

As voting on Verizon sellout winds down workers express concerns over jobs, healthcare

Our reporters
14 June 2016

Voting is set to conclude June 17 on the sellout agreement between Verizon, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) following the recently concluded seven-week strike by some 40,000 workers.

The CWA, the media and various pseudo left groups, in particular the International Socialist Organization (ISO), continue to hail the contract as a “victory,” despite the imposition of some \$200 million in health care cuts on the backs of workers.

The agreement will also facilitate the restructuring and downsizing of the company’s landline operations. Many workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site Verizon Strike Newsletter* expressed anger over the way the CWA and IBEW shut down the strike and moved forward with a vote without allowing workers to see the full contract details.

The unions ended the strike on June 1, just as strikers in New York became eligible for unemployment benefits, which would have eased the financial pressure on workers.

A call center worker in New York told the WSWWS *Verizon Strike Newsletter*, “I’m still mad about us being sent back to work without a contract in 2011. That is when they gave up a piece of our health care coverage. They never should have done that.

“I don’t like any of this. I don’t like that we were isolated. I don’t like that we were about to get our unemployment compensation when we were sent back.

“They are trying to make bigger call centers. Garden City in Long Island is big, and they are trying to build them up. Same here. With everybody, they are moving us around to set us up to move us again to where they want to put us.

“Con Ed workers may be going out on strike June 25 with Macy’s and maybe the Post Office. We were fully prepared to stay out on strike, and this would have been the biggest strike you have ever seen. We are all workers, and we want a good and fair contract. But it seems like as soon as you give a piece of something up like our health care, they just keep taking more and more pieces.”

The CWA announced an end to the strike based on the acceptance of an “agreement in principle” with management. It is not even clear if there is an actual contract document at this point. Workers expressed frustration at the lack of information about the settlement.

Another New York City call center worker told the *Newsletter*, “We haven’t had a meeting yet with the union. It is like this with every contract. All we get to see are the highlights and it is months before we get the actual contract books.

“The main questions for me are job security and medical. Before the strike they were trying to move my center to Long Island. They are still looking to move us. I have already moved four times since I started. I am 16 miles from home currently.

“Now we are hearing a rumor that our center will close and that they will be moving us.”

A Verizon worker from New York City said, “All we got were bullet points about the contract. We still don’t know what our medical costs are going to be. Nancy Pelosi style, we will vote on the contract, then we will find what is in there.

“It is a large contract. A lot of people are still waiting on answers. You can talk to any union member, the unions just seem to be interested in themselves. It seems they have lost their way from the average guy.”

A Verizon worker from Pennsylvania said, “This company is making billions, they could certainly have

afforded to pay us more.

“My main question is about retiree benefits. In 2011 they agreed to no longer enroll new hires in the pension plan. My question was, ‘How can you come to the membership and give raises to pensions when not everyone is even eligible?’ The union’s answer was, basically, ‘If you don’t like it, work somewhere else.’”

Another worker said they were moving workers around consolidating call centers. She said she knew of 100 Wireless tech workers in Queens, who had been the template for the CWA’s unionization of wireless workers, who had no contract.

Yet another said, “I signed the [WSWS] petition to not end the strike until we had the contract, studied it and voted on it.

“I don’t like the health care premiums going up from \$200 to \$330 for family coverage. I am not happy with the family leave program where if you take time off to take care of a sick child or family member, the minimum amount of time you can take is three days and then you are losing three days of pay. I am also against the pension deal where if you quit this job before you are 55, they will take away 6 percent of your pension for every year you are younger than 55. I don’t like any of these takeaways.

“I think the petition was a good thing. If it had been advertised more, more people would have signed it. We were out seven weeks, and we should not give back anything.”

A Verizon call center worker with 34 years of work experience said, “There are a lot of mixed feelings and ways to analyze the contract. We don’t know who to trust about it, including the union.

“Inside, the working conditions are about the same as before the strike. They are interested in productivity. For the call center workers, I heard about them moving call centers. That is why they moved us here to Brooklyn from Flatbush. Now they would be able to move us to Garden City.”



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