

This is the main reason why they want articles on job security in their contract.

The machinery could also mean a reduction in Postal Workers classifications. The Post Office tried to do this in 1974 when it said that all workers operating coding suites would be given a new classification P.O. 1 rather than a P.O. 4.

This would have meant a loss of \$.54 per hour in wages. This unilateral Post Office declaration plunged the Post Office into a 16 day strike before the coder job description was enlarged and their salary made equivalent to a manual sorter.

In order to stop any repetition of these moves by the Post Office the Union wants job classification protections in its contract.

"The stage has been set with a large, militant and highly visible union matched against the federal government."

The union also believes that the introduction of automation should bring some positive benefit to the workers in the industry automated. Instead automation is being carried out at the expense of the worker and used solely for the maximization of profits.

The union wants to be able to gain from automation by receiving better wages and a reduced work week at no loss in pay.

But before these protections can really mean anything, the government will have to either change the Post Office into a Crown Corporation under the Canada Labour Code or else amend the PSSRA to remove the restrictive clauses.

While automation and the restriction in the law have placed a heavy burden on this year's negotiations there are other factors that make the struggle between the Post Office and the CUPW more important for the future of labour relations not only in the Post Office but in the country.

Canada's Labour Climate

The labour climate in Canada has also led to a great deal of tension in this year's negotiations. The government is dusting off many tactics which it hasn't touched in years in an attempt to defeat the Postal Workers.

The Postal Workers struggle could set important precedents for the rest of the Public Service and organized labour as a whole.

The stage has been set with a large, militant and highly visible union matched against the federal government.

Because of the federal government's attempts to introduce and maintain certain ideas, it must make a strong stand in front of the public. It must show the public that it is in control even at the cost of the Postal Workers justifiable demands.

With the rampant inflation in the country the federal government is being pressured to show restraint. It is carrying out this policy on its workers after taking care of itself with a raise which is more than a Postal Worker's total salary.

Wage increases in the public service tend to do two things. They are used as a measuring stick for other public service unions and for workers in the private sector. For this reason the government must make sure that Postal Workers do not receive a large wage increase.

The issue of automation, while it has been introduced into some parts of the private sector has not been as noticeable before. The Post Office is the first highly visible service, with a large work force being automated. For this reason the government must define exactly what the relationship between workers and automation must be. We are beginning to see, by the government's present attitude, that automation is not meant to benefit workers.

If CUPW wins the right to negotiate automation and gains some good protections from the effects of automation in its contract then workers in both

the public and private sectors will start asking for the same thing.

The Postal Workers demands for full job security in the face of the present heavy unemployment could also create a precedent for Canadian working people, but it is undoubtedly contrary to the government's unemployment policy.

In order to defeat the union the

The Postmaster General has also tried to split the union by appealing directly to the membership. He has promised many things to the Postal Workers in public that his negotiating team steadfastly refuses to give CUPW at the bargaining table. It also refuses to put any of Mackasey's promises in the collective agreement where it counts.

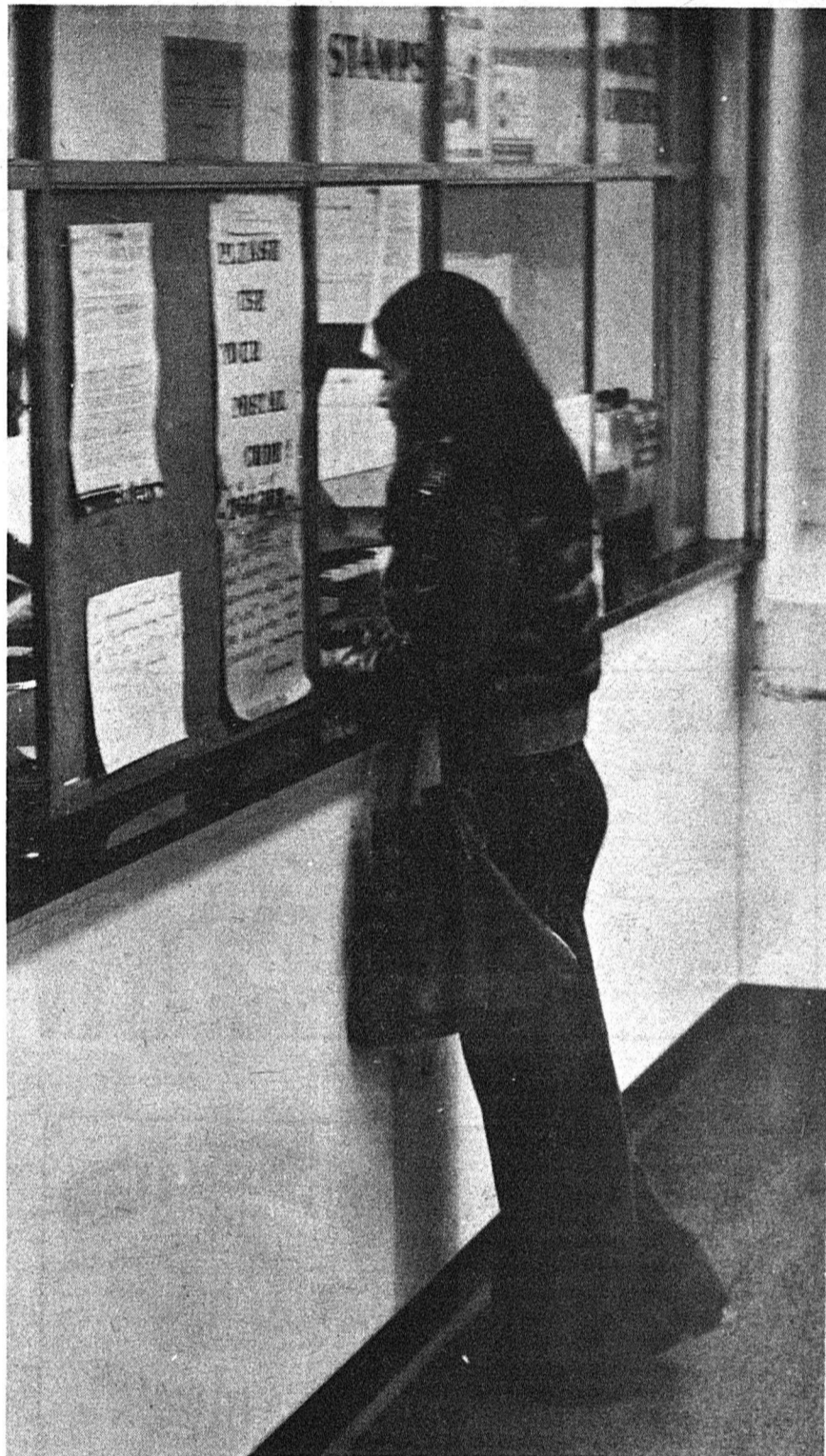


photo by Bob Austin

The post office in Athabasca Hall, many students' link with the outer world.

government, through the Postmaster General, Bryce Mackasey, has mounted an increasingly bitter attack on the union's leadership in an attempt to divide it from the membership.

However, the union's membership fully supports its leadership. The leadership is only carrying out the policies and mandates passed by the membership. All contract demands come from membership wage and contract committees. The demands are then collected and presented to the membership for ratification. The membership approved of the demands by an 87.4 per cent vote.

In some cases the confrontation takes an even more direct route as in Montreal where the Post Office provoked a situation in order to fire or give long term suspensions to more than 80 Postal Workers, most of them union officials and give out one day suspensions to more than 1,000 Postal Workers.

This was done to deprive one of the strongest CUPW locals of its leadership and to try to split the union along English-French lines.

Mackasey has threatened to close down the Post Office for three months in an attempt to intimidate the workers. This threat though is no more than a bluff as the cost to the country's economy would be enormous.

But whatever happens the confrontation between CUPW and the federal government promises to be long and bitter. The union believes in its demands and must attain them this year. The government is committed to seeing the union gets nothing.

Whatever the outcome of the struggle the Post Office is not likely to be peaceful in the years to come. The memories of the government's attacks on Postal Workers this year will remain.

And as long as the government persists in its belief that it can get what it wants by trampling workers there will always be turmoil because the workers resistance will take other forms.

The Post Office and government must wake up to the realization that Postal Workers' need to be treated as human beings and not just another piece of machinery.

Why?

Now the government is forcing private mailers to perform these tasks at the expense of Postal Worker's jobs.

The Post Office is increasing its use of private sub-contract post offices in smaller centres. These Post Offices operate at the expense of postal substations run by the government with unionized employees.

This practice could also lead to the further erosion of Postal Workers jobs. As the Post Office opens the large automated plants it consolidates smaller Post Offices in the area. The Post Offices consolidated are left with only a small packet service which is exactly the job the Post Office is contracting out.

The Post Office allows a system of private mail carriers to operate in violation of the monopoly provisions of the Post Office Act. Corporate and communications companies using these systems are mostly immune from postal rates. These companies operate at the expense of the taxpayer who must support the Post Office's many non-profitable operations.

The introduction of automated technology will mean many things to Postal Workers. The primary result will be a reduction in the workforce. While the union knows this is inevitable it wants to see it done through attrition rather than mass layoffs.

"This year can be traced to two problems: relations and the struggle over job security."