

# Telecom union calls bogus “strike” at AT&T in California and Nevada

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An estimated 17,000 AT&T technicians and call center staff in California and Nevada returned to work Thursday morning after a walkout called by the Communications Workers of America that lasted less than 24 hours.

CWA officials said the walkout was triggered by AT&T’s unilateral decision to force technicians to perform duties out of their job titles and to increase “work flow,” i.e., productivity. The CWA claimed that a settlement it reached late Wednesday would prevent the telecom giant from making technicians perform work outside their classification.

The union walkout involved only landline workers who belong to the CWA in California and Nevada. AT&T workers had picketed dozens of locations across the two states, with major picket lines in Los Angeles, Reno, Fresno, Sacramento, Bakersfield, Carson City, Tustin, San Diego and San Francisco.

The stunt was aimed at defusing anger and frustration over the fact that workers have been working without a new contract for nearly a year, since April 9, 2016. They are determined to recoup lost wages and benefits conceded by the CWA. The company knows it can count on the loyalty of the CWA bureaucracy and is doubling down by demanding a host of new concessions. These include changes to health care and overtime rules.

Additionally, about 2,200 DIRECTV satellite and warehouse workers in California and Nevada who joined the CWA in April 2016 are in negotiations with AT&T for a first contract.

Nationwide, more than 21,000 AT&T wireless customer service and field workers are working under a contract extension that can be terminated with 72 hours’ notice as they continue to bargain with the company.

The CWA has a history of colluding with management to impose concessions on workers, including wage cuts, reductions and elimination of benefits, as well as two-tiered pensions schemes that leave newer workers with no pension at all.

The CWA has blocked any nationwide struggle by workers and when it has been forced to call strikes, the CWA has isolated embattled workers and sought to starve them into submission. It has also utilized isolated walkouts, “grievance strikes,” and other short-term theatrics such as Wednesday’s “strike” to posture as opponents of the companies, while behind the scenes it collaborates with the telecom bosses.

The following pro-company actions by the CWA within the last year illustrate this policy:

- In the fall of 2016 at Momentive—a former General Electric plastics plant in upstate New York—the CWA shut down a 15-week strike and forced workers back to work with pay and health care cuts.
- The seven-week Verizon strike in the spring of 2016, despite being hailed as a “victory” by the CWA officials, saw workers forfeit wages only to be sent back to work by the CWA with concessions on health care and miniscule raises, which did not keep pace with inflation. This was followed by hundreds of job cuts.
- In May 2016, the CWA ended a four-day walkout by AT&T workers in San Diego to prevent a unified struggle on both coasts with striking Verizon workers.

The CWA is continuing to stonewall workers at AT&T West, pursuing the same backstabbing strategy that it employed at Verizon, where workers were forced to work eight months past their contract expiration deadline before the union called a strike. This gave the giant company all the time in the world to prepare its strikebreaking operation.

The delay of the Verizon strike was a deliberate effort

by the CWA and the AFL-CIO to prevent a unified movement of millions of workers whose contracts were expiring in 2015-16, including autoworkers, steelworkers, teachers and other sections of workers. Fearing a “wages push” by workers, the Obama administration called top union bureaucrats into a White House meeting in July 2015, where they agreed to block a potential strike wave, suppress workers’ wage demands and impose sharp increases in health care costs.

AT&T is the second-largest wireless telecom carrier—just behind Verizon—in the United States, with approximately 135 million wireless subscribers.

While demanding more sacrifice from workers, AT&T is seeking government approval for a massive \$85-billion takeover of entertainment company Time Warner Inc., which includes CNN, HBO and the Warner Bros. movie and television studio. AT&T acquired DIRECTV nearly two years ago, which is the largest pay TV company in the U.S.

AT&T reported \$41.8 billion in revenue for the fourth quarter of 2016 and has posted profits of more than \$1 billion a month over the previous 12 months.

As the communication conglomerates have over the last several decades continued to restructure to become larger and more powerful, the CWA has responded by weakening workers by dividing them and separating their contracts by geographic regions (seven different districts), by job designation (landline, wireless, satellite TV, call centers, technicians etc.), and by companies (ATT&T, Verizon, DIRECTV etc.).

The CWA's divide-and-rule strategy is in keeping with its embrace of President Trump's reactionary “America First” nationalism. Hostile to a common struggle by telecom workers around the world, the CWA has repeatedly railed against call center jobs going to the Philippines, Mexico and other countries.

Last February CWA spokesperson Candice Johnson told Bloomberg News that AT&T is “selling service in the US and shifting work to places like India. President Trump made a lot of promises on the campaign trail, and we are going to hold him to it.”

If workers are to defend their interests they must take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands and mount a common fight nationally and internationally against the global conglomerates.



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