

“The problem is we are currently living and working under an oligarchy”

Canada Post workers denounce union complicity in enforcing Liberal government’s strike ban

Our reporter
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Since the imposition of the Liberal government’s anti-democratic strike ban last Tuesday, postal workers have been writing to the *World Socialist Web Site* to denounce the complicity of the Canadian Union of Postal workers (CUPW) in smothering their struggle.

After a month-long strike by 55,000 workers, CUPW and the Canadian Labour Congress capitulated without a fight to Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon’s order to ban the job action, without any of the workers’ demands for real wage increases, job security, and workers’ control over the use of new technologies being met.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) was established by workers in June to seize control of the contract struggle from the CUPW bureaucracy, which has collaborated closely with management and the Trudeau Liberal government in plotting sweeping attacks on workers. The PWRFC has emphasized that the only way forward for workers is to broaden their fight to other sections of the working class, making their struggle the spearhead of a worker-led counteroffensive to secure decent-paying, secure jobs and well-funded public services.

A mail carrier from Edmonton, Alberta, wrote,

I’m angry and disappointed with CUPW. How do I join rank and file?

She continued in discussion with a WSWS reporter,

Our local held a vote, when the CIRB [Canadian Industrial Relations Board] made their decision to force us back to work. We voted 62 percent to defy the back-to-work legislation, which according to our local CUPW president wasn’t enough.

It’s like our union doesn’t care about us. Everyone is pissed off. I have been planting the seed of “let’s get the

conversation to build rank-and-file committees” going. Lots of workers here are already aware of the PWRFC, and are saying this is the way to go. It’s a good start. I’m going to print off some WSWS PDFs and leave them around the depot.

The mail carrier also addressed the broader political situation, insisting that conditions are ripe for a mass mobilization of workers against the policies of austerity for public services and imperialist war embraced by the parties of the ruling class.

The fish stinks from the head down, we all know that. I would love to see a third-party auditor go in and audit Canada Post.

With our government in shambles right now, we should have gone out on strike with the rail and dock workers, and we should have stood with CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees]. If everyone goes out on strike, the government can’t force everyone back. We’re the fourth group of workers this year to be told that our labour doesn’t matter. “Go starve.” I think there’s power in numbers, and if the rank and file have the numbers, we should be talking to other unions, talking to other workers.

The determination among postal workers to fight is being driven by a deepening social crisis produced by round after round of concessions shoved down their throats by the union bureaucracy and the growth of social inequality in Canada.

I’m not the only postie who’s a regular at the food bank. We’ve been relying on the food bank even before the strike. In Alberta, the utilities and insurance caps have been

lifted. Groceries are 300 percent more. My utilities used to be \$300 /month, now they're \$700 /month. Alberta used to be the land of milk and honey. It used to be cheap here. It's not anymore.

Edmonton had the highest rental increase this year compared to any other city in Canada. I've seen some condos in Vancouver, tiny one bedroom apartment, how is this going for \$2 million? The average one-bedroom apartment in Vancouver was going for \$2,000 /month.

She explained the significance of the postal workers' struggle for the working class as a whole, underscoring the necessity to broaden the fight if postal workers are to secure their justified demands.

If we let them push us around, they're coming for everyone else. The problem is we are currently living and working under an oligarchy. How else can you account for these companies getting our government to legislate us back to work? I'm getting further left with age.

I'm pissed off. They gave us \$1000 [a reference to the payment made by Canada Post to workers prior to the Christmas break]. \$1000 of blood money? A single person just trying to survive needs to have 3 roommates just to make it by.

If you come across any more rank-and-file members, and they're interested, and they're in Alberta, make my number available to them. I'd love to help out. We have to get together. I look forward to working with you.

Another postal worker wrote in from Quebec:

I was completely devastated when the back-to-work order came last Friday [December 13]. Even as I knew this was the most likely if not predetermined outcome, it's hard not to be caught up in the belief that we could actually do it this time. I spent the weekend and Monday trying to convince anyone I could that we had to defy the order. I've sent several emails to union leadership throughout the strike. This past weekend and Monday I sent multiple emails to union leadership relaying the anger on the line, and that the moment was perfect to defy the order. Many people at my office were supportive of the idea.

I'm guessing by now my attempts to contact them go straight to their junk folder, but I send them anyway. They have literally never replied once. I heard National Executive Board held a vote Monday evening and voted not to defy the order. I have been in a depression ever since. It was a must win situation.

The process put in place by the minister seems to have been delivered to him straight from Canada Post management. Worse than a regular arbitration, he has

granted Kaplan [the official tasked with leading the government-ordered inquiry of Canada Post operations] a mandate to propose structural changes, and better ways to bargain in the future. It is this line which set off major alarms for me. Canada Post has suggested in previous negotiations that we should agree to permanent arbitration in place of negotiation. This is the system the dummy supervisors work on. They "negotiate" and if a deal isn't made, arbitration is automatically triggered.

I'm terrified that Kaplan will, at management's suggestion, propose we adopt this system. As we all know, this is a poorly disguised arbitration and not an inquiry as they say. In May, Kaplan will propose an agreement, and when we don't accept it, he will impose it. Giving him this freedom to propose a different approach to bargaining is the biggest threat that nobody seems to have noticed. We would no longer just feel or know that our negotiations are a sham, it would be permanently part of the agreement.

An Ontario-based postal worker was angered by the abuse of temporary and part-time workers, who were sent home after the return to work, even though they had accepted shifts well in advance.

Most (workers) that I spoke with were wanting to DEFY, but wanted clear direction and outline of the consequences from the union. We needed to have more direction and communication from the NEB (National Executive Board).

I feel let down by the government, and the union. I'm angry that Canada Post is still up to their old tricks and there's nothing I can do other than file more grievances that will never be heard. I think we still have a chance to DEFY if we do it soon. But it has to be done in solidarity together.

We encourage all postal workers who want to help build the PWRFC, and prepare a political struggle against Canada Post's sweeping concessions demands and the ruling elite's class war agenda of austerity that stands behind them, to contact the Committee today. Email canadapostworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form below.



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