

The political struggle facing Verizon workers

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The month-long strike by 40,000 workers at Verizon Communications in the United States is at a critical juncture. Over the weekend, the Obama administration intervened in an effort to wind down the strike and impose the dictates of the telecommunications giant. After meeting with US Labor Secretary Thomas Perez Sunday, executives from the company and the unions are set to resume talks on Tuesday.

Verizon is determined to slash thousands of jobs, shift the cost of health care and pensions onto the backs of the workers, and reduce the workforce to the status of casual labor.

The Verizon strike is part of a resurgence of militant working-class resistance to the relentless attacks of the corporations and the government on jobs, wages and living standards across the United States and internationally. It follows last year's strike by US oil workers and the mass opposition of auto workers against the sell-out contracts imposed by the United Auto Workers union and the Big Three auto makers. It coincides with job actions and protests by teachers and students in Detroit and demonstrations by working-class victims of lead poisoning of the water supply in Flint, Michigan.

In Greece, workers are carrying out mass strikes against brutal austerity measures imposed by the fake-left Syriza government; in France, workers and students are mobilizing against social cuts and reactionary labor "reform" laws; workers' strikes and protests are spreading in China and India.

All sections of the working class and youth are under attack, whether in the form of layoffs and contract concessions or the shutoff of utilities and imposition of crushing levels of student debt. What all these attacks have in common is the fact that their source is the bankruptcy and failure of capitalism.

This is what makes them political struggles and demands that they be brought together, uniting all workers, native-born and immigrant, young and old in a single mass counteroffensive against the corporate elite

and all of its political parties and representatives.

The intervention of the Obama administration underscores the fact that the strikers are locked in a political struggle against not only a single company, but against the entire class of corporate owners and the capitalist state. The Labor Department meeting follows last week's intervention by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and the courts, which backed Verizon's request to ban picketing at New York-area hotels where the company is housing strikebreakers.

The picketing ban was granted shortly after a New York City cop, driving a vanload of scabs, rammed through a picket line, running down and injuring a striking worker. The incident highlighted the strikebreaking operation by the New York Police Department (NYPD) under the direction of the Democratic Party mayor, Bill de Blasio.

The unions are part of this unholy alliance against the Verizon workers. As in every previous struggle—oil workers, steel workers, teachers—they are working deliberately to isolate, demoralize and defeat the workers and help the company impose its demands. The Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) do nothing to fight company strike-breaking, work to starve the strikers into submission by doling out completely inadequate strike pay, and promote the Democratic Party, one of the two parties of big business, even as it organizes police attacks and works to suppress the struggle.

The unions have kept work stoppages at the lowest level of any two-term president since the Labor Department began keeping records in 1947. This has allowed the Obama administration to oversee the longest period of wage stagnation since the Great Depression, while nearly all income gains since the fraudulent "recovery" began in 2009 have gone to the top one percent of the population.

The surest sign that the unions are preparing to sell out the strike is the CWA's calling in of the police to drive *World Socialist Web Site* reporters from the picket line. As thousands of strikers know, the WSWS is the only

publication that has told the truth about the strike, given expression to the views of the workers, and fought for a strategy to mobilize the broadest sections of workers behind the strike.

That is because the WSWS is the genuine voice of revolutionary socialism—as opposed to the phony socialism of Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. The unions promote Sanders and hail his token, one-time appearance on the picket line—to drum up votes on the eve of the New York primary—because they know he supports the bureaucrats, not the rank and file workers. Above all, they support Sanders’ economic nationalism, which serves to pit US workers against their fellow workers in Mexico, the Philippines and China, and line them up behind “their” American bosses.

While the forces arrayed against them are powerful, the allies waiting to be mobilized behind the Verizon workers—the masses of workers in the US and internationally—are more powerful. As the candidate of the Socialist Equality Party for US president, I urge rank-and-file Verizon workers to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the unions and fight for the broadest possible mobilization of the working class.

The SEP proposes that Verizon workers set up rank-and-file committees of struggle independent of the unions and the Democratic Party to unite auto workers, teachers, young people, the unemployed and retired workers behind the strike. Organize mass demonstrations! Mobilize the entire working class!

“Every class struggle is a political struggle,” declared the founder of scientific socialism, Karl Marx. What was true then is true today.

It is necessary to develop a mass political movement based on a socialist and internationalist program to put a halt to inequality, poverty and war by putting an end to their source—the capitalist system.



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