

The political issues in the Verizon strike

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As the strike by 45,000 Verizon workers in the US enters its second week, the government is aggressively intervening on the side of the company to strangle the resistance of the workers to sweeping concessions demands.

The refusal of the AFL-CIO and the leadership of the unions directly involved, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), to oppose Verizon's government-backed strikebreaking operation and mobilize broader support in the working class places the struggle of the workers in great danger.

New York City police, including special "anti-terror" units, are escorting strikebreakers across the picket lines and monitoring strikers. The FBI, an agency of Obama's Justice Department, has launched an investigation into unsubstantiated company charges of "sabotage," linking the alleged violence of strikers to the upcoming ten-year anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Police are aggressively enforcing court injunctions obtained by Verizon in several states limiting picketing. Workers have been confined to fenced-in areas away from building entrances to shield strikebreakers and reduce the pickets to impotent protests. At least eight workers have already been arrested.

This assault on the right of workers to strike makes a mockery of the US government's pretensions to be fighting for democracy around the world. "Democracy" is a convenient slogan for concealing the imperialist war aims—inevitably linked to the financial interests of US corporations and banks—that drive US military interventions around the world. The real attitude of the Obama administration and both big-business parties to democratic rights is exposed in their denial of those rights to workers who resist the corporations.

Bolstered by the pro-company media coverage and the backing of the government, Verizon is seizing the initiative. On Monday, the company began sending out termination notices to strikers who it claims have violated the law. Meanwhile, real violence is being perpetrated by

the company. Dozens of workers have been injured on the picket lines by vehicles driven by corporate management, a fact that goes unreported in the media and ignored by the government.

These actions expose the class character of the state, which is essentially an instrument of the corporate and financial elite. The financial crisis that erupted nearly three years ago and the mass unemployment that followed have been seized on to implement a vast restructuring of class relations. Now, amidst signs of a new and even sharper economic downturn, the ruling class is escalating its attack—through massive budget cuts at the federal, state and local levels, and the actions of corporations like Verizon. If the drive by Verizon to rip up pensions, health care and job security is successful, it will become a new benchmark for workers in other industries.

The strength of the ruling class lies in the fact that it has a clear strategy and political institutions to carry it out. It controls the police and the courts. The corporate-controlled media works relentlessly to conceal the social crimes of the ruling class and misinform and disorient the population at large.

The working class is determined to fight, as the Verizon workers are once again demonstrating. However, it remains hamstrung by the fact that it does not have its own organizations of struggle and its own political party.

The CWA and IBEW have done nothing to resist the company's strikebreaking. The CWA has demanded that workers obey all anti-strike injunctions. It has insisted that it is willing to call off the strike without a contract and without any agreement by the company to withdraw concessions demands. It asks only that the company "bargain fairly." The main concern of the union leadership is to expand its dues base, particularly among Verizon wireless workers, and it is prepared, as it did at AT&T, to surrender current union members' wages and benefits as the price for obtaining such a deal with the company.

The AFL-CIO has ignored the strike. No solidarity actions have been called. Nothing has been done to

mobilize broader support.

The strike is being betrayed in the interests of subordinating the working class to the Democratic Party and the Obama administration, which has overseen the bailout of the banks, an immense growth of social inequality, and an unprecedented collapse in working-class living standards. The last thing the unions want is a victory and they are completely opposed to the measures that would be required to achieve it.

The treacherous role of the unions is the outcome of a long historical development. In the 30 years since Reagan's firing of the PATCO air traffic controllers in August of 1981, the unions have overseen an unbroken series of defeats. The unification of the AFL and the CIO in 1955 was itself based on a pact with capitalism and its political representatives, sealed by the purging of socialists from the unions.

Over the past several decades, as the ruling class has gone on the offensive, the unions have sought to deny even the existence of the working class as a distinct social group. In the process, the strike as a means of class struggle has virtually disappeared.

A clear warning must be made: if the strike continues on its present path, it will be defeated. Verizon, backed by the state and with the collaboration of the unions, will succeed in isolating and demoralizing the workers, strung out on meager strike pay. This will prepare the way for the unions to capitulate and agree to every concession demanded by the company.

A successful struggle depends on the independent industrial and political mobilization of the entire working class.

The Socialist Equality Party is spearheading this fight. We call on Verizon workers to initiate the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions, to organize serious opposition to the strikebreaking actions of the company. This must include mass picketing to shut down operations and an immediate appeal to all Verizon workers as well as to auto workers, facing new concessions demands in contract talks, postal workers, facing the elimination of a third of the workforce, and every other section of the working class. A campaign must be launched against any effort to victimize workers through arrests or firings, and to demand the prosecution of all those guilty of injuring workers on the picket line.

The SEP is campaigning for the broadest mobilization of the working class. The struggle of Verizon workers must be linked to the fight against budget cuts, to the struggles of teachers and students against the attack on

public education, and to the struggles of all sections of the working class against mass unemployment and social inequality.

The events of this year have demonstrated that the questions facing Verizon workers are international questions. The social upheaval in Egypt and the Middle East, mass opposition to austerity in Europe, the fight against budget cuts in Wisconsin and other US states, the riots of youth in Britain—all of these express in different forms the growth of class struggle on a world scale.

The basic issue is everywhere the same. The rights and interests of the working class cannot be secured outside of a fundamental reorganization of economic power and a redistribution of wealth. As explained in the program of the Socialist Equality Party, "The vast wealth created by the labor of generations of workers must be taken out of the hands of the privileged few and put at the disposal of the people as a whole. Workers will achieve nothing if they seek to avoid such a direct conflict with the economic and political power of the capitalist class."

This means the nationalization of the major banks and corporations, including telecommunications, as the basis for the socialist reorganization of the economy as whole, to meet social need, not private profit.

To achieve this program, a new party must be built, a party that fights to unify all the struggles of the working class and direct workers against the basic cause of their exploitation: the capitalist system. We urge all workers who agree with this perspective to join and build the Socialist Equality Party.

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