

CWA and IBEW abandon workers victimized by Verizon

Samuel Davidson
24 August 2011

The full scope of the betrayal of the Communication Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers is becoming clear to the 45,000 striking Verizon workers who were ordered back to work yesterday, ending their two week old strike.

While both the CWA and IBEW leadership have claimed a victory in forcing Verizon to “refocus bargaining and narrow the issues,” Verizon’s top executives point to the fact that none of the major issues have been removed from the table.

“We remain committed to our objectives,” said Marc Reed, Verizon’s executive vice president of human resources. “We look forward to negotiating the important issues that are integral to the future health of Verizon’s wireline business.” The company is seeking to cut of pensions, health care and other benefits, and eliminate work rules and job security.

Having ended the strike, the unions are now preparing to negotiate a contract that accepts all the main concessions demanded by the company.

Revealing of its attitude to the workers as a whole, the CWA and IBEW leadership allowed Verizon to indiscriminately discipline workers for actions during the strike. According to CWA officials, they have been given a list of 80 such workers. But this is most likely an underestimation, and the number will grow.

The return to work order explicitly states in point six, “Disputes involving disciplinary actions arising from employee conduct that occurred between and including August, 7 2011 and the Return to Work Date are **not subject** to the arbitration provisions” of the contract (emphasis added). In other words, Verizon can chose to fire workers for whatever reason, and those workers will not be entitled to even the limited protection and due process offered by arbitration.

The return to work agreement goes on to state that the

company will be given as long as it needs to collect evidence and will then present the evidence to the union. Meanwhile, the workers involved will not be paid and will have no rights to be present, to examine the supposed evidence and to mount a defense.

“It’s wrong that we are going back to work while some of the members have been fired,” said Debbie, a service representative with 14 years at Verizon in Pittsburgh.

Another worker wrote on a Facebook page devoted to the strike, “I am not happy we are not ALL going back in. Those who were suspended are screwed. How could we let this happen??”

And further on in response to comments by some union officials that everything would be ok, she wrote, “This is not okay. We should NEVER have agreed to go back unless WE ALL go back. The reality is 45,000 people are not going to walk back out because a few people lost their jobs. We needed to fight this now. We had the company on their knees... They weren't running the business... They were showing up shaking peoples hands and that's about it.”

Another worker pointed out, “The company will hold them hostage until Sept 30, that is the date that they said they hope to have all disciplinary matters resolved by. So that would be two months with no pay, not a victory in my eyes.”

The company’s victimization of these workers is a continuation of their unsubstantiated charge of “violence and sabotage” during the strike. Verizon was never able to produce evidence that strikers vandalized equipment, yet the charges were used as a pretext for court injunctions, the mobilization of state and local police and even an FBI investigation in which striking workers were compared with the 9/11 attack.

It is clear that Verizon plans to step up the harassment

and intimidation of workers. Striking workers reported Tuesday that in several cases management has asked them about things posted on Facebook.

“To everyone on who is posting on Facebook be aware that Verizon managers have accessed this site and are monitoring it as I type this. Not surprising is that they are actually questioning members about their posts. BE CAREFUL!” one worker wrote.

To which another worker said, “Just got a call from a member who was questioned...” A third responded, “Next thing you know this country will become like one where they shoot you down in the streets for peaceful protest...”

Those being singled out by the company are being chosen not because they had anything to do with vandalism or sabotage, but because they were militant and outspoken workers or actively seeking to block strike-breakers from entering Verizon buildings.

Verizon is seeking to victimize a group of workers to set them as an example of what will happen to other workers who dare to stand up to the company’s dictates.

For its part, the CWA and IBEW are supporting the victimization of these workers. The union asked for a return to work without demanding that the workers be reinstated and has only said that it too will examine the evidence compiled by Verizon.

The CWA and IBEW also want to see the discipline of the most militant and outspoken workers. They too want to use these workers as an example to the rest of the workforce of what happens if they don't follow along the lines of the union executives.

It is necessary for the bureaucracy to suppress any independent activity and thinking by the workers as they prepare an agreement with the company for the destruction of the wages, benefits and working conditions of the Verizon workers.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact