

Verizon workers speak as first week of strike ends

A WSWWS reporting team
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The 45,000 striking telecommunication workers are ending their first week on strike against Verizon this weekend. The company is escalating its strike-breaking tactics against workers. Claims of “sabotage” received the implicit endorsement of the Obama administration’s Justice Department on Friday. (See “Unions prepared to end Verizon strike without a contract”).

Verizon is demanding massive concessions from the workers, totaling \$1 billion a year. This includes ending all job security clauses in the contract, freezing pensions for current employees and ending them for new hires, making workers pay for a substantial portion of their health benefits and cutting the number of sick days and holidays.

The Center for Tax Justice in a report released earlier this year found that Verizon paid a tax rate of -2.9 percent for the past three years. The federal government gave it nearly \$1 billion in tax breaks, while the company made over \$32 billion in profits during the same time.

The *World Socialist Web Site* continued its interviews with striking workers on Friday, including workers from upstate New York, and Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Syracuse, New York

Theresa Shaver described the harassment from two police who arrived early on Friday morning and stayed for about two hours. They are enforcing the court injunction aimed at crippling the ability of workers to impede business operations.

“He took a head count,” Shaver said. “He told me I had to gather everyone together, cut it down to 15

people, and tell the other people to either go across the street or go to their cars and wait.

“That’s how he had interpreted the paperwork [of the injunction], that the headcount went by how many people were working.” She said that the union interpreted the court order differently. “The officer was very adamant. He meant it. He said, ‘Nope, give me something in writing that tells me otherwise.’

“It was scary. I followed his instructions, and some people were getting a little mad.

“Then he actually pulled another one of our members out of the group, and accused her of taking his picture, because she had her phone in her hand. He said, ‘You want a picture of me, come over here and get a picture of me.’ She walked over and said, ‘I’m not taking pictures.’ He said, ‘I figured you wanted to come over here and get my picture.’ And she said, ‘Actually I wasn’t taking pictures, would you like to look at my phone?’ He said, ‘No. I was mad. I was scared. They stuck around for quite a while.’

Kelly Ryan, another Verizon worker in the Syracuse area, added, “They’re trying to take away the jobs from the middle class for corporate greed. They are trying to take away everything that we have bargained for over the last 50 or 60 years, but they’re not willing to give us anything. We have to fight for all the middle class, not just those in the CWA [Communications Workers of America] and IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers].”

Cortland, New York

Willard, who was picketing with his two children said, “I have two others at home with these two. I just want a contract. We’re not asking for any more, we’re just trying to keep what we’ve got.”

Terry, a senior worker, added, “We’re fighting for the middle class and don’t want to get knocked back into the dark ages like they’re trying to do. It’s a way of life that we’ve fought for.”

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Chris Borquin, who was picketing outside the 9th and Race street offices of Verizon said, “The company is trying to get rid of everyone, and they really don’t care about anyone who’s beneath them and their class structure.”

Referring to the anti-worker legislation passed earlier this year in Wisconsin, he added: “The attacks on the teachers’ unions were a terrible act by the current regime out in Wisconsin.

“There’s great solidarity—everyone’s motivated to show the company we’re not going back to substandard lifestyles. We are on strike to maintain our current lifestyle”

Pat Jackson, another striker in Pittsburgh, said, “We are just trying to keep what we got over the past 50 years. They’re looking to take all that back. We’re just trying to hold on to what we got. That’s all. We’re not looking to break the bank or anything. We’re just looking for a fair contract, and they haven’t even budged.”

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Chris Zulka, a small business consultant with four years’ service at Verizon said, “I think it is very unfair. It is actually insulting what they are offering us. They should be ashamed of themselves.”

Responding to the claims of “sabotage” Zulka said, “Verizon has been saying that strikers have been destroying equipment, but they have not produced a single piece of evidence to support that claim. The network breaks every day. Things happen, but now that we aren’t there to fix it, the company is blaming us for causing it.”

He added, “The number one issue for me is job security. Without job security there is nothing else to

fight for. Without a job, there is no pension, no benefits, no paycheck.

“I see Verizon cutting jobs every day. Last year, when Verizon offered an early retirement, I think 10,000 people took it, about 20 from my department alone. They have not replaced those people. They have not hired additional reps but they have expanded our job duties.

“We have so few people in our department, and we are so overworked that they have frozen our position. That means we can’t transfer to another job or take a promotion.

“We want people to understand that we are on strike not for pay and benefits, but to protect a middle class way of life. Over the past three years the corporations are doing their best to break the unions and push people down. We have got to all unite to fight back.”

Heather Kneustaut, a service representative with five years said, “I am very upset about all the jobs that we are losing.

“It is frustrating to work for a company that wants to cut your pay and your pensions. I can’t support my children and not have a pension when I retire.”



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