

“The whole world needs to go on strike”

Verizon workers speak out as strike enters day five

A WSWS reporting team
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The strike of 45,000 telecommunications workers against Verizon enters its fifth day Thursday. The company has presented a list of 100 demands for concessions which would wipe out job security provisions, freeze pensions for current workers and abolish them for new employees, and force workers to pay for health care and other benefits.

The total amount of the concessions is estimated at \$1 billion, or about \$20,000 from each worker.

Verizon has mounted a massive strike-breaking effort. It has mobilized thousands of managers from both its wireline and wireless division to fill in for striking workers. The company has also launched a publicity campaign, slandering workers and claiming that disruptions in service are the result of sabotage by striking workers. It has begun placing ads in local media offering a \$50,000 reward for information that leads to the arrest of workers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed workers in Massachusetts, Virginia and Pennsylvania on Wednesday about the issues in the strike.

Virginia

Robert a member of the Communications Workers of America in Northern Virginia said, “We have no demands for anything new, we simply want our contracts to stay the same as they have been, and the company is trying to take away what we have.

He referred to a full page ad published in the morning in the *Washington Post* showing a family in a Ford Excursion, listing the amount of benefits union workers receive. “The purpose was basically to say that we should not have these things, that we’re too well off. We’re not. We do hard work, climbing telephone poles in 100 degree weather like this. All we ask for is a

decent living.

“Just recently they laid off several hundred workers in this area. We’ve all been working 60-70 hour weeks. Without overtime there is no way to live in Fairfax County, Virginia, without shacking up with someone else; forget trying to raise a family.”

Robert added: “Why is there no uproar when a company that is profiting in the billions like Verizon is starts to lay off workers just to save money and cash in on the wave of anti-unionism? They want us to move towards lower-paying competitors like Cox, whose workers often are forced to buy their own supplies and drive their family vehicles around performing jobs. We shouldn’t have to move down the pay scale, we want those workers to move up towards our pay level.

“None of the rich are suffering. In their mind there is no recession; they have nothing to worry about.” When asked about the protests in Egypt and Israel Robert said, “They did that to get rid of their government, which is what we should do. The whole world needs to go on strike.”

Jeremy, a central office technician who had been with Verizon for 11 years in the Norfolk area in southern Virginia, also spoke about the impact of job cuts over the past several years.

“Our crew has lost lots of people already through layoffs in 2008 and 2009,” Jeremy said. “Some moved to West Virginia to work for Frontier. They were told that if they didn’t go along with the move and the cuts, they would be fired and would not be able to collect unemployment. One worker I knew had to sell his house at a loss and move to West Virginia.”

Carol, a maintenance administrator, said, “We were happy with our old contract. The only thing we would

have asked for would be a raise to keep up with inflation. Verizon will not bargain with us on anything. I hope people understand how important the strike is for us and for other workers. The city workers in particular have shown lots of support.”

Boston, Massachusetts

Verizon strikers are picketing at locations across Massachusetts, including business offices and Verizon Wireless retail outlets, where workers are not unionized.

On Wednesday morning, several hundred Verizon strikers and retirees picketed outside the Four Seasons Hotel in Boston to protest the appearance of Verizon CFO Fran Shammo at the Oppenheimer & Co. technology conference being held there.

Steve Bowman, a tester of high-speed lines, said that the main issues for him were job security and health care. “Without job security we really don’t have anything to fight for. They’re talking about having the right to outsource our Massachusetts jobs to wherever they want.

“On health care, currently we don’t earn as much as some other workers because we’ve had better health benefits, we made concessions to get that. And now they want to take that away. They are talking about a minimum \$100 deductibles in health care. That’s a minimum for a month; we can’t accept that.”

Steve said that what the Verizon workers are facing is similar to the fight faced by other workers. “The Wisconsin workers, and the other state workers protesting earlier this year, were railroaded. Regardless of what they were asking for, they are teaching children and need to be respected. It’s the same here.

“The way I see it, if people weren’t going to sympathize with teachers because they’re paid with taxpayer money, they’re not going to sympathize with us, because we’re working at a private company. But this company is making billions and we deserve a decent contract; a decent contract and job security.”

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Jim, an outside plant technician, or lineman, also stressed the importance of job security. “The company has been contracting out line work for years and they would like nothing better than to be able to get rid of all the linemen.

“They want to get rid of the rule that says they can’t

transfer someone more than 35 miles from his home. That means that they could come in tomorrow and say that this garage is closing, and that if we want to work, our job could be anywhere.

“They have wanted to do this for a long time. When fiber optics is installed in an area, there is an enormous amount of work, placing the fiber cable and the equipment that is needed for it, but once it is installed, there is not much work, only when a car hits a pole or a tree falls on a line, things like that.

“They want to turn us into a roving work crew which they can move from area to area building the network and living out of hotels. What kind of life would that be?”



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