

IBEW apparatus shuts down Philadelphia PECO strike as deadly heat wave and storms cause mass power outages

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The strike by 1,600 Philadelphia Electric Company (PECO) workers was abruptly and undemocratically shut down late Monday night by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 614 bureaucracy after the union and management announced a tentative agreement.

Workers are due to return to work Wednesday without having even seen the details of their offer. A post on Local 614's social media account calls for members to attend "our July General Meeting... TOMORROW NIGHT, Wednesday, July 8, 2026." It explains that members "won't want to miss this meeting" because "This is where members can get information and celebrate our landmark contract!"

However, the details released so far paint a picture of a massively concessionary contract. The new agreement reportedly provides raises of only 4 percent each year for linemen and gas technicians over the next four years, and 4.5 percent for the fifth year. Call center employees will receive a meager 3 percent each year over the five-year length of the contract.

Most damning, the total 20.5 percent raise over five years is just half a percent more than what the company initially offered the union and 10 percent less than what the union had claimed was "the industry standard" for electrical workers. With inflation constantly eroding purchasing power, the token wage increases in the new tentative agreement will barely keep workers afloat, let alone make up for years of falling real wages.

Local 614 and media reports are claiming the deal guarantees "cash-balance pension plans" for all members, including newer hires who had been excluded from traditional pensions. This proposal was previously part of management's offer. Far from a traditional-style defined payment pension plan, a "cash-balance" plan is a lower-

tier form of retirement security, replacing a clear, salary-based guarantee with an individual "account" subject to weaker protections and easier corporate restructuring.

Furthermore, the union had initially sought to raise wages equally across the board, noting the disparity between the predominantly female call center workforce and the primarily male linemen, a demand they have now abandoned.

Union and PECO officials rejoiced. In the surest sign of a conscious betrayal and sellout agreement, Larry Anastasi, president and business manager of Local 614 called the sham offer a "historic win." The corporation, in turn, called the offer "a strong, market-competitive proposal that includes nearly a 20 percent wage increase over five years."

The announcement came just hours after Local 614 leaders and negotiators claimed that "numerous items" still separated the sides and that, despite the strike's considerable public support and leverage amid a record-breaking heat wave and storm-fueled power outages, the management "won't budge."

Rather than a "historic win," the TA and the shutdown of the strike without genuine membership consent show the bureaucracy snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, acting as an industrial police force to contain worker militancy before it can become the spearhead of a broader movement of the working class.

The walkout—the first in the utility company's 145-year history—had immense potential and was launched under conditions of tremendous strategic advantage for the working class. Yet, no sooner had the workers flexed their social power than the union apparatus intervened to strangle the struggle and force a return to work under a tentative agreement that is already being hailed as a 'victory.'

The walkout by linemen, gas workers, mechanics, and call-center employees began over the July 4th weekend in the city where the country was founded 250 years ago as well as in the midst of a punishing, deadly heat wave and severe storms that battered the Philadelphia region and the broader United States.

Over the past week, extreme temperatures and accompanying severe thunderstorms resulted in widespread devastation. The infrastructure in Philadelphia, like much of the country, is crumbling. Outdated substations, above-ground power lines and a severe lack of modernization mean that even moderate storms can plunge tens of thousands into darkness.

In southeastern Pennsylvania alone, storms knocked out power for 57,000 customers during a heat wave that pushed temperatures past 100 degrees Fahrenheit, creating life-threatening conditions for the elderly, the sick and working-class families who rely on air conditioning to survive. Meanwhile, severe storms left more than 350,000 electricity customers without power across Michigan, including hundreds of thousands in metro Detroit, in the same period.

The burden of maintaining this failing, dangerous grid falls squarely on the shoulders of the utility workers, who are pushed to the limit in hazardous conditions to perform emergency restorations.

The IBEW's betrayal provides clear evidence that striking workers are confronting not merely a stubborn local management, but Exelon Corporation, the massive energy utility monolith that owns PECO, and the entire political establishment that defends it.

While the company claims it cannot afford to meet workers' demands, Exelon's executives are showered with cash. Exelon President and CEO Calvin G. Butler Jr. pocketed a staggering \$24 million in total compensation in 2025. Additionally, in the first quarter of 2026 alone, PECO reported a massive \$278 million profit.

The company has cynically pointed to the high earnings of some linemen in an effort to justify poor working conditions, claiming the average lineman salary in 2025 was \$243,569. But as the company itself admitted, this figure is inflated by massive amounts of forced, excessive overtime. In reality, utility workers are forced to work punishing hours, sacrificing their health and time with their families, just to maintain a basic standard of living.

In Philadelphia, the IBEW is deeply integrated into the corrupt local Democratic Party machine—exemplified by the conviction of former Local 98 boss John “Johnny Doc” Dougherty, who spent union dues bribing city

officials and underwriting the political establishment.

The isolation and suppression of the Local 614 strike is driven by the bureaucracy's mortal fear that a sustained utility workers' strike, under conditions of a crumbling electrical grid and a deadly heat wave, could serve as a catalyst for a broader explosion of working-class anger. The trade union apparatus exists specifically to prevent these struggles from linking up into a unified movement against the capitalist class.

Only days before the onset of the strike by IBEW 614, Philadelphia Sheraton hotel workers from UNITE HERE Local 274 announced just three days before July 4 the end of a nine day strike. The end of the strike brought only moderate wage increases that fall well below the \$92,700 threshold needed for a single individual to live comfortably within the city.

The shutdown of the strike comes almost exactly a year after 9,000 Philadelphia municipal workers at District Council 33 (DC 33) went on strike for the first time in decades. Despite mass public support, the strike was shut down after eight days with a tentative agreement promising 9 percent wage increases over a three year period, something scarcely better than what the city was initially offering. In August 2025, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers shut down a threatened strike by teachers days before a strike was to occur which rank-and-file members voted 95 percent in favor of.

To carry out a successful struggle, workers require their own organizations, controlled from below and independent of the union bureaucracy. This perspective was advanced last year by the Philadelphia Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee, which formed after the shutdown of the DC 33 strike.

In its statement on the lessons of the DC 33 strike, the Committee asserted, “The more power that workers show and the greater the possibility for a broader struggle, the more shamelessly the union apparatus intervenes to isolate, demoralize and ultimately betray the movement.” This iron law has been demonstrated once again in the case of the city's electrical workers.



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