



The Brief

Vol. 2 No. 10

A project of the NB Media Co-op

July - August 2011

nbmediacoop.org

Postal workers back to work but not giving up the fight



Fredericton and Oromocto postal workers joined postal workers in nine other locations across Canada on a rotating strike one day before the Crown corporation instituted a lock-out on June 14th. The federal government has since enacted back-to-work legislation despite opposition from the NDP. Postal workers voted overwhelmingly to strike in response to attempts to implement a two-tier wage system, reduced benefits, an inferior pension and weaker job security. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

by TRACY GLYNN

On the morning of June 14th, letter carriers in Fredericton tried to deliver mail but were quickly stopped by their employer, Canada Post Corporation. Canada Post had started a nation-wide lock-out after 12 days of rotating strikes at postal facilities across the country. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) drew attention to the fact that Canada Post was breaking the law by refusing to deliver mail.

The Harper government swiftly introduced Bill C-6, which would remove the rights of the postal workers to strike and forced them to return to work with a wage increase lower than the final offer made by the employer. Canada Post's final offer included a 7.7% wage increase over 4 years while the imposed settlement included a 7.25% wage increase over the same period of time. After a marathon debate in Parliament that started June 24th and ended June 26th, the Bill passed and postal workers returned to work on June 27th. Postal workers in St. John's chanted, "So-So, So, Solidarity!" as they returned to work.

Postal workers have been in a legal strike position since

maternity leave, were cuts to postal workers' extended health care plan, replacement of their sick leave plan with an inferior short-term disability plan contracted out to Manulife and the adoption of an unsafe delivery procedure involving longer routes and the transport of double bundles.

Canada Post has one of the highest injury rates of any workforce in Canada with over 9,000 CUPW members reporting injuries last year. "With over 20,000 letter carriers out in the community every day, and tens of thousands of other workers doing repetitive work inside, it is no surprise that these injury rates are so high. This is a union that needs its sick time," stresses Palecek.

Robin Vose, President of the Faculty Association for the University of St. Thomas (FAUST), in a letter to Denis Lemelin, President of CUPW, states, "We were shocked to learn that Canada Post is proposing to cut 7000 jobs in order to reduce their payroll. This means that the remaining workers will be expected to do more with less, which has implications for their health and safety, as well as the quality of service. We are also concerned that Canada Post is demanding lower rates for current temporary employees and fewer benefits for new hires. This is deplorable, for it targets the corporation's most

May 24th when union members handed Canada Post their strongest strike mandate in history. The vote, which had the largest turn out in the union's history, resulted in 94.5% voting in favour of strike action. Workers voted to strike against Canada Post's proposals to pay new workers 30 per cent less and give them reduced benefits, an inferior pension and weaker job security.

Mike Palecek, recording secretary of the Vancouver local of CUPW points out in *Fightback* on May 25th that, "The two-tiered system is an old trick used by employers to divide and conquer the workforce.

In grocery stores across Canada, two-tiered wage plans, brought in throughout the 1990s, led to the steady erosion of wages and benefits for all workers. Today, the grocery stores are full of people making poverty level wages. The bosses at Canada Post have the same plan in mind."

Also rejected by CUPW, a union that brought us

vulnerable workers. We support CUPW's vision for the future of the public postal service: not a corporation preoccupied with profit and a skeleton workforce, but that of a 'A Modern Post Powered by People'."

Postal workers point out that Canada Post, a Crown corporation, has been profitable for the last 16 years, garnering a net profit of \$281 million in 2009, its last reported year.

The newly formed Student Worker Action Coalition in Fredericton are supporting CUPW in their struggle against Canada Post and the larger austerity measures being forced upon workers and students. Coalition members joined the picket line on June 12th at 11:00pm when postal workers in Fredericton began their 24-hour strike. The coalition hopes to combat the anti-worker, anti-union misinformation being promulgated by mainstream media outlets and Canada Post.

In their call to support striking postal workers, the coalition states, "The willingness to stand up against austerity and demand the need for strong unions is critical for our entire society as income gaps widen and social services are cut and eliminated. The postal workers are standing up and fighting for themselves, for us, and for the future generations of workers, students, and all who suffer under neoliberal capitalism's brutal system. We hope to stand with them, and that you'll join us."

On June 21st, almost 200 people gathered at MP's offices in Fredericton, Miramichi, Moncton and Campbellton. In Fredericton, postal workers and their allies occupied the office of their MP, Keith Ashfield, for almost two hours to send a clear message against back-to-work legislation.

Fredericton postal workers returned to their MP's office on the morning of June 22nd to find it closed. "We wanted to make sure that our MP knew our views before he voted for a legislation—a legislation that will affect our livelihoods and how we go to work everyday. The legislation is denying our collective bargaining rights and the right to strike. We left peacefully yesterday with the intention of coming back today so we could have the opportunity to talk to our MP and this is what we are met with— a sign on the MP's doors that says closed due to staff shortages. This is what democracy looks like today in Canada. When there is civil disobedience that challenges the government, we are met with closed, locked doors. This is the Harper Government today," said Ruth Breen, spokesperson for Fredericton and Oromocto's CUPW Strike Committee outside the closed MP's office.

On June 23rd, over 100 locked-out postal workers and their supporters marched against back-to-work legislation through the streets of downtown Fredericton.

"Our struggle will set the tone for the many fights that will inevitably rise against the new Harper majority government. A defeat would prepare the way for a series of attacks against the broader public sector. A victory would send Stephen Harper's government a powerful message that the labour movement will not be pushed around," says Palecek, who was carried out of his Conservative MP's office in Vancouver by police on June 20th.

Understanding Vancouver's “hockey riot”

by DAVE ZIRIN

How do we understand the riots that exploded in Vancouver after the beloved Canucks lost the Stanley Cup Finals? How do we understand the burning cars, broken glass, and injuries that stand as an enduring coda of their game-seven defeat at the hands of the visiting Boston Bruins?

Having communicated with several dozen people in "the most livable city in the world" I think I have a modest perspective on why the Canucks 4-0 loss was followed by fire.

One thing was made abundantly clear to me, please disregard the "analysis" of TSN's Bob McKenzie aka "The Hockey Insider" who blamed "Left wing loons" for the rubble. McKenzie tweeted that he was sure responsibility lay with "anarchists and some organized extremists... many of the same people and groups who orchestrated riots in Toronto last summer at the G8."

This is unsupported and profoundly irresponsible garbage with no basis in fact.

Let's also dispense with the fiction that this was the fault of "Canuck fans." The fans on the whole were actually in fine form after the game. They gave Conn Smythe winner, Bruin goalie Tim Thomas, a standing ovation and also rose and cheered for every Bruin from British Columbia. Of the millions of Canuck supporters, this was a miniscule mob. As Shiema Ali of Vancouver wrote to me, "I live in

Vancouver and left the downtown core just before the game started. There were tons of people coming into the city who were already drunk and rowdy (in a bad way) – win or lose those people (who I don't believe were true Canucks fans but people just sportin' the gear) were ready to riot."

What happened after the game was neither in the spirit of people at the arena nor the spirit of those who bravely protested the G8. As activist and hockey fan Derrick O'Keefe said to me, "Sometimes a riot is the 'language of the unheard,' in the words of Martin Luther King Jr. But sometimes a riot is just an expression of young male stupidity and violence – this was the case last night in Vancouver."

Another person said to me, "There were lots of [LGBTQ people] down there, some got roughed up, some dental care needed. There are also attempts to pin this on 'Black Bloc' and references to 'protesters.' There are lots of frustrated young men for sure lashing out at authority, but no analysis of what might be spurring this."

I did receive this incisive bit of analysis from Dru Oja Day, an editor at the Media Co-op. "If you ask people to pour all of their emotions and anger into a game, then a major event (Montrealers have rioted after first round game 7 wins!) is going to occasion some outbursts. Hockey commentators like Hockey Nights' Don Cherry are constantly associating hockey with the troops overseas (he went to Afghanistan and fired a live shell, for chrissakes) and promote fighting and big open ice hits. We shouldn't be surprised."

John Ward-Leighton also pointed out on his blog the role that

the liquor lobby placed in turned an entire area around the arena into a branded "Entertainment Zone" larded with bars and free-flowing liquor.

"It was clear that a lot of the participants in last night's riot and looting were at the very least impaired and looking for trouble," said Ward-Leighton. "This 'zone' has nothing to do with entertainment, and much to do with the almost criminal profit taking of the proprietors of the establishments who far from 'serving it right,' pour drunken idiots into the streets nightly to brawl and drive drunk.... The fault for last night's idiocy was not about losing a hockey game or the police response, the bomb had its fuse lit with the myth that the only way you can have fun is to get stinking drunk."

And yet the action – or inaction of the police is garnering attention as well. Alex Kerner, a law student and activist said to me:

"How the police dealt with this riot compared to the G20 [mass arrest] in Toronto last summer is instructive. While the destruction of police cars, property and lighting of fires was much more extensive this time, the police tended to focus only on those who committed the acts of vandalism. Some tear gas... (continued on page 2)

[visit nbmediacoop.org!](http://nbmediacoop.org)