

Widespread anger among Canada Post workers as CUPW enforces government strikebreaking

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Canada Post workers are seething with anger after the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) capitulated to the Liberal government's strikebreaking and enforced a back-to-work order Tuesday morning. The 55,000 postal workers were forced back on the job after four weeks on strike in a ruling by the unelected Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB), which followed Labour Minister Steve MacKinnon's demand to ban the strike if the board determined that talks with management were at an "impasse."

"We are asking our members to return to their regularly scheduled shifts as of 8:00 a.m. local time on December 17, 2024, and await further instructions," CUPW President Jan Simpson wrote in a message sent out to members Monday. Noting further, "We understand that members want to hold the line until the last minute to show our disgust with what is currently happening. Contravening this order may push the employer to go back to the CIRB for enforcement of their decision."

This miserable climbdown was a continuation of CUPW's policy throughout the strike. It worked tirelessly to keep postal workers isolated from their class brothers and sisters, and straitjacketed within the pro-employer "collective bargaining" system. When the long-expected government intervention came, for which CUPW did nothing to prepare its members, the union bureaucracy threw up its hands without a fight. This is not only a betrayal of postal workers, but the entire working class, which has a direct interest in defending the right to strike and preventing sweeping attacks on public services.

Expressing their opposition to the union bureaucracy's decisive role in the strikebreaking operations and anger over being sent back to work, workers across the country maintained picket lines until the 8 a.m. Tuesday restart time. And in British Columbia postal workers honored a

temporary "community picket" set up by non-CUPW members which kept a Richmond processing centre closed for several hours past the mandated restart time.

"I feel that we are giving up our power and momentum by following this order. I do want to find other ways of defying and sticking it to the one percent, where it actually hurts them and not the Canadian public," one Ontario postal worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Another postal worker commented on CUPW enforcing the back-to-work order, "It's a treachery for sure. Lack of organization, lack of communication, lack of direction. Canada Post had no intention of giving employees what they deserve. They waited it out, just like last time." In 2018 the Trudeau government passed back-to-work legislation to ban rotating strike action, to which the union leadership readily acceded.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC), which was established by Canada Post workers in June to fight for rank-and-file control over the contract struggle against the CUPW bureaucracy, issued a statement on Friday in response to MacKinnon's announcement which explained that conditions were ripe for defiance of a back-to-work order. However, it stressed this would only be possible through the development of opposition to the union leadership and the mobilization of the social power of the entire working class.

A collective, coordinated defiance of the back-to-work order by the 55,000 Canada Post workers would have galvanized a counter-offensive by the working class across Canada, in the US and internationally against concessions and austerity.

The committee wrote:

Now more than ever, the central issue is to

mobilize the social power of the entire working class. Every worker has a stake in our struggle, and we must make them aware of that.

The biggest obstacle we have to overcome in mobilizing working class support is the trade union bureaucracy. From the beginning, CUPW, the Teamsters (who have not lifted a finger to mobilize Purolator workers on our behalf), and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) leaders have done everything to isolate our struggle. Above all, they have done nothing to prepare mass working class opposition to government strikebreaking, although everyone knew that this was central to the strategy of Canada Post management and the Trudeau government—a government the union officialdom and their NDP allies continue to prop up. Just yesterday, the CUPW bureaucracy was urging us to campaign among MPs to pressure the government to intervene in the bargaining process.

The threat of government intervention through the Labour Minister's invocation of Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code—a new power cooked up by the NDP/union backed Liberals over the last six months to break strikes in lieu of back-to-work legislation—hung over the strike from its outset. While management dug in its heels with the expectation of an intervention on its behalf, neither CUPW nor the Canadian Labour Congress put forward a strategy to oppose a back-to-work order. Given the level of determination to fight among postal workers, the union leaderships were clearly terrified that such a stand would quickly escape their control and challenge their alliance with the Liberal government, which is why they capitulated without a fight and pledged merely to challenge the order before the CIRB.

The back-to-work order orchestrated by MacKinnon and agreed to by the CUPW bureaucracy forces postal workers to labor under contracts which expired more than a year ago and robs them of the right to strike for five months, while an “Industrial Inquiry Commission” reviews Canada Post's operations and establishes an outline for implementing the “Amazonification” of postal services demanded by management. This includes the expansion of precariously employed, low wage permanent part-time and temporary employees.

As the WSWS explained in a perspective Wednesday, the attacks in Canada on public services and basic

democratic rights of the working class, including the right to strike, are part of an international process in which the capitalist ruling elite seek to subordinate everything to their class war agenda of austerity and war.

The working class can mobilize its independent interests in opposition to that of the imperialist ruling elite only through a conscious break with the nationalist and pro-capitalist union bureaucracies and the social democratic parties which have smothered the class struggle for more than four decades and enforced one sellout after another.

The WSWS perspective makes clear the practical lessons of the sellout of the Canada Post strike:

By forming the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) in June, workers aimed to take control of their contract fight from the CUPW bureaucracy. The PWRFC's decision to affiliate with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) enabled the organization of two public meetings and numerous discussions involving postal workers and other workers from Canada, the US and Britain. A resolution adopted at the first meeting outlined the path forward: transforming the postal strike into the spearhead of an industrial and political mobilization against austerity and war.

Lessons must be drawn from this experience. The construction of rank-and-file committees must be taken forward in every workplace with redoubled urgency. This must be combined with a struggle to arm the most advanced workers with an understanding of the political character of the fight they are being compelled to wage, a task possible only through the building of a socialist leadership.

To carry forward this struggle, all who agree should make the decision to join and build the Socialist Equality Party, the Canadian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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