

Canada Post workers need socialist strategy to defy and defeat Liberals' back-to-work law

Roger Jordan
24 November 2018

Working people across Canada must come to the defence of the 50,000 Canada Post workers whose months-long struggle against unsafe and precarious jobs, and shrinking real wages and pensions is now being criminalized by Liberal government back-to-work legislation.

All workers should support and encourage postal workers in defying the Liberals' reactionary Bill C-89, recognizing that when postal workers challenge the state-employer assault on workers' social and democratic rights they are fighting for the entire working class.

To prevail over the Harper clone—Prime Minister Justin Trudeau—and his big-business masters, mail-sorters, letter carriers, and other postal workers must seize control of their struggle from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. CUPW has done everything in its power to limit and isolate the postal workers' struggle, and now intends to meekly submit to the government's dictates and order an end to any and all job action.

At every workplace, postal workers should form rank-and-file committees of action, entirely independent of CUPW, to organize an immediate all-out national strike. Defiance of the government's strikebreaking legislation raises the need for an independent working-class political struggle. The rank-and-file action committees must fight to make the postal workers' struggle the spearhead of a working-class counteroffensive against austerity and wage and job cuts, the dismantling of public services, and the criminalization of workers' struggles.

With the Liberals' staunch support, Canada Post is demanding sweeping concessions from postal workers. These include increased use of temporary workers, below-inflation pay increases, and the further extension of "flexible" working arrangements, which force workers to be at management's beck and call virtually 24/7.

Postal workers endure demanding and dangerous working conditions, including forced overtime and an accident rate that is more than five times the norm in federally regulated industries. Canada Post is using technological change to further increase postal workers' workloads, while slashing

jobs. Backed by the Conservative government's 2011 back-to-work law, it slashed pension benefits and expanded multi-tier employment.

The conditions of precarious, unsafe, and low-paid employment facing Canada Post workers are those confronted by the vast majority of workers across Canada and internationally. Over the past three decades, workplace protections and benefits won in the mass struggles of the last century—struggles often mounted in open defiance of government and the courts—have been decimated by a joint onslaught by corporate Canada and its political hirelings.

The pro-capitalist unions have responded to this class-war assault by suppressing working-class resistance, integrating themselves ever more completely into management, and by embedding themselves in tripartite (employer- state-union) collaboration.

Governments of every political stripe, including those led by the NDP and Parti Quebecois, have used a battery of anti-worker laws to impose big business's austerity agenda. Strikes have effectively been outlawed in Canada. Bill C-89 is only the latest in literally dozens of strikebreaking laws adopted during the past quarter century. Last year, Ontario's Liberal government illegalized a strike by college instructors, and the Quebec Liberals legislated 175,000 construction workers back to work. Teachers in Nova Scotia and Ontario, railway workers, York University teaching and research assistants, and Ontario elevator installers and maintenance workers have all been recent targets of antistrike laws.

The political elite deems it necessary to suppress strikes, and otherwise move to criminalize dissent, because its policies are widely despised. Trudeau's Liberal government is committed to hiking military spending by over 70 percent to enable Canada to wage war around the world under conditions of deepening inter-imperialist and great-power conflict. It is also committed to maintaining Canadian "competitiveness,"—i.e. boosting investor profits—by joining Trump in slashing corporate tax rates yet again and gutting environmental and labour regulations.

The Liberal government and Canada Post management have been emboldened by CUPW's bankrupt, right-wing strategy. Although armed with a massive rank-and-file vote sanctioning a national strike, the CUPW leadership has kept workers on a tight leash, confining job action to limited one- and two-day rotating walkouts.

It refused to link postal workers' contract fight to a broader struggle against the dismantling of public services by all levels of government. And, last but not least, it maintained a deafening silence on the threat of a Liberal strikebreaking law, and continued to suppress any discussion among postal workers about this threat and how they should respond long after Trudeau and his aides were publicly brandishing it.

On Friday, CUPW President Mike Palecek held a joint press conference with Hassan Yussuff, who heads the Canadian Labour Congress—the same CLC that campaigned for Trudeau's election, that regularly boasts of its "unprecedented" access to the Liberal cabinet, and that hasn't lifted a finger to defend striking workers anywhere for decades.

Even now, with normal parliamentary procedures suspended so Bill C-89 can be rammed into law, Palecek and the CUPW have refused to launch a national strike. Instead, CUPW's president has been boasting about how ineffectual the rotating walkouts are, and pleading, on that basis, for the Liberals to desist from illegalizing them. With Yussuff at his side, Palecek declared, "People have been getting their mail and online orders delivered. That was the point of our rotating strike tactic."

Fearing the eruption of a working-class upsurge it could not control, CUPW has deliberately avoided mobilizing the power of postal workers to resist Canada Post's concessions demands. Instead, Palecek has made bended-knee appeals to Trudeau, whose election CUPW hailed, to make good on his utterly fraudulent and vapid claims to support "progressive" policies.

Notwithstanding Palecek's occasional militant bluster, this is precisely the same course taken by his right-wing predecessors in the CUPW leadership in 2011; and which resulted in the Harper Conservative government taking the offensive, criminalizing postal workers' rotating strikes, and extorting pension cuts and other unprecedented rollbacks from postal workers.

There is yet another parallel. Like the CUPW leadership in 2011, Palecek is trying to justify the union's enforcing of the strike law with the claim that it can be successfully resisted in the capitalist courts. Yet the court ruling that the Harper government violated postal workers' constitutional rights took five years to secure, and even more tellingly reversed none of the sweeping concessions Canada Post

imposed in the wake of the breaking of the 2011 strike.

CUPW is not the exception, but the rule. Postal workers at UPS in the United States voted down a concessions-laden contract last month only to have the Teamsters invoke an obscure clause in the union's constitution to overturn the vote, block strike action, and impose the contract against the workers' will.

Autoworkers in Ontario have suffered decades of rollbacks, overseen by Unifor and its predecessor, the Canadian Auto Workers. The unions scuttled the mass opposition to the Harris government in Ontario, and are appealing to Ontario's current premier, Doug Ford, to work with them even as his government outlines an agenda far to the right of Harris's Common Sense counterrevolution.

If Canada Post workers are to achieve their entirely justified demands, they must break politically and organizationally from CUPW and take their struggle into their own hands. Rank-and-file committees must be established in every sorting centre, post office and storage facility to organize an all-out nationwide strike and mobilize support from the entire working class.

In this fight, postal workers will confront the full force of the state and Canada Post management, and the complicity and duplicity of the union bureaucracy. But their allies, the Canadian and international working class, represent a much more powerful social force.

In initiating a national strike, the action committees should raise the following demands:

- End the multi-tier wage system at Canada Post.
- Full-time, permanent employment for all who desire it.
- An immediate pay increase of 30 percent to compensate for the years of givebacks and below-inflation pay deals.
- Workers' control over the organization of work to reduce the unacceptable level of injuries on the job.
- The hiring of thousands of new postal workers to cover the increased demand placed on the service through online shopping and an end to all privatization of postal services.

These demands can be realized only as part of a broader struggle by the working class for a socialist program. Its goal must be the establishment of a workers' government, which would deploy society's vast resources so as to meet human needs, including ensuring decent-paying, secure jobs for all, not further enrich a tiny minority of capitalist oligarchs.



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