

# Growing anger among Verizon strikers as CWA and IBEW prepare sellout

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A sellout contract is being prepared by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) as the strike by 40,000 Verizon workers on the East Coast of the United States enters its sixth week.

Since April 13, thousands of wire and call center workers at the world's second largest telecom company have been on strike in defense of their health care benefits, retirement and job security. The company, which has mounted a major strikebreaking operation, is demanding increased contributions to health insurance and the ability to shift workers around the country for months at a time.

After telling workers they would not accede to Verizon's demands for a federal mediator, the CWA and the IBEW agreed to mediation as talks restarted Tuesday in Washington, DC, under the supervision of Obama's Labor Secretary Thomas Perez.

The unions have also agreed to a news blackout. While the exercise is being presented as "negotiations," it is in fact a discussion between two business entities that are equally hostile to workers. The unions have already agreed to millions in concessions and are only looking for some way to sell the deal to an angry rank-and-file.

An additional incentive for the union bureaucracy to quickly shut the strike down is the fact that workers in New York State, where 14,000 of the 40,000 strikers are located, will be eligible to collect unemployment benefits as the strike enters its sixth week. This would provide workers with some relief from the economic pressure imposed by the unions, which are paying workers only \$300 a week in strike benefits, despite controlling an estimated \$400 million "defense fund."

Verizon is spearheading the drive by corporate America and Wall Street to destroy whatever remains

of the achievements won by generations of workers. An article by billionaire Forbes Media Editor in Chief Steve Forbes appearing in *USA Today* on Wednesday demonstrates the ruthlessness of the corporate and financial elite, which wants to rid themselves of so-called legacy workers and reduce a new generation to abject poverty.

Forbes writes that workers are "living in a fantasy world" for rejecting company offers "that most American workers could only dream about." He excoriates workers for "the lavish compensation packages [that] belong in a museum beside the Pontiac GTO and rotary dial telephones" before warning that "as long as the strike continues... [it] threatens to lead the workers... into a future that looks more like Detroit than Silicon Valley."

In announcing the revived negotiations on Sunday, US Labor Secretary Perez noted, "I was singularly impressed by the parties' appreciation that time is of the essence, and their strong commitment to use the collective bargaining process to reach a mutually beneficial resolution."

Perez intervened last year amid a dispute between the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and the Pacific Maritime Association in order to impose a five-year contract, which kept wages beneath inflation.

The unions have cooperated with the company every step of the way in the current strike. They agreed to keep workers on the job after their contract expired last August and only called a strike in April after struggles of US auto and steelworkers were successfully stifled by their unions last year.

As a deal is being worked out, Verizon workers are facing increasing levels of violence from the company and the state. On Thursday, two striking workers were

struck by a Verizon security guard in a Mercedes-Benz in a company parking lot in Long Island, New York. “I don’t know what to think. It’s crazy to think that someone would use a car like a weapon like that,” said Kevin Travers, one of the victims, to ABC News. Travers was sent to the hospital with an injured leg.

The incident occurred a week after a striking CWA worker was run down by a cop in Queens, New York who was escorting scabs. The police strikebreaking operation is being overseen by New York City’s Democratic Party mayor, Bill De Blasio. That was followed by similar incidents in Westborough and Boylston, Massachusetts. The CWA and the IBEW have refused to issue any statements on these attacks, which expose the complicity of the Democratic Party and the state in the strikebreaking operation.

As they prepares a sell-out, the unions have also sought to block workers from speaking to the WSWS *Verizon Strike Newsletter*, including calling police against reporters in New York City earlier this week.

WSWS articles are being widely read by workers and shared on social media. An article published on Wednesday (“CWA agrees to federal mediator, prepares sellout of Verizon strike”) has been accessed by approximately 15,000 striking workers, many of whom have signed up for the Verizon Strike Newsletter

“Thanks for printing the truth,” wrote a striker from Queens, New York on signing up for the *Newsletter*. “Loved the article about Obama, CWA and labor trying to [shaft] the union members,” wrote a worker from the Bronx.

“Someone on the picket line gave me a copy of Samuel Davidson’s article,” wrote another. “CWA agrees to fed mediator and I am blown away, I don’t trust any of them.”

A Verizon worker in the Abington, Pennsylvania wrote: “I think a six-week long strike with no end in sight is an outrage. It feels like we have quit our jobs. We’re not informed enough by the union. Now, with a mediator in place, it seems like they’re going to side with the company and we’re going to get nothing. Which makes this whole strike in vain.”

“[The] Union and Verizon sleep in the same bed, trust me,” wrote a retired worker with over 30 years in the telecom industry.



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