

Why has CUPW refused to call a strike at Canada Post?

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The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding its first public meeting on Sunday at 7pm eastern time. We encourage all Canada Post workers interested in seizing control of the contract struggle from the pro-management CUPW bureaucracy to register here to attend.

With an overwhelming 95 percent strike vote announced last week and management intransigent in its demands for major concessions, more than 50,000 Canada Post workers are no doubt asking themselves why the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) bureaucracy has kept them on the job past the November 3 deadline for strike action.

After a year of negotiations and more than one hundred bargaining sessions between CUPW and management, Canada Post workers are not any clearer as to if or when the union will authorize job action. What is clear is that there has been no progress in realizing workers' just demands and that the company continues to make provocative concessions demands of its own. Rather than preparing workers for a struggle against the Canada Post management and the Trudeau Liberal government, which insists the Crown corporation must be run as a profit-making concern, CUPW says it is determined to work with the company to achieve financial "success," i.e., by massively reducing labour costs and increasing exploitation through the use of new technologies.

If CUPW President Jan Simpson and the other union leaders have not called a strike it is because they do not want one to take place.

The entire union apparatus—from the Canadian Labour Congress on down, along with the New Democratic Party, which propped up the Trudeau government for over two years and continues to portray it as a "progressive" ally against the Tories—oppose a genuine mobilization of postal workers in a fight against concessions and in defiance of government strikebreaking. The unions have been a key pillar of support for Trudeau as his government has enforced austerity for public services, and funnelled tens of billions to the military for waging war and the super-rich to make them even more wealthy. Above all, they fear the mobilization of

postal workers in all-out struggle could serve as a catalyst for a broader movement of the working class against the entire political establishment, which has overseen decades of sweeping cuts to social spending and attacks on worker rights, including the virtual abolition of the right to strike, while a tiny elite has gorged itself on record profits.

With workers eager to take to the picket lines and fight for better wages, working conditions and job protection, Simpson announced on Friday, November 1 that the union had reached a no strike/no lockout agreement with Canada Post management. Simpson declared that the union leadership would continue to withhold a 72-hour strike notice as long as management does not issue a lockout notice or change working conditions for postal workers, and "shows real movement to meeting our demands."

This was followed on Tuesday by the announcement of CUPW's second global offers to management for the Urban Operations and the Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers (RSMC) units. Lead Urban negotiator Lana Smidt noted that management, "has not backed off its numerous rollbacks, including two-tier pensions, vacations and benefits, and a forced part-time classification." A similar note was put out by RSMC negotiator François Senneville, who also noted Canada Post's determination to move from a 5-year to a 7-year wage chart.

While CUPW has put forward the demand for a 22 percent wage increase over four years, front loaded with 9 percent in year one, Canada Post is offering an insulting wage increase of 11.5 per cent over four years.

Despite the company's intransigence, no strike notice was issued, with Smidt instead appealing to Canada Post to "Negotiate now!"

It is now clear that what is taking place in the meetings between CUPW and the Crown corporation tops is not negotiations but a conspiracy to hash out how best to force major concessions down postal workers' throats.

Canada Post, which is publicly controlled and overseen by the federal government but reliant on funding from the sale of postal products, has repeatedly pleaded poverty. It

announced in May that it had posted a pre-tax loss of \$748 million in 2023. It has outlined plans to completely overhaul its operations in order to compete with Amazon and other private corporations, deploying technology to turn Canada Post workers into low-paid gig workers.

CUPW President Simpson's response to this has been to underline the bureaucracy's commitment to "work(ing) together" with management "toward solutions that support the long-term success" of Canada Post, that is shoring up its profits. She has put forward proposals to add new duties for postal workers, including postal banking and senior welfare check-ins, apparently oblivious to the fact that they are already overwhelmed by gruelling routes and mail sorting targets.

The union apparatus is following the same strategy they have pursued over recent decades, seeking to enforce concessions on a militant and restive workforce while avoiding a head on confrontation with the government. In 2011 and 2018, the union called rotating strikes which had limited impact on operations. CUPW officials then acquiesced without a fight to the Harper Conservative government and Trudeau Liberals' back-to-work legislation in 2011 and 2018 respectively. And in 2016 and 2021, they essentially extended the contract in order to sabotage a fight by workers. In the first case, they cited the desire to collaborate with the Liberals' Canada Post task force as an excuse, a body that fully endorsed the idea that the post office must be run as a profit-making enterprise. The 2021 extension was justified with reference to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Trudeau government and big business stand fully behind Canada Post management's demand for massive concessions. The government has repeatedly intervened in powerful struggles of the working class, using the restrictive, pro-business collective bargaining system to shut down strikes and enforce concessions, most recently this year among rail workers and at the West Coast docks last year. No doubt Trudeau will turn to the Canadian Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) and back-to-work legislation should the union bureaucracy fail to contain workers' opposition.

In order to break out of the straitjacket imposed by the union bureaucracy, Canada Post workers have established the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC). The PWRFC released a statement on Sunday calling for a working class political struggle against Canada Post and the Trudeau government. The statement called on rank-and-file workers to take the struggle at Canada Post into their own hands and outlined a clear fighting strategy:

1. Build rank-and-file committees in every depot,

sorting centre, and other Canada Post workplaces. These committees will allow us to countermand the CUPW bureaucracy's sellout of our struggle and build a powerful movement of workers to fight for our demands.

2. Broaden our struggle to all workers. The postal service should be a fully funded public utility with good-paying, secure jobs. We can achieve this by turning our fight into a defence of all public services, including education, health care, and social services, which enjoy strong support throughout the working class.

3. Prepare defiance of a back-to-work law or other state-backed ban of our strike. This will require the broadest mobilization of workers to resist the pro-war, pro-austerity Trudeau government and force it to back down.

4. Build a political counter-offensive against capitalist austerity and the prioritization of corporate profits. This must include a decisive political and organizational break from the Liberal/trade union/New Democratic Party alliance, one of the main mechanisms used by the ruling class to suppress the class struggle. We demand that the needs of workers take priority, for jobs, public services, safe working conditions, and the use of society's resources for social need, not corporate profits and war.

We need to unite our struggle with those of postal workers and other workers internationally to achieve this goal, which is why we're affiliated to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

To provide a democratic forum to discuss this program and mobilize support for it among postal workers, the PWRFC is convening its first public meeting this Sunday. The WSWs encourages all interested Canada Post workers to register here and attend on November 10 at 7 p.m. Eastern time. For more information about the PWRFC or to join it, fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact