

“It’s the ultimate in legal exploitation!”: Striking Canada Post worker condemns management and poor working conditions

Our reporter
28 November 2024

The strike by 55,000 postal workers at Canada Post is nearing the end of its second week. Strikers are fighting for job security, an end to the use of automation and AI to increase workloads, and real wage increases. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), the workers’ bargaining agent, has made clear it supports the premise of running the Crown corporation as a profit-making concern, underscoring that it wants to continue imposing concessions on workers in partnership with management and the Trudeau Liberal government.

Postal workers established the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) in June to seize control of their contract struggle from the union bureaucracy and thereby prevent CUPW from isolating postal workers from their allies throughout the working class. The urgency of broadening the strike is becoming ever more urgent, since only a worker-led counter-offensive against austerity and war can defeat Canada Post’s government-backed concessions and job-cutting drive. The PWRFC insists that postal workers would win enthusiastic support for their struggle if they make it the spearhead of a movement to defend public services, oppose state strikebreaking, and to secure full-time jobs and benefits, and decent working conditions for all.

Dozens of workers have written to the PWRFC to ask questions, sign up for the WSWs postal workers’ newsletter, and share their experiences in the workplace. We encourage all postal workers to write to canadapostworkersrfc@gmail.com with their contributions or fill out the form at the bottom of this article.

The following letter was sent by a striking postal worker in Ontario. It has been lightly edited for clarity.

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In response to your article about the recent postal strike, I’d like to add that so many cost-cutting measures can be made at the corporate level.

For one, there’s a specific order that NO mail remains at the Depots. This means that any mail not delivered goes back into the mailstream to be re-sorted. Thus costing us a second time for shipping, sorting and reshipping.

Rehandling of mail is frowned on by the corporation.

In regard to the Hamilton Mail Processing Plant:

We have many “Team Leaders” (supervisors) who have no true leadership training, and the culture is to press for more work out of the workers, including by breaking the collective agreement on an ongoing basis. In keeping with this overstaffing of APOC (Association of Postal Officials of Canada) employees, they diligently monitor every item of mail incoming, processed and outgoing, in order to earn a premium on their payslips. The corporation says they want to protect their employees but the employees are “siloes” into separate teams, not only within the 24/7 operations, but also within the workers vs the “Team Leaders,” who either disappear when an issue arises, or band together against the worker, insofar as misrepresenting the issue or incident. There’s no real protection for the workers, and if one gets hurt they are forced to take the brunt of the responsibility upon themselves.

The entire corporation is top-heavy, with all correct procedures being left to word-of-mouth or emails which filter down to the workers through the team leaders, and may not coincide with the actuality of the situation. The workers are unable to ask follow up

questions which inevitably arise. Often (almost always) there is no clear procedure. This is THE biggest problem the corporation instigates, because it slows down the process of handling mail. Inevitably questions regarding the delivery are left to the discretion of each worker, based on their personal experience or who they ask.

There's a disconnect between computer systems and case boards for manual sorting, and shockingly addresses are left off the case lists for manual sorting. For example, the mail that gets machine-sorted is based on postal code, then address, but the unworkable mail is sorted by address, even if the postal code is particular to a specific location (like a box number). This creates a doubling of mail handling, if not deliveries of said mail, and only people "in the know" can redirect it to its proper delivery method. However, the corporation wants all workers to be ignorant of any information outside of what is filtered down to them. This means greater numbers of rehandled mail, and a greater drain on the bottom line. Specifically, the corporation has worked tirelessly in creating ignorance and division among its workers, and exacerbating its problems.

For example, sometimes addresses are left entirely off the case boards and end up sitting for weeks pending investigation (which cannot be solved based on the current disconnect between systems), and end up being handled several times at least before often being rejected as undeliverable.

The faulty equipment that's been red-tagged is put right back into circulation unchanged. Some computer equipment remains unusable for months, even as workers diligently try to get the mail to its proper destination. Workers are denied simple tools (cutters) for separating plastic and string bundles.

And the list goes on.

Every day there's a new low bar, and just when you think it can't get any worse, it does. Every "change" the corporation makes is cost heavy and causes other problems down the line.

And THE WORST part of this culture is that there is absolutely NO ACCOUNTABILITY in leadership. Absolutely none. All the way to the top.

Most workers in this public service want, really want, to do their jobs well. It's a public service and we serve the public, our communities and our families and friends. When we see mail being mishandled again and

again, we are disappointed and disheartened that an iconic symbol of keeping Canadians connected is being discarded through the mismanagement of our nation's most personal connections.

Besides each of the team leaders ticking off numbers, there are computer systems that take care of that, then there are volume counters doing it, and whoever all is pencil pushing all those numbers around. This has demonstrated that the corporation only wants to manage numbers, not the connections.

The corporation must provide the necessary tools and resources to do the work right, and on time.

There's so much more that can be told, like how the letter carriers are unable to sort their own routes now, meaning they have to carry someone else's mistakes, and they have to carry longer and start later. They will be working during the height of the summer heat (think heat exhaustion etc.) and the dark dangerous days of winter (slips, trips and falls). All the while having their benefits and pensions cut. It's the ultimate in legal exploitation! It's a gut punch for all Canadians to watch this once iconic symbol of Canada become so low and degraded. This is the Canadian Dream? More like a Canadian Nightmare.



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