

# Canada Post moves to lock out 50,000 workers

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Canada Post has given the required 72-hour notice to obtain the legal right to lock out 50,000 letter-carriers, mail-sorters and other postal workers and shut down Canada's postal service nationwide starting this Friday.

The notice is highly provocative and makes clear that government-owned Canada Post is determined to press forward with an across-the-board attack on postal workers' wages, conditions of employment and pension entitlements. But in the face of this frontal assault, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) is doing everything it can to isolate the postal workers' struggle, boost illusions in the big business federal Liberal government, and prevent postal workers from taking strike action.

Canada Post is pushing for massive concessions. These include: elimination of the defined benefit pension system for new hires and its replacement by a defined contributions model; a pay freeze for temporary workers throughout the four-year life of the new contract; massive attacks on healthcare benefits; the cutting of paid meal times; and the undermining of job protection guarantees so that they would apply only to workers with 10 rather than five years of continuous service.

Although Canada Post has made multi-millions in profits over the past two years thanks to the concessions contract rammed through with the collaboration of CUPW in 2012, it has rejected out of hand the union's modest demands, including a pay increase for rural delivery workers who earn 28 percent less than their urban counterparts.

Postal workers must reject all claims that Canada Post lacks the funds to offer them decent-paying, secure jobs, and make their struggle the spearhead of a working-class counteroffensive in defence of workers' rights and public services.

This can be accomplished only if postal workers draw the lessons of the treacherous role played by CUPW and the pro-capitalist trade unions as a whole over the past quarter-century and take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracy.

CUPW—led by national President Mike Palecek, a former leading member of the pseudo-left Fightback group—has worked systematically to block postal workers from opposing the attacks of management throughout the more than six months of contract negotiations. For all his rhetoric about being a “left” and “militant” leader, Palecek has pursued precisely the same policies as the previous CUPW leadership, which oversaw a long series of defeats for postal workers, most recently in 2011 when the union bowed before the Harper Conservative government's strikebreaking legislation and subsequently agreed to a concessions-laden five-year contract.

From the outset of negotiations last January, Canada Post made clear that it is determined to impose a cost-cutting deal. In April, management initiated “conciliation,” a move which effectively set a three-month time limit for negotiating a new contract. Palecek responded by repeatedly assuring Canada Post and the media that CUPW had no desire to call a strike. The union waited until the last minute before organizing a strike ballot in early June. That vote showed the overwhelming determination of workers to resist the assault on their working conditions, producing an overwhelming majority of over 90 percent in favour of strike action.

Yet instead of organizing for a genuine struggle, CUPW has played for time. Last week it pleaded for a two-week “cooling off period,” a proposal that was summarily rejected by management.

CUPW has also sown the most fatal illusions in the Liberal government and its “independent” task-force “review” of Canada Post, claiming that the review will allow workers to be heard and to “save” Canada Post. However, in announcing the terms of the review, Minister of Public Procurement and Infrastructure Judy Foote emphasized its recommendations must be predicated on Canada Post being run as a profitable concern.

CUPW fully accepts this reactionary framework and has repeatedly signaled to management, the government and big business its desire to expand its role as an accomplice in the attacks on postal workers. As Palecek said in an

emailed statement Sunday, “We don’t want a labour conflict, especially when there’s a public review.”

Since 2013, CUPW has focused on a campaign to persuade Canada Post to introduce postal banking to counteract falling revenues from declining letter volumes. It has firmly rejected linking the defence of postal workers’ jobs with a broader working-class offensive in defence of public services, which are under sustained assault by federal and provincial governments alike.

Responding to Canada Post’s lockout notice, Palecek accused the company of “sabotaging the public review of the post office.” The union’s groveling appeal to the corporate elite was summed up in a July 4 statement in which CUPW boasted, “While the company has been creating uncertainty by warning the public to avoid the post office, CUPW has been showing up at the bargaining table with proposals to make the post office even more profitable and improve services for Canadian businesses and the public.”

CUPW’s statement went on, “We want to reassure the public and the business community that we intend to remain in talks as long as there is hope that the parties offer suggestions on how we can better serve Canadians.”

Such a pledge to the “business community” should be taken as a warning by postal workers. It reflects the fact that CUPW, like the union bureaucracy as a whole, has been transformed over recent decades into an appendage of corporate management and the state with interests irreconcilably hostile to those of its own members.

During the last labour dispute at Canada Post in 2011, CUPW crippled working class resistance by organizing futile rotating strikes. This token protest enabled management, egged on by Harper and his Conservatives, to seize the initiative by imposing a lockout. The government then used this as the pretext to illegalize any and all job action against Canada Post. Subsequently, CUPW capitulated to management’s concession demands, claiming it had no other option because otherwise a Harper government-appointed arbitrator would have dictated the contract’s terms.

The union’s hostility to postal workers is demonstrated most of all by CUPW and Palecek’s promotion of the big business Liberals, who have repeatedly outlawed postal workers’ strikes, most famously in 1978, when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s father, Pierre Trudeau, ordered the arrest of CUPW President Jean-Claude Parrot and threatened to fire postal workers en masse.

Palecek was one of the most prominent leaders of the unions’ “Anybody But Harper” campaign during last

year’s federal election campaign—a campaign that served to paint the Canadian elite’s traditional party of government as a “progressive” alternative to the Conservatives. The purpose of this initiative was to help bring to power a government that, unlike Harper and his Conservatives, would accept the unions’ offer of “partnership” and incorporate the union officialdom in designing and implementing policies aimed at making Canadian capitalism more “competitive,” i.e., profitable. Less than a week after Trudeau was appointed prime minister, Palecek was among around 100 Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) leaders who met with him behind closed doors and pledged to work with the new government.

Significantly, Prime Minister Trudeau has not ruled out stripping postal workers of their rights and imposing a contract. Speaking Tuesday, he said his government doesn’t believe it has an “immediate responsibility” to intervene in the event postal service is interrupted.

A sharp warning must be made to postal workers about the role of the CLC, which has isolated and repeatedly intervened to shut down militant worker struggles. An article in last Saturday’s *Globe and Mail* reported on the cozy relations between the CLC leadership and the Liberals. In interviews with the *Globe*, top union officials, including CLC President Hassan Yussuff and Unifor President Jerry Dias, gushed about the warmth of their relations with the government and easy access to cabinet ministers, including Trudeau and Finance Minister Bill Morneau.

Postal workers must take the initiative out of the hands of the CUPW leadership by establishing their own independent action committees to organize a strike in defence of jobs and living standards and prepare defiance of any Liberal back-to-work law. Such a struggle cannot be successful if it accepts the reactionary premise that Canada Post must be run as a profitable concern. Rather, postal workers must fight to mobilize the entire working class to protect and expand workers’ rights and public services. Above all, a new political strategy is required which rejects the capitalist profit system and fights for a workers’ government based on socialist policies.



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