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CWA calls diversionary “grievance strikes” against AT&T West in California

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Over the past several days, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) has called a series of “grievance strikes” against AT&T West facilities in California as some 16,000 CWA members in California and Nevada continue to work without a contract.

The walkouts are an evident attempt by the CWA to allow workers to vent anger and frustration about the refusal of the union to call a strike over the stalled contract negotiations. AT&T has proposed a long list of cuts and an insulting 1 percent annual wage increase. Its demands reportedly include an 8 percent annual increase in out-of-pocket health care costs.

Some 4,000 AT&T West workers, members of CWA Local 9510 and 9400, went on strike Thursday in cities up and down the length of California including Anaheim, Santa Rosa, Fort Bragg, Petaluma, and Ukiah. Most workers were ordered back on the job Saturday. The strike involved wireline workers.

The work stoppages have been almost completely blacked out by the news media. None of the major West Coast papers, including the *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, carried any report of the strikes.

According to a post Thursday on the CWA Local 9400 Facebook page, the walkouts involved a dispute over the transfer of employees within work units. The CWA said it had filed a grievance with the National Labor Relations Board over the issue. A later post indicated the dispute had been resolved and ordered an end to the walkouts. No further details were provided. Calls to Local 9510 and 9400 by this reporter were not returned.

In comments to the *Lost Coast Outlook*, a CWA official said the dispute involved service and repair

work on landline circuitry used for 911 emergency calls. Management had reportedly made a unilateral decision to shift that work from one class of employees to another class.

AT&T West workers have been without a contract since April 9. The company is demanding a host of concessions, including changes to health care and overtime rules. Management wants to drop a contract provision that entitles workers to double-time pay after 49 hours on the job in any given week. It also wants to be able to impose mandatory overtime virtually at will. Currently, management can only designate a four-month period during which they can force overtime. Among other changes, management wants to drop Kaiser Permanente from its list of approved health care providers.

The latest “grievance strikes” follow a walkout by some 1,700 AT&T West Workers in San Diego in late May. The strike came in the midst of the strike by 40,000 Verizon workers on the East Coast. CWA Local 9509 said the strike was over the refusal of AT&T to share information over calls it monitors between call center workers and customers. The CWA moved quickly to shut down the strike before it sparked a broader struggle by telecom and other workers. Few details of the reported settlement were made available to members.

One angry worker posted on the CWA Local 9400 Facebook page, “What r we waiting for(?) all California should go on strike at the same time. (T)hese walk outs ain’t doing no change, its only hurting our pockets.”

An AT&T West worker from Northern California told the WSWS, “They are not accomplishing anything

by doing these stupid maneuvers. They are picking the wrong tactics. It is getting everybody angry. We are as angry with the union as with the company.

“There was one [strike] down south where they had been doing quality operations and someone failed the quality inspection. He had had issues before, and they suspended him for 15 days.

“They are not keeping us informed. If you go to the [CWA] District 9 website, you won’t find anything. During the strike in San Diego, there was nothing either. I got all my information off the news.

“Quite a few people feel there should be no more negotiations. Everything the company has come up with from the start has been draconian. When they came out with their initial proposal, it was just a laundry list of everything you can imagine.

“We should just give them a list of our demands and after 48 hours go on strike.

“Everything considered, I am making less than I did 10 years ago. I am not doing that again. Whatever comes down the pike, I am voting against it if there is even one concession.”

The CWA is following the same reactionary and bankrupt strategy at AT&T West as it employed during the Verizon strike. Workers at Verizon were forced to work eight months past their contract expiration deadline before the union called a strike. The delay of the strike was a deliberate effort to keep Verizon workers isolated from auto and steel workers whose contracts expired in the late summer and fall.

Instead of coordinating a united struggle of AT&T West workers and workers at Verizon, the CWA kept the two sections of workers separated, even though both faced draconian concession demands. The CWA kept AT&T West workers on the job past their contract deadline, then called a strike at Verizon. When AT&T West workers struck in San Diego, the CWA ended the walkout after a few days when it threatened to spark a broader action.

The CWA then shut down the Verizon strike based on an “agreement in principle,” forcing workers to vote on the sellout deal imposing higher health care costs based on union-supplied “highlights,” not the full contract document. The CWA is now maneuvering to undermine the determination of AT&T West workers with diversionary and ineffective “grievance strikes” while the company stands fast in its concession

demands.



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