

# Canada Post union silent on Trudeau's threat to outlaw strike

Keith Jones

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The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) has not breathed a word in response to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's threat to outlaw job action against government-owned Canada Post.

Last Thursday, Trudeau told parliament that "all options will be on the table" if the union does not soon reach a tentative contract settlement with Canada Post and end its three-week campaign of rotating one- and two-day local strikes.

If Trudeau did not make specific mention of a back-to-work law, it was because he didn't have to. In the past 40 years, Liberal and Conservative federal governments have illegalized postal strikes a half-dozen times.

On Monday—after several more days in which, according to the union, Canada Post contemptuously refused to address postal workers' concerns about "health and safety, staffing, over-burdening, job security, a reduction in precarious employment, fair wages for all and a better work-life balance"—an aide to Labour Minister Patty Hadju reiterated Trudeau's threat.

"If the parties are unable to achieve a negotiated deal very soon," Veronique Simard told Canadian Press, the government "will use all options to find a solution to reduce the impacts to Canadians, businesses, Canada Post and their workers."

In a move clearly meant to provide a pretext for government intervention, Canada Post management announced Tuesday that due to the disruption caused by the rotating walkouts it can no longer live up to its service (delivery-time) guarantees and is suspending them indefinitely.

No postal worker should have any doubt as to what the union's silence in the face of the looming threat of strikebreaking legislation means.

CUPW is preparing to capitulate before Canada Post and the big business Liberal government—whether by accepting a rotten concessions deal, on the claim that this is preferable to allowing a government-appointed arbitrator to dictate postal workers' terms of employment, or by bowing before a

government back-to-work bill as it did in 2011.

From the get-go, it has been blatantly obvious that Canada Post would rely in this contract negotiation, as it has for decades, on the threat of government intervention to intensify its drive to shred workers' rights and increase their workload.

But the CUPW leadership studiously avoided any discussion of this threat. To do so would have immediately revealed that postal workers face a political struggle against the big business Liberal government, and the urgency of their tying their struggle against concessions and job and service cuts to a broader mobilization of the working class in defence of all public services and workers' social rights.

Instead, CUPW has imposed on the 50,000 postal workers the same ruinous strategy that it pursued in 2011 and which resulted in a contract that imposed numerous rollbacks, including pension cuts and the expansion of multi-tier wages and precarious employment.

As in 2011, CUPW has limited job action to ineffectual rotating walkouts. And it only launched these after nearly a month had passed from when postal workers gained the legal right to strike.

CUPW president Mike Palecek has provided postal workers with no explanation for the union's failure to act on the massive mandate the rank-and-file gave it to call an unlimited national strike.

But the rationale of the CUPW apparatus is clear. By keeping postal workers on a tight leash and deliberately sabotaging the effectiveness of their job action, the CUPW leadership hopes to avoid a head on confrontation with the government, while dissipating workers' militancy.

And just as in 2011—when the Harper Conservative government encouraged Canada Post to impose a lockout, then cited the shutdown as justification for a vicious anti-worker law—the union's refusal to launch an all-out strike is only emboldening Canada Post management and the government.

The CUPW leadership boasts of being a bastion of worker militancy. But no less than the rest of the trade union

bureaucracy, it is terrified of the threat a genuine working-class counter-offensive against austerity and the battery of anti-working class laws would represent to Canadian capitalism, to say nothing of their own cozy, corporatist relations with big business.

Led by Palecek, the CUPW played a major role in the unions' "Anybody But Conservative" campaign in the 2015 election, which helped pave the way to power for a Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government that has continued the Harper government's program of austerity and war. This includes: imposing Harper's health care accord, which will cut tens of billions from health care over the next decade; expanding Canada's military-security and border cooperation with a Trump-led America; and increasing military spending by more than 70 percent a year by 2026.

If the postal workers' struggle is not to be betrayed by CUPW or suppressed by the Trudeau government, rank-and-file workers must seize the leadership of their struggle from the union apparatus, and make it the spearhead of an industrial and political offensive of the entire working class against all concessions and austerity. This requires the immediate formation of rank-and-file action committees, entirely independent of CUPW, at every postal sorting station, post office, and delivery center. As their first tasks, these committees should immediately launch a national strike against Canada Post, prepare defiance of any strikebreaking law, and end the isolation of the postal workers' struggle by reaching out to other workers across Canada and internationally.

The *World Socialist Web Site's* call for postal workers to defy an anti-strike law is not made light-mindedly. The capitalist elite will view their defiance as an intolerable challenge and resort to still greater repression, deploying the police and courts with the aim of intimidating workers and smashing the strike.

Forty years ago, Justin Trudeau's father, Pierre Trudeau, ordered police to raid union offices and threatened to fire postal workers en masse when they defied a back-to-work law for a week.

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However, the most important factor in the 1978 strike's defeat was the sabotage of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) leadership and of the social-democratic politicians of the NDP. They actively assisted the government in isolating the strike.

In sentencing then CUPW President Jean-Claude Parrot to three months in prison for authorizing the illegal strike, the judge cited remarks of CLC president Dennis McDermott that exemplified the venomous hostility of the privileged union bureaucracy to working-class struggle. According to

McDermott, postal workers' defiance of the Trudeau government threatened "to take us down the road of anarchy" and "leave the labour movement in total disrepute."

In the decades since, the CLC and the unions as a whole have moved sharply further to the right. They have imposed massive job and wage cuts in the name of ensuring corporate competitiveness, increasingly integrated themselves into management, and openly supported NDP, Parti Quebecois and Liberal governments that have imposed round after round of austerity.

But if the enemies arrayed against postal workers are powerful, their potential allies are far more numerous and stronger.

The problems faced by postal workers—declining living standards, multi-tier wages, precarious employment, the employer's use of technological change to slash jobs and impose speed-up—are those of workers across industry and throughout the public sector.

Workers across the country, including Quebec construction workers, railway workers, and BC, Nova Scotia and Ontario teachers, have, like the postal workers, had their struggles outlawed.

An appeal by postal workers to the entire working class for a counter-offensive against the decades-long assault on worker's rights, the dismantling of public and social services, and the criminalization of worker resistance would rally mass support. Moreover, a defiant stand by postal workers in Canada would galvanize international support, beginning with US postal workers, whose jobs are threatened by privatization and UPS workers, upon whom the Teamsters union has just imposed a concessions-filled agreement although they massively voted it down.



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