

Government strike-breaking against Verizon workers

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The World Socialist Web Site invites Verizon workers and their supporters to send comments on the strike to the WSWWS editorial board.

The Obama administration, state and local police, and the courts are carrying out an increasingly aggressive intervention on behalf of the telecommunications company Verizon against 45,000 striking workers in the Northeast US. The workers, now entering their second week on strike, are opposing \$1 billion in concession demands by the company.

On Friday, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), an agency of the Justice Department, announced that it was investigating as a “national security” issue unsubstantiated charges of sabotage leveled by Verizon against striking workers. FBI Special Agent Bryan Travers issued a provocative email connecting the alleged incidents to the September 11 terrorist attacks.

“Because critical infrastructure has been affected, namely the telecommunications of both a hospital and a police department, the FBI is looking into this matter from a security standpoint as part of our security efforts leading up to the 9/11 anniversary,” the email stated.

A day later, the *New York Post* reported that New York City has begun deploying police officers, including members of an anti-terror unit, to escort strike-breakers across picket lines and monitor picketers.

According to the *Post*, police officers are “monitoring Verizon garages and following its trucks with cops from all over the city, including members of the Critical Response anti-terrorism units.” The newspaper quoted one police officer complaining, “We have to follow Verizon trucks all day.”

The government and police are seizing on the charges of

sabotage to increase pressure on the workers, even as they ignore numerous instances of picketing workers being injured by managers or strike-breakers.

At least 30 workers have been hit by cars driven by Verizon management. Last Monday, a strike-breaker drove through a picket line in Getzville, New York, outside of Buffalo, sending several workers to the hospital. In Silver Spring, Maryland, picketers reported several attempts to hit strikers. Three workers went to the hospital Friday morning after being struck by cars.

There have been no reports of arrests in connection with these incidents.

Monday, August 15 is the 22nd anniversary of the death of Gerry Horgan, who was killed on a Communications Workers of America (CWA) picket line in New York in 1989, after being struck by a vehicle driven by a strike-breaker.

Verizon workers denounced the claims of sabotage, noting that service goes down all the time. Now there are no workers to fix the problems, so Verizon is blaming the strikers.

One Verizon worker on the picket line in Buffalo told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “They are blaming us for things that happen every day, like an animal chewing through a wire.”

Gladys, a technician in New York City, said, “I really don’t think vandalism or sabotage is happening in this strike. Management can say this. They have to fight back somehow. It is sad that the media is filled with stories like this because I cannot see any workers doing this.”

“I don’t understand why the FBI has to get involved in investigating everything,” she added. “Even when there isn’t a strike, lines go down at police stations and hospitals.”

Verizon has also obtained court orders or injunctions

limiting picketing in Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey, and an injunction is pending in Massachusetts. At locations throughout the Northeast, workers report an increased police presence, with cops enforcing the orders restricting the number of picketers allowed at a given entrance and outlawing any efforts to halt the business operations of the company.

Several workers have been arrested, including six outside a Baltimore, Maryland facility last week. On Thursday, police arrested two women in Salisbury, Maryland for blocking the road and trying to prevent strike-breakers from entering. They were charged with disturbing the peace, disorderly conduct and failure to obey a lawful order—charges that carry penalties of up to 60 days in jail.

Jeanine, a call center customer service representative in Albany, explained: “The injunction is allowing everyone to walk through the door because we are fenced in and they are given a clear path to the doorway. We are supposed to stay within the fencing, which means we cannot reach the scabs. They have the fencing out in the road because they say we have to be 15 feet from the building. So they put us in the road.”

“There are three entrances to our building, and they are limiting the pickets to 30 at each entrance,” Jeanine added. “There were hundreds of pickets here before this injunction. We were keeping scabs out and slowing them down. At one point, the scabs barreled through us and knocked people down with their shoulders and elbows. We reported these assaults to the police. They talked to the union, and they now have an injunction against us.”

Pam, another Verizon worker in Albany, felt picketers could be arrested if they tried to block the scabs. A video on the web site of the CWA showed how a worker was knocked down the day before by a management official who accelerated his car as he approached the picket line.

“It does look like they could make a police state for the corporations. Look how they have us penned in,” Pam said.

The refusal of the two unions involved in the strike, the CWA and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), to oppose the scabbing or defy the strike-breaking injunctions only encourages the Obama administration and state and local governments to step up their repression and intimidation of striking workers. The AFL-CIO, by virtually ignoring one of the largest US strikes years, provides critical de facto support to the

strike-breaking operation.

These unions are allied to the Democratic Party and are preparing to pour millions of dollars into the reelection campaign of Obama, who is pursuing a right-wing, pro-corporate policy of bailouts and tax cuts for big business and austerity for the working class—a policy that in all essentials coincides with that of the Republicans.

The ability of Verizon workers to defeat the attacks of the government and the corporation depends on the mobilization of broader sections of the working class. The Verizon strike must become the starting point for a general mobilization of all workers against the attack on jobs, wages, social programs and democratic rights.

The AFL-CIO is opposed to any such mobilization and is working, with the collaboration of the CWA and IBEW leadership, to isolate and betray the strike. On Sunday evening there was no mention of Verizon on the front page of the AFL-CIO web site.

Verizon is carrying out the Obama administration's policy, supported by all sections of the political establishment, of using the economic crisis as an opportunity to slash labor costs. Obama set the tone for such actions in the forced bankruptcy of the General Motors and Chrysler in 2009, carried out with the assistance of the United Auto Workers.

The intervention of the state—FBI, police and courts—underscores that in defending their rights the Verizon workers face a political struggle against the two-party capitalist system. For all its talk of advancing “democracy” abroad, the American ruling class denies American workers their basic rights whenever the exercise of those rights impinges on corporate profits. The US state will use all the instruments of repression at its disposal to put down resistance by the working class to the dictates of the corporate elite.



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