

Trade unions' isolation of Canada Post strikers facilitates government-backed concessions drive

Our reporters

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Are you a striking postal worker? We want to hear about the issues you're fighting for and how you think you can win your struggle. Email us at canadapostworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form at the end of this article. All comments will be kept anonymous.

With Monday marking ten days since 55,000 Canada Post workers walked off the job nationwide, the entire trade union bureaucracy is working overtime to isolate and ultimately strangle the strike, so that it does not become the catalyst for a broader working class challenge to capitalist austerity, the criminalization of worker struggles, and war.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) has left strikers isolated on picket lines, giving them strict orders not to talk to anyone, while the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has remained silent on the looming attacks on postal workers' democratic and social rights being prepared by the Liberal government and Canada Post management.

The strike began with workers demanding real wage increases, a halt to the destruction of jobs and conditions through automation, a stop to management bullying, and for job security amid a major onslaught by the Crown corporation on full-time employment. Discussions taking place within ruling circles behind the scenes make clear that Canada Post management would like to eliminate tens of thousands of full-time jobs, replacing them with either part-time positions or precariously employed "gig" workers. They also intend to roll out dynamic routing, an AI-driven process that will spell the end of route ownership for postal workers and produce a massive increase in workloads as routes are revised each day.

Describing the Crown corporation's increased reliance on temporary workers with no rights, which was facilitated by the 2018 contract CUPW agreed to after the Trudeau government illegalized a campaign of rotating strikes, a Montreal striker told the *World Socialist Web Site*,

I've been here for nine years, and I started at a way lower wage than people that were already there and started as a temporary.

Everyone starts as a temporary. But, you know, the wages after the last strike [in 2018] literally went down seven dollars.

It takes let's say, four or five years to get your first raise and then every year you get a little raise. But the thing is, you're going to take seven years before you catch up to the people. So for myself, it took me four or five years to get my first raise and then it's going to take me another seven years to get to the

max wage.

Canada Post pleads poverty, citing losses in the region of \$3 billion since 2018. This is a drop in the bucket compared to the massive sums expended by the Trudeau Liberal government on enriching the corporate elite through tax cuts and other subsidies, as well as the tens of billions invested on rearming the military and waging war around the world. As a Montreal letter carrier told the WSWWS,

Even though they emphasize the extent of the deficits at Canada Post, the top executives continue to give themselves big bonuses, over \$100,000 annually. I don't even make that much.

I have two jobs right now and I work full-time at Canada Post. It's just not enough. With the cost of living, rent, a child... I need a second job. I've also heard that workers in Vancouver are in a similar situation: their job at Canada Post is their second job.

The issues confronting postal workers are common to workers throughout all economic sectors. Moreover, as with major struggles over the past two years by education support workers, port workers, and rail workers, the government has been meddling in negotiations for months and the threat of a strike ban imposed by government fiat looms large.

The CLC has not published a single statement since the beginning of the strike. Canada's principal trade union federation, which frequently boasts that it represents more than 3 million workers in over 50 unions, has nothing to say to the striking postal workers, who are engaged in a fight not just over their own jobs and conditions, but to defend the very idea of well-funded public services. This silence flows from the fact that the CLC and its constituent union bureaucracies are partners of the ruling elite as it enforces its class-war agenda of imperialist war abroad and savage attacks on the democratic and social rights of the working class at home.

The CLC has been one of the key props of the Liberal government over the past nine years, and frequently boasts about the role it played in brokering the governmental alliance under which the union-sponsored NDP propped up the minority Liberal government for two-and-a-half years ending this September. CLC President Bea Bruske

has continued to applaud Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his cabinet as a “worker-friendly” government as they have spent billions of dollars on waging war in Ukraine against Russia, backed Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians, and imposed across-the-board austerity for public spending. Her predecessor, Hassan Yussuff, was on such good terms with Trudeau that the Prime Minister appointed him to the Senate, Canada’s upper house of parliament, on his retirement from the CLC.

The last statement issued by the CLC with any relevance to the postal workers’ struggle came on November 12, when it managed to rouse itself to issue a pro-forma criticism of Liberal Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon’s decision to end lockouts at the ports of Montreal, Vancouver, and Quebec City by imposing binding arbitration. The CLC labelled MacKinnon’s draconian step merely a “troubling step,” as if the decision was out of character. It declared, “Imposing binding arbitration or back-to-work legislation undermines workers’ rights to collective bargaining, weakening their ability to fight for fair wages and safe workplaces. Political interference tips the scales toward employers and sets a dangerous precedent. Canada’s unions believe lasting solutions come from fair negotiations, not government-imposed deals. The government must let collective bargaining take its course to protect the rights of all workers.”

The cynicism contained in these few lines is breathtaking. The shutting down of the port workers’ struggles did not set a new “precedent,” but marked an intensification of the non-stop assault by the Liberal government on workers’ rights—the same Liberal government that the CLC and its individual member unions have championed since 2015. Events underscoring this include the banning of the 2018 strike by 50,000 postal workers, the 2021 Port of Montreal strike by 1,150 workers, the 2023 strike by over 7,000 west coast dockers, and the 2024 strike by 9,300 workers at CN Rail and CPKC. The latter two instances of government strikebreaking involved the Labour Minister using the same anti-democratic section of the Canada Labour Code, Section 107, as was used against the port workers this month.

What’s more, allowing “collective bargaining” to “take its course” has resulted in one round of concessions after another throughout the economy over the past 40 years. The “collective bargaining” process places numerous hurdles in the way of workers who want to wage a genuine struggle against the never-ending demands for concessions and speed-up from the bosses and political establishment.

The ongoing postal workers struggle is illustrative of this fact. CUPW participated in over 100 bargaining sessions for a full year before a strike could go ahead, leaving postal workers to labour for many months under expired contracts. During this time, Canada Post management and their corporate advisors flaunted their plans openly to savage worker rights as they prepare the “Amazonification” of the postal service. Since August, they have done this with the support of a federally appointed mediator, and MacKinnon has participated in meetings himself. Now, with the strike finally under way, it is the tender mercies of the “collective bargaining” process that prevent workers in other branches from launching solidarity strikes, even though the issues of defending workers’ right to strike against government intervention, protecting public services, and achieving decent-paying, secure jobs are of immediate concern to every worker.

On the first day of the strike, the Teamsters, which represents delivery workers at the Canada Post subsidiary Purolator, issued a statement claiming that the Purolator workers would not handle packages marked Canada Post during the strike. This gesture does

virtually nothing to prevent major commercial customers switching to Purolator and other private delivery services as the strike goes on, undermining Canada Post’s financial position and providing it with further justification—from a capitalist profit perspective—for the huge concessions it is seeking to extort from postal workers.

Since the issuing of this token statement, neither CUPW President Jan Simpson nor the Teamsters union leadership has said anything about how delivery workers can support the strike and help secure its victory, let alone provided a strategy to defy government strikebreaking.

Striking postal workers who recognize that they must take matters into their own hands by seizing control of their contract struggle from the CUPW bureaucracy have come together to establish and build the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC). The PWRFC urges postal workers to broaden their struggle to other sections of workers to build a worker-led industrial and political movement against government-backed austerity and concessions, and imperialist war, which drains society’s resources for public services. As the PWRFC declared in a resolution adopted at its November 10 public meeting that anticipated the course of the strike,

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.



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