

As more details emerge ISO continues defense of CWA sellout of Verizon strike

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As more details of the sellout deal reached between the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and Verizon emerge, the various apologists for the unions are continuing to hail the agreement as a “victory” for workers.

The CWA and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) shut down the seven-week strike by 39,000 Verizon workers just before the Memorial Day weekend, announcing an “agreement in principle” with management. The deal, many details of which still remain hidden, included a substantial expansion of medical co-pays, amounting to hundreds of millions in savings for management, and the introduction of contract language changes that will facilitate the restructuring and downsizing of the company’s landline operations.

Under conditions of deep disquiet and rebelliousness in the working class, a coterie of pseudo-left groups that operate in the orbit of the Democratic Party are more and more being called into service to prop up the unions and provide a cover for their betrayals. They are particularly aware of the growing influence of the *World Socialist Web Site*, which gained a wide readership among Verizon workers during the strike.

The International Socialist Organization (ISO) and its organ *Socialist Worker* are emerging as among the most shameless apologists for the CWA and IBEW. This is hardly a new role for the ISO. Its supporters play a prominent role in the Chicago Teachers Union and were instrumental in imposing a sellout contract in 2012, which facilitated the mass closure of schools.

The ISO does not speak for the working class, but for a disaffected layer of the upper middle class. They reject the revolutionary role of the working class and the transformation of the existing social order. Instead they look to the advancement of their own careers by carving out niches for themselves within the existing capitalist structures, including the unions and the Democratic Party.

The role of the ISO comes across sharply in a June 3 piece in *Socialist Worker* titled, “What can labor learn from the Verizon strike?” Purporting to be a balance sheet of the Verizon workers struggle, co-authors Lee Sustar and Alan Maass begin by hailing the settlement of the strike as a “victory.” They write, “It’s a strike outcome that’s all too rare these days: A corporate powerhouse forced to drop sweeping union-busting

demands by a solid strike of tens of thousands of workers with widespread public support.

“The question now is whether organized labor will follow the Verizon workers’ example and once again make the strike a weapon against the employers’ relentless attacks.”

They go on to dismiss the substantial concessions surrendered by the CWA and IBEW at Verizon as mere “downsides.” They downplay the \$200 million in out-of-pocket health care increases on the grounds that the union had already agreed to these cuts before the strike.

Socialist Worker hails the elimination of the Quality Assurance Review program (QAR) as a “rare gain.” They do not mention that in place of the QAR, the CWA agreed to the establishment of a joint union-management committee aimed at setting performance standards to drive up productivity.

The authors go on to praise the CWA strategy of subordinating the Verizon strike to the Democratic Party and the presidential campaign of “democratic socialist” Bernie Sanders. They write, “Notably, however, the CWA did break from labor leaders’ unquestioning support for Hillary Clinton the Democratic Party establishment’s choice for a presidential nominee, and instead backed Bernie Sanders’ left-wing campaign. Having encouraged members to be active in the Sanders campaign and support his anti-corporate themes, the CWA leadership prepared the ground politically for taking on the bosses.”

Sanders is a tested defender of the capitalist status quo whose supposedly “left wing” program does not go beyond a watered down liberalism. He is currently preparing to support Clinton, as he pledged to do from the beginning. His entire contribution to the Verizon workers struggle consisted of a brief picket line photo-op. To present the CWA endorsement of Sanders as a radical break with establishment politics is a fraud aimed at disarming and disorienting Verizon workers.

Socialist Worker distorts reality by implying that the intervention of US Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez in the Verizon negotiations was aimed at pressuring Verizon to settle. In fact the White House intervened to shut down the strike, with the collaboration of the CWA, to prevent it from becoming the catalyst for a broader movement of the working class. The strikebreaking role of the Obama administration was

demonstrated by the intervention of the National Labor Relations Board, which sought and secured a court injunction barring the picketing of hotels housing scabs.

The authors say nothing about the role of so called “progressive” Democratic politicians such as New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, who kept Verizon strikers penned behind metal barricades and used the New York Police Department as an auxiliary strike breaking force in the service of Verizon.

In support of its claim that the CWA’s role in the Verizon strike represents some kind of a left turn, *Socialist Worker* presents a potted history of the CWA over the past 25 years. It covers the repeated betrayals of the CWA by referring merely to “mistakes” and “failures.” By doing so it seeks to prevent workers from drawing any fundamental conclusions about the transformed role of the unions. These organizations have long ceased to function as defensive workers organizations and have become, in line with their pro-capitalist and nationalist program, appendages of the corporations and the capitalist state.

Socialist Worker calls the 1989 NYNEX strike, which the CWA isolated and sold out on the basis of a concessions contract, a “victory.” The strike saw violent attacks on pickets, including the murder of striker Gerry Horgan. Among other cuts, the strike settlement did not contain an amnesty clause for 170 CWA strikers and 35 IBEW strikers victimized by management.

The authors promote illusions in Chris Shelton, a long time union hack, who was installed in the post of CWA president in 2015. They write, “[T]here was some reason to believe that Shelton—who had opposed the return to work with no contract at Verizon in 2011—would match his fighting talk with action as contract talks began last year.”

They present the collapse of the unions and the virtual cessation of strikes as though it were simply the product of abstract forces, completely apart from the conscious policies of the trade union bureaucracy, which at every step has collaborated with management to shut down strikes and impose concessions.

In their account of the run-up to the 2016 Verizon strike, the authors refer to the active sabotage by the CWA, stating blandly, “preparations for this battle weren’t as effective as they should have been.” In fact the CWA did everything in its power to undermine the militancy of Verizon workers and ensure that the strike took place under conditions most favorable to management.

The CWA realized that it could not directly impose the cuts demanded by management. Workers were in no mood to accept massive concessions from a company raking in billions in profit every month.

When the Verizon contract expired August 1, 2015, the CWA ordered workers to stay on the job. Its intent was to prevent a united struggle by telecommunications workers with auto and steelworkers whose contracts were also set to expire soon. The

delay gave management time to make extensive preparations for strikebreaking.

When it finally called the strike, the CWA rejected any attempt to actually halt scabs from crossing the picket line by seeking to mobilize broader sections of the working class, such as teachers, transit workers and city workers in support of the Verizon workers. Instead they promoted illusions in Sanders and Obama’s labor department, presenting these defenders of capitalism as allies.

When New York police and scabs ran down strikers on the picket line, sending several to the hospital, the CWA said nothing. It did not organize any protest rallies or issue appeals to mobilize the working class. When the contract for 17,000 AT&T West workers expired in California and Nevada in the midst of the Verizon strike, the CWA ordered these workers to continue on the job. A limited strike by 1,700 AT&T West workers in San Diego was shut down by the CWA after a few days.

The CWA, meanwhile, doled out miserly strike support payments to workers while sitting on assets of some \$500 million. It decided to shut down the strike just days before unemployment benefits were set to start for Verizon strikers in New York, which would have reduced the financial pressure on workers to accept a quick settlement.

The CWA ordered workers back on the job without even presenting the full details of the reported settlement. Indeed, the CWA announced merely an “agreement in principle,” not the acceptance of an actual document. Now it is working feverishly to sell this deal, relying on the corporate media and its pseudo-left allies such as the International Socialist Organization to present the sellout of the strike as a “victory.”

This leftward movement of the working class has found positive expression in the growth in the readership of the *World Socialist Web Site Verizon Strike Newsletter*, which at every point in the Verizon strike presented an objective analysis of the role of the CWA and advanced a strategy aimed at breaking the isolation of the strike. It fought for an independent socialist political orientation for the working class, insisting that the Verizon struggle was part of a mounting resistance by the working class globally.

Verizon workers should organize a campaign to defeat the contract settlement and use that as the basis for a rebellion against the CWA through the formation of independent rank-and-file committees. Such a struggle requires clarity on the role of groups such as the ISO who at every point seek to maintain the authority of the right wing trade unions.



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