

Toronto Airport Authority imposes injunctions on striking ground crew

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Following a rally at Toronto's Pearson International Airport by around 250 striking Swissport ground crew on Sunday, the Greater Toronto Airport Authority (GTAA) has intensified its strikebreaking efforts by imposing a series of injunctions on the workers. Strikers told the *World Socialist Web Site* that they have been prevented from protesting at one of the terminals and denied the right to display their strike badges in the terminal. A striker also pointed out that the union is doing nothing to challenge these flagrantly anti-democratic restrictions.

Workers at Swissport, one of the world's largest airline service providers, have been on strike for over a month in opposition to the company's attempts to further slash their already inadequate wages and gut working conditions. The GTAA, which is owned by the Canadian government, has done everything in its power to assist Swissport to break the strike, including by facilitating the employment of untrained strikebreakers, which has resulted in countless safety breaches.

A striking baggage handler told the WSWs that workers from Teamsters Local 419 and their supporters gathered at Terminal 3 Sunday afternoon before proceeding to the on-ramp at Terminal 1. "We just shut that whole terminal down so there was no traffic for the traveling public for about 15 to 20 minutes," he explained. A rally was held at Terminal 1, before the protesters began a march back to Terminal 3. "We kept going to the on-ramp and stopped traffic again for about two hours and it was forced to go back to the 401 [highway]," he added.

The worker reported significant support from travelers entering the airport, in spite of the disruption. "They tell us not to give up, keep going, keep fighting - words of encouragement," he said. Even police at the scene acknowledged that workers were within their rights to stop traffic.

But the company and GTAA saw it differently. "We now have several injunctions because of that action," the

worker continued. "We can't rally at Terminal 1 and 3 anymore. We're not allowed to have our 'on strike' card that we carry around our neck. We can't show that in the terminals."

In keeping with the Teamsters' efforts to isolate the strike and run it into the ground, the worker reported that union leaders have done nothing to fight the injunctions. Instead, they have simply informed workers that these are the new rules that must be followed. Representatives from other unions, including Unifor and CUPE, have restricted themselves to purely verbal declarations of solidarity with workers and token gestures, and refused to call on their own members to join the struggle.

The GTAA has also cracked down on the length of time strikers can hold up vehicles. "We used to be able to hold cars for 15 to 30 minutes but now any car that joins the line can't be held for more than five minutes," the worker continued. "The GTAA is the one who imposed the injunctions on us, it's them that make the rules and we have to follow them. It's kind of a one-way street right now. Swissport makes the rules and we have to follow them, but Swissport can break almost every rule and face no consequences."

Swissport's open strikebreaking continues, with the worker reporting that all 700 strikers received a Fedex-delivered letter to their home addresses appealing to them to cross picket lines.

The GTAA, which is no doubt expecting that the Liberal government will enforce back to work legislation if the injunctions prove insufficient, is "turning a blind eye to the mess that is going on inside the airport," he added. Bags are being sent on planes without passengers, which is illegal, safety checks are not being carried out on scabs, and some baggage is being left behind.

The experiences of Swissport workers are typical of what strikers have gone through over recent years across Canada, where the right to strike has been severely

curtailed. Successive federal governments have repeatedly adopted strike-breaking legislation, including in 2012 when Air Canada machinists, ground crew and pilots were prevented from taking strike action by government legislation as the unions capitulated without a fight. The Canadian Foundation for Labour Rights reported that successive federal governments have imposed 19 pieces of back to work legislation over the past three decades, while provincial governments have adopted 71.

The role of the union bureaucracy in systematically smothering the class struggle, thus enabling the government and employer-led offensive over the past three decades to proceed virtually unopposed, has been critical.

The Teamsters union is offering no way forward for the strike and hopes that strikers will be worn down and forced to accept the company's concessions. The last article on the Teamsters' website reporting on the strike over two weeks ago noted that the strikers had voted down Swissport's second offer, which was virtually identical to the first concessions-laden contract proposal. The Teamsters made no attempt to explain why it forced its members to vote on such a rotten agreement twice within less than a month, especially since it was opposed by a 95 percent margin in the first vote.

The article concluded by boasting that the Teamsters "represent[s] 125,000 members in Canada in all industries." A more damning indictment of the union would be hard to produce, given that the Teamsters has not issued a single serious appeal for solidarity from its membership, let alone organized solidarity strikes among other sections of workers.

Instead, it has spent its time cozying up to the big business Liberal government, as shown by a joint statement by Teamsters Canada President Francois Laporte and Teamsters General President James Hoffa on the ongoing North American Free Trade Agreement talks. The pair declared that they "applaud the Canadian delegation" for its attempt to include a chapter on labour in the deal, and "commend Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland and her team for their ambition."

The union's policy of confining workers' protests to isolated local actions, while encouraging hostility to workers overseas and promoting Canadian nationalism, is all the more criminal given that Swissport operates on a global scale. The striking ground crew workers can only be successful if they broaden their struggle by appealing to airline workers across Canada and internationally to join them in a fight for decent-paying and secure jobs.

As the strike in Toronto continues into its sixth week, Swissport workers at Belfast International Airport in Northern Ireland began a strike ballot yesterday over the dismissal of a union representative. Swissport management, acting in a manner similar to their efforts to break the strike in Toronto, reportedly dismissed the steward after systematically treating him differently from his colleagues because of his union activities.

The strike by baggage handlers and other ground crew in Toronto can only be successful if the workers take control of the job action out of the hands of the union bureaucrats. This requires the formation of action committees in opposition to the trade union apparatus, controlled by the rank-and-file and including the most militant workers, to conduct and broaden the strike. Such committees should draw up a list of demands, which should include an end to all strike-breaking efforts, the removal of any injunctions against the 700 striking workers, a double-digit pay increase to compensate for the years of low-wage labour, the guaranteeing of full benefits for all Swissport workers, and a ban on the use of job agencies.

Above all, workers must issue an appeal to their colleagues both on the ground and in the cabin at Pearson, airports across Canada and around the world, all of whom confront the same drive by airlines and their service providers to slash labour costs so as to boost profits for their billionaire shareholders. This poses the need for a political struggle to break the stranglehold of the financial elite over social life and establish a society in which the needs of the vast majority are given priority over the profit desires of a tiny few. To take this fight forward, workers must take up the struggle for a workers' government committed to socialist policies.



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