

CWA ends San Diego AT&T strike to further isolate Verizon fight

Nick Barrickman
26 May 2016

In a blow directed at preventing a unified struggle with striking Verizon workers, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) called off the four-day walkout of 1,700 AT&T West workers on Tuesday night. In a perfunctory statement its web site CWA Local 9509 ordered workers back to the job Wednesday without providing any details of the supposed agreement it had reached to end the strike.

“The Grievance Strike is over,” officials from the union local arrogantly wrote. “Everyone scheduled to work tomorrow needs to report to their job at the regularly scheduled time. A settlement with AT&T has been reached. Another text with the details will be sent out tomorrow.”

When contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* a representative at Local 9509 said President Chris Roberts and other officers “had gone home today because they had been up late last night working out a deal to return to work.” He said the “grievance was settled.” CWA District 9, which oversees California, Nevada and Hawaii, did not return phone calls.

A San Diego worker who reported to the job Wednesday morning expressed the anger of workers who were cynically called out and sent back to work without any information. “I am frustrated I didn't get the details till this morning and I still don't know anything.” Other workers expressed anger over the strike being called off without gaining a contract.

In order to prevent unified action with Verizon workers, the CWA has forced 16,000 AT&T West workers in California and Nevada to work without a contract since the April 9 expiration of their previous agreement. Like Verizon, AT&T is demanding sweeping attacks on health and pension benefits and further attacks on jobs. With AT&T workers chaffing over the company's intransigence and looking for a

joint fight with their brothers and sisters at Verizon, the CWA called the partial strike to let off steam and contain opposition.

The strike was not called over the lack of contract but was limited to a local grievance reportedly over AT&T's refusal to share information from calls in monitors between customers and call center workers. This allowed the CWA to say the issue was unique to San Diego.

It is not even clear if this local issue was really resolved. The overriding concern of the CWA was shutting down the strike as soon as possible before it sparked a broader movement of all AT&T West workers and a strike on both coasts of the United States. CWA District 9 and its local affiliates did not even inform workers throughout California about the San Diego strike.

A veteran AT&T field technician from northern California told the *WSWS Verizon Strike Newsletter*, “I found out about the San Diego strike from a supervisor. We've been kept in the dark. It's abusive. They should not have walked out alone. We should have all walked out. The only way we are going to get anything is to all stand up together.

“I've been through three contracts and the CWA has sold us down the river. People are angry over the lack of representation. We have given and given and they have given away the store. The Verizon workers have more guts than I have ever seen. These people should be held up as an example. We should have all walked out when the contract expired. We need a European-style general strike in this country.”

The decision to shut down the AT&T West strike is a signal of the impending sellout of Verizon workers by the CWA and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). CWA and IBEW officials

have been engaged in more than a week of secret discussions with Verizon executives in talks, which are being supervised by Obama's labor secretary and a federal mediator. The overriding concern shared by all the parties in Washington, DC is to find a way to ram a pro-company deal past the anger and determination of Verizon strikers who have waged a month-and-a-half struggle.

The Obama administration, the corporations and the unions want to prevent the telecom workers' strike from igniting sympathy strikes and other joint actions among the more than 2.2 million workers throughout the US whose contracts are expiring this year. Last Friday, the National Association of Letter Carriers announced that it would extend contract negotiations past the May 20 expiration for 204,000 members while the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) and other unions have put the fate of an additional 370,000 US Postal Service workers, facing three-tier wages and benefits—in the hands of an arbitrator.

Workers at Verizon and AT&T should form rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the CWA and the IBEW and spread the strike to all telecom workers; they should merge their fight with private and public sector workers, and the vast majority of workers and youth are outside of the unions.

A significant factor in the effort of the CWA to wrap up the strike is the growing influence of the WSWs *Verizon Strike Newsletter*, which has provided strikers with the only source of information and a strategy to mobilize the working class to defend them. Thousands of strikers have circulated and re-circulated the newsletter.

A worker with over 25 years experience from Long Island, New York told the WSWs, "I'm on the picket lines [and] all I'm hearing is my co-workers getting back to work [and] already accepting the fact we have to give up things in the contract. We give up *nothing*, I have given up enough to this company. This is just another sellout."

"I feel a real lack of representation and support from my union. The union says all the right things to its membership, but then reneges when it comes time to walk," said the worker from California. "I know we are ready to walk, we've sent several strike notices to our union leadership, and they go and warn the company of

a possible strike action. I'm like, 'Thanks a lot,'" he added.

"After 10 years of contract concessions, I'm probably making \$10,000 less than I was before. I currently work two jobs and can't afford the cost of living, and I'm at the highest pay level in my profession." Speaking of the anger felt by workers, the worker predicted, "If at the end of the month we have not gone out on strike, I think there might be a revolution against the CWA."

From the refusal to coordinate between the workers at AT&T and Verizon, to the sudden and unexplained ending of the walkout, the CWA's behavior bears the character of the brief "Hollywood Strike" stunts conducted by unions such as the United Auto Workers. These fraudulent stunts are intended to provide a fig leaf of "militancy" to the union while allowing the workers to vent their anger before the eventual rotten contract is forced through.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact