

1 month after CUPW sellout, stage set for historic attacks on Canada Post workers

Niles Niemuth
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Are you a postal worker, or employed in the delivery or logistics sector? We urge you to contact the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee at canadapostworkersrffc@gmail.com or by filling out the form at the end of this article.

One month after the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) capitulated to a strikebreaking order from the Liberal government by sending 55,000 postal workers back to work, the ruling class is intensifying its drive to destroy the postal service.

Contract talks resumed this week and an Industrial Inquiry Commission is scheduled to hold its first hearings on the future of Canada Post on January 27 and 28. The Liberal government, supported by corporate advisers, Canada Post management and the leadership of CUPW, are setting the stage for the gutting of jobs, degrading of working conditions, and the transformation of the country's postal service into a low-cost skeleton operation in the name of returning the corporation to profitability.

This was made clear by Carleton University business management professor Ian Lee, a former Canada Post executive, in an interview with CBC News this week in which he outlined far-reaching plans for the cannibalization of the national postal service—currently run as a for-profit Crown corporation under government oversight. Lee proposed that urban operations be handed over to private, for-profit couriers and/or the elimination of home delivery in favour of delivery to post boxes at franchises in grocery stores and pharmacies. Ultimately, he proposed that Canada Post's operations be reduced to a tax-payer subsidized service for rural and remote communities. Private courier companies refuse to deliver to these communities because it is unprofitable, even when using contractors paid cheap-labour rates.

“There is a future. It's going to be a very different organization. It's going to be much smaller,” Lee told CBC News. “It's going to be restructured. The only question is when and to what extent, and what will be the proposition offered when they restructure?”

Left unsaid by Professor Lee, who no doubt has an inside view of the ongoing discussions within Canada Post management, are the implications for the thousands of workers who would likely lose their jobs or be reduced to low-paid, temporary and part-time workers.

Lee and other scoundrels like him would not be in a position to gloat so openly about slashing tens of thousands of full-time jobs and inflicting a bitter defeat on one of the most militant sections of the working class without CUPW's torpedoing of the postal workers' strike.

With the full backing of the Canadian Labour Congress, which took three days before issuing a news release mildly criticizing the government back-to-work order, the CUPW National Executive forced postal workers to return to work without giving them any say in the decision. It acted in this arbitrary, anti-democratic fashion because it well knew that there was mass rank-and-file sentiment in favour of defying the state strikebreaking.

Workers, moreover, enjoyed powerful support from the population at large and faced a Liberal government that was crumbling on its feet. On the very day that CUPW ordered workers to take down picket lines, Chrystia Freeland resigned as deputy prime minister and finance minister, deepening the crisis facing Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that led to his resignation announcement earlier this month.

In addition to this favourable political situation, the mail rush prior to the holiday period placed workers in a strong position to make their fight for secure jobs, protection against the use of automation and AI to increase worker-exploitation, and real wage increases the spearhead of a worker-led counteroffensive against capitalist austerity and war. This would have met with an enthusiastic response because postal workers' demands are similar to and of vital importance to all workers, private and public sector alike. But the CUPW leadership's top priority was to prevent such a development at all costs, since it would have upset the union bureaucracy's anti-worker corporatist alliance with the Liberals and New Democrats.

Throughout the more than year-long negotiations with CUPW, Canada Post management has pleaded poverty, noting that the company has lost \$3 billion since 2018, as mail volumes have shifted away from traditional letter mail and towards parcels. They insist that these losses necessitate the expansion and entrenchment of a low-paid part-time and temporary workforce, and the implementation of artificial intelligence and other technology to compete with the notorious conditions of brutal exploitation at Amazon, UPS, and other private delivery companies.

After months of delay, CUPW finally called a nationwide walkout on November 15 amid militant demands from the rank-and-file membership to defend their jobs, and fight for improved wages and benefits. Workers manned picket lines at depots and sorting plants across the country, determined to push back the company's demands for deep concessions. Instead of preparing workers for a looming and inevitable back-to-work order and seeking to mobilize the broader working class in the defense of

postal workers, public services and the right to strike, the CUPW apparatus kept workers isolated on their picket lines, encouraging them merely to write to their MPs and appeal for Canada Post to bargain fairly.

When the state criminalization of the strike came, in the form of an order from the unelected Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) acting on the instructions of Liberal Labour Minister Steve MacKinnon, the union bureaucracy shut down all talk of workers' defying the illegitimate order and directed them to return to work on December 17. MacKinnon's anti-democratic order relied on a cooked-up interpretation of Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code that the Liberal government has used to shut down four separate labour disputes in less than six months.

The CIRB order has extended the expired contract until May 22 to give management and CUPW more time to conspire behind workers' backs as to the best way to fundamentally restructure Canada Post, before presenting their decisions as *a fait accompli*.

The Industrial Inquiry Commission ordered by MacKinnon is a fraud—a transparent mechanism to impose the demands of corporate Canada. It is headed by seasoned arbitrator William Kaplan, who is also mediating in the ongoing contract talks. It can be said with certainty that in the name of restoring profitability it will rubber stamp many of the far-reaching attacks sought by management and demanded by Bay Street investors and big business as a whole.

The commission has a wide remit to review Canada Post's financial situation, alternative delivery models and issues in negotiations related to full-time employment, health and safety and job security. It is empowered to recommend any changes it deems needed to Canada Post's operations moving forward and to the collective agreements between Canada Post and CUPW.

While corporate Canada has everything at its disposal to get its way, workers will have no effective means to have their voices heard, let alone realize their demands. Generally, the only people allowed to appear before such commissions are corporate executives, big business lobbyists, government officials and union bureaucrats. Kaplan is mandated to deliver his Inquiry Commission report by May 15, one week before postal workers under the CIRB order are to regain the legal right to strike.

This is all part of a Trudeau government-concocted plan to stack the decks as heavily as possible against the postal workers. The Inquiry Commission will deliver a so-called "neutral," "third party" report backing Canada Post's demands, to assist in whipping up public sentiment against the postal workers. Furthermore, workers' positions will be weakened by the fact that mail volumes are far lower in May than in the weeks preceding the Christmas holiday and both the employer and Canada Post will have had five months to make further plans to weather a strike.

Despite all this, and as part of its continuing efforts to bind workers to the state-designed, pro-employer collective bargaining system, CUPW is actively promoting the Inquiry Commission. Having gagged and bound rank-and-file workers hand and foot by enforcing last month's strike ban, CUPW President Jan Simpson had the temerity to claim that the rigged Industrial Inquiry Commission will be a "vital forum to present and address the broader issues and structural changes to the public post office and

how they affect all members and the public."

In opposition to the capitulation and collaboration of the CUPW bureaucracy in the destruction of jobs and working conditions, postal workers from across Canada in the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) have been fighting for a program based on what workers need, not what the union deems is possible or what management declares necessary to boost profits. The PWRFC has worked actively to mobilize support for postal workers in the Canadian working class and to develop ties with postal workers internationally, who all confront the same attacks on their living standards and jobs.

Prior to the strike the PWRFC issued a program for developing the struggle of postal workers. It stated:

Rank-and-file postal workers must take control of our contract struggle into our own hands.

The refusal of the CUPW apparatus to act on the overwhelming strike mandate and provide a strategy to mobilize workers' power to win our just demands and meet the threat of government strikebreaking is yet further proof that it is in the pocket of Canada Post management and the Trudeau Liberal government.

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.

With the resumption of contract talks and the Kaplan commission set to begin its work, the struggle of postal workers has entered a new stage. Militant rank-and-file workers must prepare for a mobilization to stop the planned pro-corporate restructuring of Canada Post by joining the PWRFC, which is affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, and building a network of rank-and-file committees at every plant and depot which will fight for its program. Fill out the form below to get in touch with the PWRFC today.



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