

Striking Canada Post workers speak out from picket lines in Ontario and Quebec

Our reporters
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More than 55,000 Canada Post workers are continuing their nationwide strike, which erupted with rank-and-file walkouts September 25. The urban and rural letter carriers, sorting plant workers, mail delivery truck drivers and post office clerks are challenging the drive of Canada Post, the federal Liberal government and corporate Canada to dismantle postal delivery as a public service and slash tens of thousands of full-time jobs.

Canada Post management claims its “transformation” plan is necessary to return the Crown Corporation to “profitability.” Prime Minister and former central banker Mark Carney agrees, having declared the postal service to be “unviable” in its current form. The government’s support for vicious attacks on postal workers goes hand in hand with austerity across the board, increased military spending, and corporate subsidies.

Speaking to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters from the picket lines in Ontario, Jamie said of the gang-up of the government and Canada Post management against the workers,

They don’t want decent jobs and decent hours. They want us all to be gig workers. Carney just wants to eliminate all good jobs for everybody.

Let’s just call it a third world country now. We’ll all be starving, but the rich and the big companies will be okay. Anyone else will be working for poverty wages. That’s not right.

I was telling my co-worker recently, we need a revolution against this government. Enough is enough! They’re taking our god damn jobs away.

Liberal Transformation, Public Services and Procurement Minister Joël Lightbound has called for dramatic service cuts that would largely limit the post office to servicing rural and remote areas that private courier and package delivery services deem unprofitable. By mid-November, Canada Post is to begin implementing a strategy that will remove door-to-door delivery from four million households, establish community mailboxes nationwide, end protections against rural post office closures, reduce letter delivery from five to three days weekly, and shift mail transportation from air to ground, slowing service significantly. These measures are to be accompanied with an increase use of hire part-time labour and stamp price increases. As sweeping as these changes are, they are only “phase one” in a comprehensive plan to abolish postal delivery as the secure job it was traditionally considered and effectively ending Canada Post as a public service.

Jonny, originally from Peru, working part-time at Canada Post rejected the government’s framework, which is lifted from plans long developed by Canada Post and big business. “I disagree with what the government is doing, said Jonny. “They say Canada Post should make money and that it should be a profitable business. But it’s a public service!”

In its latest contract “offers” made public on Friday, Canada Post

demanded the suspension of existing “job security for life” provision for the duration of its restructuring, in order to implement the massive destruction of jobs the transformation entails. “Reducing the size of the workforce through attrition will always be the first choice, but it cannot be the only option through this transformation,” the company declared. In other words, guaranteed permanent employment should be abolished. If they get the power to end it “temporarily,” any subsequent guarantees for the fraction of the workforce that remains will not be worth the paper they are written on.

Jamie denounced the media-driven campaign to demonize postal workers as overpaid, pointing to the realities of the job:

We get a lot of hate for being supposedly lazy entitled workers, but how much do we actually make? People who’ve worked here for 30 years are making \$30 an hour.

When we went through the pandemic, we didn’t get anything. We said we’ll wait until the next contract comes up, and now they only want to give us 2 or 3 percent. It’s ridiculous.

We’re not asking for a lot and we’re not making a lot. We just want a damn job.

A worker in Montreal added

In the media, they say the strike hurts the public and small businesses, but they don’t say that we work hard. During COVID, we were called essential workers, we worked all the time. We did home delivery for those who couldn’t go out to buy their things.

Another Ontario striker, added,

Canada Post benefits suck. Almost all of the medications aren’t covered. Our insurance sucks. I worked for a private company before, and their insurance benefits were a lot better than here. People think we’re like government workers because we’re under a Crown corporation, but the benefits suck, especially for people who need medications.

The strike represents one of the most significant confrontations between Canadian workers and the ruling class in decades. But while corporate Canada has political parties, the media, and a vast governmental apparatus behind it, the organizations supposedly leading the workers, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and the Canadian Labour Congress

(CLC), are doing all they can to isolate and demobilize the workers.

The CUPW National Executive was only called the strike after workers in locations across the country began spontaneously walking off the job in response to Lightbourn's restructuring announcement. As one postal worker explained to the WSW, "The strike started in the Atlantic, then moved to Vancouver. So the national had no choice but to call a national strike. Because they'll look bad without supporting their workers."

CUPW is doing nothing to broaden the strike and appeal to workers even within the same logistics sector, much less other sections of the working class. This is because the union bureaucracy is more interested in defending its corporatist partnership with management and government, which places it in direct conflict with the workers it claims to represent. CUPW accepts that Canada Post should be run as a profit-making concern and merely wants to be in on the discussions on how to restructure its operations at workers' expense.

Jamie criticized the CUPW leadership's refusal to call for workers at Canada Post subsidiary Purolator to join the strike, saying, "Purolator workers are the same as us. It's not right. They should be saying look we're gonna stand up for Canada Post because it's gonna happen to us one day."

Abou, a postal worker picketing the Léo-Blanchette sorting plant in Montreal, told the WSW: "You know why the Purolator trucks come here? Because they don't have our equipment. So they come here to use our equipment, they make profits off our backs."

Abou expressed gratitude to our reporters: "What I don't understand is that there are certain journalists, not you, who are polishing the image of Canada Post's management. The problem is they didn't do what you did. You came here. You're talking with us, but they just stayed in their offices."

Postal workers were on the picket line for a month last November and December. Then, the government ordered them back to work, under a newly "reinterpreted" clause in Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code, unilaterally banning the strike without even the democratic fig-leaf of a parliamentary vote. Support to defy the government was widespread, but the CUPW overrode this sentiment and connived with the government to enforce the back-to-work order.

An Ontario postal worker explained the impact of this betrayal among workers:

You know, I want to strike. I support what the Atlantic CUPW members did in walking out. Otherwise we would just accept whatever Canada Post wants, and they want to privatize us.

The sad thing is, that a lot of my coworkers, the day the walkout happened, wanted to stay. They asked management to stay on the job. Which I disagree with. But I understand why they did.

If we actually fought the way we should have last November, we would have much higher morale. But right now, morale is quite low. People just want to get back to work. We had so much leverage last year, but now, not so much. We lost an opportunity.

I'm still willing to stay and fight, even though it's hard. Thing is we're not just doing it for ourselves. We're doing it for the younger people too. We want them to have a decent job here. Canada Post used to be a quite okay place to work.

Two workers picketing at the Léo-Blanchette plant who wished to remain anonymous added, "Last year we were on strike for 5 weeks, we went back to work, and there's been no change since." His colleague recalling the Black Friday strike highlighted that the bosses "don't care" about such pressure tactics. "We're outside again, we're waiting like this, and when they want they'll introduce a special law and we'll be forced

back to work, and that's it."

Countering this demoralization, which is the direct product of the trade unions' sabotage of their struggle, requires that postal workers take the fight into their own hands. As Daniel Berkley, a striking postal worker in Ontario, explained recently in an article for the WSW,

Workers should fight to give their militant hostility to the attacks on us organized expression through the building of rank-and-file strike committees at every depot, sorting facility, and other workplace. The rank and file can in this way unify our struggle with other sections of workers, mobilizing Purolator, Amazon, UPS and even United States Postal Service workers and others on our side. They all face similar attacks on their working and living conditions. We can and must deepen our struggle, positioning ourselves as the lightning rod for a mass political and industrial mobilization of the working class in defense of all public services, the right to strike, and safe, well-paying jobs.

Postal workers who agree that a successful struggle can only be accomplished through the independent intervention of rank-and-file workers into this political fight should join and help build the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee (PWRFC). Linking up with other workers throughout Canada and internationally is of decisive importance in the struggle to improve working conditions, which necessarily entails a fight against capitalist austerity, dictatorship and war.

This struggle must develop on the international arena, which is why the PWRFC is part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. Only an international organization, basing itself on the objective conditions of a globalized economy, and rejecting the subordination of workers' lives and livelihoods to capitalist profit, will be able to defend working conditions and implement improvements in line with what new technologies make possible. The IWA-RFC provides the organizing framework and leadership needed to coordinate workers' struggles across national borders in a worker-led counteroffensive to put the social needs of the vast majority, including the right to a job, secure public services, and affordable housing and healthcare, before corporate profits.



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