

The forces behind the postal strike

by David Camfield

The struggle between the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and Canada Post management is of vital importance to students and all working people.

If the only papers you read are the *Globe and Mail* or the *Star*, let alone the *Sun* (or the Bethune College *Lexicon*, now York's *Sun* imitator), you would think that postal workers were callous and greedy monsters.

One thing is clear from the mainline media reporting of this strike: this is not ordinary labour dispute. That, at least, is accurate, for this strike is not only between CUPW's 46,000 members and their tyrannical anti-union employer Canada Post.

Behind Canada Post is Brian Mulroney's highly unpopular Tory government which has brought in the GST, underfunded health care and education, attacked women's rights, kindled racism, taken part in the imperialist slaughter against Iraq and generally sought to implement the agenda of big business.

On the other side is CUPW, traditionally one of the best-organized sections of the Canadian working class. CUPW has in many respects led the way for the labour movement since its formation out of an illegal strike in 1965, which helped to win union rights for public sector workers.

In 1978 CUPW defied the Liberal government's wage controls and strike-breaking legislation, for which several of its leaders were jailed. In 1981 the union won paid maternity leave. It has taken positions that are pro-choice, pro-gay rights, anti-racist and pro-workers' control of the workplace.

The fighting spirit of CUPW and its values of solidarity and social justice are just what the Tories hate.

Since the 1987 postal strike, the government has been preparing for another round in its battle to defeat CUPW. Such a defeat would send a signal to corporate leaders that



the Tories are truly capable of carrying through on their pledges to shift the balance of power in Canadian society further towards big business.

There are several immediate issues in dispute. Since postal workers have not had a raise for almost three years, CUPW is trying to make up for has been lost to inflation. CUPW is also fighting for job security and against the severe discipline, harassment and intimidation that characterizes Canada Post

as an employer.

Part of the Tory assault on social services has been a program of cuts and privatization at the post office. This has been a major issue in the current strike, as CUPW attempts to improve postal service for the public.

Canada Post has closed 1153 post offices and plans to close all 5995 urban and rural public post offices by 1996. This will mean the loss of 14,000 CUPW jobs. CUPW

opposes post office closures and privatization.

In the past, all households in communities of 2000 or more received home delivery. Thanks to the Tories, 404,822 households must pick up their mail and by 1994 that number will climb to 1,200,000. CUPW is

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seeking to expand home delivery, thereby improving postal service and creating hundreds of jobs.

CUPW's demands are so justifiable that the Tories knew they had to further reduce the union's popularity. Although CUPW offered from the beginning to deliver social assistance cheques for free, the Tories chose a strategy of setting up ineffective dispersed mail pick-up and forced pensioners to wait in line in the sweltering heat.

If CUPW wins even a few of its demands and avoids defeat in the face of the victimization of its activists and the Tories' use of draconian court injunctions, it will strengthen the ability of all workers to make gains. It should also send a signal to students and everyone who has suffered at the hands of the Tories that militant mass action can get results.

David Camfield is an undergraduate Arts student at York. He is a member of the York International Socialists.

Unreformed

Dear editor,
In the August 28 issue of *Excalibur*, Bob Pieroway Jr. of the North York Reform Party stated that he was "a bit disappointed" that my reply (July 24) to his attack (June 26) on my article "The Reform Party's nasty secrets" (May 29) "does not provide better sport."

I am no enemy of humour, but I find little to laugh about when it comes to the Reform Party, a racist, sexist, "true conservative" organization. My exchange of letter with the Reform Party in *Excalibur* during the summer confirms that the party is trying hard to evade the real substance and implications of its right-wing policies in order to appear a respectable electoral contender.

Mr. Pieroway's Aug. 28 letter is no exception. He tries to defend the Reform Party from the charge of racism by objecting that the Reform Party does not oppose multiculturalism per se, only "the federal government's current selective and highly political means of promoting it." However, I would suggest that the Reform Party's "alternative multiculturalism" is in fact an attack on cultural diversity and the limited benefits that various groups have obtained from official multiculturalism.

The Reform Party's official policy is to "end funding of the multiculturalism program." It "supports the responsibility of the state to promote, preserve, and enhance the national culture," into which "ethnic cultures" should "integrate." The party opposes "hyphenated Canadianism" and "any immigration policy... designed to radically or suddenly alter the ethnic makeup of Canada."

The concept of a "national culture"

Letters

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which excludes "hyphenated Canadianism" is extremely ethnocentric. An "unhyphenated Canadian" does not exist — but there are First Nations peoples, Quebecois (both those born in Quebec and those of African or Asian descent), and those (of diverse origins) who live in English Canada.

For the Reform Party, "Canadians" seem to be English-speaking whites. All others are merely "hyphenated Canadians" who may choose to preserve their "cultural background" but will not receive state funding assistance. This "free enterprise multiculturalism" leaves non-"Canadians" with few resources to face the pressure to adopt the dominant W.A.S.P.-derived culture.

As is the case with all "free enterprise" policies, there is little real freedom in the Reform Party's multicultural policy — or in any of its other policies for a "new Canada."

David Camfield
Member of York International Socialists

Someone's enjoying his orientation

Dear editor,
I am writing in regards to your editorial in your August 28 edition. In it you comment on how orientation here at York is lacking in imagination and dwells on tradition. Well let me just tell you that schools are built on tradition and as far as imagination goes, well I call a wagon ride and parade around campus pretty original.

As a second-year Bethune College student I can remember my frosh year very well, and I can tell you that I had the time of my life. I met tons of new and unique people, met various administrative staff and professors and had a great time doing it. You say that the residence students were "force-marched from beerfest to

danceathon" and "subjected to mandatory and embarrassing initiation rites," well I know for a fact that no one at Bethune was forced to do anything. Actually I went to these events and I'll tell you that I had a damn good time. As for being treated like a child, I believe anyone given the opportunity to experience orientation would tell you that that's not true. I think being told that I couldn't take part in activities like these or these activities not being available would make me feel more like an infant.

You say that this can be a big culture shock to some students, well my family now live in Iqaluit N.W.T. where the culture is totally foreign to most people, and I feel safe to say that my friends up there would have no problem adjusting to this new "home."

You say that colleges don't really try to reach out to commuters. I can tell you, because I am on the Bethune College athletic council, that my council makes a serious commitment to contact commuter students. What, you ask? Drop by Bethune athletics room and see.

Basically if it wasn't for the kind of orientation I took part in at Bethune I probably would not of [sic] met the friends I did and experience the fun I had. Orientation a waste of money? NOT!

Sincerely,
Ian Sanderson

Pissed at parking

This letter is addressed to Bill Farr, vice president of finance and administration for York University.

Dear Mr. Farr,
I am a third year visual arts major here at York. I am writing regarding the

50+ percent hike to the unreserved parking pass for the 1991-92 school year. As a self-supporting student, I find the increase unfair, and on my current budget virtually impossible. I live in a rural community north of the campus and have no other choice but to take an automobile.

Apparently, the money gained from the increase will go towards a multi-level parking facility. I find it unfair that as one of the people most affected by this plan, my only means of finding out the reason for the increase was through telephone inquiries made to the staff at parking and security.

As of yet I haven't seen or heard of any concrete steps taken towards materializing this plan. It is easy for me to assume that the facility will be finished long after I have graduated. However, I don't feel that construction time is the issue. The idea of a multi-level parking facility is a bandaid solution to a much greater problem. The problem being: too many students take cars. 75 percent of students at York use cars as a means of transportation (*Excalibur*). Administration should encourage other means of transportation to the campus.

Given the multi-level parking facility would take at least five years to conceive of and build, why not put the effort into getting a subway link to York. A subway link would be the right solution to a problem that will affect the university long into its future. I feel that solving problems is not on York University's agenda. Administration realizes that they don't make a buck on people who ride public transit. York University is a hotbed of bureaucratic opportunism.

On behalf of York University students, I would like to see some more information about this proposed facility.

John Di Cesare