

“This isn’t a negotiation. It’s more like dictating.”

Verizon workers denounce company charges of “sabotage”

A WSWS reporting team
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Verizon has escalated its attack on the 45,000 striking telecommunication workers, stating that all workers will lose their health and other benefits on September 1. This follows reports that the company will fire any workers it accuses of sabotage or unlawful activities.

Verizon has used the unsubstantiated charge of sabotage since the second day of the strike to obtain court injunctions limiting pickets and to intimidate strikers, who are fighting against concessions of \$1 billion demanded by the company. Local and state police, along with the FBI, have been brought in to investigate, with the FBI comparing workers accused of sabotage with 9/11 terrorists.

Now the company is threatening to fire workers it accuses of sabotage. In reality, this charge will be used to fire any militant worker. At the same time, all workers will lose health, dental and vision care for both themselves and their families starting next month.

Verizon has been emboldened to take this step because of the refusal of the Communications Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers to mount a campaign in defense of workers. Instead, both unions have instructed their members to follow the anti-democratic injunctions.

An IBEW official in Boston called the police the “friends” of the strikers, threatening to call out the cops against reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site*. This will be the attitude of the unions to any attempt by the workers to resist the sell-out that is being prepared.

At the same time, the media has imposed a blackout of strikers’ views. Articles in the bourgeois media have focused almost entirely on the claims of sabotage from Verizon, ignoring the views of the workers, as well as the fact that at least 30 workers have been injured on the

picket lines.

The *World Socialist Web Site* continues its interviews and discussions with striking workers, including in Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Fairfax, Virginia

Bryan and Edward, both cable splicers, were picketing in Fairfax City in Northern Virginia. The two had worked at Verizon for four to five years.

Bryan was angered by the claims of the company that strikers were sabotaging equipment, “Of course they’ll say that. In reality the cables go down all the time, even on a good day like this. These are scare-tactics that Verizon is attempting to use.

“I heard today about the injunction limiting the pickets to just six people in our area. Last week there was going to be a CWA rally in Ashburn, Virginia which was relocated to what I believe is a dead end street in Leesburg, Virginia. It is located next to a high school, but nowhere near any Verizon stores.” This is to ensure compliance with the injunctions.

Speaking on the broader issues involved in the strike, Bryan said, “The protests in Wisconsin came very, very close to a revolutionary movement. I believe it was a starting point in the fights that are going on and I think will continue to go on. At the same time, its defeat was a starting point for anti-union governments around the country to use the precedent to attack the working class. A general strike I think would be a progressive step forward, because what is going on now is going to affect everyone.

“They call what we have ‘entitlements’ but they’re our gains, things which we agreed to having in the contracts. We made this company profitable; we deserve what we have gained.

“I commute from Maryland every day to work right here. A lot of guys have to commute from Baltimore

down here. With these concessions as well as the cost of daily commute, how are we supposed to live?"

On the role of the union, Bryan said, "I wish the CWA would mount a more aggressive campaign to fight back against the propaganda that Verizon is putting out against us. Last Sunday they took out a full-page ad in the *Washington Post* claiming their concession demands were reasonable. I bet if they were to actually list some of their 'demands' people would see that this isn't a negotiation. It's more like dictating."

Edward described the pressure that management is placing upon the workers. "We've been dealing with miserable conditions all throughout our contract." He explained that the company has been using GPS systems to track workers and suspend some. "It was just a measure enacted by the company in order to control us and to basically tell us, 'we don't trust you'. I heard of guys being told that if they turn off the GPS on their vehicle, they're getting sent home. Point blank.

"One guy broke his hand in a van door while talking to management, and they sent him home without pay. There's stuff like this happening all the time. Most of us are attempting to make up lost time for minor infractions in one way or another, sometimes they'll give it to you, sometimes they won't.

"I wanted to fight people nearly everyday when they first moved us into the FiOS [fiber optics] division, just because of the amount of rules and supervision. I understand the bottom line and know that you need to have rules in order to get along, but some of this stuff just makes it impossible to do our job and is actually limiting our abilities to provide service to customers.

"It takes years to become oriented to this line of work, oriented with the housing styles in a certain area and what is required for certain systems to work in certain places. When they moved me directly into FiOS and then hired some new guy off the street to fill my old job. That's two guys that need to be trained, instead of just one.

"These are two highly specialized fields we're talking about here. We're not just talking about monkeys working the equipment; we're talking about trained professionals operating with thousands of dollars worth of electrical equipment.

"Now they told us they're going to penalize us if we spend too much time talking to the FSC (Fiber Solutions Center), which is put in place to assist workers dealing with these new systems. Moving the call centers overseas to places like India doesn't help, as a lot of these specialty technicians don't have a lot of hands-on training

in this field, and are basically computer-taught.

"The installation of FiOS is supposed to be a two man job, but in order to save profits the company has cut corners, and now one man does all the work.

"We are the last line of defense in these situations, I know tons of guys who hate to be told that, but it's the truth. Workers take it on the chin all the time in dealing with the customer; the management effectively leaves us stranded."

Workers are routinely suspended for not reaching unreasonably high "customer satisfaction" scores, Edward added. "Everyone wants to do a great job, and I know there will be bad apples everywhere. But some of this stuff is just not fair. Workers built this company in a very real sense."

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Kim and Deena, both with 16 years at Verizon as consultants for small businesses, were picketing outside a Verizon Wireless Store in Downtown Pittsburgh and spoke about the issues in the strike.

Kim said, "It is just unfair what they are trying to take away from us. They want to cut back \$20,000 in our salaries (and benefits). I don't think anybody would take that, especially in this day and age. The company is not budging at all.

"This is just something we have to do, we can't give in to the company. We will take this day by day."

Deena added, "We worked so hard for them for years to get what we have, and not just us but other members and the retirees. And now they just want to take it away from us, when the company is making so much in profits.

"I feel the company is feeding the media the reports on sabotage. They want to have a lot of negative publicity out there about us and try and make us look bad. We need to all stand together."



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