

# Injunctions attack democratic rights of Verizon strikers

A WSWS reporting team  
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An examination of the injunctions leveled against the Verizon strikers shows that they undermine core democratic rights of the workers. They go far beyond addressing the unsubstantiated charges of "sabotage" that the company, abetted by the media, has leveled in order to justify its strike-breaking operations.

In addition to clauses prohibiting workers from "threatening, obstructing, intimidating, or harassing" Verizon employees or contractors, the injunctions bar legal assembly and the distribution of printed material.

In New York for instance, the injunction limits the numbers of picketers based on the number of strikebreakers who are working at a particular site. A worksite with 25 strikebreakers can have at most six pickets; a location with 50 strikebreakers can have ten pickets; a location with 100 strikebreakers only 15 pickets, and so on.

In Pennsylvania, a cookie cutter injunction used in several counties limits pickets to six, and they must be 15 feet away from the door. The injunction goes on to make illegal the "videotaping, photographing, or recording in any manner, the likeness of any individual at any worksite of any Verizon employee or contractor performing company work." This would include portrayals of Verizon top management.

An injunction applying to New York City and surrounding counties declares that there can be "no more than ten pickets and one person handing out printed material at the stores' entrance."

The anti-democratic character of these court rulings underscores the role of the state in backing the company against the workers. Police have been out in force in many areas, arresting strikers who violate injunctions. The FBI has also launched an investigation into the allegations of "sabotage."

The Communications Workers of America and the

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, which represent the 45,000 striking workers, have agreed to these injunctions and are not challenging the unconstitutional restrictions on the rights to assembly and free speech. They have instructed all workers to strictly obey the injunctions.

At the same time, the unions have made clear that they are willing to accept major concessions, only asking that the company "bargain fairly." A Verizon bargaining update posted on the CWA web site states, "We are 12 days into the strike and the company replies to our efforts at meeting them halfway with more demands for givebacks. In one union counter-proposal, we agreed to part of the company demand and in turn, their response was to withdraw that part of the proposal!"

Nowhere on the CWA web site or in their meetings with members has the CWA spelled out what exactly they are willing to accept and what constitutes "meeting [the company] halfway."

Verizon is demanding concessions totaling more than \$1 billion a year, or about \$20,000 per employee. Included in Verizon's demands are the freezing of pensions, forcing workers to pay part of their health care, removing all provisions for job security and cutting wages for workers in the business offices.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with workers in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Norfolk and Fairfax, Virginia about the issues in the strike. (See also, "New York Verizon workers rally against city schools contract")

## Norfolk, Virginia

Mike, a maintenance administrator, said of the injunctions from the courts and the increased policing of strikers: "It's all BS. The arrests of strikers, the firings by Verizon, the injunctions, it's garbage. The

terrorism charge [made by the FBI] is just another way to distract people from the real issues.

"I think mobilizing the working class would be a help," he added. "I have worked here too long for them to take \$20,000 from me and my family, and I want these people driving by the picket to know that. They want to freeze my pension and make me contribute to my health care. This is a company that makes billions in profits, pays no taxes and hands out bonuses to executives that are more money than I will make in my entire life."

### **Fairfax County, Virginia**

Joseph, an outside plant technician, said, "All the decent things in society we have are thanks to the working class; the working class put a man on the moon. I am in total agreement with you on the fact that the working class needs a political party that is willing to fight for its interests. The banks own the government; they are parasites hanging around the workers' necks.

"All I have to say about the calls to cut benefits to the workers worldwide is that it's going to do every country more harm than good.

"I absolutely support the call to mobilize other sections of the working class in this battle. If we fall here, they will come after other workers tomorrow."

Laura added, "I am not so worried about myself as I am worried about my granddaughter. What kind of a world will she be coming in to?"

"I agree that all the workers should go on strike, but if it's going to work, we'll need to do it internationally," she added.

"Not until recently did I feel that I was treated as 'just a worker,' something to profit off of by the company. I used to feel 'a part' of the company, but there is none of that now; it's depressing."

Bryan, a younger worker, asked, "Why is it that management can make millions during a recession, but workers like me can't make anything, and it's a struggle just to keep what we have?"

### **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

Calvin, an installer with nearly 20 years at Verizon said, "This is not right. We have worked a long time for the things we have, and they want to just take all that away from us. We should have gone on strike a long time ago. You could see this coming. Verizon was

combining work forces and never replacing anyone when they left. It just fell on everyone else to take up the slack.

"All they talk about is the decline in land line and how everyone is switching to wireless. Why don't they talk about the amount of data circuits we are putting in all the time?"

"Verizon started talking about vandalism and sabotage from day one. This is just a publicity stunt to make us look bad. They don't want people to talk about how the head of the company makes \$55,000 in a day.

"There is too much inequality in this country. All working people have got to stand up and put an end to this."



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