

Anger builds against CWA conspiracy to end Verizon strike

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There is growing rank-and-file opposition to the efforts of the Communications Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers to shut down the seven-week Verizon strike and force workers back to work before they have a chance to see and vote on a contract.

The IBEW and CWA ordered workers back on the job June 1 without a contract on the basis of an “agreement in principle.” June 1 is the same day that strikers in New York State would become eligible for unemployment benefits, undermining the economic pressure that the union has imposed through miserly strike pay from its \$400 million “defense fund.”

Workers have taken to social media to denounce the agreement and the return-to-work order. There is growing support for an online petition circulated by workers demanding they be given full details of the contract and that a ratification vote held before the strike is ended. The petition was initiated at a call-in meeting of the WSWWS *Verizon Strike Newsletter* on Sunday night.

One worker signing the petition wrote, “This is basically going back to work without a contract so the company and government don’t have 39,000 people collecting unemployment insurance.”

Another added, “I believe we have a right after over 45 days of struggle and all of the underhanded moves the company has displayed to review the details prior to return to work.” A third said, “I refuse to return to work until I’ve seen and agree with the unseen contract.”

“[It is] not right to go back with nothing in writing of details,” another worker wrote. “We did this last time and members went through the storm enough [not] to fold now.” This was in reference to the two-week strike in 2011 that was called off after the unions agreed to a

federal mediator who imposed concessions demanded by the company, including cuts in health care.

Even based on the self-serving highlights presented by the CWA, there is already enough information available to make clear that the union has agreed to massive new concessions. Most significant are hundreds of millions of dollars in new health care cuts, including sharply increased premiums, deductibles, prescriptions and co-pays for office and emergency room visits. The health care plan for retirees will also be changed.

The highlights include a derisory wage increase of 10.9 percent over the course of a four-year agreement and a token \$1,000 signing bonus. These increases match the rate of inflation and will be wiped out by the increase in health care costs, meaning a significant reduction in real wages.

According to an analysis in the *New York Times*, the deal also gives management “important tools” for slashing jobs. According to Roger Entner of Recon Analytics, speaking to *Fortune* magazine, the contract sets the stage for Verizon to exit the wireline business with the concurrent destruction of thousands of jobs. The agreement “gives Verizon four years basically to get rid of the unit. Let it be someone else’s problem,” Entner said.

Seeking to contain rank-and-file opposition, a number of CWA locals are now scheduling information meetings and phony votes starting today. These “votes” make a mockery of the democratic process, however, since only some locals are having them and they will not have any impact on the decision to end the strike. Since workers do not have a full contract, moreover, it is not clear what workers will actually be voting on.

The attempt to shut down the strike without a contract is the latest stage in a conscious effort by the unions to

isolate Verizon workers and enforce the demands of the company. The CWA and IBEW kept workers on the job for eight months before calling a strike. In the meantime management built up and trained a force of strikebreakers.

When the CWA and IBEW finally called a strike, they worked to prevent a broader struggle by forcing other telecommunications workers to stay on the job, including 17,000 AT&T West workers whose contract expired more than two months ago. When 1,700 AT&T West workers in San Diego struck last week, the CWA quickly shut down the action, refusing to even provide any details of the supposed settlement.

The unions have remained silent in the face of violent attacks on pickets by police and scabs. Instead of mobilizing the working class behind the strike, they promoted illusions in Democratic politicians such as Bernie Sanders. Meanwhile, Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio sent in New York cops to protect scabs and pen pickets behind barricades. The Obama administration's National Labor Relations Board solicited and secured an injunction barring picketing of hotels housing scabs.

After pledging to avoid mediation, the IBEW and CWA hailed the intervention of Labor Secretary Thomas Perez, who convened talks in Washington, DC under the auspices of a federal mediator. The White House intervened in order to shut down the strike before it became a catalyst for a broader movement of the working class. The Verizon strike takes place in the midst of a wave of strike votes by workers across the United States, including the recent vote by Macy's department store workers and workers at Kroger stores in Virginia, Tennessee and West Virginia. Workers at United Airlines are also without a contract.

The unions supported this conspiracy by agreeing to impose a blackout on the negotiations while they hammered out a deal.

On Friday Labor Secretary Perez announced the "agreement in principle," not an actual contract. Despite this, the CWA and IBEW declared the strike over.

The contract emerging from such a process can be nothing but a sellout, tailored to the needs of Verizon management, which has hailed the agreement. Verizon chief administrative officer Marc Reed said over the weekend that he was "very pleased with the agreement in principle," which includes "meaningful changes and

enhancements to the contracts to help the wireline business unit compete."



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