The way forward for Canada Post workers after CUPW's surrender to government strike-ban

Build a network of rank-and-file committees! Mobilize the working class in an industrial and political offensive to defend all public services and defeat state strikebreaking!

Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee
26 December 2024

We encourage all Canada Post workers to contact the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee at canadapostworkersrfc@gmail.com or by filling out the form at the end of this article.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) emphatically condemns the Liberal government-imposed strike ban, and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers' (CUPW) capitulation to and enforcement of it. We were forced back to work, after more than a month on the picket line, by an arbitrary strikebreaking order issued without even the fig-leaf of a parliamentary vote. The sabotage of our strike, coordinated between the government, the Crown corporation and the union apparatus, has materially weakened our struggle for a new collective agreement. However, if we draw the appropriate lessons from this experience, we can seize the initiative and return to the offensive. This requires above all that we appeal for the support of all workers to join us in a mass industrial and independent political mobilization against capitalist austerity and war.

We must prepare for the ramping up of attacks on our working conditions and wages between now and May 22, 2025, when we will once again be in a legal strike position. Canada Post executives, conniving behind the scenes with government ministers and CUPW bureaucrats, will try to use this breathing space to plot deep-going attacks on our jobs and working conditions. They know that if we are defeated, corporate Canada can use automation, precarious employment, and AI to expand its restructuring of all public services to fund the enrichment of the wealthy and imperialist wars around the world. We must use the time to organize rank-and-file committees in every workplace, giving us the organizational means to countermand CUPW's next betrayal and take the necessary measures that we, rank-and-file postal workers, deem necessary to achieve our just demands for secure jobs, real wage increases, and workers' control over the use of AI and other new technologies.

How the CUPW and Canadian Labour Congress smothered our strike

When our strike was outlawed by the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB), the union acted as an industrial police force, no doubt egged on by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). After Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon announced the strike ban, the CLC didn't make a statement for 3 days and CUPW called no mass meetings to allow us to discuss our response. When they finally broke their silence, the CLC focused on complaining about the supposed "misuse" of Section 107 of the Labour Code to ban our strike, as if it were merely a matter of a "mistake" by a government minister or staffer. In fact, the draconian provision, which according to a new reinterpretation cooked up by the Liberal government gives the Labour Minister the power to do anything he likes to end a strike, has been used systematically over the past six months to end four labour disputes on management's terms.

Throughout our strike, the CUPW and CLC sabotaged our struggle by doing everything in their power to isolate and demoralize us, so that we would be unable to mobilize in opposition to anti-democratic strikebreaking when it inevitably came. First, they arbitrarily delayed calling our strike, in flagrant violation of our overwhelming strike mandate, with the result that we did not walk out alongside dockers in Quebec and British Columbia.

Second, they insisted that we were engaged in a simple "collective bargaining" fight and made no appeals to workers at Purolator or other logistics companies, let alone workers throughout all economic sectors, to join us. Yet our struggle revolves around issues of urgent concern to all workers, including the right to strike, the ruling class' use of automation to destroy jobs, and the deployment of AI to boost productivity at our expense.

Finally, CUPW and the CLC policed the government-dictated return to work. They did so in loyalty to their commitment to running Canada Post as a profit-making concern and to the health of Canadian capitalism more generally.

All that we got in exchange for ending our strike was a measly 5 percent pay "increase" for the first year since the expiration of our old collective agreements, which will now continue to operate until May. This is a slap in the face after years of wage stagnation and other attacks. Labour Minister MacKinnon announced the creation of a phony "Industrial Inquiry Commission" to justify the employer's predetermined goal of fundamentally restructuring the post office, i.e., the ruling elite's demand that tens of thousands of full-time jobs be eliminated, and replaced by permanent part-time and temporary workers to "Amazonify" the postal

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service.

Thanks to the unions' collaboration in sabotaging our strike, the possibility of developing an independent political opposition led by the working class to the Liberal Trudeau government's warmongering and savaging of public services was delivered a severe blow. The unions' continued political suppression of the working class hands the initiative to the ruling class, which could well succeed in bringing to power a far-right Conservative government under Pierre Poilievre, dedicated to upholding the interest of Canadian capital by launching a Trump-style social counter-revolution, before we can next walk off the job legally.

The ruling class is pursuing a fundamental shift that goes well beyond the post office, and our negotiations will set an example for the rest of the economy. Workers' hard-won gains of the past are no longer compatible with capitalism. They were wrenched out of the hands of the ruling class through bitter class battles in past decades, and we must defend those gains and push ahead to new victories. Even the smallest concessions won in the past are no longer possible to maintain under conditions of capitalism in crisis.

The Liberal government, Conservative, New Democratic Party and Bloc Québécois opposition, and union bureaucracies all agree that society's resources must be subordinated to Canadian imperialism's ability to wage wars around the world and keep capitalism in this country "competitive" with its international rivals. This inevitably means a worsening of our and all workers' living standards. Over the past nine years, CUPW and all the unions have propped up Trudeau's Liberals, whom they have touted as a "progressive" alternative to the Conservatives, while they attacked workers' living standards through pro-corporate pandemic bailouts, inflation-driven real wage cuts, and public spending austerity, poured money into the military, waged war on Russia, and backed Israel's genocidal assault on the Palestinians.

Postal workers are generally considered one of the most militant sections of workers. That is why there is a global ruling-class offensive against us. If the billionaire class can "gig-ify" postal services, then they can deepen attacks across the entire economy. Full-time jobs with good benefits and good pensions will disappear.

The treachery of the CLC and the CUPW has struck a blow against our fight, while strengthening the hand of Canada Post and the Trudeau Liberal government. We were sold out by our own union exactly when we were in a propitious position to achieve our demands. The Trudeau government is on the ropes, with Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland quitting on him, prompting increased calls for him to resign. A backlog of mail and parcels was building up, even in other countries. Other parcel delivery companies were proving incapable of handling the extra capacity our strike put on them. The lead-up to the holiday season is the best time for us to strike.

But our struggle is not lost. The social forces stacked against us are strong, but the potential social forces we can draw upon, represented by the working class across Canada and internationally, are immeasurably more powerful. To mobilize the working class on our side, we must use the coming weeks to draw the lessons of our recent struggles and, on that basis, set about preparing the organizational framework and arming ourselves with the necessary political perspective to take our fight forward.

The political lessons of our strike and the way forward

What are the lessons of our rotating strikes in 2011 and 2018, and our recent month-long strike? These experiences confirm three fundamental points that are the root of why the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC) was founded:

• We face a political struggle that pits us against Canada Post management and all of corporate Canada, which is salivating over the prospect of using a defeat of postal workers to broaden the onslaught on wages, benefits, and conditions to all workers. They know that the government, whatever its political colouration, will back its concessions demands.

• The CUPW and other CLC unions are not mechanisms for us to advance our struggle, but the means by which corporate Canada suppresses working class resistance. They are the key props of the pro-war, pro-austerity Trudeau government and in recent decades have developed all manner of corporatist partnerships with big business and the state. They are led by a caste of bureaucrats who derive lucrative privileges, including six-figure salaries, for policing the working class.

• We must take the struggle into our own hands. This means building rank-and-file committees in every workplace to take control of the contract fight from the CUPW bureaucracy, and break out of the isolation imposed by the CLC with an appeal to all workers to join a worker-led counteroffensive in defence of all public services and jobs, and workers' control over production and the running of public services.

The objective strength of the working class lies in its ability to organize across company, industry and national lines. This type of global organization is possible only in so far as workers break from the union officialdom to assert their independent class interests against all forces who seek to undermine us.

We have a real opportunity to mobilize mass support, up to and including a political general strike, because workers everywhere confront many of the same threats as postal workers. Technology, including AI and automation, has the potential to dramatically improve the productivity of broad sections of the working class around the world. This increase in productivity can be used against workers in the form of layoffs and increased workloads, or it can be used for the benefit of workers by implementing decreased workloads with no loss in pay. The key question is which class in Canada, the US, and internationally will control this technology: the capitalists or us workers.

Our program is against the subordination of workers to profit, and we call for Canada Post to be run as a fully-funded public utility. Workers everywhere, including postal, UPS and Amazon workers, have shown great militancy in recent months and years, but a new strategy is now required. MacKinnon's strikebreaking was meant to rob us of our leverage, and the Industrial Inquiries Commission will build on that momentum to further stack the deck against us. The rank-and-file committee form of organization is the necessary form for developing the class struggle as a political fight waged on an international basis, unifying postal and delivery workers in North America, Europe and beyond in a common fight.

The ruling class is preparing an all-out offensive, a massive provocation with sweeping job cuts among other concessions. This raises the necessity of developing our struggle at a higher level. We can still come out ahead, but we must involve a broad section of workers who share the same fundamental interests. Aligned with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), we can position ourselves as the spearhead of a worker-led counteroffensive in Canada, the United States, and around the world against austerity at home and war abroad.

Clarifying for workers the political way forward is a responsibility the PWRFC takes very seriously, and it lays the groundwork for us to intervene when workers are thrust into struggle. Rank-and-file committees are indispensable under conditions where the ruling class is pursuing a class war agenda against us. We don't sit idly by discussing problems with the union bureaucracy. We arm workers with a viable perspective to win our just demands in struggle.

The working class proves its level of militancy with every strike and

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picket line, but now, the question of organization and political leadership is on the agenda. Contact us today to build the PWRFC in every workplace and on every shift.

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