

Workers in Philadelphia speak out against the two big business parties and union betrayals

A reporting team
15 August 2012

While the AFL-CIO organized the “Workers Stand up for America” rally in Philadelphia Saturday to promote the Democrats, a number of workers present who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* voiced opposition to this policy and the betrayals carried out by the unions.

Mike Neggie, a Verizon field technician for 17 years in New York City, had brought his two children to the rally against Verizon with homemade signs. He spoke to the WSWs, criticizing the strike’s termination.

“They should have stayed out until they got a fair contract,” he said. “I was disappointed when we came back to work without a contract. A couple of months ago, I heard that the CWA proposed that we start paying for our benefits if they take everything else off the table. Verizon rejected that. I don’t think we should be giving anything up. Labor needs to draw a line in the sand.”

Asked what he thought of the Socialist Equality Party’s presidential campaign, Mike explained: “I routinely vote for third parties. Obama has done nothing he has promised. The first thing he did was abandon the Employee Free Choice Act. Remember when the airlines stood in front of Congress with their hand out and Congress let them rip up the union contract? Then the rest of the corporations did the same thing. This is what Verizon is going to do some time, with their talk of ‘unsustainable contracts.’ Verizon makes billions. I have no problem with voting for socialism.”

Dennis, a Verizon construction worker for 16 years, was in Philadelphia with the CWA 1101 contingent of 500 workers from Manhattan. He commented: “They have to stop this ‘lucky-to-have-a-job’ BS. Everybody I talk to says that now. What is that? I was upset that

the union had not got more done than they did when they called off the strike. But I am more mad at corporate America for attacking all working Americans, not just union workers. We should go back to the regulations that presidents Reagan and Clinton took away. There should be more regulations, and if that doesn’t work the government should take them over. Unions are hoping to turn the Democratic Party around. I don’t think that is possible.”

Nadijah Hardy, who has worked for PSE&G power company in Newark, New Jersey for 10 years in customer service, also spoke to the WSWs. Nadijah is a member of the Utility Workers Union of America, the union whose Consolidated Edison members in Local 1-2 in New York City had been locked out for nearly a month in the face of demands for cuts in pensions and health benefits that the union, in collaboration with the company, is now trying to impose in a new contract.

Nadijah responded that this had already taken place at her company. “We got that. Pensions are only for senior employees. We only have a 401(k).”

She added, “I came here so that employment would be fair, so we could guarantee our benefits, pensions, medical benefits. Right now, with our union, PSE&G is trying to take things away. I am hoping that with this demonstration, they will see how important this is, that this shows there are large numbers of people here who feel the same way.”

When it was pointed out that the rally was set up by the unions trying to divert workers back to the two-party system, Nadijah commented, “I agree. A lot of it is hope that they will keep their word. We have to hold Obama and all the other politicians accountable for the promises they made and fight harder.” The WSWs reporter explained the SEP program for an independent political struggle based on socialist demands.

Al, who has worked for Verizon for 35 years, now in “specials” (working on T1’s, for data, providing the power), spoke about the continuing militancy of the CWA rank and file. “It doesn’t matter what happens, we are going to fight. We make the company. They wouldn’t know work if it hit them in their behinds. We are Verizon, not them.”

Mike, an IBEW member from Maryland who has worked for a defense contractor for 11 years, came with about 50 members. He began with the trade union argument about jobs leaving the US but, after the WSWS reporter responded that jobs are returning because the wage and benefit level has been driven down, Mike rephrased his response: “Work needs to come home to the US—without sacrifice. So we can make a living wage, not live in poverty.”

He added, “We should not give any concessions. It is our health care. I paid for it. It is not an entitlement. I am a veteran and I utilize my own health care, which I paid for, as an employee, from every paycheck. They don’t want it to cut into their profits, then cut the compensation for the executives. The average wage rate for the CEOs compared to the average worker is 450 to 1. In other countries it is 80 to 1. We are off the charts.”

Shehryar Qazi, a graduate student in sociology at the State University of New York (SUNY) in Binghamton, came to the rally with six other graduate teaching assistants, whose union, the GSEU, is affiliated with the CWA.

“We are here supporting the Verizon workers and our own struggle,” he said. He expressed his disagreement with the nationalist tone of the “Workers Stand for America” rally. “Rather than nationalism, I think what needs to happen is class consciousness in the working class labor movement,” he said. “Instead of lining up with the American capitalist class, workers should see their interests are best served by allying themselves with the international working class.

“Imperialism doesn’t serve anyone that well. These wars are hurting the working class. It makes it more difficult for people to see how much we have in common. Almost all the soldiers on any every side of these wars are working class.”

Shehryar described the conditions facing teaching assistants at SUNY Binghamton. “Like the rest of the SUNY system, our contract has been expired for three years,” he said. “We need to have a contract, but the

union officials are timid about starting negotiations. They think if they do, we will end up with lesser rights, wages and working conditions. We only get paid for 20 hours a week, and we are only supposed to work 20 hours a week. But I know in the Watson School of Engineering, TAs are working 60 to 70 hours a week and only getting paid for 20.

“The university president has raised tuition for both graduate and undergraduate students. We are opposing the plan to build up only a few SUNY schools as premier universities at the expense of the others. They are cutting the humanities and the philosophy department at Binghamton. We want to organize the TAs and undergraduate students alike against this.”

Asked about the AFL-CIO rally’s support for Obama, he replied: “I don’t think the support for Obama serves the working class. Obama is a neo-liberal, free-market president. He has bailed out the banks. He is giving tax cuts to the rich, and the laundry list is long. He has done nothing to restore wage equality.

“FDR’s Second Bill of Rights was in reaction to wildcat strikes during World War II. It was an attempt to co-opt the working class; after the war in order to rebuild there would be close to full employment. They needed to ameliorate the class antagonisms.

“It is ridiculous to think this is going to be put into effect today. Today, the Democrats and the Republicans are for the bankers, by the bankers.

“I appreciate, admire and support the Socialist Equality Party candidates for president and vice-president. We need more parties. The working class needs its own party to wage the class struggle.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact