

Talks resume as Obama administration collaborates with CWA to shut down Verizon strike

Our reporters
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Talks between Verizon, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) are set to resume in Washington, D.C. today. The negotiations are the result of the intervention of US Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez and indicate that the Obama administration is concerned about the potential of the strike by 39,000 telecom workers inspiring a broader movement of the working class, despite efforts of the unions to keep the walkout isolated.

The resumption of talks follows Verizon's provocative announcement April 28 of its "last, best offer," the cutoff of medical benefits to the strikers and their families, and increased violence by strikebreakers and the police against picketing workers.

The White House is clearly concerned about the protracted character of the Verizon strike and is intent on wrapping it up as soon as possible by assisting in the imposition of a settlement based on management's terms. The administration's policy of encouraging low wages and shifting health care and pension costs from the corporations to workers has depended entirely on the unions' suppression of the class struggle. However, social tensions are reaching a breaking point with the unions barely able to push a sellout deal past autoworkers last fall and growing signs of a rebellion by teachers and other sections of workers.

While the CWA is presenting the intervention of the Labor Department as an advance for strikers, a similar intervention by the Labor Department in the West Coast dockers in February 2015 ended in the unions pushing through a sellout agreement. It comes at the same time that the CWA has stepped up its efforts to bar workers from speaking to the *World Socialist Web*

Site, including calling the same police who have been herding scabs in New York City.

The intervention of Labor Secretary Perez follows the action of the National Labor Relations Board, which successfully petitioned for a court injunction against the CWA and IBEW, barring the unions from picketing New York hotels housing scab replacement workers. The company has recruited a small army of strikebreakers to maintain its operations during the walkout. It has meantime accused strikers of vandalizing company equipment.

The resumption of talks follows several incidents of violence directed against striking workers. Two striking workers were injured last week by vehicles being driven across the picket lines; one in Queens, New York and another in Westborough, Massachusetts. In the first case a police lieutenant driving a van hit veteran CWA member James Smith, sending him to the hospital. This was soon followed by a similar incident in Westborough when a scab vehicle hit striker Joseph Rooney.

Verizon workers have reacted strongly to the attempt by the CWA to harass *World Socialist Web Site* reporters. CWA officials called on police to remove WSWS reporters outside a Verizon call center in downtown Brooklyn Friday as reporters attempted to interview striking workers.

The intervention by CWA officials is both an attack on freedom of the press and on the rights of Verizon workers to voice their opinions under conditions of a complete blackout of the strike by the corporate-controlled media. It comes as the anger of workers is mounting in the face of company intransigence and several recent assaults by strikebreakers on pickets.

A Verizon worker in Northern Virginia contacted by the *WSWS Verizon Strike Newsletter* said, “The mainstream media isn't reporting it (the strike). The steward calling the cops speaks volumes about what is going on, they don't want anyone to know. Their local probably told workers not to speak to the website. They want to keep it isolated.

“Workers need to reach other workers; bricklayers, mechanics, everyone needs to know that the federal government is waging war against the working class.

“This is a corporate union, it has its foot in the door with the company, and with corporate Democrats. This guy that they involved in the mediations, they praise, is an Obama appointee, he is going to sell the workers down the river. Workers will end up losing jobs, they will end up losing benefits.”

A retired switching equipment technician in Virginia with 31 years service said, “The union is just like the company. They want to control the message. They don't want people talking. That's because they want to give us bull crap and call it sugar. People should know what is happening to us and that it has been happening too long.”

A worker with 11 years at Verizon from Pittsburgh said, “I can't afford to be on strike, but I want a fair deal. What Verizon is doing is not fair.” Referring to the attempt by the CWA to ban the WSWS, she responded, “It seems like we don't get much information. I think it (WSWS) is truthful. I don't see anything that is not truthful.”

One worker writing on Facebook in response to CWA attacks on the WSWS said, “Your rejection of their more radical suggestions is why we got a terrible contract in the last strike and why unions are losing power. They (WSWS) don't post propaganda, that's the news you normally watch. This is the truth coming from that page.”

The WSWS also spoke to workers about the picket line violence directed against strikers. A splicer with 29 years in Pittsburgh said, “I heard about the guys getting hit in New York and Massachusetts. Our union didn't tell us but I've read it on the Internet. I think Verizon is out to break the union this time, I really do. There is no movement. They haven't withdrawn any of their demands. They have been pushing and pushing guys, making us drive all over the place, working all kinds of overtime, whatever management says we have to do.

“It's not that they aren't making money, they are. But Verizon figures that jobs are hard to come by and they want to take advantage of that. They want to get people in here who will work for less and to be happy to have any job even if they know it will be only for a while. That is what Verizon wants, people who know they will lose their job, so they will do anything to keep it a little longer.

“We used to be an average job, now it is one of the best paying jobs around. When the steel mills were running, we were below average. When I started, people came here because they didn't want to breathe the dirt of the coal mine or the mill. You figured you got paid less, but you would still have your health when you retired.

“When the air traffic controllers were fired by Reagan (in 1981) everyone should have gone on strike. That started a lot of union busting and we are paying for it now. In every contract the union has given up something, more jobs, health care, the no layoff letter. They hope to get older guys like me to go along with it. ‘One more contract so I can retire,’ is what we say. We need something new.”



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