

Verizon workers should reject the concessions contract

Samuel Davidson
22 September 2012

The 44,000 communication workers should reject the tentative contract negotiated between Verizon, the Communication Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

This contract contains massive concessions, especially for workers with less than 10 years service, approximately one-third of the work force. It will allow the company to continue to slash jobs and attack the pensions and health benefits of retirees. This concessions contract is a result of the collaboration of the CWA and IBEW with Verizon. The union leadership actively worked to strangle any effective struggle of communications workers against the company.

Last year, the CWA and IBEW called off a strike after two weeks, claiming that the strike's aim was not to win a contract, but to force the company to the bargaining table. The unions then spent the next thirteen months attempting to channel the anger of Verizon workers over the demands for massive concessions, finally reaching a contract agreement that adopted most of Verizon's demands.

Far from fighting in the interest of the workers, the CWA and the IBEW worked together to demobilize and demoralize the membership so as to push through a concessions contract.

Just as important, the CWA and IBEW leadership worked to prevent a re-eruption of the strike during the approach of the 2012 elections. As with the Chicago Teachers strike, a strike by Verizon workers would further expose the Obama administration and the Democratic Party as supporters of big business.

The unions do not represent the workers, but a privileged group of bureaucrats who maintain their six-figure salaries and benefits as agents of the companies inside the working class. They fear that any movement by the workers will quickly get out of their control.

In examining the contract details as posted on the CWA website, perhaps the greatest lie by the union leadership in pushing the contract is that it defends the jobs and living standards of its members. This contract does nothing of the sort.

Verizon has been cutting jobs by the thousands. In 2000, the time of the last major strike against Verizon, there were 87,000 workers represented by the CWA and IBEW. Today that number is down to just 44,000 even though the company has expanded its landline business with its FiOS (bundled Internet, television and telephone) services.

The CWA and IBEW have worked closely with Verizon to cut jobs, allowing the company to not fill vacancies and negotiating buyout after buyout to cut the workforce, while forcing those who remain to do the extra work. Over the same period the unions have allowed the company to expand the use of term, temporary and contractual workers.

In addition to the job losses through attrition, workers hired since 2003—approximately, one-third of the workforce and growing—are not protected from layoff by the company.

A further provision states that only workers who retire before the end of 2012 will have the cost of their retiree health care benefits paid by the company. This is

designed to force thousands more workers to retire before they are ready and cut more jobs through attrition.

The contract summary posted on the CWA web site does not list cuts in health benefits for retirees, but other sources report the company is moving to a defined fixed-dollar annual contributions to retiree health care in order to cut costs and impose the balance of health care costs on future retirees.

On health care, all workers will increase the amount of their co-pay for insurance. For family coverage the cost to workers will increase from \$60 to \$110 a month for the least expensive plan and from \$82.50 to \$165 a month for the more expensive option.

On wages, the 4-year contract provides only an 8.25 percent wage increase, below the inflation rate, and most of that will be eaten up paying for the higher health care costs.

The contract further attacks new-hires who will not receive the traditional defined benefit pension. Instead, new employees will be placed in a 401k in which they can contribute up to 6 percent of their pay to be matched by the company.

In addition, for the first time, these workers will be eligible for up to a 3 percent lump sum bonus added to their 401k at the discretion of their management, creating the conditions for the expansion of what the company has long sought—merit pay

The contract does include the rehiring of all except one of those workers illegally fired during the strike, but those workers will not receive their back pay, meaning they have lost several tens of thousands of dollars.

The contract also provides for the company to buy back unused sick time which will be used to put additional pressure upon workers not to use their sick time even when needed. Already the company has a disciplinary procedure that can lead to an employee's dismissal if they are sick too often.

Rather than representing a gain for workers, this contract represents the further destruction of wages, benefits and rights.

To take forward their struggle against Verizon, workers must come to the understanding that new organizations of struggle are required. This struggle must be independent of the two big business capitalist parties with its aim at the socialist reorganization of society, in which telecommunications, like all utilities, are publicly owned and operated for the common good and not the profits of a few.



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