

Teamsters at subsidiary Purolator scabbing on Canada Post strike

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At the outset of the strike by 55,000 Canada Post workers on November 15, Teamsters Canada announced that they would show their “full support” for the strikers, who are members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW). They pledged to direct their members at courier Purolator, which is majority-owned by the Crown corporation, not to handle packages postmarked or otherwise identified as coming from the national postal service.

“Purolator is a subsidiary of the Canada Post group. Our goal is to stop Canada Post from diverting their freight wholesale, thereby using a subsidiary to break a union,” Christopher Monette, director of public affairs for the Teamsters, told Global News.

“Teamsters Canada firmly believes that good union jobs—with living wages and secure retirement—are essential pillars of Canadian society. Unfortunately, Canada Post has taken a different stance at the bargaining table.”

However, these assurances of support for striking postal workers from the Teamsters bureaucracy have proven to be worth less than nothing.

With the strike well into its second week, it is clear that the Teamsters’ apparatus is working with management at Purolator and through them, Canada Post, to effectively scab on the strike and undermine the delivery workers as package volumes surge during the winter holiday season. Meanwhile, CUPW maintains a complicit silence, making no appeal to rank-and-file Purolator workers.

“Purolator is open for business. As the courier company with the largest reach in Canada, our network is well prepared and ready to deliver continued success for our customers, and all Canadians, including those who have been impacted by the recent Canada Post labour disruption,” Chris Spanjaard, senior vice president and chief operations officer at Purolator boasted in a statement released last Wednesday.

His comments were included in a press release under the subheading, “Company open for all customer volumes impacted by Canada Post strike,” making clear the courier’s aim to redirect those who typically go through Canada Post to instead use the services of its Purolator subsidiary during the strike. The company expects to process 43 million packages between November 1 and December 25, “some of which is anticipated to be volume from those impacted by the Canada Post strike.”

And to poach more business from its parent company during the strike, Purolator is offering up to 50 percent off on shipping costs and a new flat rate box for \$15-\$20.

Globe and Mail noted in a report this weekend that Purolator, which is focused primarily on delivering parcels, is one of the only profitable operations under Canada Post’s remit, having posted \$293 million in profits in 2023 even as the company overall lost \$748 million. Canada Post, meanwhile, is responsible for letter mail delivery, which has declined precipitously, prompting management to seek to expand its share of parcel deliveries by undermining working conditions, and relying more on temporary and part-time workers.

According to a recent report by Ian Lee, associate professor of management at Carleton University’s Sprott School of Business, Canada Post’s cost for parcel delivery is between \$50-\$60 an hour, while at subsidiary Purolator it is \$40-\$50. It is this lower cost regime which Canada Post management, with the collaboration of the CUPW and Teamsters bureaucracies, is seeking to impose on postal workers by increasing the share of permanent part-time and temporary workers, deploying dynamic routing, expanding to weekend delivery, and holding wage increases at or below the rate of inflation. In a comment for the *Globe* earlier this year, Lee suggested that Canada Post needed to get rid of tens of thousands of full-time workers, sell off its approximately 3,000 post offices, and end daily delivery to residential addresses.

The Teamsters bureaucracy is responsible for the undercutting of CUPW members, having pushed through a sellout contract in 2022 which did not address the major concerns of Purolator workers. While all local bargaining teams across the country recommended the contract, it was ratified by just 60 percent of those voting in the ratification vote, with fully 40 percent voting “No.”

Teamsters Canada has over 130,000 members, while the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), of which it is an affiliate, is the legal bargaining agent for 1.4 million workers across North America. Its members include tens of thousands of delivery workers at UPS and FedEx, and thousands more among railroaders, where they have enforced one sellout after the next.

Earlier this year, the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference capitulated in the face of a government-imposed strike ban on 9,300 engineers, conductors, yard workers and rail controllers at the Canadian operations of the Canadian National (CN) and Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) railways. The Liberal government used section 107 of the Canadian Labour Code, the same provision it subsequently deployed against dockers in

Montreal and Vancouver, to have the unelected Canadian Industrial Relations Board impose binding arbitration on the rail workers, thereby ensuring that they will have to labour under contracts that conform with the rail barons' profit-driven demands.

The Teamsters have the closest corporatist ties to the union/NDP-backed Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as well as the Biden administration in the United States. Teamsters Canada President François LaPorte attended a meeting with other union bureaucrats convened by the US ambassador and then-Minister of Labour Seamus O'Regan in February to discuss how best to suppress the class struggle on both sides of the border. Meanwhile, IBT President Sean O'Brien has developed close ties with the incoming administration of the fascist Donald Trump, speaking at the Republican National Convention earlier this year and helping pick the new US Secretary of Labor.

With these developments in mind, it is clear why Teamsters Canada would take no serious action to support the CUPW strike or undermine the drive for profits by Canada Post and Bay Street. A real struggle by workers at Purolator, alongside their brothers and sisters at Canada Post, would require a political fight against the Liberal/union/NDP alliance, which has systematically suppressed the class struggle over recent decades, and acted as a key mechanism for the ruling elite to implement savage austerity and attacks on workers' rights. It would also require a rejection of the primacy of corporate profits, and an insistence that all postal and delivery workers, irrespective of their employer, have a right to decent-paying and secure jobs. The Teamsters' leadership, no less than CUPW and the entire Canadian Labour Congress bureaucracy, opposes such a development and is doing all it can to prevent it from taking place. The fact that they felt compelled to issue a token statement of support for the Canada Post strikers on the first day of the job action no doubt reveals their recognition that strong support for a unified struggle exists among rank-and-file workers at Purolator.

If they are to break out of a race to the bottom, striking workers at Canada Post must develop a common fight with their co-workers at Purolator, not to mention the host of other for-profit couriers, and the growing army of low paid and precariously employed gig workers at Amazon and other companies. However, this will not come from the hollow statements of "support" or "solidarity" from the union bureaucrats. Canada Post workers must seize the initiative and build rank-and-file committees which will fight for what workers need, not what the management says is possible as it pleads poverty. These committees will make it possible for workers to develop ties with workers across the postal and logistics industry in Canada and internationally by breaking out of the "collective bargaining" straitjacket imposed by CUPW and the CLC. The committees must make the strike the spearhead of a broader working class movement against capitalist austerity and war, and in defence of worker rights at Canada Post, Purolator and every other employer throughout the logistics sector and beyond.

The development of such a struggle is becoming all the more urgent as Canada Post management, emboldened by the unions' isolation of the strike, takes the offensive. Reports are emerging of Canada Post laying off retail employees at its retail postal outlets

across the country. True to form, CUPW is offering no way forward for the workers to collectively resist this outrageous attack. As a striking postal worker put it in comments to the *World Socialist Web Site*, "The corporation is laying off retail employees, and the CUPW update claims that these can either be temporary layoffs or permanent layoffs. Either way, when the strike ends, those workers who were laid off will not have a job to return to, and they are instructed to file a grievance with the union. This could take years to resolve, and in the meantime, those workers will not be collecting a salary. They will qualify for EI [employment insurance]."

Already, ahead of the strike, Canada Post workers formed the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) to set out a fighting program, break out of the isolation imposed by the CUPW bureaucracy and organize opposition to yet another sellout. The PWRFC outlined its strategy in a resolution adopted at its November 10 public meeting:

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.

All those who are interested in this fight and want to build a rank-and-file committee at their workplace can write to the committee at canadapostworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form below.



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