

“Why are we even talking about a contract when it is never followed by the corporation?”: Canada Post strikers speak out from the picket line

Our reporters

15 November 2024

Are you a striking Canada Post worker? Get in touch with the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee to let us know what issues you're fighting for and what you think the way forward is in your struggle. Email canadapostworkersrffc@gmail.com or fill out the form at the end of this article.

Some 55,000 postal workers walked out on strike Friday morning across Canada. The job action was a response to the intransigence of Canada Post management, which with the backing of the trade union-supported Liberal government wants to impose sweeping concessions on the workforce. These include below-inflation pay increases, more “flexible” work arrangements, and the use of new technologies to massively increase worker exploitation.

The strike only went ahead after months of foot-dragging by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) leadership. In the end, the provocative decision by Canada Post management to respond to the union’s 72-hour strike notice by announcing its intention to abrogate all contract protections forced the union’s hand. With workers having delivered a 95 percent strike vote in October, CUPW bureaucrats feared they would lose control of the situation if they called anything less than a nationwide strike.

Speaking to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters and members of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC), strikers denounced the ruthless practices of Canada Post management in its relentless drive to boost profits.

“Why I say this is insanity, is because this scenario has been happening since 2011 over and over again,” said a striker from Alberta. “Why are we even talking about a contract when it is never followed by the corporation. Proof of the contract not being followed is the enormous number of grievances filed every year. The number of grievances should be 10 times the amount, but most of us think that the

grievance process doesn’t work so most of us don’t file. The brave people that do file grievances are normally targeted.”

A worker from northern Ontario addressed the spiraling cost of living and denounced Canada Post’s opposition to a reasonable wage increase. “Although going on strike is not favorable and I wish that the corporation would be able to compromise and meet our needs, it’s completely necessary to strike to apply pressure on them to meet our demands and let them know that we will not tolerate accepting less than what we deserve,” she said.

“I’ve been with the post for almost nine years, eight of which are permanent full time, and I’m making just dollars above minimum wage.

“With the cost of living rising, due to inflation brought to us by the Trudeau government, 11.5 percent is not an option over four years. 22 percent is very reasonable.”

A postal worker from Quebec added, “I think that the Corporation is just going to intimidate us CUPW members. Shake any faith we might have in the union leadership and the decision to strike. They also have the biased arbitration and back to work legislation to pad their position. Workers need the option to strike, or the whole idea of keeping our employers accountable and aware of real issues we have is all an empty promise.”

Asked for his response to the fate of dockworkers, who were ordered by the Trudeau government into binding arbitration Tuesday in a move that robbed them of their collective bargaining rights and right to strike, a postal worker from Ontario commented, “The government keeps taking more power, and when they need to change the laws, that’s what they do.” Dockworkers were fighting over many of the same issues confronting postal workers, including unbearable scheduling and management bullying.

A delivery driver who stopped to speak to a WSWS

reporter about the Canada Post strike addressed the Crown corporation's push for seven-day weeks. "Weekend delivery? I don't see that, it'll never go through!" he remarked. "You guys deliver mostly business mail, anyways. No need for weekend work." He was shocked when the reporter informed him that the union leadership backs this change.

The worker from Alberta pointed to the race to the bottom in working conditions produced by private delivery firms, who often employ gig workers on vastly inferior terms. "What makes me angry is that our competitors, which management always uses to make us fearful, do not have the same crazy rules we are forced to follow," he said. "I don't understand why anyone would think that Canada Post could turn a profit with this much management and how they interfere with their own business."

"At today's meeting the useless supervisor started with 'we are all friends here.' Not one person even laughed because we are done being lied to. Nobody speaks up at meetings because we have no time even for the meeting."

"Our route maps don't even have street names on them or the correct number of stops. It's a joke that we employ management that does nothing all day. When they do work, mostly the results are sub-par. No direction, definitely no safety and especially every person for themselves. This team is not working but we see how much of the profit is needlessly spent and it drives us, the workers, crazy. We are fed up with bad management. The CEO who lost that much money would be fired at any other company, but not this company."

Postal workers are clearly ready to fight the Crown corporation, but the CUPW apparatus is doing nothing to organize them for the political struggle in which they are engaged. The union bureaucracy kept workers guessing until the last minute as to whether a strike would be called. Moreover, it has made no appeal to other sections of workers to join the struggle, which revolves around issues that impact all workers. These include the defence of well-funded public services, secure employment, predictable scheduling, and wages that keep pace with inflation.

A worker told a WSWS reporter in North Bay, Ontario, "I found out about this strike at Midnight, when the email came through. What the hell is going on, I thought we were supposed to get 72 hours' notice! I got no notice!"

A union local president underscored the vast gulf between the CUPW apparatus and rank-and-file workers, telling the same reporter, "The best way to build solidarity with dockworkers and other sections of workers impacted by anti-strike legislation is to put union resources towards legal challenges. If we are able to secure a legal victory in court, then back-to-work legislation will be outlawed for workers

everywhere."

This is a patent lie. In fact, unions have on numerous occasions "won victories" in court, with judges finding that back-to-work legislation violated workers' constitutional right to strike or right to freedom of association. However, these legal rulings, which often take years to secure, never result in the overturning of the massive concessions imposed with the bludgeon of strikebreaking legislation. Nor have they prevented governments across the country from resorting to draconian strike bans on dozens of occasions over recent years.

CUPW members know this very well. After the Harper government banned their 2011 rotating strikes with a back-to-work law, it took until April 2016 for CUPW to secure a court ruling declaring the legislation illegal. But the ruling left all of the attacks imposed following the strike ban by an arbitrator in place. Moreover, the Liberals imposed yet another strike ban on the postal workers just two-and-a-half years later. The challenge to that strike ban took even longer to resolve, with a court decision handed down only in July 2024 that threw out CUPW's challenge. The pro-corporate judge in the case declared the issue of the constitutionality of the 2018 back-to-work law "moot," since it was no longer in effect and the union and Canada Post had agreed to subsequent collective agreements.

The PWRFC stressed in its latest statement that the only way for postal workers to win their just demands is if they fight to broaden their struggle to other sections of workers, mobilizing them in a political struggle to confront the Liberal government's imminent imposition of a dictated concessions-filled contract or a CUPW-enforced sellout. Only by initiating a worker-led counteroffensive against capitalist austerity and by making their contract fight the spearhead of a movement to defend all public services can Canada Post workers achieve their just demands.

The worker from northern Ontario recalled how successive federal governments have intervened in the past to help Canada Post management impose sweeping concessions. "We got forced back to work by the government last time we were on strike, just in time to deliver the Trudeau government's Christmas cards," she said. "It felt like a slap in the face to be honest."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact