CUPW continues to demobilize Canada Post workers in face of management's sweeping restructuring plan

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17 September 2025

Daniel Berkley is a leading member of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The PWRFC was established in June 2024 by postal workers to seize control of their contract struggle from the union bureaucracy and broaden it into a worker-led counteroffensive against capitalist austerity. Fill out the form at the end of the article to join the PWRFC or to let us know about conditions at your workplace.

At a press conference last Friday, Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) National President Jan Simpson announced an ad flyer-delivery ban starting Monday, September 15. The prohibition on delivering commercial flyers, for which postal workers are not properly compensated, replaces a more than three-month overtime ban that CUPW initiated last May to block an all-out strike by the rank and file against Canada Post's plan to radically restructure the postal service at workers' expense.

The ad-flyer ban is popular among many postal workers, because it reduces the deliveries we perform for next to no pay and reduces the loads we have to carry. But from the standpoint of developing our struggle against Canada Post's drive to destroy the postal service in its current form by eliminating the majority of fulltime workers and "Amazonifying" our working conditions, the ban must be understood as yet another desperate attempt by the CUPW bureaucracy to hold back our fight.

In announcing CUPW's latest maneuver, Simpson provided her rationale for avoiding a national strike, declaring, "We want to do our best to have the least impact on the Canadian public." This absurd statement shines a light on the union's class role, which is to enforce the demands of capital against workers. In this process, the "impact on the Canadian public" that CUPW is having by sabotaging our struggle is much more devastating than any temporary inconvenience that would be caused by a strike. It is sitting on massive opposition from the rank and file as the union-backed Carney Liberal government effectively abrogates the right to strike for all workers. And it is collaborating through its corporatist partnership with the government, Canada Post executives, and corporate Canada more broadly to shred postal workers' conditions and enforce mass job cuts.

CUPW is running our struggle into the ground. If its demobilizing strategy is not countermanded by the rank and file, it will inevitably result in a defeat that would set a precedent for the devastation of jobs in the public and private sectors, and for the destruction of public services as the government redirects all of society's resources towards rearmament, handouts to the financial oligarchy, and war. As the chief roadblock for postal workers seeking to make their struggle the spearhead of a working class counteroffensive against this class war agenda, the CUPW bureaucracy is helping create intolerable conditions of life for the "Canadian public."

The struggle that postal workers find ourselves in is of vital importance to all workers in Canada, public and private sector alike. The legal right to strike has been effectively abolished, while working conditions deteriorate across the board. Fundamental questions about the role of new automation and AI technologies are being posed point-blank for postal workers, but they are relevant to workers in virtually every workplace. Will AI and technological change more generally be used for the benefit of working people, reducing workloads and raising living standards? Or will they be employed for the benefit of the capitalist ruling class, intensifying worker-exploitation to squeeze out more profit, build more lethal weapons, and swell the fortunes of the billionaires?

The fact that the CUPW leadership and the entire Canadian union bureaucracy stand on the side of the bosses is underscored by their response to the Air Canada flight attendants' defiance last month of a draconian government back-to-work order, issued, as was that illegalizing our strike last December, under Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code.

After four weeks of saying next to nothing about the Air Canada flight attendants' strike, Simpson could only muster a few words at Friday's press conference connecting our struggles. Postal workers, she declared, "aren't being paid properly for the work of delivering the flyers, similar to how the Air Canada workers aren't being paid for all hours they work."

This glosses over the courageous stand flight attendants took in defying the same government that ended our strike, and the rotten role played by their union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), in derailing their struggle.

The CUPE leadership arbitrarily ended the strike, after backroom meetings produced a tentative contract that the union bureaucracy, including the top brass of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), universally hailed as a great "victory" for the strikers. The CLC asserted that the outcome of the strike showed the benefits of

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"bargaining at the table" over government strike bans.

In fact, CUPE acceded to virtually all of Air Canada's demands, including a compensation model that will continue to force flight attendants to perform ground work for a fraction of their hourly pay rate for the next four years. To ensure that the rank and file could not countermand this sellout, CUPE struck a deal with Air Canada to exclude this portion of the agreement, as well as many other employment terms, from a rank-and-file ratification vote. The union bureaucrats with their six-figure salaries only deigned to let the flight attendants vote on the miserly wage proposal, an "increase" of 17 percent over four years. This was a slap in the face after a decade-long contract under which workers' purchasing power had been massively eroded by inflation.

Flight attendants rejected the wage offer by more than 99%, in a vote in which 99.4 percent of the rank and file participated. No doubt expecting this outcome, the CUPE bureaucracy agreed that in the event of a "No" vote, the rejected parts of the contract would be sent to a government-appointed arbitrator for a binding decision.

CUPW kept silent for weeks about the Air Canada workers' struggle—not even condemning the government strike ban—for two reasons. First, as the flight attendants' defiance unfolded in real time, it would have led to rank-and-file demands that we join them in a joint challenge to government strikebreaking. Simpson and the rest of the National Executive Board were well aware that workers at sorting plants and depots across the country were intently following the developments at Air Canada. The second reason for their silence was that the flight attendants' militant action underscored *their* treacherous betrayal of *our* strike last December, when the CUPW National Executive ordered us back to work without any rank and file vote, although there was mass support for defiance among the 55,000 urban and rural postal workers and the Trudeau Liberal government was in crisis.

The union apparatus shudders at the prospect of a workers' counteroffensive against corporate and government interests, which would inevitably develop as a rebellion against the bureaucracy and its corporatist perks. But conditions for the development of such a movement are rapidly developing. A strike by 10,000 Ontario community college workers began last week to fight against attacks on their job security and wages. Like postal workers, they too have a stake in defending the right to strike. But this right, along with working conditions and wages, cannot be defended under the discipline of the various union bureaucracies.

For postal workers, the flyer delivery ban is a stunt to hide the fact that the corporation, backed by the government and the media, has doubled down on its attacks against us. The longer we stay demobilized, the higher the stakes. CityNews interviewed Ian Lee, a former Canada Post corporate executive who now serves as a consultant on how best to gut workers' rights from the comfort of a position as a university professor, on September 2. He argued that "Canada Post is imposing baby steps, when what is needed is radical surgery," including ending home delivery, dropping service to 1 day per week, and franchising every retail postal outlet (RPO). Lee claimed this would eliminate 30,000- 40,000 of the 55,000 jobs at Canada Post.

It's a pipedream to think that the corporate media will somehow take the workers' side if and when we get locked out by Canada Post. Mainstream media represents corporate interests. This has been demonstrated time and again, with their gratuitous attacks on postal workers for being "lazy," and their denunciations of our legitimate demands as "unreasonable" and "pie-in-the-sky." The media promotes the ruling elite's plan to make an example of postal workers so as to intimidate and crush working class resistance to the dismantling of public services, austerity and war.

The CUPW is organically incapable of waging a struggle against Canada Post and the Carney Liberal government. Dragging out the negotiations with the flyer ban is a pathetic half-measure almost two years after the collective agreements first expired. This rotten maneuver demonstrates that CUPW is appealing to the corporation and the Liberal government, not the workers they claim to represent. Postal workers interests are opposed to these forces. We want to fight! We voted to strike by 95 percent last October, and we rejected Canada Post's proposed contract by 69 percent this August, under conditions in which CUPW offered us no way forward.

To fight Canada Post, and the Liberal government and corporate Canada, which both back management to the hilt, it is imperative that postal workers take the struggle into our own hands by building rank-and-file committees in every workplace, joined together in a network under the leadership of the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The tasks of these committees will be to advance demands based on what we need, not what the corporation claims is affordable, and to broaden our struggle to other sections of workers confronting the same threats to their jobs and living conditions.

Uniting with other sections of workers to defend the right to strike, public services, and working conditions for all is an urgent necessity. And the conditions to develop this movement are favourable. Workers everywhere are tired of worsening conditions, stagnant and declining wages, the growing gulf between rich and poor, the tens of billions stolen from public services to fund war, and the increasingly authoritarian methods used by the ruling class, its state, and union "partners" to impose attacks on us. This is why to secure our demands, we need to arm ourselves with a socialist and internationalist program that prioritizes the needs of workers, the vast majority of the population, over the accumulation of private profit by the oligarchs.

If you're ready to join this struggle, fill out the form below to learn more about how you can build a rank-and-file committee in your workplace.

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