

Trudeau government introduces bill to outlaw Canada Post strike

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Canada's Liberal government is outlawing the campaign of rotating strikes 50,000 Canada Post workers have mounted since Oct. 22.

Like the previous Harper Conservative government, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberals stand four-square behind government-owned Canada Post and its drive to perpetuate and intensify a brutal, profit-driven work regimen. Postal workers must endure forced overtime, speed-up, and an accident rate more than five times the norm in federally regulated industries. Their real wages have been eroded by a succession of concessionary contracts. In addition, young and other low-seniority workers face multi-tier wages and precarious employment.

Yesterday, the government presented to parliament an "Act to provide for the resumption and continuation of postal services" or Bill C-89, and initiated steps to suspend normal legislative rules, so as to ensure its speedy passage.

In tabling Bill C-89, Labour Minister Patty Hajdu claimed the Liberal government is a strong supporter of collective bargaining and worker rights, and was only resorting to strikebreaking legislation because it had "exhausted every other "option."

She went on to say that the government was holding off on immediately mounting a full-court press to ram its "emergency" legislation into law, "because we still believe that Canada Post and CUPW (the Canadian Union of Postal Workers) can get a deal."

This is all hogwash. The Liberals are a government of and for big business. Behind a bilge of phony progressive rhetoric, they have pursued the same pro-austerity, pro-war agenda as their Conservative predecessors. This includes cutting tens of billions from health care, hiking military spending by more than 70 percent by 2026, and expanding Canada's role in Washington's military-strategic offensives against Russia and China and in the oil-rich Middle East.

In Wednesday's fall "fiscal update," the Liberals rewarded big business with a further \$16.5 billion in tax cuts and subsidies in the name of boosting the country's "international competitiveness."

As for Hajdu's claim that the government wants to give collective bargaining "one more chance" even as it bludgeons postal workers back to work, this was a feeble attempt to obscure the Liberals' role as handmaidens for big business. Corporate Canada considers postal workers' fight for secure, safe jobs and a decent living for themselves and their families an intolerable infringement on profits and a dangerous example for the rest of the working class. Letting slip the government's true motivations, the Labour Minister told parliament that the rotating walkouts have "had significant negative impacts" on "businesses, international commerce (and) Canada Post."

CUPW has signaled that it will comply with the legislation and order postal workers to call off all job action, just as soon as it receives royal assent.

The union has been armed with a massive rank-and-file mandate for an all-out strike since September. Yet in response to the government strikebreaking, no one in the CUPW leadership has so much as suggested that postal workers should transform their rotating walkouts into a national strike, let alone appealed to the working class to come to postal workers' defence.

Rather CUPW President Mike Palecek—until recently a leader of the pseudo-left Fightback group—rushed to announce that the union will challenge the constitutionality of any back-to-work law in the courts.

Workers, including postal workers, have lived this scenario many times before. Time and again, union bureaucrats have enforced anti-strike laws, arguing that workers whose struggles have been criminalized should not defend themselves through class struggle, but rather seek redress through the courts. That is, by relying on appeals to a key part of the repressive state machine that enforces the dictatorship of big business. One moreover, that has played a key role in the offensive against the working class, upholding the constitutionality of numerous anti-strike and anti-worker laws.

In an attempt to willfully deceive workers, the CUPW bureaucrats are trumpeting an Ontario Superior Court

decision that found the Harper Conservative government's law suppressing the 2011 strike unconstitutional. What they omit to mention is that this ruling had effectively no material impact. The massive rollbacks, including pension cuts and a huge expansion of two-tier and precarious employment, imposed on postal workers in the contracts dictated by the Conservative government-appointed arbitrator, remain in force.

In a no less unmistakable sign that CUPW is preparing to call off all job action, Palecek issued a joint statement with Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President Hassan Yussuff "condemning" the government's actions.

The CLC, with Palecek and the CUPW's strong support, played a critical role in propelling the Liberals to power in the 2015 election through their "Anybody but Conservative" campaign—a get-out-the-vote initiative that painted Trudeau and the Liberals, long Canadian big business's preferred party of government, in progressive hues. Yussuff regularly boasts about the access he and other top union bureaucrats enjoy to the Liberal government, and served on the government's NAFTA Advisory Council along with leading representatives of big business.

In the joint CUPW-CLC press release, Palecek used fiery rhetoric. The CUPW president charged Trudeau with "showing his true colours" and sharing Harper's "anti-worker agenda." But all this was hot air, since Palecek went on to cravenly accept the imposition of a concessionary contract as a foregone conclusion. "Back-to-work legislation," he declared, "has serious long-term impacts on the work environment and on labour relations. Once contracts are imposed that don't address our core concerns around unsafe working conditions, equality for rural carriers, and access to secure full-time middle-class jobs, that's just more ground we'll continue to struggle to regain."

With the full support of the rightwing CLC leadership, Palecek and the CUPW apparatus will point to the threat of \$1,000-a-day fines for workers should they defy the Liberals' strikebreaking legislation to claim that there is no viable alternative to submission.

But it has been obvious from the outset of the negotiations that a back-to-work law was the pivot of Canada Post's strategy and that the Liberals, if need be, would do its and big business's bidding—just as they did in 1978, when Trudeau's father, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, threatened to fire postal workers en masse, after they defied a back-to-work law; and in 1997 under Jean Chretien, when the Liberals again stripped postal workers of their rights to strike and bargain collectively.

Yet rather than prepare for a political struggle against the government, by fighting to make the postal workers' struggle the spearhead of a working-class counteroffensive

against the dismantling of public services and the shredding of workers' social rights, the CUPW leadership has done everything to demobilize and isolate them.

Not only did CUPW restrict job action to one- and two-day regional strikes. It breathed not a word about the threat of government intervention and it persisted in this silence even as the government, starting with Trudeau's November 8 statement about Ottawa being ready to use "all options" to get the mail moving, openly brandished the threat of a strikebreaking law.

This week, after the government served the requisite 48-hour notice that it would be introducing a bill to outlaw the postal workers' job action, Palecek suddenly blurted out that Canada Post is "up to their same old game, which is to try to provoke back-to-work legislation... They create a crisis, in this case a fictional (backlog of undelivered mail), and then wait for the government to bail them out."

Palecek's words stand as an indictment of his own and the CUPW leadership's complicity. If workers have been ambushed by the government, it is because the union that purports to represent them has deliberately sought to blind them to the threat they face, while preventing them from mobilizing their strength to shut down Canada Post and appeal to the working class for support.

If postal workers are not to suffer a further reversal, they must seize the leadership of their struggle from the hands of the CUPW apparatus by forming rank-and-file committees at every workplace to immediately initiate a national strike and prepare defiance of Bill C-89. To defeat the government assault will require a working-class political struggle. Postal workers must link their struggle to the broader mass, but as of yet inchoate, opposition to the relentless big-business assault on working people's social and democratic rights and rampant social inequality.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recognizes defiance of Bill C-89 will make postal workers the target of a savage counterattack from big business, its political hirelings in the Liberal government, and the capitalist courts and police.

But if postal workers face powerful enemies, their potential allies among workers across Canada and around the world are even stronger.



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