

Lockout Friday morning may end postal service

By Tabitha Wells

If you have mail you want to send, now is definitely not the time to do it.

Canada Post issued a 72-hour notice warning Tuesday morning that its unionized employees could be locked out as of Friday morning.

Just after midnight Tuesday, Canada Post sent out a press release notifying the public of the lockout following failed negotiations with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW).

The uncertainty caused by the prolonged negotiations and the union's strike mandate is having a negative and escalating impact on the postal service, the release stated.

As of tomorrow (Friday), Canada Post will change the terms and conditions of employment for all employees represented by CUPW, as the old collective agreements no longer apply. Under the new terms and conditions, Canada Post said their employees will continue to receive their regular pay, as well as some benefits like prescription drug coverage.

The corporation must now respond to the rapidly deteriorating volumes and the financial impact to the business, using the means provided in the Canada Labour Code.

This means that some items, which were under the previous collective agreements, have been cancelled to line up with the minimum conditions established under the labour code. Another change includes Canada Post's ability to adjust staffing according to the amount of work they feel is required.

Canada Post told CUPW Monday that its offers, which had been presented June 25, are to be considered final, as they felt they represented a fair and reasonable framework for settlements.

Although the 72-hour lockout notice has been provided, Canada Post iterated this does not necessarily mean the business will not be operating Friday.

Following the announcement from Canada Post, CUPW issued a statement accusing the corporation of driving the workers out onto the streets without pay in order to force them to accept steep concessions being imposed.

We knew this was their game all along, said CUPW President Mike Palecek. They are sabotaging the public review of the post office. They refused to negotiate fairly with us and now they're locking the doors and will try to starve us into submission.

CUPW portrayed much of its negotiations as involving an attempt to get pay equity for its female-dominated workforce, as well as stave off the company's demands for massive rollbacks.

Currently, female postal workers earn 28 per cent less than their male counterparts, according to the union.

The union said that since the negotiations began, Canada Post tabled only one offer, and would not budge on its details throughout the talks. Now, the company is warning they may shut down the postal service, blaming the move on its workers.

In 2011, Canada Post locked out postal workers following failed negotiations for their contract renewals at that time. The Conservative government forced workers back to work using legislation that has been called by some experts unconstitutional, imposing a four-year collective agreement on CUPW.

According to Canada Post, the union's demands are unaffordable, costing it more than \$1 billion. In sticking to its June 25 offer, it cited rapidly deteriorating volumes and the financial impact to the business as the basis for the lockout.

While Canada Post said it cannot maintain a profit and meet the demands of the postal workers, President and CEO Deepak Chopra won a new five-year contract from the Conservative government in 2014, giving him a salary of \$500,000 per year. It is estimated he also receives upwards of \$400,000 in bonuses annually, with other upper-level management also receiving six-figure salaries.

In a press conference Tuesday, Palecek countered claims the dispute was about pensions, citing the lower earnings of female employees and the fact that workers responsible for delivering packages are not paid beyond 6.5-hour shifts, even if the parcel volume is far higher.

Rather than being paid for their actual time on the road, CUPW said the workers are paid \$1 per package delivered outside of the set shift hours.

They have been lying to the public, Palecek charged.

He added that another lie is about the profitability of the Crown Corporation. Despite claims by Canada Post that profits are decreasing, outside critics have said the company has seen an increasing profit over the past 22 years. Palecek said the company turned a \$100-million profit last year, and appears to be expecting higher profits. So far, Canada Post has refused to open its books to the union.

At a press conference in Quebec Tuesday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the government did not intend to take action on the

impending lockout.

“We do not feel, unlike previous governments, that it is the immediate responsibility to be heavy-handed,” he said. “We respect labour. We respect the need to come to terms at the bargaining table and that is what we are going to continue to work on.”
At press time, Canada Post had not provided warnings of an impending lockout to customers on their website's homepage, or anywhere other than its media page.