

# Socialist Worker

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## SUPPORT POSTAL WORKERS!

**In the first major battle against the Harper majority government, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW, representing 50,000 workers across Canada and Quebec) have gone on strike. CUPW members voted almost 95 per cent in favour of strike action. Here are five reasons why solidarity needs to receive an equally strong mandate.**

### 1) POSTAL WORKERS ARE UNDER ATTACK

In its drive to make work more “modern” and “efficient” (i.e. profitable), Canada Post Corporation is trying to impose work conditions that threaten the health and safety of its workers. According to Bob Tyre, president of the Winnipeg local:

“You’re walking with different shapes and sizes balanced in your arm, with another in your hand. It obscures your feet. You can’t see where you’re walking, and you’re up and down stairs all day. You have to hold your arm rigid and balance the load while you’re walking. It’s caused a lot of slip and fall injuries, a lot of shoulder, arm, and neck pain.”

Now Canada Post is trying to roll back the compensation for this dangerous work. According to CUPW president Denis Lemelin:

“The Corporation wants to pay new employees 30 per cent less. It wants to reduce their benefits, weaken their job security and provide an inferior pension. It also wants to attack retiree benefits and sick leave, and turn back the clock on many other contract provisions.”

An injury to one is an injury to all. Out of basic solidarity, we need to support the postal workers.



### 2) POSTAL WORKERS ARE STANDING UP FOR GOOD SERVICES

The mainstream media is trying to pit postal workers against those who depend on postal service. But it’s Canada Post Corporation that has been cutting services, closing offices and trying to privatize postal services; former-CEO Moya Greene left Canada Post to continue pushing privatization on Royal Mail in Britain.

Meanwhile, CUPW has a history of linking good jobs with good services. CUPW has organized against the closure of rural post offices, and has led unionization drives for rural and suburban mail carriers. These initiatives both protect workers and expand services, which is good for everyone who uses Canada Post.

During this round of negotiations, CUPW wants to regularize temporary employees and increase the number of full-time workers, while increasing door-to-door delivery and staffing at postal outlets. If we want a strong public postal service, we need to support those who provide it.

### 3) THIS IS PART OF THE AUSTERITY AGENDA

Despite making profits for the past 16 years (including \$281 million in 2009), and having the highest paid public service bureaucrat in Canada, Canada Post Corporation is trying to blame workers. This is part of a broader austerity agenda to make ordinary people pay for the economic crisis they did not create.

After arguing for more than a generation that government should have no role in society—in order to justify cuts to social services—governments briefly changed their tune, responding to the economic crisis by bailing out banks and corporations with billions of dollars of public funds. Now that there’s a deficit, governments are balancing their books on the backs of working people, by imposing an austerity agenda, and by blaming workers for both the crisis and the deficit.

As Lynn Bue, CUPW’s 2nd national vice-president stated, “This is a fight against an ideology from the government, from banks, that big businesses

should make more, and people should live on poverty wages.”

Prime Minister Stephen Harper promoted the austerity agenda at last year’s G20 Summit in Toronto. When the CUPW strike was announced, Harper was in Greece, giving his support to its brutal austerity regime—an agenda he wants to impose here. A defeat for CUPW will be a victory for Harper and his corporate backers across the country, but a victory for CUPW will build unity and confidence for others to resist the austerity agenda. This is a fight for all of us.

### 4) POSTAL WORKERS STOOD UP FOR US. NOW IT’S TIME TO STAND UP FOR THEM

Postal workers have a long history of standing up for women’s rights, civil liberties, peace and justice. This year is the 30th anniversary of CUPW’s strike for paid maternity leave. Following the lead of the Common Front of public sector workers in Quebec, postal workers struck for 42 days in 1981 and became the first federal union to win paid maternity leave—encouraging others to demand this basic right.

CUPW was the first Canadian union to boycott South African Apartheid, was the first to join the BDS campaign against Israeli Apartheid, and is organizing mail for the Canada/Quebec Boat to Gaza. CUPW has also helped oppose secret trials in Canada, and the war in Afghanistan.

More broadly, the labour movement has been central to the fight for Medicare and abortion rights, and against war and austerity. Now it’s time for all of us to show our solidarity in return.

# Continue the orange wave, Take the surge to the streets!

## 5) THIS STRIKE COULD TRIGGER A BROADER FIGHT BACK AGAINST THE HARPER AGENDA

There is tremendous ideological resistance to the Harper agenda: from majority support for Medicare, abortion rights and war resisters to majority opposition to the war on Afghanistan, fighter jets and corporate tax cuts.

The federal election on May 2 saw these sentiments translate into political resistance, as people across Canada and Quebec gave a historic mandate to the NDP opposition, marking a surge for the left from coast to coast to coast. But with a Harper majority, the Official Opposition can't win on its own in Parliament: it needs opposition in the streets and workplaces.

The postal strike offers the chance to connect the "orange wave" of political resistance to economic resistance against the Harper agenda. This can lay the foundation for future struggles, as developments in Egypt show.

In 2006—after years of opposition to occupations in Palestine and Iraq, and the beginnings of opposition to dictator Hosni Mubarak—women textile workers in Mahalla, Egypt went on strike,

triggering a strike wave that connected political opposition with economic resistance. This strike wave planted the seeds for the Egyptian Revolution that blossomed early this year: further strikes by workers in Mahalla and elsewhere finally drove Mubarak from power, and Egyptian workers are continuing the revolution by organizing independent trade unions and spreading strikes for better conditions.

People across Canada and Quebec have been inspired by resistance from Egypt to Wisconsin, and hoped for similar resistance here. Ten thousand mobilized in Hamilton on January 26; 75,000 in Montreal on March 20; 10,000 more in Toronto on April 9; and then over 4.5 million across the country voted for the NDP on May 2.

Now we have the chance to have our own Mahalla, a strike that can build from previous struggles, deepen solidarity and strength across Canada and Quebec, and take opposition to Harper to a whole new level.

### SUPPORT POSTIES!

\* Visit a picket line at a post office near you. Let your local postal workers know you support their strike.

\* Write a letter to the editor of your local paper explaining why you support postal workers.

\* Download solidarity posters to put in your window, on your mailbox or on street posts in your neighbourhood. Ask your neighbours to do the same. Visit <http://supportpostalworkers.wordpress.com/>.

\* Download a solidarity petition to generate support for postal workers. Ask your neighbours, friends, co-workers and family to sign it. Fax the signatures to CUPW and deliver the signed petitions to the nearest NDP MP. Visit <http://supportpostalworkers.wordpress.com/>.

\* Send solidarity messages and strike support funds to CUPW from your local trade union, student union, community organization or faith group.

\* Get regular updates online: [www.cupw.ca](http://www.cupw.ca). Follow @People4Posties on Twitter. Show your solidarity on Facebook: <http://on.fb.me/CUPWSol>.

## CUPW Timeline

**1981:** CUPW strikes for 42 days and wins paid maternity leave

**1986:** CUPW launches campaign against rural postal office closures

**1994:** CUPW is part of international campaign that helps strikers South African workers defeat Apartheid

**2003:** CUPW joins mass protests that stop Canada's majority government from sending troops to Iraq

**2008:** CUPW becomes first major union in North America to join BDS campaign against Israeli Apartheid

**2011:** CUPW strikes to protect public postal service and stop concessions that blame workers for the economic crisis

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**LETTER TO HARPER:**  
**WE**  
**SUPPORT**  
**POSTAL WORKERS!**

- \* strong public postal service
- \* healthy employees with decent pay
- \* no scapegoating workers for economic crisis

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