

Verizon workers denounce corporate-police intimidation

A WSWS reporting team
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45,000 telecommunication workers entered the second week of their strike Sunday against Verizon, the nation's second largest phone company.

The company is demanding concessions of \$1 billion a year, or roughly \$20,000 per employee. This includes a freeze on pensions for all workers and the elimination of pensions for new hires, thousands of dollars in health care payments, and the destruction of job security provisions.

Verizon has spent million of dollars on a publicity campaign aimed at branding strikers as saboteurs and criminals. The company has received the support of the courts through injunctions severely limiting picketing; the police, which are monitoring pickets and escorting strike-breakers; and the Obama administration, which has launched an FBI investigation into unsubstantiated charges of "sabotage." (See, "Government strike-breaking against Verizon workers".)

The *World Socialist Web Site* continued its interviews of striking workers throughout the region over the weekend.

New York, New York

Moamer, a central office technician, explained, "When we went on strike for two weeks in 2003, management took over our jobs. They smiled a lot and were happy to make so much money. In 2005, Verizon took away management's pensions and benefits. The scabs are coming in from other states doing our jobs now. I have heard they are from states as far away as Texas, Florida and Virginia.

"We were told today that they will start enforcing the injunction here tomorrow. There was a cop here yesterday doing a head count. The number of people you can have picketing depends on how many people work at that location. We have about 2,000 people working here. According to the injunction, we cannot have more than 150 people picket. This makes no sense. Where are the other people supposed to go to fight for a better contract?

"When we had our rally here on July 30, we had about 15,000 people here. If any of the politicians had a rally, and 500 or 600 people showed up, this would be great. The politicians would hand out flyers and take donations and put it on TV. It would be a good thing, and they would put it on the news. But if it is for a contract, they want to make it illegal under

the injunction.

"Do we have the choice of how many people can come in and scab and take our jobs?" Moamer added. "They don't give me a choice about this. The injunction strengthens the company position. People cannot bring their children to the picket line. We cannot have people from other unions come here to support us. I think we should have 500 or more people just sit down here. Let us see what happens.

"Already there is a heavy police presence here, and lots of cameras. We have the right to be here picketing a company that is making billions in profits. I feel this is a violation of basic human rights."

Monique, another Verizon worker, added, "The unions are too laid back. They are not pushing the issues. They are not pushing for us. If you have a family these cuts are really going to go deeper and deeper into your pocket. And they're taking away vacations. That's just not fair. You already have to work fifteen years here to get four weeks vacation. For five weeks you have to have worked here twenty-five years. That's ridiculous! The injunctions can't stop me from fighting. I will still come out and fight".

Christopher added, "I remember the strike in 2000. The writing was on the wall back then. They have been slowly eroding the workforce, outsourcing a lot of our work. It's going to be a long fight. But we have no choice, no choice but to stay and fight. And we will".

Melody said, "I came from Atlanta for this strike. The powers that be are taking away retiree benefits that these people have worked towards for twenty or thirty years. And they're trying to stop us from fighting with these injunctions. But if we don't strike, don't do something about it, there will be no future for our kids, and their kids. We all have to band together and fight. All of us. In all districts. All over the country".

Phil said, "I can't see a way out of this. Everything has been tried. You try to negotiate, but that won't work. All you have now is a lower class and an upper class. That's all. If this goes on much longer, you're going to see a different side to people, in this strike and out. As it goes on, you'll see a shift in attitudes. People won't be so nice."

Norfolk, Virginia

Pam, a central office technician in Norfolk, Virginia has been with Verizon, and before that, AT&T, for 32 years. Responding to charges that workers had sabotaged service to a local hospital, Pam said, "The idea that the workers who built this infrastructure are sabotaging it is completely wrong. We would never disrupt lines to a hospital. Any one of us could have a friend or relative receiving treatment there."

"What Verizon doesn't want to admit is that the lines need maintenance to work properly. Things break down and require repairs. That's what we do. So when they talk about us sabotaging the lines, the reality is that they can't maintain them adequately with us on strike."

"I don't trust the courts, not since the *Citizens United* decision," she added, referring to the Supreme Court case eliminating restrictions on corporate influence over elections. "People may want to trust these institutions, but it is impossible at this point."

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

In Philadelphia, striking workers outside the company's headquarters on 9th and Race were determined to defeat Verizon.

Greg has been working at Verizon for 25 years. He said the company "wants to take away what we have labored for for half our lifetime. With the new plan, workers will have to pay about \$4,500 out of pocket in health care costs before insurance kicks in.

"The company wants to maintain 'flexibility': workers are basically at beck and call. I've got a family at home. It's hard. You've gotta call and say, 'Look, I know I told you I was going to do this or be there for that. But I can't. I'm not allowed to.'"

Greg says that the company is trying to use the economy as an excuse: "They didn't lose any money through this whole recession, and they're still not losing any. How much is enough? They projected to Wall Street that they were going to make \$11.5 billion this year, but they only made \$10 billion. So in their minds, they lost \$1.5 billion. That's how they do their math. They just want it all. That's it."

Buffalo, New York

One worker, who asked not to be named, said he has worked for Verizon for 14 years as a lineman/construction worker. "I'm frustrated that executives are making so much money while workers are being asked to give up so many concessions."

Another worker said that for her, the main point of the strike was health care benefits. "Workers can't afford to pay so much more at once, especially when all our other bills are going up too."

When asked what she thought of statements from the Communications Workers of America that they would end the strike without a withdrawal

of the concession demands by the company, she said, "This can't just be about collective bargaining. We have to at least keep pay and benefits where they are now. We can't accept concessions."

Sandy, employed with Verizon for twelve years, said, "The company wants concessions from us while the Verizon executives paid themselves \$258 million. I feel the people in this country should be much more vocal about the issues facing workers today."

Another worker complained about the treatment of the striking workers by a local television station. When a picketing worker had his foot run over by a replacement worker, and had to be taken to a hospital for his injuries, the station portrayed the strike-breaker as the victim of angry picketers. In fact, the striking worker was merely trying to block the path of the replacement worker, who set his foot on the gas.

Washington, D.C.

About 100 striking workers and supporters attended a rally on Saturday morning,

Chris, a service technician said, "This is a battle between the corporate greed and the middle class of America. Verizon wants to take away all the gains we have made in the last 50 years. If we back down from this, the rights of workers everywhere could go."

Lingran, a student from the University of Wisconsin taking part in the rally said, "I'm here with university students from all across the United States. I was at the protests in Wisconsin" earlier this year, she said. "We have to show solidarity to workers everywhere."

The WSWS noted the role of the unions in calling off the mass demonstrations in Wisconsin and channeling worker opposition behind the Democratic Party. "This is not what I would have done," Lingran said. "I would have supported the call for a general strike."

Sonny, a services technician, said of the Obama administration: "The banks were greedy. Obama helped bail them out, now we're facing the consequences of that. He has not done much good."

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Kathy, a customer service representative with eleven years at Verizon said, "Verizon got a \$1.9 billion tax rebate. They made like \$32 billion dollars and they get a tax rebate. You are paying more taxes because Verizon and lots of companies like them aren't paying taxes.

"Verizon is making a profit, they are giving big dividends to their stock and bond holders. The executives are making millions, but they don't think it is right to let the people who do all the work make a decent living.

"If I would think backwards, I would have expected this from the

Republicans, but the Democrats are doing it as well.”



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