

Brief to The Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

By the Canadian Union of Postal Workers

June 19, 2020

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) has 50,000 members and represents postal workers, cleaners, couriers, medical dispatchers, and health care workers. We submit this brief to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, in order to join others' voices in demanding that Canada engage in a COVID-19 recovery process that is centred on justice for workers, their families and communities. Canada must recover in a way that is forward-looking in terms of preserving the sanctity of our planet, as empirical scientific evidence indicates it is already desperately compromised by the overuse of fossil fuels.

After setting out our perspective on the current context, this brief will present CUPW's vision for changing the direction of collective governance in this country, as well as concrete measures to improve people's lives and help address the climate emergency.

The coronavirus, its pandemic proportions, and the resulting shut-down of large swaths of the Canadian economy has shown that neoliberalism and profit-based systems have been hurtful to Canadians. COVID-19 has, however, also enabled us to see the possibilities of building a strong economy while also ensuring greater accessibility, inclusivity, support and relief for all Canadians and our planet.

Neoliberal policies have hurt many marginalized segments of the population: the elderly, Black, Indigenous, racialized peoples, women, migrant workers, frontline workers and those with low or no incomes. These groups were already suffering under a neoliberal regime with inadequate public supports prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic has shown the extent of the brutality meted out on them by such policies and governance: a healthcare system starved by years of austerity measures that has resulted in the untimely deaths of too many elderly people, and the frontline workers who cared for them. The fact of the matter is that many workers, including gig-economy workers, have been living in dire conditions because of a system that does not offer adequate pay, does not offer life-supporting measures such as paid sick leave, vacation leave, family leave, public pharamacare or child care. It does not provide sufficient protection or measures to counter systemic racism throughout institutions of power, starting with the police, and extending beyond to the courts and the correctional system.

The pandemic has also shown us that change and justice are indeed possible. It is crucial that we direct relief funds and support towards those who are in need and those who are unemployed or underemployed, rather than towards wealthy corporations that will continue to ask for more and can never be satiated. When priorities change, we can ensure the health and wellbeing of workers, their families, and all of our communities. This is the Canada we want, need, and deserve.

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CUPW has worked tirelessly over the years to convince Canada Post and you, the elected representatives of the federal government, to implement a series of initiatives that will improve conditions for Canadians and the planet. Our most recent vision, *Delivering Community Power*, is based on principles and initiatives that are proven to work. Other countries have already begun implementing similar changes and Canada risks falling far behind.

This is an opportune moment in history to bring Delivering Community Power to fruition. In line with Just Recovery principles, we advocate for the necessity of placing people's health and wellbeing first; strengthening our social safety net; ensuring that we have vibrant and expanded public services, including Canada Post, that serve the interests of all Canadians; ensuring workers have good jobs, and being mindful of reducing our carbon footprint to help heal our planet.

Delivering Community Power is a broad vision that is composed of three main elements: 1. Ensuring the provision of needed services to Canadians; 2. Contributing meaningfully to the climate emergency; 3. Ensuring the viability of a Canada Post as a needed public service and a good employer.

1. Ensuring the provision of needed services to Canadians

Along with a sizeable number of Canadians, as well as municipalities from coast to coast to coast, we argue for the necessity of postal banking, as part of the gamut of services that Canada Post can and should offer. This would serve two purposes. In the first instance, it would provide needed financial services to remote and rural regions that either have no bank, or where the big banks have chosen to close their branches. Recent closures have resulted in people having to travel sometimes hundreds of kilometers, in order to get their banking done. In the second instance, payday loan operators have taken advantage of, and exploited the working poor through outrageous interest charges, harming them and their families and putting entire communities at risk. Non-exploitative financial services at postal outlets would give people a real option for banking, one that is based on their needs.

We also believe, and this need has been made clear by the pandemic, that our letter carriers are uniquely positioned to look in on the elderly, to ensure their safety, as well as that of other vulnerable groups. A strong Canada will require us all to do our part and look out for each other. We must ensure that nobody is left behind, and that all people are treated with care and compassion. Postal workers are uniquely positioned to take on this role. Of all public servants, postal workers enjoy the most esteem from the public.

2. Contributing meaningfully to the climate emergency

The Delivering Community Power vision calls for the transition of Canada Post's fleet to electric vehicles. This will considerably reduce Canada Post's carbon footprint and serve as an example to other segments of society to adopt a similar trajectory. Canada Post operates 13,000 vehicles. What a terrific investment for Canada to build these vehicles, putting people at work, and ensuring our own resiliency.

Another key component of the vision is to retrofit existing post offices to make them more energy efficient using green technology such as solar panels. This would also create jobs.

We also recently reached an agreement with Canada Post to proceed and plant trees on its properties.

3. Ensuring the viability of a Canada Post as a needed public service and a good employer

Implementing our vision would ensure that Canada Post remains a vital public service that addresses key gaps in existing public services. This in turn, would ensure the continued viability of the Post, and retain and create jobs. Good jobs with good benefits for workers are mandatory as we move forward and recover.

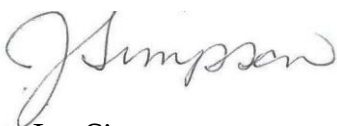
The pandemic has shown Canadians the importance of frontline workers – whether they are cleaners, couriers, medical dispatchers, postal workers, health care workers, and others on the frontlines. CUPW members work in all these areas. We demand policies from government that will actually provide a living wage for all. We caution against a return to the same dysfunctional policies as before. Workers must not be made to bear the brunt of the cost for the recovery through austerity measures. Attacks on workers or their right to organize and strike must stop. The attack on our planet by giant corporate interests and their disregard for climate issues and pollution must stop. A much higher rate of tax imposition on the wealthy is the order of the day.

This is why we endorsed the Just Recovery principles:

- Put people's health and wellbeing first, no exceptions;
- Strengthen the social safety net and provide relief directly to people;
- Prioritize the needs of workers and communities;
- Build resilience to prevent future crises;
- Build solidarity and equity across communities, generations, and borders; and
- Uphold indigenous rights and work in partnership with indigenous peoples;

These form the basis of a large-scale vision for what our post-COVID-19 society needs to become. They are a common platform around which to come together and articulate a vision for a better future. CUPW's Delivering Community Power already offers many concrete proposals that are harmonious with these principles.

While COVID-19 has been a serious challenge and strain on our systems, it presents a once-in-several-generations opportunity to fix many societal ills. It is also a pivotal moment to set ourselves up to avoid climate catastrophe, while creating a just transition for workers.



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