

The way forward for Verizon workers

Socialist Equality Party (US)
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Five days into their struggle, 45,000 striking Verizon workers face a determined drive by the corporation to impose massive concessions. The company, which made \$10 billion in profits last year, is attempting to freeze pensions for current workers and eliminate them for new workers, impose health care costs of thousands of dollars a year, cut sick days and eliminate job protections and classifications.

The multi-millionaire executives who run Verizon have prepared for a long struggle. They have mobilized thousands of managers to serve as strikebreakers. They have sought and won a court injunction in Pennsylvania barring picketers from stopping management personnel entering buildings, and have filed similar lawsuits in several other states. They are waging a media slander campaign against alleged "sabotage." Several workers have already been injured on the picket line.

The Verizon workers have demonstrated enormous solidarity and determination. They express the desire of the working class as a whole to fight for their rights against the demands of the corporations. For its part, Verizon is relying on the Communications Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers to string workers along on meager strike pay—\$100 to \$200 a week, beginning only after three weeks on strike--and sap their militancy.

The CWA has said it will call off the strike if Verizon indicates it is "ready to get serious at the bargaining table." Rolando Scott, president of Local 1109 in New York, repeated Wednesday that the CWA was "willing to negotiate on all items." In other words, it is prepared to accept concessions all down the line. The union has not even presented a list of contract demands to the company.

The CWA and the IBEW have a track record of helping to impose company demands. As Verizon

noted in a letter to Congress, the changes the company is demanding are "similar to what the CWA has already agreed to with other companies," including AT&T.

The AFL-CIO is doing nothing to aid the Verizon workers or mobilize broader sections of the working class. The strike—the largest industrial action in the US in years—is not even featured on its web site. A small blog entry merely urges supporters to tweet their opposition to the company's demands.

The strike takes place on a significant anniversary—30 years since the PATCO air traffic controllers strike of August 1981. The Reagan administration smashed that strike and broke the union. This was the opening shot of a wave of attacks throughout the 1980s that led to the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs and the elimination of gains won by workers over decades of struggle.

The AFL-CIO isolated the PATCO strike and ensured its defeat. In the 30 years since, every major struggle of workers has been betrayed. The strike weapon itself has virtually disappeared from American life. Under conditions of economic crisis, the destruction of millions of jobs, and the corporate-driven assault on wages and benefits, the AFL-CIO has worked to suppress any organized working class opposition.

This treacherous policy is bound up with the unions' opposition to the independent political mobilization of the working class and their support for the corporate-controlled two-party system, which they maintain through their alliance with the Democratic Party and the Obama administration.

The Socialist Equality Party warns Verizon workers that the CWA and the IBEW are preparing another betrayal. The workers are fighting for their economic survival. The wealthy executives who run these so-called unions are concerned only with protecting their own salaries and perks. Their main goal is to convince Verizon that it could make more money by allowing

them to “organize” the wireless workers—and expand their dues base—and they are more than willing to use the jobs, wages and benefits of the strikers as bargaining chips.

To carry forward their struggle, workers need to form rank-and-file committees and take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of the CWA and IBEW. Aggressive steps must be taken to shut down the company, including mass picketing and the mobilization of other sections of the working class. Strikebreaking court injunctions must be defied. The ruthlessness of the company must be met with an equal degree of determination by the working class.

The Verizon strike must at the same time become the starting point of a broader counter-offensive of the working class against the dictates of the corporate and financial elite. The panic in financial markets this week makes clear that the so-called economic recovery is a fraud. The current crisis is not temporary. It is an expression of the breakdown of the capitalist system in the United States and internationally.

The banks and corporations, represented by both the Democrats and Republicans, are responding to the crisis with a ferocious attack on every social gain won by workers since the 1930s. The Obama administration has reacted to the downgrading of US debt by pressing for more cuts beyond the \$2.4 trillion already agreed to as part of the deal with the Republicans earlier this month.

As Verizon seeks to cut the health care and pensions of its workers, the government is taking an ax to Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security. In the midst of the worst jobs crisis since the Great Depression, the Obama administration has ruled out any federal jobs program, instead insisting that employment must be left to the “private sector.”

Just as Reagan gave the signal for union-busting and wage-cutting 30 years ago by smashing PATCO, Obama set the course for far deeper wage and benefit cuts today when he forced through the restructuring of General Motors and Chrysler and cut the wages of newly hired auto workers in half.

In the name of expanding US exports and “creating jobs,” his administration has promoted precisely the steps Verizon is now taking. Spearheaded by the government, corporations are using the disastrous economic situation and mass unemployment as an

opportunity to blackmail workers into accepting their own impoverishment.

There is a growing mood of opposition to these attacks. This opposition must now find a new organizational and political path.

The Socialist Equality Party encourages and will fight aggressively for mass working class support for the Verizon strike. We call on Verizon workers to contact us today to begin building independent rank-and-file committees and launching a nation-wide campaign of solidarity.

This struggle must become the basis for a fight not just against one company, but against the capitalist class as a whole. This requires a combined industrial and political struggle. The Socialist Equality Party is spearheading the fight to mobilize the working class in opposition to the Obama administration and both big business parties on the basis of a socialist program that starts from the needs of working people, not corporate profits.

We urge Verizon strikers and all those who support their struggle to study the program of the SEP and make the decision to join and build our party as the new leadership of the working class.



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