

Verizon strikers denounce federal mediation, CWA news blackout

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A *World Socialist Web Site Verizon Strike Newsletter* reporting team spoke to striking Verizon workers on the picket line in New York City and Virginia. Workers expressed concern over the intervention of the Obama administration in the contract talks and the news blackout being imposed by the leadership of the Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW).

Workers said they were determined to defeat any attempt by the unions to repeat the 2011 sellout, when a strike was ended without a contract and concessions were imposed by a federal mediator.

Verizon strikers picketing in the Forest Hills neighborhood of the borough of Queens in New York City were divided into the technicians, who picketed in front of the Verizon store on busy Austin Street, and the customer service and inside technical workers, who picketed in front of a Verizon central office building up the block.

Gisela, who has 17 years as a Verizon customer service representative, responded to a WSWs reporter's question about the ongoing federal mediation. "I personally don't like mediation. We were out two weeks in 2011 and they ended it and had mediation. We are all thinking that we don't want a repeat after being out here for seven weeks.

"We were sold out. We started having to pay for our medical, unlimited sick days were cut to 10 days, an increasing percentage of jobs were outsourced, and there was a lot of relocations after that. Most of us here on this picket came from the Bronx. I live in the Bronx. There was a rumor that we may get sent to Garden City out on Long Island after the strike ends. Many of my co-workers rely on public transportation so we think it is to get rid of people.

"They originally wanted to bring back the same mediator as in 2011, but we did not want that. I believe that in the mediation we may lose something big. What is the point of being out if we lose something big?

"The last contract was a stepping stone for everything to get worse. They have offered us another 7 percent in wages over four years, but want us to pay for our health care. So there is an increase in pay, but then that gives us nothing. They want to take away health care from people who worked their entire careers."

Asked about the political struggle facing workers and the role of the Democrats, who were responsible for the recent injunction limiting picketing and the strikebreaking by police, Gisela explained, "I'm not very political. The election campaign has been a joke. It is scary. I am not a Democrat. I am a Republican because of my Christian beliefs but I don't like Trump.

"You are explaining things in a new view. I have not seen the WSWs before. I think, from the way you explained it, a workers' party would be better. We had been talking here about what to do if we don't like the negotiated contract. But we have not thought so far about what we do, how we respond. We don't hear much about what the union is doing. Workers are the affected party and should know what is going on."

A 17-year veteran at Verizon, working as a central office technician doing inside wiring as a switchman or carrier, said, "There is no end to corporate greed. The company is built by the sweat of the working class. They don't see us as humans. In a city as congested as New York, they want to be able to send us to work in New Jersey, 60 or 80 miles out and then to come home to our family. Is there any soul in this man?" he asked, referring to Verizon CEO Lowell McAdam.

With respect to the Democrats, he said, "Verizon donated to Hillary's campaign. But I leave politics to

the politicians. We have no voice. They are playing a game with our lives. We are fed up.”

Another Verizon worker of 11 years, who said he did not want his name to be used, reflected on the dead end under the union strategy. “In the previous 2011 go-round, we gave up things, and I am sure we will give up more this time too. We had 100,000 members and now are down to 40,000. There is attrition in place, and they are not hiring to replace jobs. In my particular group, there are not enough workers, so we are getting overtime. Now they want to increase the number of contractors. If they can bring in more, they can replace all of us. That is their long-term objective. I think it is a conscious process of them wanting to do away with the unions.”

Another Verizon striker said, “I believe that we are on the tipping point. The economy has hit a brick wall. I have two kids out of college stuck with huge student loans.”

Another striker working in the call center with 16 years of experience said, “Right now, a federal mediator from the US Department of Labor is involved, and both the company and the union were advised not to make any public statements.

“In the interregnum, 39,000 employees are in limbo. I don’t like the fact that this is taking place behind closed doors. I read that the last time the labor mediators got involved, it was not good for the workers.

“Exploitation is horrible, whether it is in the Philippines, India, the Dominican Republic or here. The unity of the workers is a great thing.” He added, “I don’t know what the future of capitalism is, but I am nervous about it.”

The WSWs *Verizon Strike Newsletter* also spoke to a striking Verizon worker in Virginia about the US Labor Department’s intervention into the strike. “Obama doesn’t speak for us. [Democratic Party politicians] only show up for rallies and then leave once they get the big dollars,” he said.

“The [Obama] administration has done us no good, our union sold out our health care when it [endorsed] his presidency.” When speaking about the decision of the unions to keep workers on the job for eight months after their previous contract expired in August, the worker, who wished to remain unnamed, said, “I don’t agree with that, [originally] when our company merged

with NYNEX we had all of our contracts put in one, so they would expire at once.”



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