

Unions preparing to agree to concessions at Verizon

Samuel Davidson
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Two weeks after shutting down a strike of 45,000 Verizon workers in the US Northeast, the Communications Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers are in ongoing negotiations with management over huge concessions in health care, pensions and job security.

The unions claimed that they ended the strike after the company agreed to “seriously bargain.” However, union leaders indicated in a conference call to members on Thursday that there had been no progress in the talks.

The strike was ended without any agreement from the company to withdraw any of its demands. At the same time, the unions agreed not to resume the strike for at least 30 days, and then to give a seven-day notice before a strike was launched.

At Thursday’s meetings, union officials claimed that there had been a “noticeable change in the attitude” of management during bargaining. However, they did not indicate that the company had reversed its demand for any of the \$1 billion in concessions that provoked the strike.

While Verizon workers were motivated to strike because of their opposition to these demands, the unions insisted throughout that it was only about “bargaining rights.” To the officials of the CWA and IBEW, this means the right to collect dues and be part of the process of extracting concessions from the workforce.

CWA President Larry Cohen pointed to the likely line that the union will take in justifying a concessions contract when he said on Thursday, “We have a strategy; our strategy is jobs. Their strategy is health care and cost structure.”

In other words, an agreement sacrificing worker benefits will be sold as a victory if it contains

provisions supposedly preserving jobs. This is a line used repeatedly by unions to justify their betrayals. In the end, the job security guarantees prove entirely fictitious.

Cohen and several other union officials praised the return-to-work agreement, emphasizing that the CWA was demonstrating more concern about the network than Verizon management.

Chris Shelton, the head of District 1, which includes New York, bragged that his statements to the press forced Verizon to institute mandatory overtime for his members to fix the thousands of problems created by the strike and Hurricane Irene.

The Verizon strike was called off by the unions at the very point that it was beginning to affect company operations. Many workers are concerned that they have only been called back to catch up with back work. The unions, which are wedded to the corporatist position that the interests of workers and the company are identical, have turned this into a virtue.

A local president from Allentown, Pennsylvania bragged that his garages were working 12 hours a day repairing damage from Hurricane Irene.

At the same time, the union executives chastised workers on 12-hour shifts for not participating in enough leafleting campaigns. “Mobilization activities have been relaxing,” Shelton said, “We can’t relax, we have to keep the pressure on them.” The “pressure” on the company, however, came from the strike, which the unions called off.

Thursday’s meeting, like previous meetings, was highly stage-managed. The call was kept to only 40 minutes, with most of the time being given to empty declarations of solidarity from union officials.

Direct questions from members were not allowed. Instead, questions were submitted to a moderator who

asked general questions to the officials present.

Nothing was said about the workers who were fired or suspended during the strike until late in the meeting in response to a question. The union reported that “15 or 16” of the more than 80 victimized workers have been brought back, and that they were looking at the evidence the company had against the others.



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