

Returning Verizon workers face consequences of CWA betrayal

By Nick Barrickman
2 June 2016

Thousands of Verizon workers returned to their jobs late Tuesday and early Wednesday morning after the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) unilaterally shut down their nearly seven-week walkout on the eve of the Memorial Day weekend when workers were away.

The “agreement in principle” provides Verizon with sweeping health care concessions that result in a de facto wage cut and a green light to slash jobs. It was reached during 10 days of secret talks in Washington, DC, overseen by Obama’s labor department and a federal mediator.

The 39,000 telecom workers were sent back to work without ever seeing an actual contract or having the opportunity to vote on it first. Voting on a tentative proposal—which was presented in the form of a 10-page summary painting the deal in the most favorable light—is currently underway and will continue until June 17.

On Wednesday morning local union officials greeted workers with claims that the deal was an unmitigated victory over Verizon. The bitter consequences of the sellout, however, began to emerge immediately. Taking advantage of the demobilization of workers, Verizon management, with the complicity of the CWA, sought to make an example of militant workers who showed up wearing the red strike T-shirts.

In an email to the *WSWS Verizon Strike Newsletter*, a New York City worker wrote: “If you are interested, central offices at 56 and 79 street in Manhattan were still out today, June 1. Management sent us home because we wore what union asked us to wear 'union red shirts with CWA logo.' Over a hundred members lost day of pay because we listened to the union and management at these locations sent us home. Other

locations were allowed to work but ones under Thomas McGriff were dismissed until Verizon attire was worn by every technician. Union told us to go home and come back in uniforms tomorrow.

“Again we came dressed in what union asked as to be dressed in. Other locations came as we did and it was no problem. Hundreds of members lost day of pay, insurance, etc. at 56 and 79 street in Manhattan. We are pissed.”

Workers in Suffolk County, Long Island reportedly faced the same threats and denial of pay.

Under the terms of the “agreement in principle” there is no amnesty clause for an unknown number of workers who were fired during the strike for using supposed “hate speech” against strikebreakers, or other so-called picket line infractions. Instead, the fate of these workers will be determined through binding arbitration.

Moreover, while the hated Quality Assurance Review (QAR) supervisory program, used to harass and victimize workers, has been reportedly removed, it is being replaced by a joint union-management review which will be used to discipline and fire workers.

Workers at a customer service call center in New York City arrived to work only to be told that their jobs will be transferred 35 miles away to Garden City, Long Island. Given the fact that the metropolitan New York area is one of the most densely populated in the world, the additional 35 miles could add several hours to the commute for workers who already travel great distances.

This is a part of the company’s scheme to consolidate call center workers in order to eliminate smaller work sites and older, higher-paid employees. The grueling travel and union-backed harassment are some of the ways the company intends to force

so-called legacy workers to take early retirement buyouts.

A column by Roger Entner in *Fierce Telecom* confirms Verizon's strategy of hiving off its current supply of wireline services in favor of turning to its more profitable wireless division. After mentioning Verizon's 2014 sale of nearly 5 million copper landlines throughout the United States to telecom firm Frontier, Entner says the ending of the recent strike "should renew the determination to push ahead with exiting the wireline business... A sale of the remaining wireline assets beyond what it needs to operate its wireless backbone is the way to go."

In the course of the struggle thousands of workers turned to the *World Socialist Web Site* for information and a strategy to oppose the union's isolation and sabotage of the strike. Hundreds signed up for the *WSWS Verizon Strike Newsletter* and signed a petition demanding the rescinding of the back-to-work order pending the release of the full contract and a democratic vote by the rank-and-file.

Many workers who signed the petition left comments expressing their anger and determination. "This is unfair to jump [the] gun and go back without seeing [the contract] detailed out," said one worker in New Jersey, adding, "our local work place conditions were not addressed" by the current agreement. "Why are we ratifying a tentative agreement? No contract exists but we are supposed to return to work anyway!"

"No contract, no work!" states another.

"Multiple huge, *huge* points to be negotiated *after* the contracts are ratified? Shady," says another anonymous worker.

Workers subscribing to the *Newsletter* also thanked the WSWS for its reporting on their struggle. "Your site is the only one on the web that has covered this strike and its issues; it is also, from what I've discovered, the *ONLY* media outlet in the entire nation, whether television, radio, magazine or newspaper that hasn't succumbed to the 'news blackout' pressure. Thank you," said a worker in Virginia.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit: