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Public Services and Procurement Minister Carla Qualtrough announced on January 24 what she called "the government's vision for renewal at Canada Post." Minister Qualtrough declared on behalf of the government that its "new vision is that of a renewed Canada Post that will provide high quality service at a reasonable price to Canadians no matter where they live." The Minister did not elaborate the meaning of this "new vision" and "renewed Canada Post." Notable as well was her refusal to refer to any of the reports or thousands of views submitted by Canadians on what they would like to see with a renewed Canada Post. Nor did she mention the problems postal workers have raised within their struggle to defend their working conditions against the corporation's demands for cutbacks, elimination of postal services, and attacks on their wages and benefits.



The Minister announced that Canada Post's program to eliminate home delivery and replace it with community mailboxes will be "terminated effective immediately." However, where community mailboxes have already been installed, the program eliminating home delivery will not be reversed. In other words the program to eliminate home delivery is being paused. This means close to a million households have now permanently lost home delivery. Is anyone to believe that the Liberals are not just working with Canada Post to figure out how to finish the job in the future? The government is also asking Canada Post to set up a panel of experts and advocates for seniors and people with disabilities to do a study and provide advice on "development, implementation and promotion of an enhanced accessibility program."

In addition, Minister Qualtrough announced she will be seeking changes to the *Financial Administration Act* to reclassify Canada Post. She said, "Currently, under its listing in the *Financial Administration Act*, Canada Post has a legal obligation to pay a dividend to the federal government. I intend to seek the Governor in Council's approval to move Canada Post Corporation from *Financial Administration Act*, Schedule III Part II to Schedule III Part I to remove this obligation. This change also means that Canada Post is now legally required to, along with its annual corporate plan and capital budget, submit an operating budget for Government approval."

The government is also directing Canada Post to "better promote" its remittance services and provide more information about postal money orders and the digital remittance service it provides through Moneygrams.

Disregard for Review of Canada Post and Consultations

In May 2016, the newly elected Liberal government announced a review of the Canada Post Corporation for which it created the Canada Post Corporation Review Task Force. Within this review the Minister in charge asked the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to consult Canadians on the future of Canada Post.



The review was to be completed by the end of 2016 and to include "extensive consultation with Canadians." Nearly two years later, it appears the Liberal government has chosen to ignore the report of its own Task Force, including the hundreds of submissions it received, as well as the results of the public consultation and report of the Standing Committee entitled, "The Way Forward for Canada Post."

The formulation of the Minister about a "new vision" of a "renewed Canada Post" is problematic and difficult to explain given the existing regulations already in place within the Canadian Postal Service Charter. Those regulations govern the functioning of Canada Post Corporation and outline the kind of service the company is required to provide Canadians.

The first article of the Charter is titled "Universal Service" and states:

Universal Service

Canada Post will maintain a postal system that allows individuals and businesses in Canada to send and receive mail within Canada and between Canada and elsewhere. Canada Post will provide a service for the collection, transmission and delivery of letters, parcels and publications.

The provision of postal services to rural regions of the country is an integral part of Canada Post's universal service.

Affordable Rates

Canada Post will charge uniform postage rates for letters of similar size and weight, so that letters to Canadian addresses will require the same postage, regardless of the distance to reach the recipient.

As required by the *Canada Post Corporation Act*, Canada Post will charge postage rates that are fair and reasonable and, together with other revenues, are sufficient to cover the costs incurred in its operations.

Canada Post will provide advance notice of and publicly advertise proposed pricing changes for regulated letter mail products and consult with consumers during the rate-setting process.

Does the Minister's announcement mean that the Liberal government intends to change or violate the Charter in some manner to implement its "new vision" for Canada Post?

Qualtrough's very feeble announcement means that the Trudeau Liberals have chosen to ignore the work of the Task Force and the Parliamentary Committee and the views submitted by Canadians, including postal workers, on the direction of the post office. It refuses to explain what their plans are for a "new vision" for a "renewed Canada Post." This directly ignores and contradicts the overwhelming demand of Canadians during the last elections and since for a strengthened public post office. The results of all the consultations, online surveys, town halls and public hearings bear out the demand for a reinvigorated public Canada Post and reversal of the years of privatization and cutbacks in service.

The Liberal government is not touting what Canadians have said they want and is deliberately keeping silent on its own unilateral plans. On January 24, in addition to her public announcements, Minister Qualtrough also sent a letter to the new Chair of the Board of Directors of Canada Post with the grandiose title "Innovations and Best Practices for Implementing Renewal." These "Best Practices" demanded by the Federal Cabinet come right in the midst of negotiations with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers for a new collective agreement within which postal workers, with the support of Canadians, want the cutbacks in postal service stopped and reversed. But the Trudeau government has its own neo-liberal agenda. The Minister's letter in part directs the corporation as follows:

"The Review has identified various areas of opportunity for Canada Post. In this context, the Government is asking Canada Post to undertake the following as it develops its program for implementing renewal:

"Consider the applicability in Canada of best practices and successful innovations in other countries, particularly various models of alternate day delivery."

What hypocrisy the Liberal government displays. Under the guise of preserving home delivery for those households that still have it, the government is directing the corporation to reduce home delivery from five days to alternate days or less. These demands to cut services to eliminate more jobs will not save the post office as the government claims, as they directly run counter to its founding charter and obligation to Canadians. These measures to reduce service will further undermine and weaken the ability of Canada Post to provide a universal postal service to which all Canadians are entitled. This is not renewal and nation-building but a continuation of the wrecking of a public institution and treasured asset that Canadians need and want to see strengthened in new ways. The Trudeau Government must be held to account and denounced for its duplicitous stands.



Canadians should judge the situation for themselves. The postal workers are defending their working conditions and the public post office. There is broad public concern about the attacks on the post office and broad demands that the public postal service not only be maintained but expanded. This was amply demonstrated in the widespread support for the just stand of postal workers during the 2011 strike and lockout. The current discussion on the state of the post office and any review of Canada Post at the very least should take these stands as their starting point. Postal workers and all working people need to discuss what is going on, how to defend the public post office and the public

interest, and assess the remarks of Minister Qualtrough and the plans of the Liberal government on this basis.



Discussion on Criminalization of Quebec Construction Workers

Defend Workers' Dignity and Rights!

A vigorous discussion is taking place in Quebec on how to defend the dignity and rights of construction workers who are under state-organized attack. *Workers' Forum* received many views and comments in response to its January 25 issue that exposed and denounced the Quebec government's Bill 152, which further criminalizes construction workers. Two of those responses are published below.

Anti-worker Bill 152 blatantly attempts to criminalize union activity, by falsely equating construction workers' organized actions in defence of their rights to criminal intimidation, including deeming workers' defence of their health and safety criminal interference to restrict trade.

Bill 152 is meant to prevent the problems in the construction sector from being solved. By criminalizing the workers, the actual corrupt elements in the sector carry on unobstructed and the problems facing the economy, and hundreds of construction projects of all kinds, are left to fester. The bill is somewhat reminiscent of the early struggles to organize legal trade unions a century ago when all organized activity of the working class in defence of its rights was declared an illegal "restriction of trade." The difference is that today, workers who resist unfair labour practices and dangerous and anti-union activities can be defamed or accused of terrorism for harming the national economy. For more than one hundred years workers have systematically defeated attempts to deprive them of their rights and won certain, albeit limited, legal recognition under labour law. Today, governments at all levels are simply throwing those laws out the window and acting like robber barons on a much larger scale than ever before.



Authorities Must Deal with Problems in Construction Instead of Attacking Those Proposing Concrete Solutions

A construction worker in Montreal said to *Workers' Forum*:

"My question is, why is the union being attacked as being the one responsible for intimidation? We are being told that Bill 152 is a continuation of the Charbonneau Commission. What I heard from the Charbonneau Commission was that it was employers who committed fraud; it was the employers who were connected to organized crime, and it was the political parties that were filling their pockets by artificially raising the costs of public contracts they are awarding for construction

projects, in exchange for the construction companies funding their parties. How is it today, when no one has been convicted and no one has been arrested under this commission, that the unions are being attacked under the hoax that they are the ones doing the intimidation?

"It's the employers who are using intimidation on construction sites. They are the ones who force us to work in unsafe conditions and threaten us by telling us that if we are not happy with that, they will simply replace us, or stop calling us for jobs and even fire us. When we denounce them, we are threatened with dismissal, and we have no way of protecting ourselves other than with the union. Why are issues like this not being dealt with, for example, when employers threaten us with dismissal if we do not work on Saturdays? If I want to keep my job I know very well that on weekends, when I go to work, I cannot ask for a regular pay check with deductions; I may have to do undeclared work, otherwise I can be fired. This means working under the table. We are getting paid our gross wage but without deductions for pension funds, income taxes -- tax money that does not go to the government. There is no one but the unions that are defending us against this. If I make a complaint to the Quebec Construction Commission (CCQ), I am not protected by the CCQ. My job is not protected. On the other hand, the union is able to work in such a way that I am protected, that I am not identified. Because it is the union itself that files a complaint with the CCQ.



"Today, under the pretext that the Charbonneau Commission provided evidence of a lot of problems on construction sites, the unions are being attacked. They attack the unions that are there to defend us rather than dealing with the corruption that exists in the construction industry. It is this corruption that has raised the costs of the construction projects, not the workers' wages.

"Already, when they passed Bill 30 in December 2011, which abolished union placement, they included in the law provisions against intimidation that was allegedly committed by the unions. Why today, when union placement no longer exists, have measures been taken to prevent workers and their representatives from doing their jobs? As a worker, I need a union that is able to raise issues. As far as threats are concerned, the employers are constantly using them against us. Their right to manage does not give them the right to make threats whenever the union denounces something in order to enforce existing collective agreements and laws.

"When I denounce the fact that the tools I have to use are not the right tools for the job, I'm bluntly told to work with those tools, otherwise I can go home. These are threats that are being uttered by the employer. If you work with a tool that is not appropriate for the job, you are facing a hazard, that is a threat. However, we never hear anything from the government about this. There has never been a government that has intervened to deal with this. Measures are not being taken that would eliminate the danger. On the contrary, it is those who are there to defend the workers who are being attacked.

"Another example. Let's say I have the right to mileage compensation for going to a remote worksite because I have to drive so many miles from home to work. However, the employer tells me that if he has to pay me the mileage compensation he will hire someone else because that will cost him less. In addition, he tells me that if he pays the mileage compensation, the other workers in the region will ask for the same thing, so he threatens to no longer hire anyone from my area. This is illegal because compensation for mileage is written into the collective agreement, and yet these things happen

regularly on construction sites.

"Since there is no job security in construction, employers can use any pretext to say that they no longer need us. As individual workers we can't prove anything, the only ones who can do something are the unions.



"The law [Bill 152] is written in order to take away our means to protect ourselves. On paper, these means still exist. But in reality, with the measures that are being taken to prevent a union representative from being able to do his job, the situation is very different. He is prevented from taking the necessary means to enforce collective agreements, laws and regulations.

"If I had job security, protection, it could help me to demonstrate that if the employer kicked me out, he did that so as to hire someone else, which he had no right to do. So that would give me some protection. In construction, we do not have that security, so we have an even more urgent need for a union representative who can intervene, show

that the employer is at fault. At the same time, there is negotiation to convince the employer to respect his word because a collective agreement has been signed by both parties. We want to respect our part of the deal and we ask the employer to respect his. Within the current conditions, I do not ultimately have the ability to exercise the right to have a union that can act on the construction sites. I have the right to choose my union, but the union can do very little to change things in a context like this. We understand that if we had seniority -- a form of job security and income security -- the situation would be much different.

"To improve the situation, you need job security measures and income security measures. It is also necessary that when we vote to go on strike, the construction sites stop functioning normally, everyone has to be on strike. The measures in the anti-scab law do not even apply in construction. How is it that I go on strike to get a pay raise but the construction sites remain open, and this is not illegal even though we took a strike vote? If one intervenes to close the building sites, one can be accused of intimidation.

"We need to tackle the real problems that exist in construction, while the new law is attacking those who want to solve problems in construction. We must make sure that the union can do its work on construction sites."

Government Attack Requires Collective Response from Workers' Movement

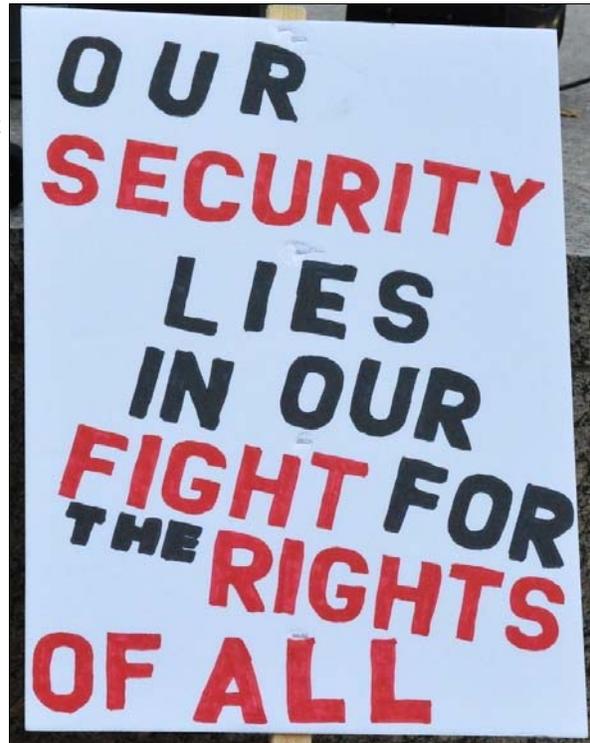
A Montreal postal worker says:

"After reading the articles in *Workers' Forum*, I went to look at Bill R-20 and I noticed that it already puts construction workers under a lot of pressure by excluding them from being covered by various labour standards. Knowing how dangerous the conditions already are in the construction industry, knowing that it is already difficult to get a collective agreement because there is no retroactivity, it is not easy to reach agreements that are negotiated in good faith. [In construction, wage increases are not retroactive to the expiry date of the collective agreement, which means

employers deliberately prolong negotiations -- WF Note.]

"Understanding the context of Bill R-20, we better understand the move the government is making in putting forward Bill 152. It is to try to prevent workers from affirming their rights.

"We read in the *Workers' Forum* articles that the bill puts a lot of emphasis on what a worker's action is 'likely' to produce. This is disturbing because we are no longer in a mode where we must demonstrate things by facts but in a mode of "possibilities." Is it possible that the workers intended to intimidate the employer? Is it possible that the workers' action is "likely" to hinder the employer's activity? We are in the subjective domain. The person at the head of the company may feel a strain because the workers' move is likely to intimidate him. We are to move away from the facts and act on the basis of moods, how the employer felt about this or that move from the workers. This undermines the ability of workers to affirm their rights. If workers want to put their foot down and defend their rights in terms of health and safety, will their actions now be interpreted as intimidation? In addition, there are heavy fines that are imposed for breaking the law. This bill greatly expands the rights of employers to challenge the means that workers have to uphold their rights.



"This further aggravates the imbalance in labour relations in one of the most hazardous sectors. This directly affects workers who want to assert their rights on the shop floor in other sectors of the economy, and the ability of the trade union to exercise its right and duty to defend the interests of workers.

"The way I see it, this attack is not specific to construction workers. It is a broad attack against the basic right of workers to negotiate and to affirm their rights. In my opinion, it is important that the workers' movement is made aware of what is going on in the construction industry because a collective response is required, not just from the sector, to defend workers from such attacks. In my opinion, the government is seeing if this bill will work, and if so and the workers directly targeted in the sector are defeated, the government will go even further. We must not allow any sector to be isolated. This requires a collective response from the workers' movement."



Whose Economy? Who Decides?

Sobeys Attacks Workers and Economy in Western Canada

Since Sobeys' 2013 takeover of Safeway in Western Canada, it has closed over 50 stores within its empire affecting thousands of workers and those who relied on those locations for groceries and other supplies. Fifty store closures alone were announced in June 2014, that the company asserted

"logically follow the acquisition of Canada Safeway." These included Sobeys, Safeway and IGA stores in the Maritimes, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, with a majority in Western Canada.

The closures and attacks on the workers continue to the present. Take the example of Sobeys' operations in Vancouver. Sobeys demolished the Safeway on Davie Street in Vancouver's West End last year. The 102 workers at the Davie Street Safeway were offered employment in other stores in the city but those jobs turned out to be insecure as Sobeys announced 10 more store closures this January.



On January 23, it handed termination letters to 660 Safeway workers who are members of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1518. The firings come while all 4,500 Safeway Local 1518 members throughout BC were slated to begin negotiations with Sobeys for a new collective agreement. Local 1518 President Ivan Limpricht said Sobeys cancelled a meeting on January 18 that was supposed to set up the bargaining schedule. Then, five days later, the company announced the closure of ten stores and sent termination letters to 660 members of the Local. The company even had the gall to say publicly that if it receives anti-worker concessions in the new collective agreement it would consider reopening five of the closed Safeway locations under its FreshCo discount banner.

The President of Local 1518 immediately denounced the timing of the closures and layoffs as suspicious saying, "Last week, on the first day of bargaining with UFCW 832 in Manitoba, Sobeys demanded poverty concessions and then walked away from the table. Now as negotiations are set to begin in British Columbia, they announce 10 store closures? It's a classic scare tactic. But our members won't be fooled."

Sobeys has decided to make 2018 the year of attacking its Western Canada employees. This is not simply a BC fight; it is a fight that Sobeys has decided to launch across the entire West, the union said.

Local 1518 immediately filed a complaint with the BC Labour Relations Board that the termination notices to its 660 members constitute an illegal lockout. President Limpricht said the timing of the announcement coupled with the carrot-and-stick nature of the FreshCo news and the fact that the pharmacies at the five locations earmarked for FreshCo will remain open, provide grounds for the illegal lockout complaint.

"Look," said Limpricht, "we're about to begin negotiations with the company. And Sobeys picks this moment to announce 10 store closures? The company's message is clear: it will re-open at least five of those stores only if the union and our members accept a substandard agreement. That constitutes an illegal lockout. It's a threat intended to intimidate our members, weaken the union's position and further Sobeys' own cause at the bargaining table.

"The BC Labour Relations Code defines an illegal lockout as closing a place of work, a suspension

of work or a refusal by an employer to continue to employ a number of employees in order to compel the employees to agree to conditions of employment.... This illegal lockout is a bold and callous move to strip our members of their employment and their rights under a legally negotiated collective agreement -- that's shameful."

Sobeys is a subsidiary of Empire Co. Ltd (ECL), which in turn controls land, housing and financial speculators Genstar Development Company (GDC) and Crombie REIT.

The GDC website reads, "[GDC has] operations in Southern California, Atlanta and throughout Canada. GDC focuses on residential land investments and equity financing.... GDC directs the acquisition and development of Canadian master planned communities."

Crombie REIT is a Canadian Real Estate Investment Trust listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange. It became a subsidiary of Sobeys Stores Limited in 1976 and subsequently part of the ECL empire. The Sobeys supermarket chain is Crombie REIT's major insider tenant.

Sobeys' acquisition of Safeway added to the ECL empire 213 stores, 4 distribution centres, 12 manufacturing facilities and various properties mostly in Western Canada. Those in control of ECL told the *Globe and Mail* at the time that the almost \$6 billion in social wealth required to conclude the purchase of Safeway would come in part from "selling Safeway's real estate and then leasing it back. Crombie Real Estate Investment Trust -- which Empire spun out to handle its real estate -- has the right to make first offers on the buildings, Sobeys said."

Sobeys' Land Speculation and Other Actions in Vancouver

The scale of the private interests the ECL empire controls extends well beyond the food sector into land and other forms of speculation. One closure clearly shows that the takeover of Safeway was just as much about speculation on land and housing as anything else. After Sobeys demolished the Safeway on Davie Street in Vancouver's West End, it started building two residential towers. This follows the recent city rezoning of the area allowing for high rise construction. The two towers to be built on the block will join another tower under construction immediately adjacent and yet another underway across the street. Land values, condo prices and rents have soared since the rezoning, with the most infamous case being the sale of the nearby White Spot restaurant and parking lot for \$245 million where units in the proposed towers will be priced in the millions. With small parcels of land fetching hundreds of millions of dollars, the speculators consider the existing commercial operations as useless no matter their shape or how needed they may be for the community.

The sheer size of ECL confronts workers with a formidable challenge. How do workers defend their rights when a colossal cartel with tens of billions of dollars of assets and annual gross income from various sources organizes a planned assault and they are made powerless, by the limitations imposed on them by labour law, to deal with it?

The situation demands serious treatment. Sobeys' actions not only negatively affect Safeway workers directly, they have implications for food and housing security, the price of land, food and housing, the direction of the economy and the historic issue of who should control decision-making about the social wealth workers produce and how and where it should be invested and with what aim.

What decisions can workers take which respond to the situation in a manner which affirms their rights and defeats attempts to criminalize the workers for doing so? What can other workers do to defend the rights of those under direct attack?

(With files from ufcw1518.com, Wikipedia, Globe and Mail)