

For a political struggle against Canada Post and the Trudeau Liberal government! Stop CUPW's sellout of our contract struggle!

Founding statement of Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (Canada)

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The following statement was discussed and adopted at a recent meeting of Canada Post workers. It follows extensive discussions with several dozen postal workers who have contacted the World Socialist Web Site over recent months, including an April meeting at which a resolution calling for the establishment of a rank-and-file committee was passed. To contact the committee, fill out the form at the end of this article.

Brothers and sisters:

We announce the formation of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (Canada) to take forward our struggle against Canada Post, the Liberal government and all corporate Canada. Management is demanding sweeping concessions in the current contract negotiations as the opening shot in a planned massive restructuring of Canada Post's operations at the expense of our jobs, wages and working conditions. They intend to dramatically increase the use of new technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) to intensify worker exploitation.

Rather than oppose this, CUPW is deepening its collusion with management and the Trudeau government. CUPW is a key pillar of support for the Trudeau government through its important role in the Liberal/union/New Democratic Party (NDP) alliance, which is backed by the Canadian Labour Congress, Unifor, the CNTU and other Quebec unions.

In opposition to the conspirators in Canada Post management, the federal government and the CUPW bureaucracy, we reject the claim that Canada Post must be run as a profit-making corporate enterprise. We oppose the use of new technologies to step up exploitation. We demand that workers on the shop floor make decisions about the operation of the postal service, the implementation of new technologies, and our wages and benefits. The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee will fight for these objectives in a political struggle against the corporatist partnership between CUPW, corporate management, and the Liberal government. We will do so in alliance with workers throughout the logistics sector, workers across Canada—public and private—who all have a stake in our struggle to defend public services and worker rights, and postal workers throughout the world.

Overturn the decades of concessions imposed with the complicity of CUPW

CUPW has repeatedly sabotaged our struggles in recent years against right-wing Conservative and supposedly “worker-friendly” Liberal governments alike. Some of our main concerns produced by this never-ending series of concessions are:

- Overburdening, especially with increased neighbourhood mail volumes.
- Management harassment and intimidation.
- Two-tier wages and benefits, with brothers and sisters toiling for years before reaching what was once the universal base wage rate for all.
- The increased use of super-exploited contract workers to fill roles previously performed by full-time Canada Post employees, resulting in worsening conditions for contractors and full-time employees alike.
- The use of technology, including automation and AI, to intensify our workloads so management can squeeze out more profits from us, instead of it being used to increase our pay and reduce our workloads.

The dramatic increase of fliers across Ontario depots, preceded by the near bankruptcy and subsequent debt restructuring of Metroland Media last year, has led to overburdening and management looking for loopholes to pay us less for more work. In some instances, routes have gone from an average of two sets of fliers per week to 15 or even 20 full sets. Management wants to bundle multiple fliers together for only one neighbourhood mail count, even though the full weight and volume are still present.

Separate Sort and Delivery (SSD) restructures are sweeping across the country. The balance of inside and outside work is being destroyed. One worker is expected to work inside all day, while another's work is outside all day. Machine-sequenced mail is often a prerequisite for SSD and can see over 2,000 points of call per route.

New technologies that ought to be used to improve working conditions are instead being wielded as weapons against postal workers. This is not unique to Canada Post, as it affects workers in all industries and around the world. Dynamic routing, trialed against rank-and-file workers with the CUPW's approval in the Montreal area for over five years, takes advantage of automation and AI to overburden us and deny us a consistent route and work schedule.

Canada Post is now seeking to create another group of super-exploited workers called Permanent Flexible Employees. Their very title indicates that their working conditions would be under permanent revision and attack.

In opposition to the rigged “collective bargaining” system, a political fight is necessary

CUPW and its partners in Canada Post management and the Liberal government want to keep our struggle confined to the pro-employer “collective bargaining” framework. But this will inevitably produce our defeat. The fight we face is first and foremost political, and not just because we work for a government-owned corporation and face the threat of an anti-democratic anti-strike law. All of big business and its media mouthpieces support the restructuring of Canada Post at our expense. Corporate executives and Trudeau government ministers view the “successful” restructuring of the postal service as setting a major precedent for an assault on all public services and the rights of all workers, public and private sector alike.

We know this from bitter experience. Successive governments have repeatedly criminalized our past struggles with strikebreaking legislation. From the Liberal government in 1997, to Harper’s Tories in 2011, and Trudeau’s union-backed Liberals in 2018, the result has always been the same. The power of the state apparatus has been used against us to enforce management’s dictates, while the CUPW and the entire union bureaucracy helped impose these illegitimate laws. We only need to look at what happened to BC dockworkers last year, Port of Montreal workers in 2021 and the ongoing efforts to block and suppress a rail workers’ strike to understand that the government will have no qualms about acting in the same way this time.

In a calculated move to give its vast restructuring plans some legitimacy, Canada Post decided to announce massive financial losses. The more than \$700 million lost in the past year and \$3 billion over the past six years are intended to intimidate us. Canada Post management is threatening to end daily mail delivery, a proposal that the Liberal government has said it will consider.

Canada Post’s “losses” are in fact small change compared to the vast sums the union-backed Liberal government is making available without batting an eyelid to rearm Canada’s military and wage war around the world. Canadian imperialism’s recent defence policy update includes a plan to increase defence spending from around \$32 billion currently to \$49 billion by the end of the decade—an increase that could write off Canada Post’s losses for the past six years some six times over. Over \$10 billion has been made available to the fascistic Ukrainian regime in the form of weapons and financial guarantees as it sacrifices the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian workers to continue a war against Russia spearheaded by American imperialism with Canadian and European imperialist support. These funds must be redirected away from war and destruction to improving public services and the wages and working conditions of the workers who administer them.

Canada Post’s “losses” are also dwarfed by the \$600 billion made available to Bay Street and corporate Canada at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic by the Liberal government and Bank of Canada in consultation with employer organizations, the Canadian Labour Congress and its mouthpiece in the NDP.

The problem is not a lack of funds. Rather, it is the corporatist tripartite alliance of Canada Post management, the CUPW bureaucracy and the Trudeau government, who all agree that the crown corporation must be run as a profit-making concern. Ever since Canada Post was created as a crown corporation in 1981, the union bureaucracy has agreed that postal workers’ jobs, wages and working conditions must be subordinated to Canada Post’s bottom line. This principle applies not just to Canada Post, but to the funding for all public services, which is being slashed to pay for war and the enrichment of the elite. We therefore appeal to all workers to support our struggle and join with us in fighting for a working class counteroffensive.

CUPW’s record of miserable betrayals

A review of CUPW’s record demonstrates that far from championing workers’ interests and mobilizing their social power, the union bureaucracy has systematically demobilized us. This has been a key component of its collusion with management in enforcing round after round of concessions. Moreover, this is true whether the union apparatus is led by a career bureaucrat or a left-talking, purported “militant” like Mike Palecek.

In 2015, Palecek was propelled to the presidency on a wave of worker anger. This militancy was fuelled by the previous leadership’s capitulation to Harper’s 2011 back-to-work law without a fight and subsequent imposition of unprecedented contract concessions. But Palecek pursued exactly the same strategy as his right-wing predecessors. He stumped for the election of the Trudeau government, claiming that the “progressive” Liberals would be more worker-friendly. He subsequently extended our contract as a goodwill gesture to the Liberals and to underscore his support for their “Canada Post task force,” which was set up on the premise of making Canada Post more profitable.

Then, in 2018, Palecek and the CUPW bureaucracy smothered a push by postal workers for an all-out strike. He adopted the same toothless rotating strike strategy the union had imposed in 2011, even though we voted overwhelmingly for an all-out strike, and did nothing to alert and prepare workers and the broader working class to meet the threat of an anti-strike law. This emboldened the government to ram through a back-to-work law that neither the CUPW nor the Canadian Labour Congress lifted a finger to oppose.

After Palecek’s ouster, the current leadership under Jan Simpson cooperated with the government and corporate management to pursue their “profits before lives” pandemic policy, which risked our lives in the face of the spread of a deadly disease. CUPW and all other unions endorsed the government’s back-to-work campaign, which took place with virtually no protections in place to stop workers from getting infected. To top it all off, Simpson and the CUPW bureaucracy plotted behind our backs to conclude a two-year extension to our contract while the pandemic was still raging, denying us a golden opportunity to unify our struggle with other sections of workers labouring under the same dangerous conditions.

The material interests of those leading the unions, the CUPW included, correspond with the interests of big business, not the workers they claim to represent. They back austerity for public services, attacks on workers’ pay and conditions, and the waging of imperialist war because they believe that these policies will protect their six-figure salaries and corporatist ties with business executives and the state.

CUPW provides a glaring example of this process. The CUPW bureaucracy argues that Canada Post’s financial crisis can be overcome by creating new revenue streams so as to boost profits. It thus appeals to management to laden already overburdened postal workers with additional tasks, such as serving as bank tellers for a utopian postal banking scheme or retraining as community carers to pay visits to the elderly and other vulnerable people.

Why we need a rank-and-file committee

We face powerful enemies in our struggle, but our potential allies are

even stronger. By building the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, we are appealing to the working class in logistics and other economic sectors across Canada, as well as postal workers and the working class as a whole internationally, to join our fight. We say that there is no way forward within the suffocating, state-sponsored “collective bargaining” system. Rather, we can only counter the looming threat of strikebreaking legislation by making our struggle the starting point for a worker-led counteroffensive against capitalist austerity and war.

While the CUPW bureaucracy confines our struggles to the framework of the nation-state, Canada Post management operates, takes its business decisions, and introduces new procedures on the basis of a globalized economy. We must adapt to the global character of the logistics industry by advancing our own global strategy to unite our struggles and bring postal and delivery operations under workers’ control.

Our brothers and sisters around the world are facing similar attacks on their working conditions and confront the same anti-worker union-management collusion. In the United States, the Delivering for America campaign is wielding automation and AI to make postal workers work longer hours for less pay. In Britain, the Communication Workers Union is negotiating attacks on the Universal Service Obligation, which is a first step towards privatizing Royal Mail. In Germany, the Verdi Union, which represents approximately 200,000 Deutsche Post/ DHL workers, demobilized a massive strike mandate last year, under conditions where 86 percent of workers voted to take strike action.

We are joining a growing international movement of workers who recognize that the only way forward is in a rebellion against the nationalist and pro-capitalist trade union apparatuses. New organizations of class struggle must be built that systematically mobilize workers’ social power, fight to link workers’ struggles internationally, and tie the defence of workers’ jobs and conditions to the struggle for workers’ political power. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is leading this struggle. Our committee will be built as an affiliate of the IWA-RFC.

The CUPW bureaucracy must be liquidated and power placed back in the hands of workers on the shop floor through the establishment of a network of rank-and-file committees supported by postal workers in every depot.

Our demands

With the power of the Canadian and international working class backing us up, the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee puts forward the following demands:

- Wages must be immediately increased by 30 percent to make up for decades of real wage cuts and inflation, and be automatically pegged to inflation going forward!
- Full pension, full pay rate and full benefits to all employees! On paper, it looks like rural and suburban mail carriers and urban postal operations workers reach top rate at five and seven years respectively. However, in practice, many carriers get caught up in union-enforced technicalities and may go 10 years or longer at 85 percent pay rate with no benefits, meagre vacation leave, and inconsistent work schedules.
- No more contracting out of jobs! All areas of work at Canada Post should be performed by workers with full employee rights and all current contract workers must be offered immediate full-time positions. We should make an appeal to logistics workers at UPS, Amazon and other delivery companies to unite in a common fight for decent-paying, secure jobs throughout the logistics sector.
- Workers must have control over the introduction and development of

all new technologies, so they are used to improve working conditions and service, not increase worker exploitation!

- Corporate vehicles, PDTs and AI must not be used to introduce Amazon-style surveillance and disciplinary tickets!
- Admail must be compensated at a higher rate, and all workers must have a minimum of three days to complete admail delivery!
- New hires must be given proper on-route training, not limiting their training to three days before being sent off on new routes to fend for themselves!
- Management harassment must immediately cease, incompetent and abusive managers must be fired, and the Canada Post’s practice of using annual evaluations to run roughshod over our contractual rights must end!
- The postal service should not be run as a profit-making concern! We demand that a portion of the tens of billions set aside by the union-backed Liberals to rearm for world war be used to fully fund postal operations in Canada, and that the remainder go to supporting education, health care, and social services for all!

CUPW has refused to hold a strike vote, even though our collective agreements expired over four months ago! How much longer must we wait while the negotiations are deliberately dragged out with minimal information making it to CUPW’s public negotiating page?

We in the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee are not prepared to wait any longer and demand an immediate strike vote. We must use this vote to initiate a broadening of our struggle to embrace the upsurge of strikes and protests launched by workers in Canada and internationally over recent months.

To join the committee or find out more about it, fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact