

Workers have a right to read full contract document

Stop the CWA betrayal of the Verizon strike!

Jerry White—SEP candidate for US president
27 May 2016

The WSWS Verizon Strike Newsletter is holding an emergency call-in information meeting on Monday, May 30 at 7:00 PM Eastern Time. To participate, call 213-416-1560 and enter PIN 581 991 086#.

After 10 days of secret talks in Washington, DC overseen by Obama's labor secretary, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) announced in a brief message Friday afternoon that it had reached "an agreement in principle" with Verizon and was ordering workers to take down their picket lines.

Without presenting any details, the CWA announced that it had won major gains that had "improved working families' living standards," secured "good union jobs" and achieved the "first union contract at wireless stores."

Nothing the CWA and its hired public relations people say should be trusted! Why would the telecom giant back down on the basis of the impotent strategy pursued by the CWA over the last 45 days? Far from mobilizing the real power of the working class, the CWA deliberately isolated the strike, blocked any unified struggle with AT&T West workers and based itself on backroom maneuvers with the Obama administration, whose National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and federal judges have repeatedly intervened on behalf of Verizon.

The only "contract" that could be achieved on this basis is a sellout even worse than the 2011 betrayal. This is confirmed by the statement of Verizon Chief Administrative Officer Marc Reed who said, "Verizon is very pleased with this 'agreement in principle'... and we look forward to having our employees soon back at work. ..." Verizon shares on Wall Street also rose on the news.

Why are the CWA and IBEW shutting down the strike now? A major factor is that tens of thousands of workers in New York and other states will soon qualify for unemployment benefits. In addition, CWA strike pay is due to increase to \$400 a week.

As far as CWA President Chris Shelton & Co. are concerned, the lessening of economic pressure on strikers is a bad thing because rank-and-file workers would be willing to dig in for an all-out battle. The union executives know workers would never have bowed to Verizon's demands last August or even in April, when the strike began. In the eyes of the CWA executives the real target of the strike was not Verizon but their own members. They calculated that leaving workers on the picket lines for a month and half with only a pittance in strike pay would soften them up for a sellout. Now after workers have sacrificed more than \$10,000 in lost wages, the unions are dangling a signing bonus in front of them to accept another pro-company deal.

From the beginning, the CWA and IBEW made it clear they were willing to impose \$200 million in concessions on workers. The chief concern of the union apparatus was to gain more dues-paying members, regardless of how low-paid and exploited they were. The deal being prepared apparently fulfills those demands.

As for Verizon workers who have suffered years of stagnant and declining real wages, eaten up by higher health care costs, the four-year agreement includes an insulting 10.5 percent raise that barely keeps up with the rate of inflation. There are undoubtedly deeper concessions, which the CWA is hiding behind its self-serving highlights.

The Obama administration has intervened to prevent the Verizon strike from sparking a broader movement

of the working class against social inequality and the low wages and health care and pension cuts at the center of the president's so-called economic recovery. With millions of workers laboring without contracts or facing contract expirations, the big business politicians are relying on their union "partners" to keep workers in a state of disunity and at the mercy of corporate America.

In his statement on the deal, Labor Secretary Tom Perez, who intervened last year to block a strike by West Coast dockers and to impose the dictates of the shipping bosses, said that Verizon workers would be back to work "next week."

Verizon workers must be on guard against any attempts by the CWA and IBEW to order workers back to work without a ratification vote, or on the basis of phony highlights from a "contract" that has not even been written yet.

The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site Verizon Strike Newsletter* proposes the following course of action:

* No return to work without a written agreement that has been ratified by a full membership vote!

* Workers must demand full access to the entire contract, including all "memorandums of understanding" and other side agreements.

* Workers must have at least one week to study and discuss the contract without a rush to ratify.

* Rank-and-file workers should call their own meetings, independent of the union officials, to exchange information on the deal with each other and counter the lies and propaganda of the CWA and the corporate-controlled news media.

Workers should begin to rally opposition now to defeat this sellout. The rejection should be the starting point for the development of a real struggle to win workers' demands, including the full restoration of past concessions handed over by the CWA and IBEW.

The working class never achieved anything through collaboration with the corporate bosses and their bought-and-paid politicians. Every social right ever won was only on the basis of collective and determined mass struggle. Everything now depends on the initiative of rank-and-file workers to reach out to their real allies: the tens of millions of workers and young people fighting corporations and the rich, which are determined to return workers to industrial slavery.

This means, first of all, fighting for joint strike action with 16,000 AT&T West workers who have been working without a contract since early April, as part of the fight for a national telecommunications strike.

An appeal should also be issued to all workers and youth in New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, DC and other cities: "The fight of the Verizon workers is your fight! Join us in a common struggle against the economic and political dictatorship of the rich and to defend the social rights of the working class!"

In this fight, the Socialist Equality Party will provide Verizon workers with every assistance possible.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact