

Meeting of postal workers demands rank-and-file control over contract struggle at Canada Post

Our reporters
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Are you a postal worker, or employed in the delivery or logistics sector? we urge you to contact the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee at canadapostworkersrfc@gmail.com or by filling out the form at the end of this article.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) held its first public meeting Sunday to discuss the ongoing contract fight by 55,000 workers at Canada Post. Dozens of postal workers from across the country attended to discuss the way forward, including how to oppose the crown corporation's government-backed austerity demands, and the need to break from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) bureaucracy as it works to sabotage their struggle. Members of the Socialist Equality Party, as well as construction and education workers from Ontario, also participated.

The meeting was held one week after the passing of a November 3 strike deadline established after 95 percent of postal workers voted in favour of strike action in October. The vote demonstrated their determination to fight against decades of concessions, brutal conditions caused by gruelling routes and schedules, the threat posed by the corporation's control over new technologies, and wages failing to keep pace with inflation. But the CUPW bureaucracy ran roughshod over the vote, extending the strike deadline indefinitely. Although it belatedly announced a 72-hour strike notice Tuesday, meaning workers could theoretically be on the picket line as of Friday, November 15, the announcement bluntly admitted that CUPW has not yet decided if the strike will proceed.

Canada Post Worker Daniel Berkley, a founding member of the PWRFC, introduced the meeting. He declared,

The rank-and-file committee is an organizational form that enables workers to seize control of our contract struggle from the union bureaucracy and extend our struggle to other sections of workers by linking it with the defence of all public services.

We're engaged in a bitter battle against a ruthless corporation that cares nothing for our health and safety. Canada Post wants us to break our backs with long shifts and extended routes so they can make a profit. Trudeau's Liberals back them in this capitalist strategy to the hilt.

Berkley described why postal workers need to take up a political fight not only against Canada Post, but against the Trudeau Liberal government and CUPW bureaucracy:

Union bureaucracies across the country have actively

collaborated with the Liberal government and provincial governments of all political stripes to sabotage numerous workers' struggles over the past two years, including by enforcing anti-democratic strike bans. Ontario education workers in 2022, West Coast dockers in 2023, and rail workers at CN Rail and CPKC this year are just some examples. These developments show that there's a massive amount of anger and readiness to fight among the working class, but also that the union bureaucracy is determined to keep it suppressed. Their interests are connected with the Liberal government's class war agenda of austerity for public services to pay for wars abroad, military rearmament, and subsidies for the corporate elite. That's why we need to take control of our struggle into our own hands.

The basis for developing such a struggle exists, he stressed:

Although we've seen savage attacks against our working conditions over this round of negotiations, including attacks on our defined benefit pension plan and attacks on our weekends and holidays, we are now in a far stronger position than our brothers and sisters were in the past to defy government and union attacks and win our just demands in struggle. That's because key sections of the working class are already on strike or rebelling against the union bureaucracy across North America, fighting for many of the same demands we have.

The close correspondence of the political conclusions drawn by the PWRFC with the objective reality faced by Canada Post workers was demonstrated in the comments of workers who shared their experiences and concerns following Berkley's introduction.

A letter carrier related, "I work with a gentleman who has been passed over for three raises because of a computer error. And when we filed that grievance to CUPW's regional and then national levels, we're told they're not going to argue it because they already had a situation where it was just a computer error. Well, if it's a computer error, who entered it into the computer? So they don't want to fight for us when we need it. I know a lot of people feel the same way that I do. And I know a lot of people want their voices heard because they are not satisfied with the representation we have today."

Another worker declared,

Inflation has been up to 18 percent in the last few years, and they don't want to give us a decent raise. We worked through COVID. We were deemed essential workers, and yet they don't want to treat us like such. Union members feel abandoned. There are many I know that have been screwed over, and when they filed a grievance, they're told the union that they paid dues to will not help them or argue their case.

A member of the Socialist Equality Party noted that postal workers won immense respect from the entire working class for their sacrifices during the COVID pandemic, but that CUPW squandered that political capital by arbitrarily agreeing to a two-year extension of postal workers' contracts. The CUPW leadership feared that mobilizing other sections of the working class for support would threaten its relationship with other union bureaucracies within the Canadian Labour Congress, and ultimately with the Liberal government.

One of the most important features of the meeting was the presence of international workers and workers from other industries. An American worker in the meeting related the experience of a US Postal Service worker who died of heat exhaustion on the job:

His temperature was 104 when he was brought to the hospital. I think he was dead already, but they don't care. They're just trying to get rid of people and make money. And so that's becoming clearer every day. And this is all capitalism. People know that capitalism isn't serving them.

Will Lehman, an autoworker from the US who ran as a socialist for the presidency of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and secured 5,000 votes in an election in which the bureaucracy suppressed turnout, brought greetings from the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). He explained, "Workers need representatives for our struggles that actually represent the interests of the workers on the floor. When those aren't found by the traditional means, then workers need to move beyond the traditional means."

In the course of the discussion, a resolution from the PWRFC providing a program for developing the struggle was presented to the meeting. Read out by Berkley, it stated:

Rank-and-file postal workers must take control of our contract struggle into our own hands.

The refusal of the CUPW apparatus to act on the overwhelming strike mandate and provide a strategy to mobilize workers' power to win our just demands and meet the threat of government strikebreaking is yet further proof that it is in the pocket of Canada Post management and the Trudeau Liberal government.

We call on postal workers and all workers throughout the delivery and logistics sectors to join and build the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee. We fight to:

1. Achieve postal workers' demands, including a 30 percent pay rise to make up for years of concessions and for workers' control over the deployment of new technologies.
2. Broaden our struggle to other sections of workers across Canada in order to defy a back-to-work law or any other anti-democratic state-imposed strike ban.
3. Launch a political struggle that rejects Canada Post being run as a profit-making enterprise, and makes our contract fight the spearhead of a worker-led counteroffensive in defence of fully-

funded public services and workers' rights, and against austerity and war.

After further discussion, the resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority.

A CUPW shop steward in attendance took strong exception to the resolution, declaring it to be "anti-union" and accusing the committee of "dividing" workers. She asserted that the committee was "busting the unions, the unions that are struggling to preserve the rights for workers."

On the contrary, Berkley's opening report, together with contributions by SEP members, demonstrated that the union apparatus has worked systematically for over four decades to suppress the class struggle and impose concessions dictated by big business. Twice within the past thirteen years, in 2011 and 2018, CUPW has rolled over without a fight in the face of government back-to-work legislation, allowing sweeping rollbacks to be imposed. This record of betrayal, and collaboration with management and the government, is not confined to CUPW, but is the same for all unions in Canada and internationally.

An education support worker in attendance reviewed the experience of the 2022 education support workers' strike in defiance of a strike ban imposed by the hard-right Ontario government. With calls for a general strike building from broad sections of workers to back the low-paid school support staff, leading figures in the Canadian Labour Congress intervened to quash the movement by calling off the strike, laying the basis for the imposition of a sellout contract.

Rank-and-file workers also directly contradicted the CUPW representative's remarks.

"I agree with the resolution that the RFC put forward," said one. "I feel like our 'democratic' union is not as democratic as it should be. We all put in a strike vote. CUPW is not listening to us. They're not listening to our demands. I'm a letter carrier, and the consensus on the floor is our union doesn't give a damn."

Lehman recalled, "In running in my own election for president of the UAW with the specific aim of the abolition of the bureaucracy of our own union, lots of reps came out and denounced me for being 'anti-union' or 'divisive' but really what they were saying was that they were hostile to the class interests of the workers on the floor."

The meeting concluded with a strong appeal for attendees to contact the committee at canadapostworkersrfc@gmail.com to build its influence at every sorting station, depot and workplace. This step is essential to create an organization controlled by the rank and file, allowing workers to fight for support throughout the working class for a worker-led counteroffensive against capitalist austerity in defence of all public services.

Workers were also reminded of the campaign to free Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk, which the PWRFC declared its support for at its founding meeting in June. Syrotiuk was arrested in April and has been detained for over six months by the Western-backed Zelensky regime for the "crime" of calling for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers in opposition to all of the belligerent governments involved in the US imperialist-led war on Russia.



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