

Opposition continues as CWA orders Verizon strikers back to work

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Amid protests and opposition, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) are moving to shut down the Verizon strike, with most workers scheduled to return to their jobs today before they have had a chance to review or vote on a contract.

In an attempt to placate anger over the lack of information on the settlement, the CWA held information meetings Tuesday, including a conference call. At the meetings CWA officials defended the agreement, which provides for a minimal 10.5 percent pay raise over the life of the four-year contract while imposing sharply higher out-of-pocket medical expenses.

As of this writing an online petition being circulated by rank-and-file workers and the WSWS *Verizon Strike Newsletter*, which demands a rescinding of the unions' back-to-work order pending the release of the full contract and a democratic membership vote, has gained significant support, with several hundred workers signing. Many workers left comments expressing their opposition to the attempt by the CWA to shut down the strike without first revealing the full details of the contract.

It is highly suspicious that the CWA and IBEW set a return to work for June 1, the day unemployment benefits were scheduled to begin for thousands of Verizon workers in New York state. It is also telling that the announcement of the settlement came just before the Memorial Day holiday, timed so that workers would not have time to meet and discuss the deal.

An analysis of the 10-page contract summary and related documents presented by the CWA shows that the agreement is a betrayal of the seven-week struggle by Verizon workers. There is no amnesty clause for workers fired during the strike for trumped up picket line infractions. Instead workers will have their fate determined in arbitration, with no assurance of ever being rehired.

It is not even clear that there is a written agreement. The CWA statement announcing the end of the strike referred to an "agreement in principle," not an actual contract.

The paltry 10.5 percent wage increase over four years, reported by the CWA, is not retroactive back to the previous contract expiration date in August 2015 with the final increase on the end date of the agreement. Meanwhile, the CWA and IBEW have agreed to impose higher health care costs on workers that will amount to hundreds of millions of dollars in savings to management, including a 44 percent increase in monthly premiums and a 33 percent increase for emergency room visits.

In a meeting Wednesday, CWA Local 1101 President Keith Purse justified the failure to pay workers their pay increases retroactively, saying the "company said they couldn't afford it." As for the health care cost increases workers would have to bear, he said, "a 6 percent rise is the going rate."

Retirees, who will get an insulting 1 percent annual raise, are also saddled with higher out-of-pocket health care costs and greater restrictions, that will significantly impact their care.

Further, the deal will facilitate a restructuring of the company that will lead to the loss of thousands of jobs. As one analyst told *Fortune*, the settlement is a "prelude to the company exiting the wireline telecommunications business."

The CWA says that balloting will be conducted by locals with results to be submitted by June 17.

Local 1101 officials brushed aside questions from rank-and-file workers about the return to work without a contract vote with the response that it was "standard" procedure.

In fact, the principle "no contract, no work" was for decades standard procedure in the labor movement. It is a testament to the utter degeneracy of the unions that the CWA and IBEW take for granted their right to shut down

a strike without a membership vote. Indeed, according to the bylaws of New York City's CWA Local 1101, one of the largest Verizon locals, "Termination of a strike shall be made at a regular or special meeting or by mail referendum by a majority of the members voting."

Later on a CWA conference call Tuesday evening, during which no member questions were permitted, top union executives continued their claims of victory, demagogically praising workers for their determination and solidarity.

CWA Vice President Edward Mooney boasted of the union's bankrupt strategy of relying on the big business politicians of the Democratic Party. He noted that the strike had been timed to coincide with the New York Democratic primary and praised the brief appearances of Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton on picket lines. He failed to mention the actual role of Democratic Party officials such as New York City Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio, who used the police as a strikebreaking force against Verizon workers. Nor did he cite the intervention of Obama's National Labor Relation's Board, which obtained an injunction against workers picketing hotels housing scabs.

CWA officials unashamedly boasted that they went into talks with the intention of saving management hundreds of millions in health care costs and to force workers into less expensive plans. They also touted as a victory the establishment of a joint committee to drive up productivity.

In response to the call, one veteran Verizon worker told the WSWS, "For months the CWA was telling us we faced losing everything. Now they are calling it a victory because the very worst didn't happen. The main thing the company wanted was to shift medical costs onto the shoulders of workers, which is exactly what they did. The 1,300 workers they boasted that the company will add could be laid off within a year as far as I can see.

"Meanwhile, the CWA has been very active on social media attacking anyone who raises any questions about their claims."

Janice, a call center worker, said, "This is about the union keeping dues, not about us keeping our jobs. The company got what they wanted, they can go ahead and create their mega-centers and route our calls to them. Then they will say our center is no longer needed. They are still going to close the smaller call centers down. The mega-centers will be staffed with new people who get paid less benefits but will still pay union dues. We may be offered to move, but we are established in an area, we

have a house, our kids are in school--you just can't up and move. Like I said, we lose our jobs, but the union keeps getting our dues."

A Verizon worker from Virginia told the WSWS, "A lot of people don't understand going back without a contract ratified. A couple of more days out will not kill anybody. Medical went up a lot, but our pay is not going up that much.

"It is not cool that they took three days to get the details to us."

A retired worker said, "They have sold out the strike. They have been doing this for as long as I worked there. They get people back to work and then you see the real details of the contract. They don't want people to see the contract. They don't want people to discuss it. They say the union is democratic but that is not true.

"These companies are making billions, there is no reason we should have to give up anything.

"I worked 31 years with the promise of health care. Now that is being cut. It may seem like a little, but when you are on a fixed income that can be a lot. They are also forcing everyone into an Medicare Advantage plan rather than being able to have Medicare and a company supplemental."

In fact the conduct of the entire contract negotiation process at Verizon has been a violation of basic norms of working class solidarity. After keeping workers on the job eight months after the August 1 contract expiration date, the unions called a strike on short notice under conditions where management's strikebreaking plans were well prepared. They left Verizon workers isolated, keeping 16,000 AT&T West workers in California, Nevada and Hawaii on the job past their contract deadline. Meanwhile, they CWA and IBEW were silent as police and scabs carried out violent assaults on pickets.

The CWA then collaborated with the Obama administration and US Labor Secretary Thomas Perez to shut down the strike, going into nearly two weeks of closed door talks that resulted in the present contract betrayal.



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