPW bureaucracy would act any differently this time round. They haven't said anything about how we should oppose government strikebreaking, even though Trudeau, MacKinnon and Co. have been interfering with bargaining for months.

CUPW President Jan Simpson responded to our massive strike vote by announcing that any strike action would be delayed more or less indefinitely if Canada Post showed "real movement" to meeting our demands. What does "real movement" mean? We have no way of knowing, because CUPW demands that we take their word for it. What we do know is that with less than 72 hours to go until we were in a legal strike position, CUPW conveniently discovered Friday that "real

movement" was taking place in talks, so they did not issue a 72-hour strike notice. After they sabotaged our fight against government interventions in support of the employer by Harper's Tories in 2011 and the Liberals in 2018, we think it's reasonable to assume that "real movement" is just another excuse to avoid a serious fight.

Moreover, Simpson has herself openly offered to collaborate with the employer to achieve "success," which for the bosses and union bureaucrats means ensuring that Canada Post makes a profit. As she said last week, "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."

Conditions for us to fight and win are propitious. We could be fighting alongside the 33,000 Boeing strikers in the United States now in their seventh-week of strike action. Since 2022, across Canada and internationally, there has been a major upsurge of the class struggle as workers strive to win inflation-busting pay increases and put an end to decades of rollbacks. Were we to make our struggle the spearhead of a working class counter-offensive in defence of public services and workers' rights to strike and bargain collectively, and against imperialist war and the use of technological change to increase workers-exploitation, we could and would rally mass support.

CUPW wants to impose Canada Post's concessions

Canada Post wants to continue the process of the "Amazonification" of our conditions, turning us into profit-generating machines with virtually no rights and poverty-level wages. The company's "global offer" includes major attacks on our working conditions, a pittance of a wage increase of 11.5 percent over 4 years, the undermining of health benefits, further entrenchment of a regressive defined-contributions pension plan, and the start of weekend delivery. After detailing these concessions to us in a bargaining update, CUPW acknowledged that the corporation has more rollbacks in mind, then proposed we can fight these attacks with a pathetic appeal to "make some noise."

Instead of mobilizing the membership to stand up in defence of working conditions, wages and the right to strike, CUPW would have us call our MPs to follow-up a totally ineffective postcard campaign from September. This "pressure politics" campaign involves hopeless appeals to a big business government hell-bent on making workers pay for capitalism's crisis, including by eviscerating social spending and public services to fund war. Pressure politics is a dangerous distraction that serves to further

entrench CUPW's corporatist alliance with the deeply unpopular Liberal government. It should be noted that moral appeals aimed at convincing the ruling class to halt their support for the genocide against the Palestinian people have proven totally ineffective. Why should we have any better luck? United with the rest of the working class, we are a mighty social force, but so long as we're isolated and subordinated to capitalist politicians and union bureaucrats, our independent class interests will never find expression.

The union's global offers for RSMCs and UPO workers are largely the same, asking for a 17.5 percent wage increase in the first 2 years, COLA payments to be rolled into our wages going forward (rather than paid retroactively), and the adding of 10 sick days to complement our personal days. This is inadequate. We demand an immediate 30 percent pay increase to make up for decades of wage stagnation and concessions, with substantial increases in each year of the contract to keep pace with rising inflation and exploding rents.

Instead of proposing the elimination of a multi-tier wage scale, the union further entrenches this unpopular and exploitative dynamic, meekly asking for "improved rights for Temporary employees," which are a proposed new worker classification.

CUPW makes the vague and largely meaningless demand for "improved protections against technological change." This begs the question, who is going to enforce such "improved protections?" With AI and automation rolling out at scale, and destroying jobs around the entire globe, this should be an area of special concern for postal workers. Under the autocratic control of the ruling class, new technologies displace workers, and those who remain suffer longer, more arduous work hours. Under the democratic control of the working class, new technologies would usher in an era of improved work-life balance while easing the burden of the most repetitive and physically-demanding tasks; productivity would increase and work hours decrease without a loss in pay. This is why the only serious demand that can improve our conditions is workers' control over postal service operations.

CUPW makes the demand for "Improved staffing provisions," but fails to elaborate on this, leaving workers in the dark. As any mail carrier knows, short weeks often feel the longest, because we still have 5 days of work but compressed into 4 days of delivery. We would like to see more staff in on the short weeks, to help with collating ad mail, numbering and delivering parcels and even street-sorting mail for those depots who do not yet have machine-sequenced mail. Mondays are also generally the heaviest days because the sortation plants have the whole weekend to load up our routes, and we would like to see more staff in on Mondays.

The Urban global offer demands "the full elimination of SSD" (separate sort and delivery). Any worker who has experienced an SSD restructure would know exactly why this demand is on the table. Routes can take massive pay cuts, while point-of-calls (POCs) increase. Urban workers are split up into 2 groups – inside workers and outside workers – leaving those outside workers with routes as big as 2,000 POCs and 25 Km per day walks.

CUPW concludes their list of demands with "service expansion projects, including postal banking, senior and other check ins." As the PWRFC explained in our statement calling for a massive "yes" vote in our strike ballot:

The idea of postal banking floated by top union leadership accepts the premise that Canada Post should be run as a profit-making concern. We don't. Postal workers don't want to be retrained as glorified ATMs and loan sharks! Service fees from postal banking wouldn't end up in workers' pockets, but would go towards bonuses for the bosses and upper management.

The same could be said of senior check-ins. We are postal workers, not healthcare workers. Rejecting the idea that the postal service should be run as a profit-making concern, the PWRFC knows that the demands for a fully-funded public postal service must go hand-in-hand with the demand for vast increases in funding for all public services, including healthcare. Check-ins for the elderly should be carried out by a publicly funded health care system to improve the wellbeing of all, not a profit-driven Crown corporation to boost the wealth and prestige of its executives and their partners in the union bureaucracy.

What CUPW leaves out of their global offers is also telling. The union has nothing to say about the proposed 7-day delivery schedule, and that is because they would also have us working weekends. Why would our own union work with the Crown corporation, behind our backs, to take away our weekends? So that Canada Post can be competitive with other delivery services, pitting postal workers against other delivery workers in a race to acquire ever-greater profits at the top, with the complimentary ever-greater suffering at the bottom.

Also absent from the global offers is any mention of COVID. During the life of the current CA, which the CUPW leadership arbitrarily extended during the second year of the pandemic, thousands of Canadians have died from an entirely preventable virus and millions have been infected. Postal workers have been on the front lines since the pandemic emerged, and it continues to spread disease and death five years on. COVID is a social phenomenon, and expecting individual workers to shoulder the entire burden is crazy and counterproductive. We need mitigation measures in every workplace such as far-UVC light, improved air circulation and high-quality masks made available to all workers. The corporate slogan, "Profit before lives!" must be replaced with "Lives before profit!"

What next for postal workers?

We propose the following course of action for postal workers who want to take forward our struggle:

1. Build rank-and-file committees in every depot, sorting centre, and other Canada Post workplaces. These committees will allow us to countermand the CUPW bureaucracy's sellout of our struggle and build a powerful movement of workers to fight for our demands.

2. Broaden our struggle to all workers. The postal service should be a fully funded public utility with good-paying, secure jobs. We can achieve this by turning our fight into a defence of all public services, including education, health care, and social services, which enjoy strong support throughout the working class.

3. Prepare defiance of a back-to-work law or other state-backed ban of our strike. This will require the broadest mobilization of workers to resist the pro-war, pro-austerity Trudeau government and force it to back down.

4. Build a political counter-offensive against capitalist austerity and the prioritization of corporate profits. This must include a decisive political and organizational break from the Liberal/trade union/New Democratic Party alliance, one of the main mechanisms used by the ruling class to suppress the class struggle. We demand that the needs of workers take priority, for jobs, public services, safe working conditions, and the use of society's resources for social need, not corporate profits and war.

We need to unite our struggle with those of postal workers and other workers internationally to achieve this goal, which is why we're affiliated to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

We strongly urge all of those who agree with this program to distribute this statement widely and make plans to attend our public meeting on November 10 at 7pm Eastern time. Register here.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact