

55,000 Canada Post workers on strike as Liberal government moves to dismantle public postal service

Pierre Lajeunesse
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Over 55,000 Canada Post workers walked off the job Thursday in response to the federal Liberal government's drive to all but eliminate postal delivery as a public service. The trigger for the strike was Transformation, Public Works and Procurement Minister Joël Lightbound's announcement of an unprecedented "transformation plan." It calls for the federally owned Crown Corporation to dramatically curtail services and slash tens of thousands of full-time jobs over the next few years.

Letter carriers and sorting?plant workers in Atlantic Canada began spontaneously walking off the job immediately after the minister's Thursday afternoon press conference. News of their defiant action quickly spread via social media. According to information received by the *World Socialist Web Site* from rank-and-file workers, workers also walked out in Manitoba before the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) felt compelled to call a nationwide strike in the early evening, with the aim of placing themselves at the head of the movement the better to politically control and suppress it.

For the second time in less than a year, postal workers find themselves in an industrial and political struggle that pits them against Canada Post management, the Liberal government, and corporate Canada as a whole. The entire ruling class wants to see Canada Post "restructured" to set an example for the destruction of all public services across the country to pay for military rearmament, the waging of global war, and the enrichment of Canada's financial oligarchy.

Postal workers can defeat this class war agenda by appealing for all workers to join in their struggle, since the issues they are fighting for are of paramount importance to all workers. They include defence of public services and the right to strike; protection against Amazon-style precarious employment; and the need to establish workers' control over the use of AI and other new technologies, so they are used to lighten the workload with no loss of pay, not boost worker-exploitation and corporate profits.

The government of former Bank of Canada and Bank of England governor Mark Carney, who took over the prime ministership earlier this year, has seized on the Canada Post crisis to declare war on postal workers and on the working class as a whole.

With the full-throated support of the corporate media, the Carney Liberal government is moving to implement a self-avowed program of "austerity and investment." Public services are to be slashed, beginning with a 15 percent cut in federal discretionary spending over the next three years, and hundreds of billions diverted to expanding the military, and providing subsidies and tax cuts for big business and the rich.

Postal workers only got back the right to strike in May, after they were robbed of it for five months by a draconian back-to-work order issued by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon last

December, after a month-long strike.

However, CUPW refused to mobilize postal workers and appeal to the entire working class for support in defending public services. Instead, it kept the rank and file on a tight leash, confining them to an overtime ban, which was later replaced by a ban on delivering unaddressed ad flyers.

Although the union offered no perspective for carrying forward the struggle, when the Liberal government intervened against the postal workers yet again, forcing them to vote in July on Canada Post's concessionary offers, 70 percent of the workers, both urban and rural, voted "No."

Speaking in Ottawa Thursday, Lightbound portrayed his plan as a rescue operation, aimed at "saving" a national postal service that he claimed was facing an "existential crisis." He pointed to billions of dollars in accumulated losses, a sharp drop in letter?mail volumes and a recent \$407 million quarterly loss.

The minister unveiled measures drawn almost entirely from the rigged Industrial Inquiry Commission (IIC) the government established last December at the same as it stripped postal workers of the legal right to strike.

Declaring the post office "effectively insolvent," he ordered Canada Post to implement massive cuts. These include eliminating door?to?door delivery for the 4 million households that still receiving it and their conversion to "community mailboxes"; lifting the moratorium on closing rural and suburban post offices; and adjusting letter?mail delivery standards so that non?urgent mail can be trucked rather than flown. Under the government's plan, which Lightbound has given Canada Post management 45 days to translate it into an action plan, mail delivery will drop from five to as few as three days a week, stamp?rate increases will be accelerated, and management will gain authority to hire part?time weekend staff.

Sweeping as they are, these measures mark only the first step in a much broader restructuring plan aimed at slashing the total workforce by two-thirds or more and hiving off the most profitable markets to private providers, leaving Canada Post to serve rural and remote areas with a skeleton staff of gig workers. These plans are to be fleshed out by a new committee the government is forming to review Canada Post's mandate.

Former Canada Post executive Ian Lee, now a frequently cited professor of business at Carleton University, has stated that it is necessary to sell off the post office's profitable urban operations and reduce Canada Post to a skeleton service in rural areas, meaning the elimination of 40,000 jobs.

What Lightbound presented as fiscal necessity is in fact a premeditated assault on the public postal service. The blueprint he invoked emerged directly from the Trudeau government's strikebreaking operation last December. Invoking a newly concocted, and patently illegal "re-interpretation" of Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code, the Liberals

illegalized the postal strike without even the fig-leaf of parliamentary support, unilaterally extended postal workers' expired contracts and imposed a five-month ban on collective action.

At the same time, they established the IIC under Section 108 of the Labour Code and tasked it with proposing restructuring measures. Chaired by trusted federal mediator/arbitrator William Kaplan, the commission was given the power to recommend changes to all Canada Post's operations, its collective agreements and even the bargaining process. In other words, the government rode roughshod over postal workers' right to strike while it established a hand-picked commission to rubber stamp its plans to gut their jobs and benefits.

While the rank and file have made clear their determination to fight these attacks, including through defiance of government intervention, management and the CUPW bureaucracy share a common objective: to return Canada Post to profitability at workers' expense. The union leadership has backed expanding night and weekend deliveries and proposed non-postal ventures, such as electric-vehicle chargers and check-ins on seniors to raise revenues. All of these proposals leave untouched the premise that the post office should be run as a profit-making business.

The CUPW leadership confronts postal workers in their struggle as an enemy that stands on the side of management and the government. This fact was summed up in comments by CUPW negotiator Jim Gallant, who told reporters Thursday that the workers' actions were "organic," i.e., not under the bureaucracy's control, and declared, "We don't want to be there."

Such comments reveal the bureaucrats' fear that a militant movement could develop beyond their control. This fear is well-founded, given the dramatic sharpening of the class struggle in Canada and internationally over the past year. The Liberal government has repeatedly stepped in with anti-democratic strike bans, including against dock workers, rail workers, and most recently 10,500 Air Canada flight attendants. But unlike on previous occasions, when the union bureaucracy succeeded in dragging workers back on the job when faced with government strikebreaking orders, the flight attendants courageously defied the government.

However, their militant stand—lacking an organized leadership fighting to broaden the struggle and seize control of it from the bureaucracy—did not prove sufficient to prevent the Canadian Union of Public Employees from stabbing them in the back. It concluded a late-night deal with the help of a government-appointed mediator—the same William Kaplan who wrote the IIC report on Canada Post—to sabotage the strike and give the company what it wanted. This included denying the flight attendants the right to vote on most elements of the sell-out deal, and imposing arbitration on them when they rejected the proposed wage settlement by more than 99 percent.

The renewal of the struggle by postal workers therefore has significance far beyond the immediate dispute. The manner in which the strike broke out, like the Air Canada workers' stand, shows that the death grip exercised for decades by the union bureaucracy over workers' struggles is breaking down, and underlines that extremely favourable conditions exist for the postal workers to obtain a powerful response from other sections of workers if they fight to broaden their struggle.

To do so, strikers must immediately establish rank-and-file strike committees to take control of the fight and advance demands based on what workers need, not what management and government ministers claim is "affordable." These committees must take up a struggle against the corporatist partnership between the union bureaucracy, corporate management, and the government, repudiating the rotten Canadian nationalism on which it is based and appealing for support from postal workers in the US and further afield.

CUPW, CUPE and the wider union bureaucracy act as arms of the state: policing the workforce, collaborating with management and blocking any

challenge to the profit system. The union leaderships cover up their indispensable role in imposing the interests of the ruling elite on the workers with bogus references to a "Team Canada" that supposedly unites workers and bosses as one against Trump, when in fact the "team" they are part of is the one bought, paid for, and sponsored by the financial oligarchy.

The basis to oppose this gang-up against the workers is the closest alliance between postal workers and other sections of the working class in the US, Europe, and internationally. Workers everywhere face the same dangers, including the slashing of jobs and wages, destruction of public services, and abrogation of their right to strike and other basic democratic rights in the name of funding wars and with the aim of enforcing the interests of the capitalist oligarchy through dictatorship. In the US, the would-be dictator Trump wants to privatize the US Postal Service, while in Britain the rights of Royal Mail workers are under systematic attack.

The Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee was established in June 2024 to lead this struggle among postal workers. It rejects the claim that Canada Post must be run as a profit-making enterprise. It demands that decisions about operations, new technologies and working conditions be made by those on the shop floor. The committee's programme calls for an immediate 30 percent wage increase to reverse decades of concessions, full pensions and benefits for all employees, and an end to two-tier wage scales and contracting out. It insists that automation and artificial intelligence be deployed to reduce workloads and improve service, not to intensify exploitation, and that Canada Post be funded as a public utility rather than treated as a cash cow for bondholders.

Affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, the PWRFC appeals to logistics workers and public-sector workers across Canada and internationally to join a common fight against austerity and war. By building independent rank-and-file committees and uniting workers' struggles across borders, postal workers can defeat the Liberals' assault and lay the basis for a broader working class counteroffensive.

Only through such a movement can workers defend public services and secure decent jobs; the battle over Canada Post will determine whether essential services remain public and accessible or are sacrificed to corporate profit.



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