

CUPW blocks strike action; touts plans to boost Canada Post's profits

Laurent Lafrance
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As contract talks continue between government-owned Canada Post and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), the union is making ever-more explicit its opposition to any job action against management's sweeping concession demands, to say nothing of the mobilization of the working class as a whole in defence of public services.

Earlier this month, Canada Post temporarily withdrew its threat to lock out 50,000 mail sorters, letter carriers, mail truck drivers, and other postal workers and accepted the CUPW's call for a 30-day "cooling-off period" to pursue "intensive negotiations."

This followed an intrusive intervention by the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau against postal workers. Just a few days after the Liberals claimed they had no immediate plans to mimic the previous Stephen Harper-led Conservative government and impose a concessions-laden contract on postal workers, Labour Minister MaryAnn Mihychuk urged the CUPW to accept binding arbitration.

Canada Post management was quick to endorse this reactionary proposal. Initially, it said its acceptance of the CUPW's truce proposal was conditional on the union agreeing that at the end of the 30 days any outstanding contract issues would be determined through binding arbitration.

However, at the urging of the government, which has developed close ties with the union bureaucracy with the aim of using it to smother opposition to its right-wing agenda, Canada Post backed down.

As for the CUPW, which has been promoting the big business Liberals as allies of postal workers, it "politely declined" Mihychuk's "offer of help," while touting its commitment to making Canada Post even more profitable. Then, in a further show of "good faith," the CUPW dropped its complaint of illegal management

bargaining tactics, after the post office agreed to the 30-day cooling-off period.

Canada Post will use the extended period of negotiations and the CUPW's latest retreat to press ahead with its concession drive.

The Crown Corporation is exploiting technological change—including the decline in letter volumes and the growth of online shopping—to justify its demand for labour "flexibility" and major rollbacks. These include the elimination of the defined benefit pension system for new hires and its replacement by a defined contributions model, a pay freeze for temporary workers, massive cuts in health care benefits, the cutting of paid meal times, and the undermining of job protection guarantees.

From the very beginning of the conflict, the CUPW—led by National President Mike Palecek, a former leading member of the pseudo-left Fightback group—has demonstrated it has no intention of mounting a serious struggle. It has confined postal workers within the narrow framework of collective bargaining, refusing to make the defence of postal services and postal workers' jobs and working conditions the spearhead of a working-class counter-offensive in defence of public services and worker rights.

For all his "left" posturing, Palecek has continued and deepened the right-wing policy of the CUPW bureaucracy, which has overseen a long series of reversals and concession contracts.

Palecek has repeatedly spoken against job action, saying that the union is determined to avoid anything that would disrupt or take attention away from the Liberal government's review of Canada Post's operations.

The union has hailed this review as an instrument whereby postal workers can defend their interests. In

reality, it is the fulfillment of a bogus Liberal election promise aimed at giving a “democratic” veneer to the continued dismantling and privatization of postal services.

Instead of mobilizing its membership to seriously defend postal and public services, the union is fully participating in the review and accepts without question its fundamental premise: that Canada Post, and by implication other public services, must be profit-making enterprises.

The union is using the review to promote its diversionary and reactionary campaign for Canada Post’s revenues and profits to be boosted through the introduction of postal banking. This campaign is an appeal to the political establishment and big business, not the working class. It separates the struggle to “Save Canada Post” from the defence of health care, education and other vital services, and once again is predicated on Canada Post being run as a profit-making, capitalist enterprise.

Indeed, the CUPW has demonstrated repeatedly in recent years that it is dedicated to making the company profitable. In 2011, after isolating its membership in a series of futile rotating strikes, the union bowed before the Harper Conservative government’s strikebreaking legislation and subsequently agreed to a five-year concessions contract, enabling Canada Post to pocket hundreds of millions in profits.

The anti-worker, pro-capitalist character of the CUPW is most clearly demonstrated by its support for the Liberal Party, the ruling elite’s favoured party of government for most of the last century. Palecek and the CUPW played a critical role in the “Anybody but Harper” campaign that paved the way for the coming to power of Trudeau and his Liberals in the 2015 elections by promoting them as a “progressive” alternative to the Conservatives.

Less than a week after Trudeau was appointed prime minister, Palecek was among more than 100 Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) leaders who met with him behind closed doors and pledged to work with the new government.

It is an indication of just how far the CUPW apparatus has moved to the right that it is shamelessly boosting the same party that in 1978, under the leadership of the current prime minister’s father, Pierre-Eliot Trudeau, jailed CUPW President Jean-Claude

Parrot and threatened to fire postal workers *en masse* when they defied a strikebreaking law.

While the current Liberal government is urging Canada Post management to rely on the CUPW and the CLC to impose a concessions contract, the Liberal government, like its Conservative predecessor, stands ready to impose back-to-work legislation should the union bureaucracy prove incapable of ramming through rollbacks in the face of rank-and-file opposition.

Trudeau and his Liberals have themselves already signaled this with their call for the postal contract dispute to be settled through binding arbitration.

If postal workers are to prevail in a struggle that pits them not only against Canada Post, but against the Liberal government and the entire ruling class, they must seize its leadership from the hands of the CUPW apparatus and repudiate its corporatist program. This requires the building of independent rank-and-file committees oriented to mobilizing the entire working class in defence of public services and defiance of the battery of anti-worker laws and initiating the struggle for a workers’ government. Such a government would radically reorganize social-economic life so as to make the satisfaction of human needs, not capitalist profit, the animating principle.



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