

“Why should CEOs get double and triple raises and we get health care cuts?”

## Verizon workers discuss CWA contract betrayal

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Verizon workers are voting on the deal accepted by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) in the face of a barrage of propaganda from union officials, the corporate media and a host of pseudo-left groups hailing the sellout deal as an unqualified victory.

Some 40,000 Verizon workers returned to the job last week after seven weeks on strike, with the unions announcing an “agreement in principle” with management. Since that time, voting has started on the agreement despite the fact that the full contract document has not been published.

In fact, it is not clear whether there is even an actual contract, with full details likely still being worked out with management. The deal contains a totally inadequate 10.5 percent non-retroactive pay raise, with the last raise reportedly coming at the end of the four-year agreement. The raise, barely above the rate of inflation, will be more than offset by cuts to health care.

The agreement does nothing to prevent the company from consolidating and eliminating jobs. It also gives management more tools to push higher-paid workers into retirement so it can fill their slots with lower-compensated new hires.

The CWA has touted the removal of the hated Quality Assurance Review (QAR) supervisory program, used to harass and victimize workers. However, QAR has simply been replaced by a new joint union-management committee tasked with squeezing more productivity out of workers. The

committee will establish the basis for disciplining and firing workers who do not meet goals.

A cable splicer from New York City said many of his coworkers were inclined to vote ‘yes’ on the deal in the face of economic pressures from a long strike, during which time the CWA paid out a pittance in strike benefits and the IBEW none at all.

“I can see how it was set up to look like a win when it really wasn’t much of a win. While we didn’t get totally raped, when you look at it, with the company making \$2 billion a month in profits there shouldn’t be any cuts. Why should CEOs get double and triple raises and we get health care cuts?”

“Verizon will have 5G technology in another year, and I am not sure what they will do to their wireline operations. The fight just seems like it is postponed for now.”

He spoke about the CWA’s strategy of relying on appeals to Democratic politicians. “Once the primary was over and Clinton and Sanders left New York, there wasn’t any more talk of the Verizon strike.”

He referred to the court injunction imposed at the initiative of the Obama administration’s National Labor Relations Board. “We can’t strike the way we used to. We weren’t allowed to picket hotels housing the scabs. We had actually gotten a lot of hotels to stop housing the scabs.”

Another veteran worker from New York City said, “It is all still kind of a mystery—no one has seen the actual contract document yet. I don’t think we will see a physical copy for a year.

“We stood on the picket line for seven weeks to get

this? The CWA will collect more dues, but it doesn't help the rest of us.

"A lot of workers are confusing the relief of being back to work after seven weeks with victory. The CWA is stoking that and so is the media.

"The *New York Daily News*, right after the settlement was announced, claimed it was a win without offering any details.

"The whole ratification process is a joke, with the union officials counting the votes."

He noted that the contract gave the company the green light to consolidate call centers. "The call center near where I work is being moved a long ways away. It will create a hardship. One half the families in this city do not have autos.

"As far as eliminating the QAR program, they just came up with something with a different name. When the union sits down with the company to help develop methods to measure productivity, you can't file a grievance because the company just says, 'the union agreed to this.'"

A retired Verizon worker from Western Pennsylvania added, "In the last contract the retirees had to pay more in deductibles. When I first saw the contract summary it sounded good. But then I thought, 'at first they wanted to take away everything, but now they suddenly gave in? Something is fishy here.' In fact, we don't really know yet what is in the new contract.

"What gets me is they settled the strike on a long [Memorial Day] weekend. We were digging in for a long strike and suddenly there is a settlement. I didn't know what to make of it. You can't trust anything they say.

"They say the increase in health care is less than the increase in wages. That may be true for a single, healthy person, but not for a family. They have opened the door. Now the company will want more and more."

He said that he had been forced onto an inferior plan in the last contract. "With our new plan, for every procedure you have to pay \$20-\$25. It adds up.

"The union bosses are more like corporate bosses. They will sell their members down the river. What the union is putting out is aimed at hiding the truth. We are supposed to have an informational meeting on Tuesday; if they don't invite the retirees to attend I will be angry.

"The corporations are destroying America. They are pitting the older against the younger. These CEOs are

making outrageous pay. Lowell McAdams is getting a \$5 million bonus and he has the nerve to tell us to take health care cuts.

"There could be a revolution in America. We already had a civil war. A lot of middle-class people have lost their jobs. Some are living in tent cities in California. It is like the *Grapes of Wrath* is happening all over again today. The banks are taking people's homes and their land. They are even trying to privatize Social Security."

Tony, a longtime Verizon worker from upstate New York, said his initial reaction was to support the contract. After talking with a WSWS reporter, he conceded, "We lost on a few items. They don't honor seniority in assigning jobs, at least in my area and now they also have us paying more for our medical too.

"In the last 15 years things have gotten worse. They [the company] don't honor seniority any more. They also are no longer investing in the infrastructure."

He said he respected the analysis presented by the *World Socialist Web Site*. "I found the (*WSWS Verizon Strike*) newsletter very informative and often the only source of reliable information. I read your coverage of the 2011 strike and what you said would happen in regards to what the company and the union would do was correct and the same held true for your coverage of negotiations this time around."



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