

# US telecommunications giant Verizon demands job and benefit cuts

A Verizon worker  
1 August 2008

Contracts covering 65,000 workers at the US telecommunications giant Verizon expire Saturday at midnight. Verizon executives are demanding that current and retired union workers accept massive health and pension concessions as well as greater flexibility to cut jobs and move workers.

Verizon has made extensive plans to continue operations in the event of a strike. Management employees from throughout the company will be relocated to work in areas affected by a possible strike. The company has also recruited retired supervisors to work during a strike. Contractors and non-union vendors have been hired and are being trained to do work normally performed by union employees.

Verizon employs 230,000 workers. It is one of two major telecommunications companies in the US providing landline, wireless, broadband and long distance service. The company is currently undertaking a massive upgrade to its network that will allow it to enter into the cable TV market.

The contract covers workers in Verizon's landline division in the northeastern states and Washington, DC.

For their part, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have made it clear that they are willing to sacrifice the jobs and benefits of their members. The chief concern of the union bureaucracies is to maintain a minimum number of dues-paying members, regardless of their wages, benefits and working conditions. The CWA and IBEW are also reluctant to take any action that might interfere with their promotion of Democratic candidates in the November elections.

The unions have not informed their members of any specific bargaining demands. Instead, they have spoken in generalities about defending jobs and maintaining

benefits.

Nor have they set a strike deadline. In the past, both the CWA and IBEW have allowed contract deadlines to come and go without calling a strike. They have put forward the absurd claim that by doing so they are hurting the company by forcing it to cover the costs of an anticipated strike.

If the union bureaucracy does call a strike, it will seek to use it to pressure management into allowing unionization of Verizon wireless and business divisions. To achieve this, the union leadership would be willing to agree to wage and benefit concessions for its current members and sub-standard pay and benefits for workers in newly unionized divisions.

The CWA signed a deal with AT&T, which accepted concessions in exchange for allowing workers in its wireless division to join the union. Since 2005, the CWA has been able to sign up 19,000 additional members.

Verizon is aiming to make its employees pay the cost of creating its new network by gutting health and pension benefits and holding down wages. In 2005, Verizon ended pension benefits for more than 50,000 management employees. At the same time, the company eliminated retiree health benefits for those managers with fewer than 15 years. The company is now seeking to impose similar cutbacks on its unionized work force.



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