Break the CWA's isolation of the Verizon strike!

Jerry White—SEP candidate for US president
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The strike by 39,000 Verizon workers in the eastern United States is at a crossroads. The Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) are currently meeting behind closed doors with Verizon executives and Obama administration officials. They are working on a rotten agreement and trying to figure out how they can get it past angry and determined workers.

The Obama administration, which has overseen the greatest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top in US history, fears that a prolonged strike could get out of control of the unions and spark a broader movement of the working class. This is particularly true in metropolitan areas at the center of the strike, including New York City, Boston, Philadelphia and Washington, DC, where millions of workers and young people are facing relentless attacks even as corporate profits and the stock markets hit record highs.

If Verizon workers are to prevent an even more disastrous defeat than the sellout of the 2011 strike, rank-and-file workers must take the conduct of this battle into their own hands. This means the formation of strike committees free from the authority of the union bureaucracy to fight for the mobilization of the entire working class to defeat the government-backed attack by the telecom giant.

In an effort to undermine their resolve and sow as much complacency as possible, the union executives and their apologists constantly repeat the slogan, "One day longer, one day stronger." One article, published in the *Jacobin* magazine, adds, "This is particularly true of a strike like this one, which is by design and circumstances a war of attrition."

This is a vile lie. Each day that goes by without a mobilization of the working class behind the Verizon strikers leaves them further exposed to provocations by the police, firings for alleged "picket line misconduct" and further economic hardship that the CWA and IBEW will use to starve workers into submission. While they sit on a half-billion dollar "defense" fund, the CWA and IBEW are paying out only $300 a week in strike pay, while its executives continue to collect their lavish salaries and perks. This includes the nearly one million dollars pocketed by the top two IBEW executives.

From the beginning, the CWA and IBEW, along with the AFL-CIO and Change to Win federations, have sought to isolate the struggle of Verizon workers.

The main reason the CWA forced workers to labor without a contract for eight months—giving Verizon ample time to prepare its strikebreaking operation—was because the unions did not want a strike to coincide with the contract expirations of nearly 200,000 auto and steel workers. The Verizon workers were told to keep working while the UAW and USW rammed through concession-laden contracts.

The CWA has kept 16,000 AT&T West workers in California and Nevada working without a contract since April 9 in order to prevent a telecom strike by workers on both coasts. The CWA has also submitted the contract of 24,000 flight attendants and United Airlines to federal mediation.

The unions hope that as workers' limited savings disappear, they will be more willing to accept concessions. There is a particular incentive for the CWA and IBEW to shut the strike down before early June when unemployment benefits will kick in for 14,000 out of the 39,000 workers who live in New York State. With a little less pressure, the unions fear, workers will dig in for a prolonged fight.

For its part, the AFL-CIO has been virtually silent on

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the Verizon workers, leaving strikers to fight this battle without broader support. Just look at the web site of the AFL-CIO. There is not a single mention of the Verizon strike on the front page. One would have no idea that at this moment one of the largest strikes in recent years has been going on for a month.

The unions are determined to conceal the role of the Obama administration and the Democratic Party, which no less than the Republicans is a determined enemy of the working class. Last week the National Labor Relations Board requested and received from a federal judge an injunction barring strikers from picketing New York City area hotels that are housing strikebreakers. The ruling was made right after a vanload of scabs, escorted by police, ran down a striking worker. The incident revealed the massive strikebreaking effort by Mayor Bill de Blasio and other Democrats.

The unions' silence on the police violence has only encouraged further attacks by scabs on strikers in Massachusetts and New York in a chilling reminder of the 1989 murder of NYNEX striker Edward "Gerry" Horgan.

In the surest sign that a sellout is imminent, the CWA has sought to bar WSWS reporters from picket lines. In the face of the corporate media and union blackout of information, thousands of striking workers each day turn to the WSWS and its *Verizon Strike Newsletter* for the truth and to express their views to a wider working-class audience.

The CWA, which endorsed the self-proclaimed "democratic socialist" Bernie Sanders, is now resorting to ever-more frantic redbaiting against the WSWS. That is because, unlike Sanders, we do not cover up for the unions and the Democrats, and because we are the genuine voice of international socialism.

Verizon workers are locked in a political struggle not just against a single company but an entire class of capitalist owners, which control both big-business parties and every lever of political power, including the police, the NLRB, the courts and the media.

These enemies are formidable, but the potential allies of the Verizon workers are far more powerful. Verizon workers must appeal to all sections of workers, young people, the unemployed, native-born and immigrant and say: "Our fight is your fight! It is time to take a stand with your brothers and sisters at Verizon!"

The Socialist Equality Party urges workers to demand:

· Negotiations must be opened up to the workers. Workers have the right to know what is going on behind closed doors.

· Workers must be provided with resources to carry out a serious struggle. Every striker could be allocated $10,256 simply out of the resources of the CWA's strike fund. The massive funds controlled by the AFL-CIO, accumulated through the dues of workers, must be used to sustain the strike instead of the salaries of union executives and campaign contributions to the anti-working class Democratic Party.

This struggle can and must be won. Everything, however, depends on the initiative, determination and political alertness of rank-and-file workers themselves. The isolation of the strike must be broken through the mobilization of the entire working class.

Real strength comes from unity! Only in this way can the power of the corporations and their bought-and-paid-for political representatives be broken and a path forward be forged.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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