

Polish Post plans to cut thousands of jobs

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On March 5, the management of Poczta Polska (Polish Post, PP), the Polish postal service, announced an “employment and remuneration plan” for 2024. According to this, the number of postal workers is to be reduced from 62,939 to 58,482 full-time positions this year, i.e. by 4,457 jobs. This would continue a retrenchment programme that has seen over 10,000 postal employees fall victim to the cuts since 2021 alone.

According to the new PP executive board member Sebastian Mikosz, the reduction is to be achieved through “natural fluctuation,” i.e., through expiring contracts and retirement. However, the NSZZ-Solidarnosc trade union has been informed that this is only the tip of the iceberg. Even more extensive savings and 10,000 redundancies are planned in 2024 alone.

Since the reintroduction of capitalism in Poland more than three decades ago, one attack on postal workers has followed another. The general assault began in the 2000s with the liberalisation and privatisation of the Polish postal system. Like all the “reforms” intended to make Poland “fit” for joining the EU, it led to massive cutbacks at the expense of the workers.

In 2012, the abolition of the government monopoly of the mail created a lever to make the postal service even more profitable in competition with other providers. Countless waves of staff cuts and thousands of closed post offices later, however, PP is still not profitable.

The idea that it is not possible to make a profit from public utilities such as the postal service, healthcare or waste disposal without devastating consequences for workers, is simply not criticized in the Polish media. This is not in the least due to the trade unions, which have helped organise all “restructuring” to date.

Even the monthly minimum wage of 4,242 zloty (around 933 euros), which has been in force since January 1, is not being adhered to by PP in the lowest

wage bracket. It is only achieved because the basic salary of 4,023 zloty is topped up with special bonuses.

The fact that PP resembles a “zombie” that still “seems to be functioning but is already falling apart,” as *Gazeta Wyborcza* puts it, is not in the least a result of the complicity between all the establishment parties and the trade unions.

According to press reports, PP posted a loss of 787 million zlotys in 2023. As salary payments account for around 80 percent of expenditure, the trade unions also argue there is basically no alternative to making cuts. Faced with workers’ opposition to far-reaching cost-cutting measures, however, they are striking a combative pose, talking about the “imminent collapse” of PP and threatening to strike. But these brash speeches are part of a familiar game with which the nationalist trade union bureaucracies seek to disguise their corporatist role as co-managers.

This applies to both the postal section of Solidarnosc and the ZZPP postal union, which belongs to the competing trade union organisation OPZZ. Both knew about the cuts planned weeks beforehand. The ZZPP met with the new Minister of State Assets, Jacek Bartmi?ski, who is responsible for the postal service, in January, praising the talks as “very fruitful.”

A PP extraordinary general meeting was then held on February 8. As the state is the main shareholder, it was more of a consultation within the government. With the appointment of Pawe? Wojciechowski as Chairman of the Supervisory Board and shortly afterwards, Sebastian Mikosz as Chairman of the Management Board, a hand-picked duo was formed to push through the austerity regime.

Wojciechowski had previously been a member of a government under Donald Tusk, who is now leading the Polish government again. When the far-right PiS was in government, Wojciechowski had campaigned for a flat-tax model as chief economist at the Social

Insurance Institution (ZUS). He later became director of the consulting firm Whiteshield Partner and an economic expert in the election campaign team of the conservative Polska2050 party, which has been part of the governing coalition since last year.

Mikosz made a name for himself from 2013 to 2015 as head of the Polish airline, LOT, with a rigid austerity programme. He implemented wage cuts, redundancies and route closures and has since been regarded as a hardliner who simply cancels collective agreements.

The fact that the trade unions were involved in PP's cost-cutting plans from the outset is also shown by their representation on the company's management bodies. Robert Czy? (ZZPP) and Magdalena Lebied? (Solidarnosc) sit as union representatives on the Supervisory Board. And with Andrzej Bodziony, Solidarnosc even provides the Vice President.

On February 21, a meeting was held at company's headquarters between board members and trade union officials. In a press release, Solidarnosc subsequently reported favourably that the aim of Mikosz's "action plan" was to "restore the company's profitability, which required a significant transformation/restructuring."

While the unions now claim they are the only ones who know how to restructure properly, all sides are concealing the real reasons for the financial difficulties. Due to price increases and rampant inflation, which reached almost 20 percent in 2022, Poland's ruling class was also forced to significantly increase the nominal minimum wage, from 2,250 zlotys (495 euros) in 2019 to 3,600 in 2023, 4,242 in January 2024, to 4,300 zlotys (946 euros) in July 2024.

Although real wages still fell, the increases tore a hole in the finances of the state-owned company, which also has to compensate for the cost increases in the energy sector. As PP cannot simply raise prices at the same rate due to legal regulations, there is now a huge gap in its finances.

Donald Tusk's government, like its predecessor under the PiS, is spending billions and billions on armaments and war. Now it is using PP's deficit as an excuse for a drastic "cure."

The latest parliamentary resolution on the new postal law passed last week only provides for an increase in state subsidies from 593 million to a maximum of 750 million zlotys this year, and from a further 651 million

to a maximum of 1,302 million zlotys in 2025. This is nowhere near enough to cover the cost increases. The same Tusk government that recently purchased Swedish weapons for one billion zlotys is not prepared to pay decent wages to postal workers, but is continuing the PiS-era policy of cuts.

The trade unions also fear that this attack on postal workers will not be without consequences. They quote the *Wyborzca* at length with the warning that the massive attack could lead to "a dangerous escalation of social tensions, followed by an escalation of protests and even a general strike."



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