

“They are trying to make the worker an indentured servant to corporate America”

Verizon strikers speak out

A WSWS reporting team
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The walkout by 45,000 telecommunication workers against Verizon has entered its sixth day with a propaganda blitz by the company and media branding strikers as saboteurs and overpaid relics. At the same time, court orders are being used to limit the numbers and activities of striking workers.

From the start of the strike Verizon issued statements, echoed without substantiation by the *New York Times*, CNN, the *Wall Street Journal* and almost every other media outlet, that strikers were destroying company equipment. One New Jersey report went so far as to claim that strikers were placing children in the way of Verizon trucks crossing picket lines.

Looking up the alleged incident on You Tube video showed this was nothing but a malicious slander. The worker in question can be seen holding his daughter in his arms as the truck passed through the picket line and angrily telling the strikebreakers they were taking food out of his daughter’s mouth.

On Wednesday, Verizon posted ads in local papers offering a \$50,000 reward for the arrest of those responsible for equipment damage. That was followed by a larger advertising campaign listing exaggerated wages and benefits of workers and arguing that the strikers deserved only contempt because they made too much. This comes from a company whose top five executives pocketed \$258 million over the last four years.

Meanwhile, several injunctions have been issued against striking workers limiting picketing. In almost every state involved in the strike, Verizon is seeking injunctions, and it has already been granted several. In Allegheny County, in western Pennsylvania, strikers are limited to six pickets and are prohibited from “interfering with business, by threatening, obstructing, intimidating or harassing” customers or other employees.

The unions involved—the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the Communications Workers of America—issued a cowardly joint statement in response to these provocations, pledging, “We fully expect that union members will respect and follow the law.” The unions, including the AFL-CIO, have done nothing to mobilize broader popular support for the struggle of the Verizon workers.

Strikebreakers have struck several picketing workers with their cars but no arrests have been made nor has the media launched a campaign condemning company violence. Next Monday will mark the 22nd anniversary of the death of Gerry Horgan, a 34-year old telephone worker who was run over by a strikebreaker on August 15, 1989 during the four-month strike against NYNEX, later incorporated into Verizon.

Verizon is the nation’s second largest telecommunications and largest wireless company with 196,000 employees. It is demanding massive concessions from the workers including abolishing job security, freezing pensions for current workers and eliminating them for new employees, forcing workers to pay more for health and dental care and cutting the number of sick days.

Workers in Virginia, New York City and Pittsburgh spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* about the issues in the strike.

New York City

Roland Morgan, an employee of Verizon for 23 years, said, “I was in the strike in ’89 and since then we have been getting partial wage increases every year. Now that the company is making huge profits they want us to accept cuts, because that is what all the other companies are doing. Verizon cannot enter talks because they cannot justify the cuts they want.

“They are trying to make the average American worker an indentured servant to corporate America. The working class needs its own party. Every corporation is an imperial court that can do whatever it wants.”

Doug La Tourette, 28 years at Verizon and a central office technician, said, “We had no choice but to strike because Verizon’s demands are ridiculous. The company’s strategy is to keep us out on strike for a long time so they will save a lot of money.

“Since 1983, when I joined this company, my overall pay has been stagnant. The raises really don’t count for much when you

take into account the rise in the cost of living. When I was growing up only my father had to work. Today both my wife and I have to work in order to maintain the same lifestyle. This is happening worldwide.

“I am an activist. I picketed with the United Parcel Service and Daily news workers when they went out on strike. The unions have suffered more and more since the PATCO strike.

“The executive board of the union consists of mostly retirees—so their interests do not jibe with ours. They retired after they got elected and then increased union dues to pay for their loss of wages. They did this even though they got good bonuses when they retired.

“If you are a dissident, the union leadership along with company security will go after your livelihood. It appears that the union leadership works with the company. I see the need for workers all over to unite. We should have a national strike. I agree that we need a rank-and-file committee independent of the union to organize this kind of struggle.

“The Democrats have let me down. I had hoped that giving money to the Democrats would do some good. Obama is a wimp. Wall Street financed him to get into office.”

Another striker said, “IBEW Local 3 of New York is not honoring our struggle. They are delivering goods into the building. They are not only scabbing on those of us on this picket line who are members of Communications Workers of America Local 1101, they are also scabbing on Local 829 of the IBEW, which is out on strike against Verizon in New Jersey.”

Nancy Worrell, a customer service and sales representative with 17 years and a union shop steward, explained what the company was demanding. “They want to be able to contract our work out of the state. They want to be able to relocate us 35 miles away. They want to freeze our pension.

“We made them \$14 billion profit and now they are trying to take away our pay. They want to only guarantee 70 percent of our pay. We need a good appraisal to get the other 30 percent. This is really a 30 percent pay cut. This is the way management gets paid. If their unit does not meet the sales quota then they only get 70 percent of their pay.

“Currently, the company pays for tuition if we go to school. Now they are proposing that if we don’t get a good appraisal, then we do not get the tuition money.”

Virginia

“I’ve worked for this company for 29 years,” said one worker. “In one year I get my pension; do you realize what a pension freeze would do to me? I don’t know about everyone else, but I live paycheck to paycheck. I have a savings account that I put a little money into here and there, but at the end of the

month, I’m using it to pay my bills.

“I know I have one of the best healthcare plans out there; a few years ago when my son got injured he was able to be flown to Fairfax Hospital and at the end of the operation the total cost was \$20,000, and I didn’t have to pay for that. But if they start getting us to agree to pay any portion of that then the crack starts to widen and they can get more and more out of us. It just feels like they want us to go backward, my question is; when do they stop? When do the rich get enough?

“Why don’t we ever see a cutback on the higher ups? Executives never receive a cutback. It feels wrong that our pay is moving backwards. Taking it back even 5 years for us is painful.

“Verizon is putting out a bunch of propaganda saying we’re greedy. If people believe that I feel bad for them. I feel like I am doing my part to fight for the living standard of everyone, not just me personally.”

Pittsburgh

Donna is a customer service representative in Pittsburgh who has worked for the company for 11 years. “You have no idea how much pressure we are under. You come to work, log onto your terminal and calls start coming in. You are monitored for how many calls you take each hour, how long they take, how many items you sell to the customers. They may be calling because they were overcharged for something on their bill, but you are supposed to sell them something more. They don’t want us to help the customer; they want us to make them money.

“They want to make our pay raises based on our performance. Then if we don’t sell enough, we will lose pay.

“The company is trying to make us look bad, but it is [former CEO and current chairman] Ivan [Seidenberg] who is making \$55,000 a day. Why should one person be allowed to make that much money and they say people who work everyday should not be allowed to make a decent living?”



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