

CWA-Verizon “agreement in principle” facilitates victimization of workers

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3 June 2016

As 39,000 Verizon workers returned to work after a seven-week strike they are increasingly facing intimidation from management, which has been facilitated by the “agreement in principle” signed by the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW).

The unions have told workers that the new proposal—which they are voting on now—is an unmitigated victory for workers. This lie has been repeated by various pseudo-left defenders of the trade union, including the International Socialist Organization, which claimed, “The unions took on and beat a powerful 21st-century corporation in the same basic way they did in the 19th and 20th—by withholding their labor and watching the bosses squirm.”

In fact, Verizon was able to attain sweeping health care concessions and a freer hand to consolidate its operations and wipe out jobs. In particular the deal—which workers have only seen in the form of a self-serving “summary” by the CWA—has made it easier for Verizon to push higher-paid workers into early retirement.

On Wednesday hundreds of workers at Manhattan’s 56th and 79th street garages, a Verizon location in Suffolk County, Long Island, were sent home without pay by managers because they were wearing red strike T-shirts. The workers lost a day’s pay for “not wearing proper attire.”

“No language in [the agreement] will stop the harassment,” a worker in Virginia with 18 years at the telecom company told the *WSWS Verizon Strike Newsletter*. “They are trying to make this situation throughout entire company like the conditions installation and maintenance workers already face,” he said. “The FiOS [fiber optic system] workers are

treated the worst. They have to crawl through raw sewage and God knows what else is lining the ground under these homes with wiring. They are required to wear hard hats when on the job but how can you do that when crawling through a hole?”

“I’ve had managers show up to my work site [when working FiOS] to question me about my productivity. I filed a harassment grievance against one and was able to win because four or five others also filed [against that person].

“I’ve seen supervisors quit because they cannot find enough people to suspend. They actually have ‘suspension quotas.’ I’ve had managers pull me over as I’ve left the yard to search my vehicle to see if I had a cell phone in the cab. They’re trying to build a case to suspend you. There are managers that brag about all the ways they can get you suspended. When they’re transferred to a new region, they say [of the workers] ‘I can’t wait to wipe the smiles off of their faces.’

“They’re going back in time. This stuff is like George Orwell or something,” he said, likening the harassment he’d faced from management to “an inquisition.”

The new agreement supposedly removes the hated QAR (Quality Assurance Review) program in New York City. Similar work regimes are in place throughout the country. Under the terms of the new “agreement in principle,” new labor-management bodies will be set up so the unions can jointly carry out the harassment and disciplining of workers for failing to meet production or other arbitrary requirements.

Over the past decade and a half, Verizon has downsized and dismissed tens of thousands of employees as it has moved to consolidate its grip on the telecom industry and dominate the wireless and digital domain. The new deal increases the frequency of early

retirement offers which usually offer older workers around \$50,000 to leave the industry, although workers have been known to be receive much smaller amounts from the company.

A worker writing to the legal advisory website *avvo.com* last October stated, “I had gotten hurt at work and went on disability for a few months. Verizon didn’t want to move me elsewhere to work inside and I was given an option after 52 days to go back to work or get terminated. Then a buyout came out around and I took it. I also got screwed in the buyout. I was supposed to get \$50,000 as a buyout bonus but only received \$21,000. I was supposed to get \$2,200 a month for every year I worked there and I’m only getting \$500 a month.”

In addition, workers in call centers have been told that they must move their job sites miles away. In New York City, call center workers are being forced to relocate 34 miles east to Garden City, Long Island, extending the commute for workers by hours through one of the US’s busiest transit routes.

Throughout the month-and-a-half walkout the unions did everything to isolate strikers and promote the Democratic Party even as President Obama and state and local Democrats were helping Verizon to break the strike. The CWA and IBEW welcomed the intervention of Obama’s Labor Department, which helped craft the back-to-work order that handed all the leverage to the telecom giant while stripping workers of the most basic democratic right to see and vote on a contract before returning to work.

In early April the CWA forced 16,000 AT&T West workers to labor without a contract in order to prevent a simultaneous telecom strike on both US coasts. The CWA quickly shut down a local strike in San Diego just hours before it spread throughout California.

The CWA has ignored a strike vote taken by AT&T West workers in California, Nevada and Hawaii. An AT&T worker in Northern California told the WSWS that workers he knew “had a feeling of great powerlessness against the union. We’re in a bind,” he said, “we’re afraid to go out on strike and lose money or to end up with a contract like the workers at Verizon.”

In a message to the WSWS *Verizon Strike Newsletter*, a worker from Pittsburgh said, “Our numbers keep deteriorating. I’m sad for the kids

growing up today—the middle class is history! Corporate America is in it for themselves \$\$\$\$\$\$.”

A retired worker living in Arizona also wrote, “Working people need to get informed. The US media is not going to inform the working class. It is going to be up to each individual. Then we can have a grassroots movement. The sooner the better.”



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