

'We Are on Strike,' CRA Workers Union Announces

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After a bargaining team representing federal workers failed to reach a deal with the Canadian government by a strike deadline set by the union, picket lines have formed at hundreds of locations nationwide.

Almost one-third of federal public service workers [are on strike](#), according to a [statement](#) released late on April 18 by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), which represents 35,000 Canada Revenue Agency workers and 120,000 Treasury Board of Canada workers. Strike action began just after midnight ET on April 19 for all 155,000 workers, “setting the stage for one of the largest strikes in Canada’s history,” the union said.

“All members, except those of you who are deemed as essential workers, are expected to report to a picket line,” according to an April 18 [release](#) from the Union of Taxation Employees — the tax component of the PSAC. “We are on strike.” There are picket lines in over 250 locations across Canada, according to the PSAC.

Canadians should expect slowdowns and shutdowns of services starting April 19, “including a complete halt of the tax season,” the PSAC said April 18. “As we begin this historic strike, PSAC bargaining teams will remain at the table night and day as they have been for weeks,” Chris Aylward, national president of the PSAC, said.

“The government has done everything it can to reach a deal and avoid disrupting the services that Canadians rely on,” the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat said in an April 18 [statement](#). A fair offer that includes a 9 percent pay increase over three years was presented by the government during the April 17-18 negotiations, but “the PSAC continues to insist on demands that are unaffordable and would severely impact the government’s ability to deliver services to Canadians,” the statement said.

While the proposed 9 percent wage boost “mirrors the recommendations of the third-party Public Interest Commission,” which issued a [report](#) in February on the dispute with the CRA, the counteroffer came in at 22.5 percent, according to an April 19 CRA [release](#).

“Canadians should expect that some CRA services will be delayed or unavailable” as a result of the strike, the CRA said. Benefit payments will take priority, and “the Canada child benefit will continue to be issued as scheduled,” it added. Essential services like employment insurance and Canada Pension Plan payments, veterans’ income support, and old-age security and guaranteed income supplement payments will continue, according to the Treasury Board.

"I can't stress enough how disappointing this is — based on the progress we've made at the negotiating table, this is not where we should be," Treasury Board President Mona Fortier said during an April 19 press conference. "We recognize and respect employees' rights to strike but when a good offer is on the table and there is a genuine commitment to compromise, the focus should be on negotiation."

All members of the Public Interest Commission endorsed the government's offer of a 9 percent wage increase, including the PSAC's nominee, Fortier said. "We have also put forward proposals on a number of other priorities for the PSAC, including remote work, increased shift and weekend premiums, and improved leave with pay for family-related responsibilities," she said. "We are implementing a modern workplace where employees have the flexibility to work from home 2-3 days per week," she added in response to questions about the ability of workers to continue to work remotely following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been a sticking point in the negotiations.

Regarding how far the parties are from reaching a resolution, Fortier said that "as we are negotiating, I'm not privy to share where we are in gaps or whatnot. I think right now the focus is to find compromise and work together."

"Most practitioners and taxpayers are bracing for disruptions in the availability of CRA personnel, processing of tax returns, and issuance of refunds," said Roy Berg of Roy Berg International Tax Law. Though the possibility of a strike has been looming for weeks, the timing of it "hits a flat note for Canadians who are struggling with the effects of inflation and historically high interest rates," he said.

"We are disappointed that the public sector unions that include the CRA chose to strike at this time," said Kim Moody of Moodys Tax Law. "With all that Canadians have gone through in recent years — including a decline in service quality despite massive increases in the numbers of public sector employees — the demands for significant wage increases and resistance of [return to the office] mandates does not resonate well with many Canadians."