

# CWA union prepares sellout contract after ending strike by AT&T workers

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After ordering 20,000 striking AT&T employees back to work Wednesday without a new contract, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) for the Southeastern US announced it may have a deal with the telecom giant as soon as today.

The CWA strike lasted less than a week. While the contract covering the workers expired on Aug. 3, the CWA did nothing to mobilize opposition, only reacting by calling the strike after workers mobilized independently.

AT&T views the present contract as an opportunity to restructure its labor force, giving it greater flexibility to fire workers for attendance and not meeting production quotas. In addition to seeking a system where workers can be called out at almost any time and with little notice, AT&T plans to eliminate many work rules and job classifications for technicians and to further monitor call center workers to boost exploitation. The company proposes no pay raise and is demanding that workers pay more for health care.

The CWA only resorted to a strike when AT&T workers in south Florida began walking off the job in response to the company's victimization of militant workers. Eager to head off the movement of workers, the CWA called a strike for workers in the rest of Florida as well as in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

"District 3 leadership and the bargaining team appreciate the spirit and solidarity shown by your protest against the company's unfair labor practices over the last 4 days," the CWA declared in a statement posted on CWA Local 3204's website.

"The company saw how seriously you and your members took the protest and that you would not stop until they bargained with us in good faith."

As justification for calling off the strike just days later, the CWA claimed that the strike had succeeded in forcing AT&T to resume bargaining in good faith. Not a single issue of concern to workers—wages, benefits, working conditions and company harassment—was resolved.

To further ensure the isolation of AT&T Southeast workers, in June and July the CWA pushed through concessions contracts on 14,000 workers in the AT&T Midwest and Legacy bargaining units.

The strike was the first of such a size in the South in decades. The CWA feared that this struggle would link up with the hundreds of thousands of other workers in auto, airlines, grocery stores and health care industries who have voted to strike in the past few weeks.

Additionally, the CWA wants to prevent a protracted strike in the Southeast, as it will soon begin negotiations with AT&T for contracts covering workers in the West. The AFL-CIO leadership shares this sentiment, terrified at the prospect of simultaneous strikes at a time when the United Auto Workers leadership is exposed for taking millions in bribes from the auto companies. Above all, the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracies want to prevent a unified movement of the working class.

The CWA's strike demobilization follows a familiar pattern.

Workers are determined not to accept yet another bad deal. Fearing above all the militancy of the rank-and-file as a threat to their privileges, union leaders act as a brake at every juncture. This includes:

- Delaying a strike as long as possible to allow the company time to prepare to minimize losses in the event of a strike.
- Keeping workers in the dark about any contract terms.

- Limiting strike pay or forcing workers to accept unemployment or charity.
- Refusing to call sympathy strikes in the same industry, in the same company, and even in the *same union*.
- Calling off the strike without releasing any contract details or even any contract agreement at all.

In every such case, the union demobilizes the strike as soon as workers have any leverage and before it overlaps with another contract dispute involving another section of the working class, even in the same industry. Teachers across the United States will recall being told that their strikes were local issues, having nothing to do with teachers in neighboring counties or states who face identical challenges.

In the more recent examples of this “Hollywood” type of strike, union executives declare victory without any contract terms being made public. And finally, they add insult to injury by asking their just-sold-out members to “remember in November,” i.e., to vote for the candidates of the big business Democratic Party.

Now that the CWA has announced that a deal is pending—acknowledging that no substantive changes have taken place in negotiations—what can AT&T workers expect? Can anyone seriously believe that the company did an about-face, abandoning demands for deep cuts and casualization of the labor force, and embracing workers’ calls for precisely the opposite?

The financial speculators rendered their verdict, with AT&T’s share price hovering around \$35 per share after the strike was called off, up from a low of \$33.49 when the contract ended earlier this month.

One worker posted the following on the Facebook page for CWA Local 3122, representative of a mood of distrust:

“Why are we going back if we are being kept in the dark on bargaining? The company will not take us seriously coming back to the table with our tails between our legs. We need to stay out until we get everything we want and especially NO GIVE BACKS.”

A CWA bureaucrat replied to the post, saying, “you should read the last bargaining report.”

The worker replied with open hostility, “Directly from the District 3 site? There is no specific bargaining info, just the general sentiment of ‘we are working hard’ and ‘thank you for your solidarity.’ Nice try.”

The slipping grip that the CWA has over the minds of its members underscores the role of figures such as Democratic presidential aspirant Bernie Sanders, a self-proclaimed “democratic socialist,” who appeared with CWA bureaucrats in Kentucky when the strike began for a photo op. His appearance sought to provide the pro-company union with a fig leaf of left-wing credentials, the better to deceive them with.



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