

Verizon strike: CWA officials call New York cops against WSWS reporters

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The WSWS urges Verizon workers to sign up for the Verizon Strike Newsletter to receive the latest updates by email.

Officials from the Communications Workers of America (CWA) in Brooklyn called the police to prevent striking workers from speaking to reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* Friday. The effort by the CWA to silence its critics and intimidate militant workers occurred just days after a New York Police Department lieutenant, driving a van load of scabs, ran down a striking Verizon worker on a picket line in the neighboring borough of Queens.

About 60 striking workers were standing and sitting behind the ubiquitous police barricades near a Verizon call center near downtown Brooklyn at noon on Friday when two reporters from the WSWS *Verizon Strike Newsletter* approached them, seeking interviews and commentary on the one-month-long strike.

In the face of a virtual blackout of the strike by the corporate-controlled news media, the WSWS has been the only publication that has consistently reported on the strike since it began on April 13. Hundreds of strikers, looking for a way to break the isolation of the strike by the CWA and other unions, have signed up for the WSWS *Verizon Strike Newsletter*. WSWS reporters have repeatedly interviewed strikers at the Brooklyn location over the last few weeks, as well as during the 2011 strike.

The incident happened after a WSWS reporter identified himself to a striker, handed her a copy of a WSWS article, and asked her if she would like to comment on the latest developments in the strike. In particular, he asked her about the running down of striker James Smith on May 9 by an NYPD cop, as well as the injury of another picket, Joseph Rooney, by a scab driving a car on May 12 in Westborough,

Massachusetts.

The striking worker gave her permission to the WSWS reporter and the interview began. Within a few moments, however, a woman approached the two and said, “The interview is over.” When asked, she said she was a CWA shop steward. The reporter explained that the WSWS wanted to hear and publicize the views of rank-and-file workers but the union official insisted that comments could only be gotten from top officials in the union headquarters.

The reporter moved on and began interviewing another striker. A man came up who identified himself as the picket captain and told him that there would be no more interviews. The worker being interviewed replied that she could speak for herself but the picket captain persisted. “You have to go,” he said to the WSWS reporter. Without the slightest substantiation, the picket captain claimed that there had been complaints about the reporters.

The CWA picket captain then spoke to two nearby police officers. The reporter went outside the barricade and was approached by the cops, who said, “You can’t stay here. They don’t want you here.” The reporter asked who it was that didn’t want the WSWS there and the officer replied that it was the union.

In the meantime, another union official told the other WSWS reporters, “You know you can’t get interviews. If you continue I will call the police and have you arrested.” When the reporters insisted that the workers had a democratic right to talk, the official replied, “I don’t have time to debate the Constitution with you.” When the official was asked his name he walked away in silence.

The attack on the democratic rights both of the WSWS and of strikers themselves underscores the role of the CWA and other unions as a labor police force.

The same union bureaucrats had no problem parading Bernie Sanders, Hillary and Bill Clinton around the picket lines, even though the Obama administration and the Democratic Party are fully backing the strikebreaking operation by Verizon. Just last week a federal judge issued an injunction in response to a request by Obama's National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to ban strikers from picketing hotels where Verizon is housing strikebreakers. Bill de Blasio, another Democrat praised by the CWA, is overseeing the operations of the NYPD, which is conducting a scab escorting service for Verizon.

The effort to muzzle its critics is the surest sign that the CWA, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and the other unions are preparing a miserable sellout of the strike. This is underscored by the meeting the CWA and the IBEW had with Obama's Labor Secretary, Thomas Perez. The Obama administration, with the full backing of the AFL-CIO and other unions, wants to shut down the strike as soon as possible, on management's terms. If it goes on much longer, the Democrats and unions fear workers could rebel and trigger a far broader mobilization of the working class, which would lead to political confrontation with the Obama administration.

In order to prevent another sellout like the 2011 strike, the WSWs has called on rank-and-file workers to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the unions by organizing independent strike committees. The Socialist Equality Party's presidential candidate, Jerry White, has denounced the Obama administration's strikebreaking intervention and called for the mobilization of the entire working class to defend the Verizon workers.

Despite the efforts to silence them, Verizon strikers continue to express their views to the WSWs. Joe, a customer service representative in New York City, said, "The public is being misled by the media. Mayor de Blasio is giving a police escort to the strikebreakers and every week the company is taking out more and more ads to make us look like the bad guys.

"I have been working here for 35 years, and every few years they do this. We have had to fight for everything we have. I was here in 1989 when Gerry Horgan was killed on the picket line, and we had to stay out for four months.

"It is wrong to freeze workers' pensions at 30 years. I

have stayed this long with the company and worked all those years, worked loyally and produced everything they have. Why should my pension be taken away now that I have given my loyalty already? This is when the company president makes \$20 million a year and gets free lifetime health care. They never said they didn't have the money, because they do. But they want to spend it on buying AOL, which they did last year, and Yahoo, which they are planning to buy now.

"I don't understand how the judge could rule for Obama's NLRB to stop our picketing at the scab hotels. The company wrote us a letter before the strike admitting it was legal to follow any truck or van as long as we don't interfere with what they are doing. This is the same thing. It is not a secondary picket, and Verizon told us it was legal. We are allowed to picket the Verizon Wireless stores even though they are not on strike or part of the union. This is not a secondary boycott. I think this is being done just to block us and make it harder to get our message across.

"I am surprised that Obama is calling for this injunction. I thought he was more balanced and would allow these things to be done. But the Democrats go where the money is. It is both parties, really. They promise everything to get elected; then when they are elected they won't do what they said they would."

The WSWs *Verizon Strike Newsletter* calls on workers to denounce this undemocratic attack on the WSWs and Verizon workers. We urge all strikers to attend its online conference call on Tuesday, May 17, at 7:00 p.m. Eastern time: One month on strike: The way forward for Verizon workers. Participating in the call will be the Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate and WSWs US labor editor, Jerry White. To take part, dial 213-416-1560 and enter PIN: 581 991 086 # or sign up for the *Verizon Strike Newsletter* to receive an email invitation.



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