

Verizon steps up strikebreaking after “last, best and final” offer

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Telecom giant Verizon stepped up its strikebreaking efforts against 39,000 workers after issuing a “last, best and final offer,” that includes job cuts and sweeping health care and pension concessions.

On Sunday, the company announced it would terminate medical insurance for over 110,000 active and retired workers. Verizon also announced it would be shifting an additional 1,000 managers and contractors to “special assignment” to ratchet up pressure on strikers. The company previously announced that it had trained as many as 10,000 strikebreakers in the month prior to the walkout.

Verizon’s ultimatum includes an insulting 7.5 percent wage increase over three years. In exchange the company would have the power to force workers to commute over 60 miles for up to 120 days per year without accommodations. In addition, the proposed contract would see the closure of up to 11 call centers across the Mid-Atlantic region, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs. Other parts of the contract would allow for increased hiring of outside contract workers.

The concessions demands come as Verizon continues to post immense profits. Last month, Verizon published first quarter operating income (profits before tax and interest payments) of \$7.9 billion and profits of \$1.06 per share, exceeding Wall Street expectations. The company’s highly profitable wireless division saw revenue growth of 5.6 percent to \$22.6 billion, while its wire division saw a 4.5 percent revenue growth to \$4 billion, with the bulk of revenue coming from its FiOS fiber optic service.

In an ominous move, the company claimed Wednesday that it had documented 57 acts of vandalism against its wire infrastructure since the strike began April 13. The company’s allegations of sabotage during the previous strike of 2011 were followed by the

involvement of the state and federal government in strikebreaking operations against the workers, including attacks on their democratic right to assemble.

In the face of this coordinated provocation, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have restricted workers to toothless stunts such as urging customers to boycott company’s wireless stores and holding rallies with bureaucrats from other unions and Democratic Party politicians. The isolation of the strike has been enforced by the AFL-CIO and Change to Win unions, which do not want the struggle to develop into a broader mobilization of the working class against the Obama administration and the Democrats, with whom they are allied.

In a teleconference Sunday night, CWA District 2-13 Vice President Ed Mooney sought to sow complacency among workers, claiming Verizon would improve its offer if the strike continued as is, while making it clear the union was open to making further concessions. Asked if negotiations had arrived at an impasse, Mooney said, “the union has plenty of room for movement, it’s the company that has been refusing to give up on its proposals.” He added that the CWA and IBEW had already offered to save the company “hundreds of millions of dollars.”

The two unions have been responsible for consecutive sellout contracts. In 2003, the unions oversaw the creation of a two-tier benefits system, in which new hires lost all job protections and pensions. During the Sunday night call, Mooney told younger workers to remain in solidarity with the older workers and to “learn their history,” even if they worked under a different “retirement structure” from the older generation. Mooney did not explain that younger workers receiving lesser retirement benefits than the

older generation was the result of conditions the union imposed.

Picketing workers spoke to the WSWs *Verizon Strike Newsletter* about the latest contract proposal by the company. Sherry, a worker from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with 25 years, explained, “We’re fighting for our retiree benefits, and our benefits. I have 25 years. I want to retire. They want to close a lot of shops and move people further away than the 35-mile limit.”

Kim, another Verizon worker, explained, “Everything we’re giving up we’re not going to get back.” Karen explained, “We’re out here for everybody who works for a greedy company. It’s not just us it’s everybody around the country.”

John, a call center worker, explained, “They just came back with their ‘last and final offer,’ which sucks. It’s nothing special. They want to be able to relocate people up to 120 days. If you’re an installer or something like that, they can send you elsewhere, away from your home, away from your family. It’s ridiculous.”

When a WSWS reporter suggested that Verizon wants to do this to force older workers out, John agreed. “I think that’s definitely what they’re trying to do. I don’t see any other point behind it. Instead of hiring more people they are subcontracting the work out to people who work for less money.”



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