

International Socialist Organization covers for CWA sabotage of Verizon strike

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Following the announcement last Friday of an “agreement in principle,” the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have moved to rapidly shut down the seven-week strike by 39,000 Verizon workers. A back-to-work order has been issued that will go into effect today.

There is widespread anger among Verizon workers to what is in fact a sabotage of their struggle. Workers are being sent back to work without a chance to read a contract—and indeed a contract has not even been reached. The “highlights” of an “agreement in principle,” released by the CWA and IBEW, make clear that the unions have agreed to major concessions, including hundreds of millions in additional health care costs and changes that will facilitate the restructuring of Verizon and the layoff of thousands of workers. Corporate management has hailed the deal.

In their effort to force workers to return to work and accept whatever contract is eventually reached, the unions are finding crucial support from a coterie of pseudo-socialist organizations, whose specialty is to pass off concessions as “victories.” Groups like the International Socialist Organization (ISO) are essentially factions of the Democratic Party often serving as a liaison between Democratic officials and the union apparatus, while giving a “left” cover to both.

The ISO in particular plays an active role in the CWA apparatus, with a number of its members and supporters holding lower-level positions. An interview with an unnamed CWA shop steward in New York City who is clearly a supporter of the ISO appeared on the organization’s website *Socialist Worker* on Tuesday (“We took a stand against corporate power”). Conducted by *Socialist Worker* writer Danny Katch, the interview and the responses are aimed at painting the sellout agreement in as rosy colors as possible, while countering what they both sense to be the deep suspicion and anger among workers over the end of the strike.

Socialist Worker introduces the article by acknowledging that “only partial details are available as union members prepare for a ratification vote. But strikers believe they’ve won a victory on balance.” In the course of the interview, the ISO supporter declares it is his “gut feeling” that “it’s a defensive victory, with a couple exciting potential advances.”

What is the nature of this “victory”? The shop steward states in passing that “we were all expecting some cost-shifting on medical and probably pensions,” justifying this with the statement that “the union had already offered to give back \$200 million worth of concessions.” The fact that workers under the new agreement will have to pay substantially higher health care costs, which will have devastating affects on their families, is brushed aside with the assurance that the union had already agreed to these concessions, so it is not really a big deal!

The ISO supporter instead hails a supposed plan to hire an additional 1,500 low-wage call center workers, and an agreement to let the CWA “organize” a small number of Verizon Wireless workers earning second-tier wages and benefits. These provisions are about ensuring the interests of the CWA to continue to collect union dues. CWA officials often describe these low-paid workers as new “dues units.”

Attempting to counter anger that workers are being returned to work without being able to review a contract, he states it is “frustrating” that “we took down the picket lines before anyone had seen anything official about the contract.” He reassures workers, however, that “it’s very rare in the labor movement for the membership to read a fleshed-out contract before returning to work.” That is, the treachery of the CWA and IBEW is justified...because of the treachery of the pro-capitalist unions as a whole.

As a telling supposed counter-example to this record of deceit, the ISO supporter sites the 2012 Chicago teachers strike where, he claims, “the union kept the strike going to give their members time to read over the contract.” The ISO, which plays a leadership role in the Chicago Teachers Union, did not tell its readers that the CTU only agreed to extend the strike after a near-rebellion of teachers demanding the right to know what was in the contract—a campaign that was spearheaded by the WSW (see “Teachers have the right to know: What’s in the contract?”).

Later, he acknowledges that Verizon workers will only be able to see “a Memorandum of Understanding” before returning to work, and that “this isn’t a full accounting of the changes [to the contract] that will be included. People remember our last contract, which had a number of surprises that we didn’t see in the MOU before we voted.” None of this,

however, prevents Katch and the ISO supporter from declaring victory and supporting an end to the strike.

The ISO wants to prevent workers from drawing the obvious conclusion from the rapid shutdown of the strike over Memorial Day, when workers were not on the picket lines and had little opportunity to discuss the “agreement in principle” with their fellow workers: namely, that the unions want to get workers back on the job before they have time to study and discuss the rotten agreement that has been reached.

The ISO also does not mention the fact that strikers in New York were due to receive unemployment benefits starting on June 1, as well as an increase in the miserly strike pay that the CWA has allocated from its \$400 million strike fund. This would have lessened the economic pressure bearing down on workers, which the unions and the company are counting on to force through the agreement.

Most significantly, not a word is said in the interview—or, for that matter, any of the articles appearing in *Socialist Worker* on the Verizon strike—about the role of the Democratic Party, which emerged as a key issue during the strike. Democratic Party New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio (hailed by the ISO when he was elected as a “progressive” politician who could transform the Democratic Party) mobilized the police force to carry out strikebreaking operations on behalf of Verizon, including the running down of several picketing workers.

This was followed with the intervention of the Obama administration to end the strike under the tutelage of a federal mediator. The administration also sought and received injunctions barring the picketing of hotels where scab workers were staying.

The response by the ISO to these developments has been to cover up for de Blasio’s role in the first place, and in the second to portray Obama’s intervention as a favorable development. *Socialist Worker* asserted in an earlier article that the intent of federal mediation was “to get a reluctant Verizon to come back to the bargaining table.”

The ISO’s interview with the CWA shop steward followed a “solidarity” meeting held by the organization Friday in Queens, New York. With news of a proposed settlement, the speakers uniformly hailed it as a tremendous victory, despite the fact that they had no information on any of the exact terms. They promised a social media offensive to drum up support.

Throughout the seven weeks of the Verizon strike, the ISO colluded with the union apparatus to isolate the strike, ultimately attempting to wear down resistance to concessions demanded by the corporation. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the refusal of the CWA to call out 16,000 AT&T West workers who have labored for months with an expired contract. The limited walkout of 1,700 San Diego CWA members was shut down in a matter of days, precisely when calls for joint action were reaching a peak.

In five articles this month by *Socialist Worker* on the strike, not a word appears on the CWA’s efforts to sabotage a strike

by telecom workers on both US coasts, which would have tremendously strengthened Verizon workers.

In an article published May 24, *Socialist Worker* turned reality on its head, portraying the CWA and IBEW as striving to unite the workers. They cite a demonstration in Washington, DC, which brought together Verizon strikers and a handful of functionaries from other unions. In place of genuine unified action, the article promotes the unions’ “mobile pickets, social media and picketing Verizon Wireless,” a radio ad which calls for a “fair economy that works for everyone,” and “personalizing the strike” through a kids and families day.

The growth of rank-and-file opposition to the betrayals of the CWA and IBEW are part of a series of conflicts between workers and the pro-capitalist trade unions. In recent months, Detroit teachers launched a series of sickouts in defiance of the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) to protest unsafe conditions and years of DFT-backed pay and benefit cuts. Chicago teachers also forced the ISO-led CTU to back down from accepting sweeping attacks on pensions. Last fall, there was a near rebellion of autoworkers against the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, which resulted in the first rejection of a UAW-backed national contract in three decades.

In every case, the growing militancy and political radicalization of the working class led to increased interest and support for the *World Socialist Web Site* and its fight for workers to build rank-and-file committees independent of the pro-capitalist trade unions and the two big business parties.

At a time when growing working class anger threatens to break through the straitjacket of the trade unions and develop into a political struggle against the Democratic Party and the entire political establishment, the pseudo-left groups are seeking desperately to maintain the authority of these anti-working-class organizations.



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