

Postal workers union hails Liberal government's Canada Post review

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Canada's Liberal government unveiled a public review earlier this month of the operations of the state-controlled Canada Post. The review is designed to provide cover for the government to restructure Canada's postal service to make it a more profitable concern at the expense of postal workers.

During last year's federal election, the Liberals made much of their opposition to the Conservative-backed plan to end home delivery by 2018, but it is clear that their alternative agenda offers nothing to Canada's approximately 50,000 postal workers other than further job cuts and attacks on working conditions.

Even in the event the Liberals ultimately decide to retain home delivery, Public Services and Procurement Minister Judy Foote made clear that it would be bound up with a continuation of the assault on working conditions and service cuts. She told a recent press conference, "There's a potential here for restoring home mail delivery. The question is, is it restored on a two-day a week, three-day a week, five-day a week—we need to hear from Canadians what they need."

More fundamentally, the Liberals have set themselves the explicit goal of making Canada Post a more profitable concern, a task that can only be enforced at the expense of postal workers.

None of this stopped the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), and its self-styled "left" president Mike Palecek, from hailing in an unrestrained manner the Liberals' review. "This government has a historic opportunity to reinvent Canada Post. We're glad privatization isn't on the table. We need to get out of the rut of endless cuts, and start getting excited about the possibilities," Palecek enthused in a press release greeting the Liberal announcement.

Palecek and CUPW fully accept the reactionary premise that Canada Post be run as a profit-making business, and have consciously separated postal workers' opposition to service and job cuts from a broader struggle in defence of public services. To this end, they advocate Canada Post's expansion into postal banking operations, which the *World*

Socialist Web Site has previously characterized as a "reactionary pipe dream."

CUPW's hailing of the Liberals' phony consultation pledge reflects a broader reorientation of the union bureaucracy in the wake of the Liberals' and Justin Trudeau's ascension to power. The unions spearheaded an "anybody but Harper" campaign during last year's election modelled on a similar 2014 initiative in Ontario, which saw union bureaucrats back a right-wing Liberal government of austerity and privatization. A leading role in the federal pro-Liberal campaign was played by Palecek, who only months before was a prominent leader in the pseudo-left Fightback group.

Fightback maintained a studious silence on the evolution of one of its former members into a leading union bureaucrat, even when Palecek and the union top brass consummated their pro-Liberal agitation by attending a closed-door meeting with Trudeau, a week after he was sworn in as prime minister, to pledge their readiness to work in collaboration with the new government. Such pledges were aimed at securing the privileged positions of the union bureaucracy and reassuring the ruling elite of their steadfast support in the intensification of attacks on the working class under conditions of deepening economic crisis.

Palecek's latest statement proves that the unions will not shy away from flat-out lies to cement their cozy working relationship with the Liberals. His assertion that privatization is not "on the table" is a deliberate effort to deceive postal workers. In truth, while the public services minister stated that full-scale privatization was "off the table," Foote made a point of noting in her announcement that nothing has been ruled out prior to the review.

The composition of the panel of four "experts" appointed by the government to oversee the process gives an indication of its potential outcome. One figure is Krystyna Hoeg, a board of directors member at Shoppers Home Health Care, one of Canada's largest pharmacy chains where many "franchised," i.e., privatized, post offices are now based. The retail workers who man such outlets typically earn

around half of what postal workers paid by Canada Post do.

CUPW's endorsement of the Liberals' phony public consultation is the logical consequence of its pro-capitalist outlook and a years-long record of right-wing betrayals of postal workers' struggles. In 2011, in the immediate aftermath of the election of a majority Conservative government fully committed to backing an assault on postal workers' wages and working conditions, CUPW called a series of toothless rotating strikes aimed at allowing the increasingly angry postal workers to let off steam, while causing as little inconvenience as possible for the postal service. The Conservatives first encouraged Canada Post to impose a lockout, then implemented legislation to force postal workers back to work, which met with the approval of the Liberals who vowed to do nothing to prevent the law's passage.

For its part, the official opposition at the time, the New Democratic Party (NDP), mounted a fraudulent pose of opposition and filibustered the bill for a brief period. The filibuster was a manoeuvre worked out in close collaboration with the CUPW leadership to send postal workers back to their jobs and avert a serious struggle. CUPW soon told the NDP to end its filibustering activity and acquiesced to the back-to-work order without a fight. It subsequently agreed a sell-out contract with Canada Post, citing the government's threat to impose an arbitrator to justify its acceptance of sweeping concessions.

Five years later, the Ontario Superior Court belatedly ruled late last month that the Conservatives' reactionary 2011 law, which banned workers from taking job action by threatening them with the imposition of exorbitant financial penalties, was unconstitutional.

Palecek and the CUPW could hardly contain their excitement, with the CUPW president declaring, "This is a win for workers everywhere."

In truth, the ruling changes little for postal workers. It left untouched the concessions contract agreed to by CUPW and Canada Post. Palecek claimed it could have an impact on current talks between the two sides on a new collective agreement, suggesting that it would restrain the company. The spreading of such fatal illusions in the capitalist courts, which have time and again enforced anti-worker strikebreaking legislation, is designed to prevent the workers from taking the struggle into their own hands.

Canada Post has already requested the Liberal government appoint conciliators to help broker a deal, and Palecek has responded by threatening strike action. Strike ballots are to be organized by CUPW in late May and June. Striking a hardline pose, Palecek declared his determination to lead a strike if bargaining breaks down, stating, "We're telling people to get ready for that eventuality. If they want to go

that route, we'll see them on the picket lines."

Palecek's attempt to lay the blame for the defeat of the 2011 strike at the door of the Conservatives' reactionary anti-strike law, and present its overturn as a new dawn for a successful struggle by postal workers, is thoroughly dishonest. In truth, former prime minister Stephen Harper was only able to succeed with his right-wing project, which marked the beginning of a much broader assault on the right to strike, because of the hostility of the CUPW bureaucracy and the unions as a whole to waging any genuine struggle to oppose him.

Palecek emerged at the head of CUPW when workers, angered by the repeated betrayals, threw out the old leadership in May 2015. But he has made explicit ever since that he has no intention of changing course. In an interview on the eve of becoming CUPW president, he foisted the blame for the unwillingness of the unions to challenge Harper's anti-strike laws onto the workers themselves in an interview with the RankandFile.ca web site.

He declared, "The rest of the labour movement must be ready to stand up to the government, and rank and file workers have to be ready to go the distance. ... I have a good idea of what it takes to force a government to back down, and have promised our members I am willing to lead them as far as they are willing to go."

To defend their jobs and working conditions, postal workers must break with all illusions in the viability of a struggle waged by the reactionary trade union bureaucracy. Only an uncompromising fight against the right-wing policies advanced by the CUPW and Palecek and the creation of rank-and-file action committees independent of the trade unions can provide the basis for the development of a struggle among postal workers in conjunction with workers confronting similar attacks in other sectors of the economy.

Postal workers must reject the pro-capitalist premises of the campaign for a postal bank and take up the fight for the creation of a workers government to organize the postal service, and all other essential public services, as public utilities serving human need and not the profit interests of the ruling class. Accomplishing this requires the adoption of a socialist and internationalist programme.



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