

“We are fighting for our rights”

Verizon workers denounce demands for massive concessions

By a WSWS reporting team
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The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Verizon workers on picket lines in Virginia, Boston, New York and Pennsylvania on Monday. They are among the 45,000 workers in the US Northeast on strike against demands for massive cuts in wages and benefits.

Verizon has presented a list of 100 concessions it wants from the workers that would gut job security, destroy pensions and cut into health care, work rules and other benefits. Workers are bitterly opposed to the cuts, saying they are determined to fight for equality, their rights, and their future.

Members of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers are carrying out around-the-clock picketing at Verizon's New England headquarters in Boston's Financial District. One striker with 26 years seniority told the WSWS, “Verizon wanted us out here. The contract expired and they gave us nothing. It's unbelievable what they want to take away.”

There are about 6,000 Verizon workers in Massachusetts and another 800 in Rhode Island. The strike is expected to affect utilities across the region, as Verizon shares telephone poles and manholes with other utilities. Members of Local 369 of the Utility Workers Union of America, which represents NStar and National Grid Workers, are refusing to cross Verizon picket lines.

At Verizon's corporate Headquarters in Lower Manhattan, the WSWS spoke to a number of members of Communications Workers of America Local 1011.

Lakisha and Antoinette, both with 11 years as customer service representatives, said that they felt that had no choice but to strike. Verizon wanted to take away too many rights that workers had fought for over the last fifty years. “If we don't take a stand, we will

lose our future. We are fighting for our future,” Antoinette said.

Lakisha added that Verizon was attempting to take away things that workers needed to live a decent life, “We are on strike for job security, and against pay decreases. We have to stand together for equality.”

Zephyrine, a customer service representative for 11 years said, “They're trying to cut our benefits. We have to work here 30 years to get a pension, and now they don't want to pay it. We fought for the rights we have for many years, and we don't want to regress. We are fighting for our rights.

“The company made billions last year. Who do you think made all that money for them? This whole economy is falling apart. I think all the workers should join us, union or not. It's not that we don't want to work; we just don't want to work harder for less money. We're already doing the work of 2 or 3 people. Now they want to pay us even less. The CEO gave himself a raise two weeks ago. It would be great if workers themselves made the decisions together instead of the CEO.”

Joi came to New York all the way from Virginia. “I'm here fighting for equality. They fired me for taking my sick daughter to the hospital. I took one day off. What was I supposed to do? They don't care.”

Charisse, another Verizon worker, said, “They're taking away our benefits. I'm a dialysis patient. It will cost me hundreds extra per week to get the treatment I need. I'm here to protect the benefits this company agreed to 20 years ago. We need to stick together. Our corporate boss makes over \$50,000 a day! It's not right for the working class people who do all the work to take all these cuts. The rich never have to deal with

cuts.

“At Verizon South, they gave me trouble for having to go get dialysis treatment every week, and that’s after I’ve been working there for 21 years. I take care of my 76-year-old mother who suffers from dementia. If I miss one day of work this year, I’ll be fired.”

Lloyd added, “I’ve worked for Verizon as a building representative for 15 years. We’re here to get our rights back. The corporations are attacking workers’ rights across the country. Both Democrats and Republicans get their money from the corporations, so the little guy gets screwed. Because businesses are investing so much overseas, people have fewer options and have to take what they can get.

“I still remember how one woman told [former president] Bush how she’s working three jobs to survive and he said this was ‘uniquely American.’ Before one person in the family had to work in order to get by. Now the entire family has to work to make ends meet.”

In Norfolk, Virginia, Terry Leonard and Bobby, cable splicers on the picket line at a local construction garage, spoke about the reasons they went on strike.

Terry has been with Verizon for 12 years. “I’m concerned about our annual raises and pensions. I hear they are going to end our pensions altogether, freezing them on December 31. What happens to us happens to the retirees, too.”

Bobby, who has been a cable splicer for Verizon for 15 years, described the cuts as an attack on the middle class. “They call us dinosaurs; they say we (land-line workers) are obsolete.”

In Pittsburgh, about 200 members of the Communications Workers of American Locals 13000 and 13500 joined picket lines in front of Verizon’s main headquarters downtown.

Cindy, a service representative for 18 years said, “I have worked too long for them to take away my pension. These are the things you work for. You go into work, day after day, putting up with all the things management brings down on you and the pressure from the customers. You look forward to your vacation, sending your kids to college and retiring. Now they want to take this from us. A pension is something they promised me for 18 years. How can they just say I can no longer have it?”

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