

Congressional Democrats call for end to Verizon strike

Shannon Jones
21 May 2016

In a clear signal that the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) are moving to sell out the strike by nearly 40,000 workers against Verizon Communications, 88 Congressional Democrats have issued a statement expressing their concern over the walkout.

The letter begins by praising management, citing the company's success and its ability "to be profitable throughout the changes that have taken place in the telecommunications industry." It then reprises the position of the union, denouncing the lack of a negotiated contract and plans by Verizon to send jobs to the "Philippines, Mexico and other locations overseas or outsourced to low-wage, non-union domestic contractors."

It then calls on Verizon to "be committed to hiring and retaining the skilled staff necessary to complete the buildout of its FiOS broadband service in a timely manner in all markets." Expansion of FiOS, the unionized sector of Verizon, has been a major demand of the CWA and IBEW.

Significantly, the statement says nothing about Verizon's demands to increase health care costs for active and retired workers. Nor does it mention the company's effort obtain the power to shift workers to distant locations for months at a time.

The release of the statement follows the intervention of the Obama administration, which convened talks in Washington this week under the auspices of a federal mediator. President Obama's National Labor Relations Board has also intervened to secure a court injunction barring workers from picketing hotels housing strikebreakers.

Obama, Congressional Democrats, the CWA and IBEW are intent on wrapping up the Verizon strike before it becomes the catalyst for a broader movement of the

working class. There are indications that strikers are winning broad public sympathy under conditions in which workers' living standards have been under relentless attack by the supposedly "liberal" and "progressive" Obama administration.

The news blackout on the talks imposed by the IBEW and CWA is an affront to workers' right to know what is happening behind closed doors. Workers have the right to the full details of the talks and all offers and counteroffers. The silence by union officials further underscores the necessity for workers to take the conduct of the strike into their own hands by organizing an independent strike committee to fight for the broadest possible mobilization of the working class.

Another factor creating pressure for the unions to call a quick end to the strike is that strikers in New York state will soon be able to collect unemployment benefits. This would take some of the economic pressure off workers trying to survive on the miserly weekly strike checks of \$300 provided by the unions. The CWA alone is sitting on a \$400 million "defense" fund.

The *World Socialist Web Site* warns Verizon workers not to be railroaded into returning to work without a ratified contract. Workers must have access to the full text of any agreement and be given the chance to study its details before any ratification vote.

Verizon workers contacted by the WSWS *Verizon Strike Newsletter* expressed opposition to the intervention by the Democrats. Glenn, a Verizon striker with 25 years from upstate New York, said, "I keep telling everyone we can't go back to work without a signed contract. Obama wants to cut this off before it becomes larger. Why stop now? We are only a few days before our unemployment starts. We are in a much different position than in 2011. The public support is unbelievable. We have had teachers and Teamsters walking the picket line."

Another Verizon striker from Baltimore said, "I feel

that going back without a contract should be voted on by the members. If it is voted on, I would vote ‘no.’ I think we need at least a clear framework before we go back.”

The intervention by Democratic Party officials takes place under conditions of continuing violence against strikers. On Thursday, a security guard driving a Mercedes Benz hit two Verizon strikers in a company parking lot in Long Island. One of the workers was sent to the hospital with a broken leg.

These were the fourth and fifth workers to be struck on the picket line by police, security guards or scabs. Two strikebreakers have been arrested, one in Queens and one in Massachusetts, for ramming pickets with their vehicles. In the incident in Queens, the driver of a van ferrying scab replacement workers was reportedly a police lieutenant. He has not charged.

A further indication of the advanced preparation by the CWA and IBEW to impose a sellout was the recent attempt by CWA officials in Brooklyn to bar WWSW reporters from the Verizon picket line and prevent reporters from speaking to striking workers.

Glenn said he was outraged by the attempt of the CWA to ban the WWSW. “What is more outrageous is when you went to Brooklyn and they told you to get lost. That is an attack on First Amendment rights. A lot of workers think like I do. Your articles have been spot on. We need to make sure that we don’t get suckered into a rotten deal.

“You have to keep an eye on those at the bargaining table who are supposed to represent you. We would like time to review any contract that comes down. Why should we leave our position of strength? Let’s do this intelligently or the strike will have been in vain.”

The pressure by Democrats to end the strike comes amid indications that the walkout is beginning to have an impact on Verizon’s bottom line. Wells Fargo cut its second quarter and 2016 revenue and profit margin estimates, citing the impact of the strike on Verizon’s operations.



To contact the WWSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact