

# Two striking Verizon workers could face 18 months in jail

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20 August 2011

Two striking Verizon workers, Susanna Short, 37, and Leabern Kennedy, 44, arrested on a picket line in the town of Norton, in southwest Virginia on August 8, could face up to 18 months in jail and a \$3,500 fine, according to local press accounts. The women were arrested for allegedly blocking a vehicle of a strike-breaker from entering a Verizon parking lot.

Short and Kennedy were each charged with two misdemeanors for obstructing free passage and failing to obey a police officer. Both received letters of suspension from Verizon.

“We were not on company property. Of course we’re not on company time,” Short told a local newspaper. “There was no violence... and yet they’re suspending us.”

About 300 call center workers and technicians are on strike in Norton, which has a population of about 4,000.

Kennedy has worked for Verizon for 12 years and is a grandmother. Short, who has worked for Verizon for 11 years, is the mother of two children.

The two women face an October 11 hearing before Wise County General District Court. They will be represented by Patti Church, the widow of former United Mine Workers President Sam Church, according to the local newspaper *Tricities.com*.

The potential jail time for Kennedy and Short is of a piece with a massive joint corporate-government offensive against the 45,000 workers who have been on strike since August 7. A growing number of Verizon workers have now been arrested for no other “crime” than picketing.

In several states courts have slapped injunctions on the right to picket. On Friday in Boston a panel of Suffolk County Superior Court judges supplied Verizon

with another injunction, issuing a ruling limiting strikers from blocking Verizon facilities by “physical obstruction, intimidation, coercion, violence or threat of violence.”

“They not only want to gut our contract but also our freedom of speech and assembly by the injunction to keep us from reaching other workers,” Joseph, a Verizon worker and CWA shop steward in the Bronx told the WSWS.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has launched investigations into Verizon’s claims that workers have sabotaged its facilities, even though no credible evidence has been supplied.

The claims of sabotage also provide Verizon with a pretext for the failure of its management replacement workers to effectively carry out the work of the strikers. There are a growing number of reports of the failure of phone service and long wait times for technical assistance.

One Verizon customer, John Simcho, a 68-year old retired police officer in Munhall, Pennsylvania, is without phone service. The Pittsburghchannel.com reported, “‘In case there is an emergency, I can’t even dial 911,’ said Simcho... ‘They said, ‘There is a problem, but we can’t tell what it is. We could send somebody out Sept. 9.’” Neither Simcho nor his wife has a cellular phone.

“I even asked them if there’s any program where I can get a cellphone temporarily and they said, ‘We don’t know of a programs that exist like that,’” he added.

There is strong support for the strike among workers from Virginia to Massachusetts. But the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have sought to isolate the strike and have done

nothing to oppose the court injunctions and government intimidation.

Instead of expanding the struggle, the unions have increasingly turned to middle class protest tactics. On Thursday night, hundreds of striking workers and their supporters held a candlelight vigil near the Mendham, New Jersey mansion of Verizon CEO Lowell McAdam. The unions are also pushing a signature drive that demands Verizon “stop union busting and negotiate fairly.”



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