

“What they are fighting for, we are fighting for”

Striking AT&T West workers declare support for Verizon struggle

Our reporters
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AT&T West workers in San Diego, California are now entering the fifth day of a strike over working conditions and the corporate offensive against pensions and wages.

The Communications Workers of America (CWA) has kept the workers at AT&T West on the job without a contract for two months, even as 39,000 Verizon workers on the East Coast have been on strike for more than five weeks. The CWA and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have sought to separate the struggles of the telecommunication workers on both coasts, even though there is widespread support for joint action.

There are 16,000 AT&T workers in California and Nevada covered by the contract that expired on April 9. However, only 1,700 workers are striking the company, with the CWA insisting that it is not over contract negotiations but instead over an “unfair labor practices” grievance related to call-center monitoring.

Aware of the sentiment for a united struggle of all telecommunications workers, the unions felt they had to take some action while trying to limit it as much as possible.

As the CWA negotiates with AT&T behind closed doors to end the strike in San Diego, the media has maintained a virtual news blackout of the struggle. Workers informed us that Fox News came to the picket line in Chula Vista in the morning and packed up their truck and left without interviewing the workers.

The WSWS *Verizon Strike Newsletter* spoke to workers in Mira Mar and Chula Vista, both in San Diego County.

“We stand with the Verizon workers,” said Dotty, a customer service representative for 26 years. “We

know their struggle and we are on the brink of it ourselves.

“AT&T has continued to show billions of dollars in profit when everyone has been going under. I don’t understand the concept of taking away from your employees when you have been making hand over fist as far as quarterly gains are concerned. Corporations are doing fine. [AT&T CEO Randall] Stephenson made an exorbitant amount of money last year on his bonus.”

Dotty added, “There are a lot of things wrong with this country, and the people running for office are scary. There is nothing concrete in voting for either party right now, and you don’t know who to trust.

“The working class people carry most of the weight of the country. A lot of working class people have no voice, and I’m one of them. I feel like my voice is not heard.”

Armando is a premises technician, or prim tech, who installs and repairs AT&T’s U-Verse video and Internet systems. He said that workers have closely following the Verizon strike from California. “We stand with our brothers and sisters on the East Coast. We have been out for five days ourselves and have picketed the Verizon store here in San Diego. We are in full support of their cause, because what happens to them can happen to us.

“Corporate America is taking away our rights, and we have to take them back.”

Derek, also a prim tech, talked about the working conditions at AT&T West: “From the time I have been here there have been many different grievances, people have been wrongfully terminated, and we as a local have walked out until they have been put back on the job.

“Being a prim tech, we are at the bottom of the totem poll, we don’t get a lot of time off, working 365 days a year with only a little bit of time off.”

Felix, another prim tech, talked about the safety conditions, referring to the death of Robert Alfred Hernandez, a 61-year-old worker from Los Angeles who suffered from a medical emergency working alone. “We are expected to work faster and harder and still maintain a good relationship with the customer, which puts a lot of stress on us that we take on to the next job.

“When someone gets hurt, management tells us it is because of a “choice” that the technician makes. There is so much hypocrisy in this, because they are telling us we have to get the job done faster, and we can’t do the best we can with the time we are given—it is a formula for disaster. It is the company taking advantage of us. Safety is not important for them, it is money, it is numbers.”

Felix then expressed his solidarity with the Verizon strike: “Their concerns are our concerns, what they are fighting for we are fighting for. Even though the company titles are different, we are doing the exact same job. We are concerned with the exact same thing. We are here to provide for our families and are worried about issues such as health care. How can we get a raise when they raise our health care?”

Alec, a maintenance technician with nine years, said, “We’re the ones that make AT&T work. Without us nothing would function. We’re the ones that have to install it, maintain it and repair everything.”

“Right now, we’re only trying to keep what we have. How much the CEOs make versus what workers make—it’s an outrage. They keep pushing and pushing and at some point we have to push back. What we do is dangerous, technical work that takes years to learn, and not everyone can do it. We take pride in what we do, but the company thinks otherwise. They don’t value what we do. They would be fine paying us \$10 an hour.”



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