

Canada Post demands sweeping concessions in contract talks as postal union keeps workers demobilized

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The Canada Post Corporation (CPC), a Crown corporation wholly owned by the federal government, is demanding massive concessions from around 50,000 postal workers in ongoing contract talks. The company has been in closed-door bargaining with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) since late last year over the contracts for two mail carrier bargaining units: Urban Postal Operations (UPOs), who account for some 42,000 workers, and Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers (RSMCs), of which there are approximately 8,000.

The contract for UPOs expired January 31, while RSMCs have been forced to work without a contract since December 31.

Although CUPW has admitted in its own sporadic updates that CPC is looking for sweeping concessions, the union has not mobilized postal workers in a fight against the givebacks floated by management, never mind in a struggle to demand improvements. The union bureaucracy is determined to keep the workers confined to the pro-employer “collective bargaining” process, allowing CPC management to go on the offensive.

Dynamic routing and two-tier employment schemes are two of the main concessions currently on the table. Dynamic routing relies on computer software to adjust mail delivery routes day by day. CUPW describes the system as “a major restructuring of letter carrier work,” which will end route ownership by letter carriers, introduce more part-time workers and eliminate time values for some inside work, among other concessions.

Instead of owning a route, under dynamic routing, letter carriers will bid on a work schedule within which a computer program will decide “carriers’ daily work tasks and order of delivery.” Owning a route gives workers an expectation of what their job will look like into the future—the next week, next month—until the worker bids and accepts another route.

The consistency of being able to walk into work and having clear expectations for that day is a fundamental part of a postal worker’s career. Changing the route day-to-day massively undermines job security and seniority rights, effectively turning the entire workforce into the lowest tier of on-call employees, whose role is traditionally to cover routes based on worker absences.

As part of the changes associated with dynamic routing, CPC intends to create “a new function within the letter carrier classification called Permanent Flexible Employees.” These workers would be expected to come into work every day for three

to eight hours of work to cover tasks currently performed by full-time workers on overtime pay. UPOs depend on overtime to make extra money, especially around the Christmas holidays. “This proposal would mean more part-time work within the group” and fewer full-time positions, a CUPW update noted.

The company also wants to create a new inside role called Delivery Support. “This function would combine the current LCA [letter carrier assistant] and Router functions, moving that work from Group 2 to Group 1 where no time value is given to the work.” This mechanism would allow the company to hugely intensify workloads and the pace of the job.

In line with these changes, CPC is looking to scrap the eight-hour day and replace it with a “variable work week.” CUPW describes this as a schedule where daily shifts within any given week will vary. An example provided is, “a carrier might work 8.5 hours Monday but shorter shifts the rest of the week,” to make a total of 40 hours in a five-day work week. This will effectively end overtime premiums for working more than eight hours in one day.

The employer also hopes to expand the use of temporary workers, and is demanding the ability to “call in temporary employees before offering overtime to full-time carriers” to cover absences. This could refer to having temporary employees cover known absences such as planned vacations, as well as unknown absences such as sick days or emergency personal days.

CPC currently relies on workers to take on additional work when workloads are seasonally high or routes are not covered. Instead of creating high-quality and full-time jobs, the understaffed UPOs are incentivized to take on additional work at overtime rates. After a grueling 11 hours of work in one day, a UPO’s overtime rate increases to double time. Expanding the use of temporary workers would eliminate this additional cost. As the union noted, “The employer wants to stop paying double time from the third hour of overtime.”

Marriage leave is currently provided for both the RSMC and UPO bargaining units, where five days paid leave is provided for workers who are getting married. RSMCs won this leave only five years ago in 2019, and already, CPC is looking to remove it for both bargaining units.

There is no benefit too small for CPC to attack. The UPOs’ collective agreement provides workers with “five (5) minutes paid wash-up time before the meal period,” which the corporation now

wants to remove from the paid workday.

Workers' vacation rights are also threatened. Currently, all 52 weeks of the year are available for bidding for vacation leave, but CPC is looking to "Black out" ... Vacation Leave schedules during the Christmas peak period," "Get rid of superimposed Vacation Leave" and "Stop reposting vacation weeks that become available during the year."

Vacation leave for mail carriers currently maxes out at seven weeks per year, after 28 years of continuous employment. Vacation leave starts at three weeks for a new employee, and increases by one week after seven years of service. Pitting current workers against new hires, CPC wants to introduce a two-tier vacation scheme. For new hires, the seven-week vacation tier would be completely removed. Rather than gaining an extra week of vacation after seven years, new hires would have to work for 10 years. Additionally, employees who are 50 to 60 years old, depending on how long they've worked for Canada Post, will lose their Pre-retirement Leave, according to CUPW's Bargaining Update.

The union is fully complicit in this savage onslaught on worker rights. AS CUPW sheepishly noted in its February 15 update, the union worked closely with and supported CPC in the Champlain, Montreal, depot during the recently expired contract to trial a "novel" way for mail carriers to perform their daily tasks by implementing dynamic routing.

Recognizing the union's invaluable services in imposing concessions on postal workers, CPC hopes to continue the corporatist partnership that has enabled it to enforce one round of attacks after another in recent decades. In CPC's words, the corporation's "goal is to work collaboratively with CUPW to reach negotiated agreements." CUPW noted blandly, "We can expect more rollbacks in the coming weeks," but it has yet to call a strike vote, let alone discuss any plans for a struggle to defeat these "rollbacks."

Management's brazenness in pushing for such a massive restructuring of the workforce is connected to the broader onslaught on working conditions and wages being enforced by the ruling elite.

In order to pay for Canadian imperialism's wars abroad, military rearmament, and handouts to the corporate elite, the union-backed, NDP supported Trudeau Liberal government has spearheaded austerity policies that have been taken up by governments at all levels.

The Trudeau government has also directly intervened in major struggles to impose pro-corporate settlements. During the strike by over 7,000 British Columbia dockworkers last summer, the Liberals prevailed on the Canada Industrial Relations Board to impose a draconian strike ban, and succeeded through bullying and threats in ramming a concessions-filled contract down workers' throats.

Postal workers have made their own experience with the supposedly "progressive," "worker-friendly" union-backed Liberals. In 2018, the Trudeau government adopted Bill C-89 to criminalize rotating strikes by postal workers, which the union called as a desperate measure to block an indefinite all-out strike. The strikebreaking legislation proved that the Liberals will not

hesitate to use the full force of the state against workers to enforce management's dictates. CPC can count on the federal government to intervene if CUPW is no longer able to police the working class by containing workers' anger within the suffocating "collective bargaining" system.

Any fight against CPC-demanded concessions must raise the necessity of a political struggle against the tripartite corporate-union-government alliance, which works to further capitalist interests, including the imperialist genocide in Gaza and the US-NATO war in Russia and Ukraine.

The CUPW apparatus is a major component of this alliance and is key in providing political cover to the agenda of austerity for the working class, tax cuts for the ruling class, and increased military spending to wage war abroad. These policies of class war are fully endorsed by the union bureaucracy. This treachery is not simply a matter of bad union leaders, but is ultimately due to the fundamental class role the pro-capitalist, nationalist union bureaucracies play in suppressing workers' struggles.

Postal workers have natural allies in other sections of the working class to wage such a fight, both in Canada and internationally. A struggle by Canada Post workers for improvements to working conditions and wages must encompass the full CUPW membership and appeal to workers even more broadly, including postal workers in the US and Britain, who have experienced similar attacks on their conditions and established rank-and-file committees to oppose the treachery of their respective unions in implementing pro-employer attacks.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges postal workers ready to fight CPC's outrageous concessions demands to draw the necessary conclusions from CUPW's complicity in undermining their working conditions. The only way forward is through the construction of rank-and-file committees at every depot to seize control of the contract struggle from the hands of the bureaucracy and place power back where it belongs on the shop floor. These committees should draw up a list of non-negotiable demands for postal workers and call for a broadening of the struggle against the gutting of wages and workplace protections into a political struggle against the ruling elite's drive to make workers pay for imperialist war and rampant capitalist profiteering.



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