

National strike by Canada Post workers sabotaged by CUPW bureaucracy

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To get involved in the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which fights for workers to seize control of their struggle from the pro-company CUPW apparatus, fill out the form at the end of this article or email: canadapostworkersrfc@gmail.com.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) announced late Thursday evening that the nationwide strike planned to commence at 12:01 a.m. May 23 would be transformed into an overtime ban. This decision underscores that at every point during the current long-running contract struggle, the CUPW leadership has made decisions designed to put workers in the worst possible position to wage their fight to defend secure full-time jobs and quality public services, and ensure that AI and other new technologies are used to improve services to the public and workers' lives.

The 55,000 postal workers confront an onslaught by management and the Liberal government, with the full backing of corporate Canada, against their wages, working conditions and jobs. The goal of this assault is to turn Canada Post into a profit-making concern by "Amazonifying" the postal service. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained in previous articles, the sweeping restructuring that they are demanding includes a vast expansion of gig work, the introduction of dynamic routing to ratchet up worker exploitation, the elimination of thousands of full-time positions, and below-inflation pay "increases."

More broadly, they want to make an example of postal workers in order to intensify the gutting of public services and the evisceration of workers' rights, including the right to strike. The government and big business view this as necessary to funnel tens of billions of additional dollars into military spending and into enriching the financial oligarchy through further subsidies and tax cuts. The postal workers' struggle is therefore a fight in which all workers, regardless of their economic sector, have a direct stake.

The CUPW leadership has consistently deceived the rank and file by denying the political character of the struggle they face and the necessity of broadening it to other sections of the working class.

This was continued in recent days, with CUPW offering management a two-week delay in any job action, if it would agree to remove the threat of a lockout so that union officials could go through the legal provisions of Canada Post's latest miserable contract offer. This offer included a miserly 13.59 percent compounded wage hike spread over four years, the introduction of seven-days-a-week delivery, and the implementation of "dynamic routing," which will see routes adjusted on a daily basis in the

name of "efficiency" and facilitate a massive expansion of part-time work. The Crown Corporation belligerently rejected the two-week truce, knowing full well that it enjoys the backing of the entire ruling class, including the Liberal government led by Mark Carney, and can rely on CUPW to muzzle rank-and-file opposition.

At an online meeting Thursday evening with up to 1,000 workers from Atlantic and Central Canada in attendance, CUPW unveiled its plan to turn Friday's strike into an overtime ban. Full-time workers were instructed not to accept duties beyond the regular full-time schedule of eight hours per day or 40 hours per week.

However, the CUPW leadership immediately undermined even the effectiveness of this ploy. To help management cover the work arising from full-time workers' refusal to accept overtime, the union announced that "part time and temporary workers are permitted to extend (their hours), to a maximum of 8 hours per day, 40 hours per week."

The overtime ban would "minimize disruption" to the public, the union bureaucracy asserted, underscoring their view of the rest of the working population as essentially a hostile mass arrayed against the postal workers. To top it all off, CUPW's announcement criticized management, not for planning to savage postal workers' conditions, but for creating "uncertainty" that had directed "some customers" to "our competitors." In other words, workers at Purolator, UPS, Amazon and others are not allies in struggle against the bosses, but commercial "competitors" to be fought.

CUPW president Jan Simpson and her fellow union bureaucrats want at all costs to persuade postal workers that they stand alone and isolated, and must confine anything they do to the rigged, pro-employer "collective bargaining" framework.

Sabotaging workers' resistance

Since the contract struggle began, this approach has led the union leadership to do everything it possibly could to weaken the postal workers' struggle and prevent workers from expanding it to other sections of the working class, leaving the ruling class with a free hand to plot and implement their restructuring of Canada Post. This has included:

- Delaying the start of last year's strike by two weeks in November in the name of staying at the "bargaining table," in spite of an overwhelming, more than 95 percent rank-and-file vote for strike action.

- Isolating workers on the picket lines for close to a month and opposing any broadening of the movement to workers at Canada Post-owned Purolator and other logistics companies.

- Failing to alert workers to the inevitability of government intervention and outlining what the union leadership proposed to do to oppose it; then enforcing the illegal back-to-work order when it finally came from the Liberal government in December, in the face of widespread calls from the rank and file that it be defied.

- Promoting the government-established Industrial Inquiry Commission (IIC) as an open forum where workers could have their voices heard, when in reality it was a setup from the outset, based on the suppression of workers' collective action and dominated by trusted representatives of big business. As was intended, the IIC, headed by long-term federal arbitrator Robert Kaplan, served as the instrument for drawing up the bosses' battle plan against postal workers.

- Meeting with then Labour Minister Stephen MacKinnon, the very man who criminalized the postal workers' strike, to work out "Team Canada" trade war measures, which CUPW touted like all the other unions as aimed at protecting Canadian workers.

- Claiming that postal workers had the opportunity during the federal election campaign to take forward their struggle by voting for the New Democrats, the same party that secured a parliamentary majority for the strikebreaking Liberals for over five years. At Thursday evening's meeting, Simpson had the audacity to claim that the ultimate election of the former central banker and Liberal leader Mark Carney as prime minister was the "second-best" outcome that postal workers could have hoped for.

The CUPW bureaucracy's systematic sabotage of the postal workers' struggle is due to the fact that the union leadership's material interests are hostile to those of the rank and file. The CUPW bureaucracy wants to reach an accommodation with Canada Post management that will allow both "partners" to preside over a for-profit capitalist corporation that exploits workers and pays dues to its "worker representatives." The bureaucracy has proposed increasing the workloads of already overburdened postal workers with schemes such as postal banking and check-ins on elderly residents.

While having no shortage of new business ideas for Canada Post management's consideration, the bureaucracy has never advanced a strategy for workers to defend their interests against the combined attacks of the employer and Liberal government.

The union bureaucracy's demobilization and isolation of postal workers has helped create an atmosphere of confusion. A worker who attended Thursday's online meeting reported that some workers spoke out against a strike because they had no confidence in the union to lead it. When another worker spoke during the question period to ask why the union refused to broaden the struggle to workers at Purolator and other logistics workers, Simpson and the other bureaucrats on the panel claimed they couldn't hear him and swiftly moved on.

The rank and file must take the struggle into its own hands!

The events over recent days underline the urgency of workers taking control of the struggle into their own hands by building rank-and-file committees at every workplace. The CUPW leadership has succeeded thus far in maneuvering postal workers into an extremely vulnerable position. Canada Post management now has a strong hand, with the option of locking the workers out at a time of its choosing, relying on part-time workers to soak up the additional work produced by the overtime ban, or waiting for a direct government intervention to enforce a pro-employer settlement.

But postal workers could counter this by mobilizing an even stronger social force behind their struggle: the Canadian and international working class. Conditions to do so are favourable. The issues at stake in the postal workers' fight—the defence of public services and the right to strike, whether new technology will be used to increase workers' exploitation or to improve workers' lives, and a halt to the spread of precarious employment—are of vital concern to millions of workers across the country. They can and must be mobilized in an industrial and political counteroffensive against capitalist austerity and war.

What's more, this battle is unfolding as postal workers in the United States mobilize against the Trump administration's plan to privatize USPS. As Daniel Berkley, a postal worker and leading member of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee put it at a meeting organized last weekend by the USPS Rank-and-File Committee:

In Canada, the unions tell us to line up behind our Canadian bosses, who use Trump's trade war as an excuse to further exploit us. The tariff war, a precursor to a global military conflagration, can only be halted by the international unification of workers' struggles. We should not be lining up behind our own ruling classes on the basis of reactionary nationalism. Unfettered by the treacherous union bureaucracies, we could unleash our collective social power to fight for credible demands to defend our jobs, and improve our wages and working conditions. This is why we are here today.



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