

Spectrum strike in New York-New Jersey enters fifth month

By Mark Witkowski
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The strike by 1,800 workers in the New York-New Jersey area against Spectrum has entered its fifth month. While workers have demonstrated their determination to fight the telecom giant, formerly known as Time Warner Cable, their struggle has been deliberately isolated by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), along with the Communications Workers of America (CWA).

The workers, members of IBEW Local 3, have been working without a contract since 2013. They walked out on March 28 to oppose company demands to shift the cost of health care and pensions onto their backs. In addition, they are fighting disciplinary measures instituted by the company, which penalizes technicians for troubles caused by the company's cost cutting measures.

Tony, an engineer with Spectrum told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "A lot of workers don't realize this is groundbreaking because of the way they are going after our pensions. If they take our pensions here, all the companies will see and start going after pensions as well."

"I was making \$84,000 a year. Now I'm trying to survive on unemployment that ends up being about \$300 a week," Tony said. Many strikers, unable to pay rent or their mortgage, have taken on other work where they can find it, including Uber jobs. Others are exhausting their life savings.

"Honestly, I blame the union for this situation," Tony said. "The union should have had a plan when we went out on strike. They should tell us what it is. They should have seen this coming. We worked without a contract since 2013, and the union told us to just keep working because they were taking care of things. When Charter/Spectrum bought out Time Warner Cable and came in with a new proposal with demands not related

to our past contract, then the union called a strike."

While the IBEW was forcing workers to labor without a contract, Time Warner continued to fund the union's joint pension health care fund. After the company was acquired by Charter Communications and rebranded as Spectrum, management ceased those contributions.

Workers throughout the telecom industry after facing the same attacks, while the corporations squander billions on their top CEOs and wealthy shareholders, through stock buybacks, dividends and mergers and acquisitions. The telecom unions, however, are keeping workers divided, forcing them to take on the corporations alone.

More than a year after its betrayal of the 45-day strike by 39,000 Verizon workers, the CWA is forcing tens of thousands of AT&T workers to remain on the job long after the expiration of their contracts. After 17,000 AT&T West workers rejected a CWA-backed deal last month, the union blocked a strike and agreed to federal mediation. Workers are currently voting on a new sellout deal accepted by the CWA, which acknowledged AT&T "has not moved from its three key demands on health care costs, the scope of work and new hires."

Like the CWA, the IBEW is encouraging workers to place their faith in various Democratic Party politicians, like Mayor Bill de Blasio who has said the company is being "fundamentally unfair to the workers" and has offered to mediate the dispute. Earlier this week de Blasio made empty statements about revoking Spectrum's franchise agreement if the city's Department of Technology and Telecommunications finds that the company has failed to honor a proviso requiring it to provide services through vendors based in the five boroughs "to the

extent feasible.”

“I’m not going to prejudge that investigation,” the Democratic mayor said, “but if negative findings occur, it can have a very real impact on the future of Charter Spectrum’s business with New York City and their ability to be here and do their work here.”

De Blasio is no friend of the working class. Throughout the Verizon strike, the double-talking mayor dispatched his police to escort scabs and harass striking workers. The entire political establishment—Democrats and Republicans—has overseen a social catastrophe for workers in the city, including declining public services and plunging wages, even as Wall Street hits record levels.

Another striker, Paul Sohan, told the WSWS, “This is political because all the City Council Democrats, the Governor and the Congress people have come out here to say they support us, but they don’t do anything to settle this. The union says they should use the franchise agreement against Charter/Spectrum. But I think there is a conflict of interest the Democratic politicians have here.”

Francisco Marty, picketing on the Upper Westside, told the WSWS, “The situation doesn’t look good at all because of the way it is all about politics. It is being left in the hands of the politicians, and we have been out on strike for far too long.”

Absolutely nothing is to be gained from workers looking to the Democrats or the company agents in the trade union bureaucracy. To break the isolation of this strike, Spectrum workers should elect rank-and-file committees, independent of the IBEW and CWA, to appeal to all telecom workers and workers throughout the New York-New Jersey area for a common fight to defend health care, pensions and other social rights.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>