

AT&T and CWA union agree on federal mediation as strike in US southeast enters second week

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AT&T workers: what are your conditions like, and what are you fighting for in your strike? Tell us by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The strike by 17,000 AT&T workers throughout the US Southeast is being threatened with a betrayal as it enters its second week. The Communication Workers of America union has announced the acceptance of the company's offer of federal mediation to oversee the remainder of contract talks.

The CWA District 3 bargaining committee commented: "We remain optimistic that the mediator will help us gain ground on securing a contract that is acceptable to our members. While we know that everyone has questions and concerns about what is going on, please know that we are working diligently to get the current issues resolved and to get everyone back to work."

However, the government will not be involved as a "neutral arbiter" but as the political agent of corporate America. Its top aim will be to break the strike and ram through a deal favorable to the company.

The Biden administration in particular has used mediation and direct involvement in major national contract talks to screen its attack on workers. This was the role, for example, that a federal mediation panel played against the railroad workers in 2022. When workers rejected that deal, the Biden administration and Congress pre-emptively banned a strike and imposed the contract.

This state intervention into the strike signals its imminent sell-out by the union bureaucracy. The CWA is working behind the scenes to enforce a new contract that meets workers' demands even less than the

previous rotten contract—which contained a no-strike clause—pushed through after the sell-out of the six-day 2019 strike.

The seriousness with which the state will seek, through its intervention, to shut down the strike must not be underestimated by the rank-and-file membership.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* previously reported, the CWA bureaucracy has extremely close ties with the Democratic Party, with a delegation invited to attend and speak at the recently concluded Democratic National Convention.

In his address to the DNC on its opening night, CWA President Claude Cummings Jr. praised the Biden administration's response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic—in reality, its complete elimination of even the piecemeal measures implemented at the start of 2020.

He added that Vice President Kamala Harris gave the CWA "a seat at the table...while creating good union jobs." But this is a "seat at the table" for the bureaucracy, not for rank-and-file workers. The Biden White House is working closely with the bureaucrats to deal with internal dissent, summed up in Biden's declaration in August that the AFL-CIO was his "domestic NATO."

Workers responded to the CWA's Facebook post of Cummings' speech with scathing criticism:

? "Missed opportunity to maybe mention that 17,000 of your paying union members are on strike not getting a paycheck.. wonder if that would have put any pressure on [AT&T]? Embarrassing."

? "Why is he not talking about the entire Southeast being on strike basically? Talking about creating union

jobs, but we got 17,000 of those jobs on strike!”

? “I feel like we were sold out by him not mentioning our [Unfair Labor Practice] strike in District 3, which was broadcast on every major network and news channel. Sent an online message yesterday asking why we weren’t mentioned and I’ve received no email or call back. 24 year 4 month paying member, along with my 17,000 brothers and sisters deserve an answer.”

? “Why on earth did he not mention what’s going on in district 3??? That absolutely would’ve put pressure on AT&T....man what a missed opportunity and an expensive one for me”

For its part, the CWA bureaucracy is attempting to divert strikers into toothless appeals with a petition campaign addressed to AT&T CEO John Stankey.

While acknowledging in its petition that AT&T made “over \$16 billion in profits in 2023,” it begs the CEO “to respect the dedicated employees who work every day to provide service and support AT&T’s customers.”

At this critical juncture for the strike, rank-and-file CWA member must break the spell of the union bureaucracy’s corporatist maneuvers, take control of the strike and contract talks, and make the broadest appeal to their brothers and sisters throughout the CWA, and in other unions, to unify in collective struggle against the corporations and state apparatus.

CWA District 3 Vice President Richard Honeycutt has acknowledged that “Teamsters are refusing to cross picket lines to deliver packages to AT&T locations.” But the Teamsters bureaucracy is currently actively engaged in betraying their railway brothers and sisters in Canada, who are being set up by the Canadian government and the Canadian Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to accept the dictates of Canadian National (CN) and Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC).

The experiences of federal mediation, utilized by the union bureaucracy and corporations in both Canada and the US against railroaders and west coast dock workers in 2022 and 2023, underscores the dangers posed to AT&T strikers.

The collective strength of the international working class must be mobilized and united in order to defend its interests against the corporations, state apparatus and the union bureaucracies. The latter which effectively serve as a labor police force to keep the rank-

and-file membership imprisoned behind the bars of capitalist exploitation.

AT&T strikers throughout the US Southeast must establish direct channels of communication across picket lines, and strategize how to defend and continue their strike against the company. A step in this direction should be the demands for no federal mediation in the contract talks, for direct rank-and-file oversight and live streaming of the talks, and for AT&T workers throughout the country to unify in a nation-wide strike against the company. For this, a political break with both the Democratic and Republican Parties, the twin parties of Wall Street and the Pentagon, is essential.



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