

# Liberal government intervenes to outlaw Canada Post strike

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Labour Minister Steve MacKinnon announced Friday morning that he was ordering the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to break the nearly month-old strike by 55,000 postal workers and to force them back on the job under their expired contracts, if it determines that contract talks between the Crown corporation and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) are at “an impasse.”

Such a finding is a foregone conclusion, since a special federal mediator withdrew from contract talks more than a week ago declaring the two sides were too far apart to warrant his assistance, and Canada Post responded to CUPW’s latest contract proposal by claiming it would add billions in new costs.

MacKinnon’s move is an attack not just on postal workers, but the entire working class. It marks the third time since August that the Liberal government, without even referring to a parliamentary vote, has arbitrarily robbed workers of their supposedly constitutionally protected right to strike.

“After months of conciliation and mediation supported by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, work stoppages, and the subsequent appointment of a special mediator to assist with the negotiation of their new collective agreements, Canada Post and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers remain unable to reach an agreement,” MacKinnon told reporters Friday morning in Ottawa.

Contrary to the labour minister’s assertion, the government’s repeated meddling in talks was never intended to help reach an agreement that recognized the interest of workers. Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government, the corporate media, and Canadian big business all support the sweeping restructuring of Canada Post to turn it into a low-wage, profit-making enterprise that competes with Amazon in its brutality towards its workers. MacKinnon’s provocative announcement demands an independent political response by striking postal workers and the working class as a whole, which must be mobilized in a political struggle to halt the ruling class drive to destroy Canada Post and all public services and to defend workers’ right to strike, that is, to collectively fight for their class interests.

MacKinnon outlined a plan which will see postal workers return to their jobs as early as Monday under the terms of their long-since expired collective agreements until May 22, 2025. The contracts for both the Urban Postal Operations (UPO) and Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers (RSMC) units expired in January 2024 and December 2023, respectively, after having been extended for two years in 2022. This will leave workers languishing for another six months under terms which were put into effect more than four years ago.

The contract extensions will be accompanied by the appointment of an Industrial Inquiry Commission under the direction of William Kaplan, a veteran arbitrator and mediator. MacKinnon has tasked the Commission “with examining the structural issues preventing the resolution of the current labour dispute.” Kaplan has overseen the implementation of pro-employer contracts through arbitration at Air Canada, Canadian Pacific

Railway and Westjet, among others.

MacKinnon noted further: “The inquiry will have a broad scope as it will examine the entire structure of Canada Post from both a customer and business model standpoint, considering the challenging business environment now facing Canada Post.”

Kaplan’s commission will undoubtedly endorse the “Amazonification” of Canada Post’s operations which management is seeking, including the expansion of low-paid casual workers. Throughout the strike, representatives of corporate Canada have openly discussed the need to eliminate as many as 20,000 full-time jobs from Canada Post’s workforce, scrap its monopoly on mail delivery, and sell off some 3,000 single-use post offices in favour of a franchise model.

The Liberal government’s strike ban was based on a cooked-up re-interpretation of Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code to grant the labour minister the power to end strikes and impose binding arbitration by executive fiat. Whereas in the past, governments obtained a legal fig leaf to break strikes by passing back-to-work legislation in parliament, Justin Trudeau’s Liberals now rely on Section 107 of the Labour Code to arbitrarily issue sweeping anti-worker orders to the CIRB. This tripartite body, consisting of state officials, business representatives and trade union bureaucrats, is an unelected board appointed by the governor in council operating under the labour minister’s auspices.

The labour minister has now invoked Section 107 three times in the last four months to shut down strikes in key industries—first among railroaders at CPKC and Canadian National, then among dockworkers in British Columbia and Quebec, and now at Canada Post.

The response of the CUPW bureaucracy to MacKinnon’s intervention has been one of total complacency. While the possibility of government intervention has hung over the strike since it began on November 15, the union has worked tirelessly to keep postal workers isolated and offered no strategy to oppose a government-ordered strike ban. Nor has it sought to broaden the strike to other logistics workers, including at the Canada Post-owned courier Purolator.

Instead, the CUPW bargaining team has repeatedly appealed to Canada Post to bargain in “good faith,” and after talks all but collapsed after the special mediator’s withdrawal, to “come back to the table.” In its latest offer to the company, CUPW proposed a major climbdown on wages, overtime, and working conditions.

This only emboldened Canada Post management. It responded with a denunciation of the union for moving the parties “further apart.” As late as Thursday, just hours before MacKinnon made his announcement, CUPW National Director-Central Region Peter Denley was sending out emails to striking members that urged them to appeal to their MPs to put pressure on the government to intervene in the talks to end the strike.

A statement by CUPW President Jan Simpson Friday afternoon in response to MacKinnon’s announcement declared that the union would “consider every available option” once a back-to-work order is issued, and asked workers merely to “stay alert for more information in the

coming days.”

In contrast, rank-and-file Canada Post workers in the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) have taken the initiative, fighting to take control of the contract talks out of the hands of the union bureaucracy and to mobilize support from workers across the country and internationally. The PWRFC issued a statement Friday calling for defiance of the Liberal government’s strikebreaking, writing:

Conditions for us to defy the state assault on our right to strike and mobilize broad support within the working class, up to and including in a general strike, are propitious. This is because the issues that we are fighting for are of burning importance to all workers, public and private sector alike—the defence of public services; workers’ control over the introduction of new technologies; an end to concessions and multi-tier workforces; and the defence of the right to strike.

We do not issue our call for defiance lightly.

It must be accompanied by a fundamental change in strategy. We must make our strike the spearhead of a working class counter-offensive against the dismantling of public services, the sacrificing of social needs to the war agenda of Canadian imperialism, and the defence of the right to strike.

A postal worker from Ontario told the *World Socialist Web Site*:

Today Stephen MacKinnon said that the current agreement that has already been expired for a year will be extended until May of 2025. That to me is insulting. We haven’t been on strike for four weeks only to be thrown aside and forced back to work. It is antidemocratic and it is something I absolutely won’t stand for.

The employer has time and time again refused to provide for its employees. They’ll reward you with Tim’s [coffee] cards and Subway catering, but they don’t look at the big picture. We haven’t had a wage increase in over six years.

This decision by the labour minister is atrocious and it truly sets dangerous precedent.

She also addressed the broader social consequences for working people if the strike is defeated.

The news itself is not shocking. It tells me that everything I have been saying is true, that Canada Post is being deceptive, manipulative and downright unethical in its so-called “negotiation practices.”

Home ownership is becoming more uncommon due to the housing crisis, food stuffs and necessities have become out of reach for millions. Disabled and injured people have to conserve and go without medications because CEOs hold their benefits and pensions hostage.

Another worker referenced CUPW’s previous negotiation of an extension of the contract for two years behind the backs of the membership, and now “a year of bargaining ... and still nothing.” The worker continued, “so anything we get is five years behind in the making. ... Anyone who says we’re asking too much should check themselves.”

The Canada Post strike has reached a critical inflection point for the

working class as a whole.

What the Labour Minister described as an “imaginative solution” to the ongoing contract dispute is in fact part of a concerted assault on workers’ basic rights. The collective bargaining system established as the result of the mass struggles of workers in the 1930s and 1940s has effectively been blown up, with the federal government running roughshod over workers’ democratic rights and arrogating to itself the power to criminalize at will worker job action. Corporate Canada has been incentivized to remain intransigent in demanding concessions, knowing that a drawn-out strike or lockout or one paralyzing a key industry will provoke government action on its behalf.

This attack on the right to strike is being carried out by a minority Liberal government which continues to be backed by the entire union bureaucracy and kept in power by the trade union-sponsored New Democratic Party. It reflects the shift of the entire Canadian ruling elite, like its counterparts internationally, towards authoritarian forms of rule.

In the United States, Trump has declared his intention to establish a fascist dictatorship so as to secure the naked domination of the billionaires over all aspects of social and economic life. In Europe, decades of job protections and relatively well-paid jobs are being trashed by governments like that in Germany, which increasingly enforces the policies of the fascist Alternative for Germany as it rearms for world war.

The connection between the ever more draconian suppression of the class struggle and imperialist war is intimate, since the ruling class can only afford its wars of plunder and conquest if it turns the working class at home into paupers and decimates public services. The far-right leader of Canada’s Conservatives, Pierre Poilievre, is waiting in the wings to take over from Trudeau in Ottawa to pursue this course with even more ruthlessness. Like Trump, he has been able to make a phony social appeal because the parties promoted by the trade unions as “progressive”—the Democrats in the US and the Liberals and NDP in Canada—are pro-austerity and pro-war and utterly indifferent to the growing social distress of working people.

The fate of the Canada Post strike depends upon the independent industrial and political mobilization of the entire working class to defeat the government-imposed strike ban and defend public services. As the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) explained in a December 5 statement,

The defence of jobs, worker rights and public services requires a frontal assault on the financial oligarchy’s death grip over society. It demands a struggle to assert workers’ control over society’s vast wealth and productive forces—including new technologies like AI, which have the potential to greatly increase the productivity of labour—so that they can be deployed to meet social needs, not private profit.

Such a revolutionary transformation will only be realized through the industrial and political mobilization of the working class to seize political power from the ruling class and set about transforming society along socialist lines.



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