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FAST FACTS

June 17, 2011

Canada Post locks out Postal Workers; Harper locks out Collective Bargaining

Members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) initiated job action on June 2 in response to Canada Post’s refusal to continue the collective bargaining process for the purpose of achieving a new collective agreement. The main unresolved issues were: health and safety, staffing, sick leave and short-term disability, wages, pensions and benefits, job creation and service expansion.

Initially, CUPW members conducted rotating strikes beginning in Winnipeg, as a means of informing the public of the reasons for the impasse in collective bargaining while at the same time minimizing disruption of service.

When Federal Labour Minister, Lisa Raitt, raised concerns about the economic impact of the rotating strikes, CUPW offered to suspend strike action on June 10th and resume collective bargaining provided Canada Post would agree to reinstate the terms of the collective agreement until a new agreement was reached. Canada Post rejected this offer and announced on June 13 that CUPW members would be locked out on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On June 15 Canada Post announced a total lockout informing the public that “all mail processing plants and letter carrier depots are closed and all facilities have been secured. No new mail will be accepted.” Although it was the employer, not the union, that disrupted

service to the public, the Conservative government is threatening back-to-work legislation and settlement of the dispute by arbitration – actions that will effectively punish the workers for actions taken by their employer.

Canada Post’s refusal to negotiate at the bargaining table and the Harper government’s derailing of the collective bargaining process will hurt all Canadians.

Canada Post is undermining the working conditions of postal workers and degrading postal services for Canadian citizens. Most Canadians know the difficulties and hazards faced by both outside and inside postal workers. Letter carriers deliver our mail, rain or shine. They contend with 40 below weather, heavy snow and slippery sidewalks. It is not uncommon for letter carriers to encounter vicious dogs and other dangers. In recent years, postal workers have been saddled with bigger bundles and more weight and higher production quotas. This has added to the hazards of work and increased injuries.

Many Canadians are dependent on the door-to-door delivery service that Canada Post workers provide. This is especially the case in rural areas and for seniors and individuals with mobility issues living in urban areas.



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Canada Post's anti-union agenda, and the Harper government's tacit support for it, concern all Canadians who believe that workers should be treated fairly and postal services improved, not degraded. Since CUPW members' last national job action in 1997, Canada Post has made \$1.7 billion in profits. Clearly, there is room to negotiate a collective agreement that works for both Canada Post and its workers.

CUPW proposed measures to improve postal services, including the expansion of door-to-door delivery, provision of banking and financial services (which would be particularly beneficial in remote locations) and an increase in job opportunities for young people coming into the labour market. Canada Post rejected these innovative proposals and instead proposed to reduce worker salaries and benefits as well as service to the public. They also want to scale back wages by paying new workers 30 per cent less than existing workers; reduce employee and retiree benefits, pensions and sick leave provisions; and weaken job security.

Canada Post's strategy and the Harper government's support for it suggest an alarming parallel to the recent attacks on public sector workers in Wisconsin and other states. The U.S. agenda of drastic cuts to the public service, cutting public sector wages and contracting out public sector jobs while undermining public sector unions will not benefit ordinary people, in the U.S. or in Canada. Most of us rely on the quality services provided by these workers, which we get at far lower cost than comparable services bought from private firms.

Public sector unions also contribute in important ways to the quality of life we value. Fair wages, job security and other advantages bargained by public sector workers help maintain the community standards that benefit all workers by slowing the "race to the bottom" that leads to low wages in precarious jobs with few benefits. Public sector unions also offer a bulwark against declining

union density. Overall, less than 32 percent of Canadian workers are unionized, but 71 percent of public sector workers are union members. Higher unionization is good for all Canadians, even those not lucky enough to be union members. Recent studies show conclusively that countries with higher unionization enjoy more social equality, better health, fewer social problems, more trust, and a higher quality of life. Public sector unions protect the good life that we in Canada enjoy.

Canadians want and deserve good jobs with decent wages and working conditions. Regressive changes to collective agreements undermine those objectives. A two-tier wage structure that would pay new employees 30 per cent less to do the same job as their co-workers, with no chance at comparable wage for seven years, is unfair. Reducing the number of good paying jobs and scaling back benefits makes workers more vulnerable and will lower community standards and weaken the economy.

Like the thousands of Manitobans who gathered in solidarity with postal workers in Winnipeg on June 16th the members of the Brandon and District Labour Council fully support CUPW members in their efforts to get a better agreement and better postal services for all Canadians. We believe that these are goals that all Canadians can support.

Eliminating good jobs and reducing the quality of services provided by crown corporations is not in Canada's best interest. And undermining the collective bargaining process by legislating workers to return to work shows disregard for worker rights.

The Conservative government must take back-to-work legislation off the table and order Canada Post management to negotiate a collective agreement that addresses the concerns of postal workers and improves the quality of services to citizens.

Jan Chaboyer is President of the Brandon & District Labour Council.



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