

National postal workers' strike enters second week

By Nate Smelle

With the national strike by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers now in its second week, negotiations continue with the support of a special mediator. Despite efforts to resolve the ongoing labour dispute, the two sides remain far apart on key issues, including changes to the delivery model and worker benefits. The strike, which began on Nov. 14, has significantly disrupted Canada Post services across the country. In a statement issued on Nov. 25, Canada Post acknowledged the widespread impact of the strike, with many post offices closed and mail and parcels left undelivered. The corporation warned that the longer the strike continues, the harder it will be to resume normal operations, particularly as the holiday shopping season ramps up. "The longer this strike continues, the greater the impact will be when services resume and we work to stabilize operations," the statement read. "Processing and delivery will be challenged due to the shutdown of the network, and customers should expect delays. We understand the impact on our customers. Unfortunately, we now enter the biggest online holiday shopping week of the year with the postal system shut down for the millions of Canadians and businesses who rely on it. Negotiations between the two parties have been ongoing since the strike began. Canada Post maintains that it is focused on changing to its delivery model, and aiming to introduce weekend services and more flexible staffing during the week to meet the growing demands of e-commerce. However, CUPW, which represents both urban and rural mail carriers, remains steadfast in its demand for improved working conditions, fair wages, and expanded public services. Citing Canada Post's recently released financial report for the third quarter of 2024, CUPW's national president Jan Simpson addressed the state of their employer's finances in a statement issued Monday, Nov. 25. In the statement, Simpson emphasized that Canada Post's financial difficulties, including a reported loss of \$313 million in the third quarter of 2024, must not come at the expense of workers' rights. "Canada Post is a public service. It is not a private, for-profit operation. Postal workers deliver to every address in the country no matter how remote. We go places the private sector won't go because profit not service is their bottom line. While the competition puts corporate profit over everything else, we're proud to offer services to everyone. In the past week, she said the Union has heard many stories about just how much people and communities rely on our public postal service. She also pointed out that throughout much of the country, none of their competitors can match their service quality, coverage, or our prices. "Postal workers have every reason to be proud of the work they do," stated Simpson. Simpson also criticized Canada Post for using the financial report to justify cuts to worker benefits and rights. "The corporation says it is running out of cash. But remember, Canada Post has invested hundreds of millions of dollars into new equipment, new vehicles, and a new parcel processing centre in recent years," she said. "Workers can't be made to pay for the corporation's current financial condition. CUPW has proposed expanding postal services to include postal banking and wellness check-ins services that could generate new revenue for the corporation. These proposals, Simpson argues, are key to Canada Post's long-term viability, but have been largely ignored by the employer. Meanwhile, Canada Post has claimed that some of CUPW's demands, particularly those regarding wages and benefits, could hinder the corporation's ability to adapt to the changing postal landscape, especially the growing e-commerce sector. In its Nov. 25 statement, the company reiterated its goal to build a "path forward" that would ensure Canada Post's continued service to Canadians in this new environment. However, CUPW members argue that the company's push for "flexibility" in staffing is a cover for reducing wages and benefits. In a statement provided to Bancroft This Week on Sunday, Nov. 24, CUPW called out Canada Post for trying to create a "second-class workforce" by hiring lower-wage, part-time workers. "While Canada Post is doing everything it can to portray itself as fair and reasonable, the reality is that this round of bargaining has been an all-out attack on the rights and benefits postal workers have fought for decades to achieve," the statement from the Union declared. "While talks continued this weekend, Canada Post was also busy laying off striking workers and it still hasn't reinstated benefits and disability programs for workers. Much of the discussions this weekend focused on protecting our bargaining units' work. Canada Post says it wants flexibility, but what it really wants is the flexibility to hire lower-wage, part-time workers, reduce worker benefits, and create a second-class workforce. We all know that once workers lose rights, it's incredibly hard to get them back. This is not how a Crown corporation should treat its workers. Canada Post should be setting the standard, not engaging in a race to the bottom. As the strike continues, the impact on Canadians is becoming more pronounced, with delays in mail and parcel deliveries expected to worsen, particularly during the critical holiday shopping period. Although the special mediator is working to facilitate progress, it remains uncertain when a resolution will be reached, or how long the strike will continue. Until then, both customers and workers face uncertainty as the national postal system wrestles with the issues at the bargaining table.