

14,000 AT&T workers authorize strike as contract expirations loom

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Contracts covering 14,000 telecommunication workers at AT&T's Midwest and Legacy T regions expire at midnight Saturday. Workers in both regions have voted overwhelmingly to strike, expressing outrage over the company's demands for massive concessions in health care and continued job cuts.

The over 90 percent vote to strike is also part of a growing movement of the working class, particularly teachers who have struck in West Virginia and Oklahoma, demanding better pay, health care and increased funding for education.

Communication Workers of America officials have not set a strike date, saying only that the vote authorizes them to call a strike. While union officials have told workers to take home their personal things, the union also holds open the possibility of working under a contract extension, or without a contract, if no new contract is reached.

AT&T Midwest covers workers in Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin, while the AT&T Legacy T contract covers workers nationwide.

Workers in both regions have faced massive job cuts and cuts to health care. In the AT&T Legacy T region, which covers about 6,000 workers, health care costs have increased by 28 percent a year for the past 5 years, forcing many workers to opt out of health coverage entirely, according to the union.

On top of this, AT&T is demanding that workers pay a third of the total cost of health care. At the current cost this would amount to about \$6,000 per year, which is 12 percent of earnings for a worker making \$50,000 a year.

The company is also seeking to continue their job-cutting. Since their last contract in 2015, the company has cut nearly 10 percent of the workforce.

Last year, AT&T reported \$160.5 billion total

revenue and earnings per share of stock of \$4.76, compared to \$2.10 in 2016. Randall Stephenson, AT&T CEO, was a strong supporter of the Trump tax cut and made headlines when he promised to pay each worker a \$1,000 bonus and to create 7,000 jobs.

The \$200 million that the company will pay in bonuses amounts to a small percentage of the billions that the company will reap in extra profits from the tax cut. As far as the promised new jobs, those have yet to materialize.

Stephenson made \$28.7 million last year, or roughly 570 times that of the average worker at AT&T. Other top executives at the company made equally obscene amounts.

But while the company is making billions in profits, it continues to contract out work and demand that remaining workers take massive concessions. AT&T, along with the other major telecommunications provider Verizon, cites the decline in landline use to justify the attack on its workers.

In fact, the landline business is still making enormous profits for both AT&T and Verizon. But compared to the wireless side of the business it has become a smaller share of the companies' overall revenue. And both companies are seeking to cut costs by driving down living standards of the workforce.

While the CWA is claiming to be fighting for health care and job security, the current loss of jobs and cuts to health care are the product of past concessions contracts in which the CWA traded away workers' jobs and benefits in exchange for the company agreeing to allow the CWA to represent workers in the company's growing wireless division.

The CWA currently represents 45,000 workers in the wireless division. The CWA consistently traded workers' benefits and jobs to insure a steady stream of

dues income. When the union refers to job security, they are really referring to the job security of the union officials.

If the union does call a strike, the union has already made clear that it intends to isolate the workers, to be used as an example for the rest of the industry. Over the past year, the CWA and the company have signed contracts in their five other regions. Just last month, the CWA ordered striking Frontier workers in West Virginia back to work after a three-week strike.



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