

55,000 Canada Post workers walk off the job in nationwide strike

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Are you a striking postal worker? We want to hear about the issues you're fighting for and how you think you can win your struggle. Email us at canadapostworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form at the end of this article. All comments will be kept anonymous.

Approximately 55,000 Canada Post workers walked off the job at 12:01 a.m. Friday morning in the first nationwide strike called by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) since 1997.

Workers across the country from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Vancouver, British Columbia, took enthusiastically to picket lines outside their depots and workplaces, seeking to beat back demands for major concessions by the federally controlled Crown corporation, including sub-inflation wage increases, attacks on their pensions, and the deployment of new technology and artificial intelligence to the detriment of working conditions.

One postal worker from Ontario told a *World Socialist Web Site* reporter, "With the cost of living rising, due to inflation brought to us by the Trudeau government, 11.5 percent is not an option over 4 years. Twenty two percent is very reasonable." The final contract offer prior to the strike from Canada Post proposed an 11.5 percent wage increase over four years.

Another worker told WSWS reporters in Kitchener that it is "about time rank-and-file workers defied any back to work order that would come." In 2011 and 2018, Stephen Harper's Tory government and Trudeau's Liberals respectively banned rotating regional strikes by postal workers with back-to-work laws.

Teamsters Canada announced that its members at courier Purolator, a subsidiary of Canada Post, would not handle packages postmarked or identified as originating from the post office for the extent of a strike or lockout.

Liberal Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon, working at the behest of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, intervened late Thursday night in a last-minute effort to head off a strike. He announced the appointment of Director General of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services Peter Simpson as a special mediator. Simpson was involved in concocting the sellout imposed on British Columbia dockworkers after their 13-day strike was shut down by government intervention last year.

MacKinnon, who just this week invoked the Labour Code to rob dockworkers in Quebec and port foremen in BC of their right to strike and collectively bargain, told reporters Friday unconvincingly that the government was hopeful for a negotiated settlement at Canada Post.

"I'm not looking at any other solution other than negotiation," MacKinnon told reporters Friday. "Right now, every day is a new day in collective bargaining, and we are going to continue to support the parties in any way we can and make sure they are able to try and get a negotiated agreement."

However, he noted that talks remained "extremely difficult" and that, "There are many big issues to solve at the table, and not a lot of progress has been made on those big issues."

MacKinnon's unilateral action against the dockworkers makes clear what action the big business Liberals are prepared to take against postal workers if their strike continues for any significant amount of time.

Ahead of a possible strike the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), issued an appeal to the government to "use all its powers (including binding arbitration or back-to-work legislation) to keep the postal system working if negotiations are unsuccessful."

Pushing back-to-work legislation through parliament speedily has become more complicated since the New Democratic Party (NDP) withdrew its support for a "confidence-and-supply" agreement with the Liberal minority government that enabled Trudeau to impose austerity, wage war and increase military spending by billions of dollars for over two years. As a result, Prime Minister Trudeau has turned to cooking up new interpretations of the Labour Code and expanding the powers of the unelected Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to legalize strike action by fiat without even the fig leaf of the democratic oversight of Parliament.

The CUPW bureaucracy was hesitant to call for a strike, which had been authorized by 95 percent of the union membership, keeping workers on the job for more than a week past a November 3 deadline. Had postal workers walked out on time, they could have found ready allies in the dockworkers, making it much harder for MacKinnon to send the dockers back to work on Tuesday. But by the time the CUPW bureaucracy finally issued the requisite 72-hour strike notice earlier this

week, the union leadership didn't commit to any action. Instead, they asserted that the national executive board (NEB) would still have to take a decision.

Taking advantage of the extra time given them by the union leadership's delaying tactics, Canada Post responded to the strike notice by issuing a lockout notice for Friday morning. Management announced plans to unilaterally change the terms of employment if work continued, cutting off health benefits, ending paid time off, and discontinuing disability and pension payments. In the face of growing demands for action from the rank and file, and intransigence from management—despite continued claims of “progress” from the bargaining team—an all-out strike was called.

Had CUPW not called a nationwide strike, there was a very real likelihood that workers would have begun walking out on their own in response to Canada Post's imposition of “non-contractual” working conditions, jeopardizing the bureaucracy's control over the rank and file.

The talks between CUPW and Canada Post management have been dragged out for more than a year, with more than 100 meetings yielding no clear advancements in the interests of postal workers. Throughout, Canada Post has insisted on extracting major concessions as it pleads poverty, trumpeting \$3 billion in losses since 2018 and shifts in mail delivery from letter mail to parcels as justifying the need to shred working conditions and benefits, and keep wage increases below inflation. The reality is that \$3 billion is a drop in the bucket compared to the tens of billions spent by the union-backed Liberals to wage war around the world and enrich the wealthy elite with tax breaks and subsidies at home. If Canada Post is running out of money, it is because its operations, like all other key public services, have been starved of resources by decades of ruthless austerity policies enforced by governments led by all major parties.

Opposition is growing to CUPW's collusion with management to enforce yet another sellout. Drawing the lessons of previous struggles, including the 2011 and 2018 rotating strikes that were illegalized by back-to-work legislation without any resistance from the union apparatus, a group of Canada Post workers came together in June to establish the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The PWRFC fights to place control of the contract struggle in the hands of workers on the shop floor, and advances demands based on what workers need, not what is deemed “affordable” by management.

On the eve of Friday's walkout, the PWRFC issued a statement calling for an all-out strike with a real fighting political strategy. The statement urged postal workers to broaden their struggle to defeat government strikebreaking, since the issues postal workers are fighting for—inflation-busting pay increases, an end to management harassment, workers' control over new technology, and secure jobs with predictable schedules—are issues faced by all workers. The PWRFC warned:

Canada Post, the Liberal government, and the CUPW are colluding against us. Faced with Canada Post's demands to eviscerate our rights so the Crown corporation can profitably compete with Amazon and other gig-economy employers, CUPW president Jan Simpson declares that the union “recognize[s] the challenges our employer is facing, and our goal is not to simply make demands, but to work together toward solutions.”

We for our part reject that postal workers' jobs and wages—or those of any other workers, including our super-exploited brothers and sisters in the gig sector—should be sacrificed on the altar of big business profit.

Postal workers must recognize our class enemies, and take the struggle into our own hands. We must mobilize independently of the rotten tripartite union-management-government alliance, and put forward our own set of demands, including an immediate 30 percent pay raise to offset inflation and workers' control over the introduction of all new technologies.

What is required for us to win our just demands is above all the recognition that we are in a political fight. We must appeal to all workers to join us in a worker-led counteroffensive against universally deteriorating working conditions, the gutting of public services, and the diversion of society's resources from meeting crying social needs to waging war.

A public meeting of the PWRFC on November 10 outlined a fighting strategy for postal workers which made clear that the committee rejected the running of Canada Post as a profit-making enterprise and that workers should make the contract fight, “the spearhead of a worker-led counteroffensive in defence of fully funded public services and workers' rights, and against austerity and war.”

All Canada Post workers who are interested in this perspective and building the PWRFC can write to the committee at canadapostworkersrfc@gmail.com or fill out the form below.



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