

“You're making more starting out at McDonald's than you're making at the post office”

Growing outrage among Canada Post workers over miserable working conditions and complicity of CUPW bureaucracy

Our reporters
1 April 2024

Numerous postal workers across Canada have contacted the *World Socialist Web Site* over recent weeks to express their outrage at miserable working conditions at Canada Post, a crown corporation controlled by the federal government, and the complicity of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) in enforcing them. The trigger was an article posted in March on the ongoing contract negotiations for approximately 42,000 Urban Postal Operations (UPO) workers and 8,000 rural and suburban mail carriers (RSMCs). We encourage all postal workers to fill out the form at the end of this article to continue sharing your experiences.

The major issues currently facing the approximately 50,000 postal workers include real wage cuts, increased workloads and speed-up, multi-tier pay scales, and aggressive bullying from management. The contract for RSMCs expired December 31, 2023, while the urban unit's agreement ended on January 31. However, the union leadership is determined to keep workers demobilized, with only sporadic updates being provided on slow-moving talks. More than two months after the last contract expired, no plans for a strike vote, let alone a date for strike action, have been announced.

Right off the bat, multiple workers described conditions at Canada Post as a “tyranny.”

One wrote, “Pushing for higher productivity to the point when workers are getting injured and stressed to their breaking point. Powder found on the machines out of envelopes and management sweeping it up and telling workers to continue to work. Not allowing workers to leave the building when a fire alarm sounds. Instead telling workers to go back to their machines until they find out what's going on. These are just a few things that happen in the plant. It's pure tyranny.”

Noting management's constant pressure on workers to work harder, a shop steward from Toronto commented, “I'm scheduled to attend two interviews for letter carriers who are bringing mail back, because they cannot finish these routes that

they're being assigned. This is not something the corporation is allowed to discipline for under the collective agreement. But they now started doing this, where they're disciplining people for being unable to finish the route despite the letter carrier filling out all the paperwork, which states the reasons why they are unable to finish. Things like backlogged mail, 100 percent coverage of the ports of call, stuff like this. Our rates are assessed for 60 percent coverage of points. It's punitive. It's a system designed to punish workers and keep them down.”

Commenting on the intimidation and incompetence of management in her workplace, another worker wrote, “Absolute tyranny. We have had meetings where we have been shown how to deal with someone who comes in with a gun. A video by the York regional police called ‘run hide and defend.’ It's on YouTube. A superintendent who was taking the role on as an acting manager would not let us leave the building during a fire alarm because this person was trying to call security to find out what was going on. We are constantly being harassed, intimidated and bullied by management to get production when management has never worked on the machinery and has absolutely no idea how painful it is to do the job. Workers' pay has been tampered with by management, resulting in loss of pay, so now we have to take screenshots of our hours, vacation and any other type of leave that requires them to pay us so we don't lose pay. Complete incompetence and combative management who thinks they are right when they have no idea what they are talking about.”

A shop steward from British Columbia said in a discussion with a WSWs reporter, “It used to be a good job. It was hard, but it was good. You were proud to go to work. You know? But if you were to walk on our work floor right now as a new employee, you would not know we have a union. That's how far we've fallen.

“Every single motion that we do is timed. The smallest thing, like a walk, is timed. From tying your shoes to washing your

hands, we're timed for all this stuff. The corporation has now put forward that they want to get rid of wash up time. Now wash up time might not seem like a big deal to the average person. Well, it's 5 minutes a day but it would work out to about 500 routes across the country that would be gone. I know the [union] national is going to give that up.

"One of the losses that Canada Post is putting forward is paper losses, something like 700 million dollars this year, but they invested close to a half billion dollars in the new processing plant and installed telematics in all the vehicles to track us better and whatnot.

"They want to change the workday to make it more of a flex day, where some days you would work 14 hours and other days you would work six. The goal is of course to eliminate employee overtime. And they do not want you to own a route anymore. Instead, you'd bid on an area of the city so you would be going from route to route doing different things every day. And all that's about is weakening seniority rights and everything else. Maybe you are doing this route on Monday, another route on Tuesday, maybe a route didn't go out so they can move you over to that route for the day. You won't know until you walk in. Today's fourteen hour day could end up being only three hours, you know what I mean? So it affects people with child care and everything else, right? And as a 30-year employee you are essentially going back to day one, you have become a precarious employee.

"And the two-tier wage system is B.S. The amount of time it takes to reach top wage now is ridiculous. I think it is over ten years. And, say you get a yearly raise after 1000 hours but you transfer positions, your anniversary date resets to that date when you transferred into that position. So now it's a year from there till you get your first pay increment. I mean, our terms don't have benefits, right? So essentially with benefits, you're making more starting out at McDonald's than you're making starting out at the post office."

Referring to the rampant understaffing and the push for increased productivity, a worker added, "No safety, or company worried about health and safety, full timers in the plant are forced to work evenings and nights, and part-time and casual employees are being put on day shift. No vacancies have been filled."

There was a broad recognition among the workers who wrote in that while management bears chief responsibility for Canada Post's horrendous working conditions, the CUPW bureaucracy is complicit in the undermining of workplace benefits and conditions.

The BC shop steward said of the last contract concluded in 2021, "What happens is people propose resolutions at the local level. Then they go to the regional conference and then to the national stage. But what our union did in our last contract negotiations [a two-year contract extension] was cut a two-year deal with management behind the scenes while all this resolution process was going on. So they basically silenced the

workers' voices.

"They basically threw out all the resolutions and got rid of the workers' voice and just cut a deal directly with management. Of course, we had to ratify it, but it was a full-court press by the national executive to sign this deal once they had agreed to it.

"But it basically violated our union's constitution in how they did it, because they disregarded all the resolutions and they allowed everyone to go through the process which cost millions of dollars. It was completely undemocratic."

Complaining about the paltry salary Canada Post workers are expected to live off of and the "Amazon-ification" of postal workers' jobs more generally, another worker commented, "It is unfortunate to say that Canada Post is not a good company to work with any more. Due to so much stress and anxiety and pressure being given by management. Workers are human beings, not robots, to deal with the nonsense of delivering parcels, mail and lots of flyers without more pay. By the time tax is taken out some are taking home less than \$1300 per two weeks. How can a family of four afford to live with that? No wonder workers get stressed and get injured at work."

The anger boiling over among postal workers demonstrates that they are more than ready for a fight with Canada Post management to secure their demands. The first prerequisite for this is for workers to recognize that they confront a political struggle against the class war strategy of the entire ruling elite, not just a single employer. Canada Post has relied repeatedly on Tory and Liberal governments alike to enforce its dictates in previous bargaining rounds, including in 2011 when the Harper Tory government stripped postal workers of the right to strike to facilitate the introduction of two-tier wages, and in 2018 when the Trudeau Liberals criminalized rotating strikes.

The CUPW bureaucracy is a key prop of support for the union-backed Trudeau Liberal government. Workers must organize independently of the CUPW apparatus in rank-and-file committees in every workplace. These committees will enable workers to advance a series of non-negotiable demands and unite their struggle with those of postal and logistics workers across national borders, all of whom confront similar attacks on their conditions. This fight must confront head-on the subordination of all aspects of social life, including the postal system, to the accumulation of private profit by taking up a struggle for a socialist reorganization of society. We encourage all workers who agree with this perspective to contact us today.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact