

As voting continues, CWA officials pressure Verizon workers to accept sellout

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After their first week back on the job, Verizon workers are facing concerted pressure from management, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) to vote “yes” on the sellout contract proposal that served as the basis for ending their nearly seven-week strike. Voting is currently underway at union locals until June 20.

In an effort to sell the rotten offer to a deeply suspicious workforce, union officials have been invited by the company to address workers personally. “[Union] Bureaucrats were out to [our] work location yesterday. They were irrational in their exuberance towards this great ‘victory,’” a New York Verizon worker told the WSWS.

The worker added that union officials “were very defensive when asked any questions. Most questions they avoided answering. A few people started asking tough questions and were shouted down before they could even [finish] asking.

“A lot [of] people feel uneasy about the way they are hyping this [proposal]. There is something really fishy about the behavior of the bureaucrats. Their behavior borders on the unhinged in the way they are calling this thing a victory, which indicates there is a major sell out in the works,” the worker continued. Union officials have reportedly resorted to distributing news articles published by the International Socialist Organization, *Salon* magazine, *Labor Notes* and other pseudo-left groups promoting the union’s so-called “victory.”

Though voting on the new offer has been underway for over a week, workers have not been shown a finalized version of the offer. This is because a contract likely doesn’t exist. Instead, workers are being urged to vote for a tentative “agreement in principle” which consists of a ten-page bullet point list and a

Memorandum of Agreement between the company and union that is subject to change at any time.

The “agreement in principle” served as the basis for ending a nearly seven-week strike by 39,000 East Coast telecom employees just days before unemployment benefits were to kick in for New York workers, a much-needed financial respite for workers trying to get by on a paltry \$400 weekly strike pay by the CWA. The proposed offer—a product of talks that were overseen by the US Department of Labor and the Obama administration—would facilitate the elimination of higher-paid workers and impose significant increases in healthcare costs across the board.

Behind the CWA and IBEW’s push to ram through the “agreement in principle” is a fear that a militant and aroused workforce may break free from the suffocating grasp of the Democratic Party and pro-capitalist trade unions.

An AT&T worker in California informed the WSWS that as of Wednesday four West Coast CWA locals had called “grievance” strikes, with two more set to go out on Thursday. In May, the CWA, facing pressure from its rank and file in the midst of the Verizon strike, was forced to call out a limited “grievance” strike over a local issue in San Diego. The CWA quickly shut down the strike in order to continue the isolation of the Verizon workers and prevent a unified movement of telecom workers on both coasts.

“I was informed by an associate that on the district-wide phone call between the leadership and the locals nothing was said about mobilization, only instructing various local leaders where they could go to get first aid assistance,” the worker told this reporter. If true, the CWA is not announcing the locations of the strikes because it is fearful that a mobilization of telecom workers will endanger its collusion with the telecom

giants.

The real character of the CWA-Verizon agreement was spelled out on the industry news site *Fierce Telecom*. The telecom news site quoted global investment firm Jefferies, which stated that Verizon's expected second-quarter revenue losses were due not to the supposed concessions made by the company during bargaining, but were attributable to "reduced demand and a focus on repair and maintenance during the strike," which Verizon Chief Financial Officer Fran Shammo stated would be offset once the company got out of "catch-up mode."

This outlook was echoed by Wells Fargo senior analyst Jennifer Fritzsche, who gloated "While there likely will be some impact on Q2 financials related to the strike...the savings that should result from this Strike outweigh the near term distractions, in our view... We would expect more quantitative details related to these savings to come from the company when it reports Q2 2016 earnings (late July) if not sooner."

Chief in Verizon's projected "savings" include plans to spin off less profitable sections of its wireline business while harassing and coercing older, higher-paid workers into taking an early retirement. Speaking from the 2016 Bank of America Merrill Lynch 2016 Telecom and Media Conference earlier this week, CFO Fran Shammo announced that Verizon would make plans to sell off nearly 50 data centers "over the next three months" for a profit of \$2.5 billion.

In addition, Shammo announced that Verizon's plans to spend nearly \$3 billion to acquire the online web browsing and digital media service giant Yahoo! will go forward, as the telecom seeks to position itself as a digital provider.

The "agreement in principle" is being modeled on Verizon's decision to sell off portions of its wire service to communications firms Fairpoint in 2008 and Frontier in 2014, the latter deal netting the company over \$10 billion. In the aftermath of both deals, workers formerly employed at Verizon were forced to take massive concessions, which were agreed to by the unions. In return for their service in selling out the Verizon strike, the CWA/IBEW unions will obtain the addition of nearly 1,400 wire and 65 wireless workers with significantly lower benefits who will provide the unions with a further source of dues income.



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