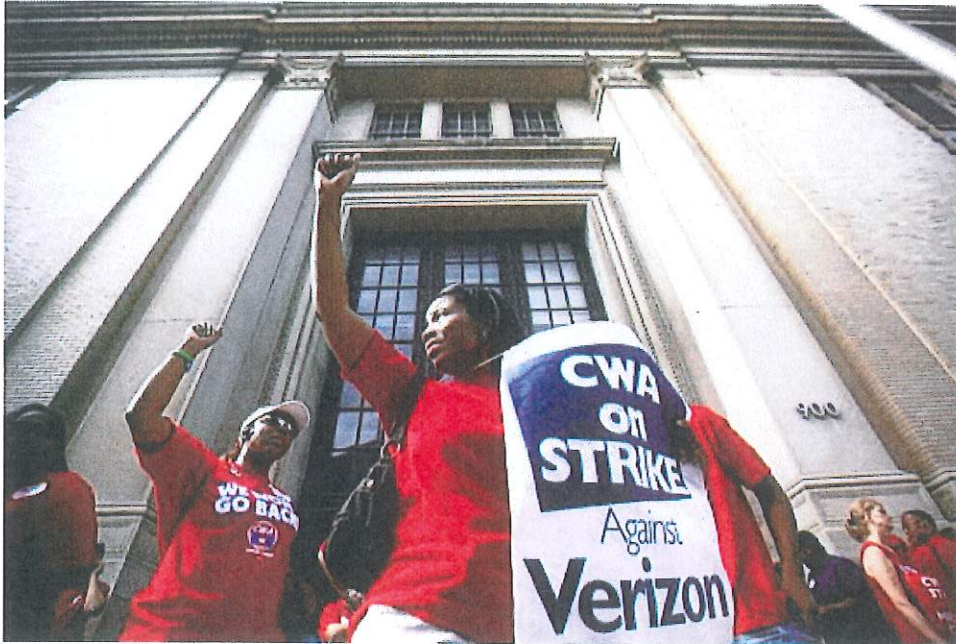


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Verizon Strike Turns Nasty

By GREG BENSINGER And SPENCER E. ANTE



Associated Press

Workers picketed outside a Verizon office in Philadelphia Monday.

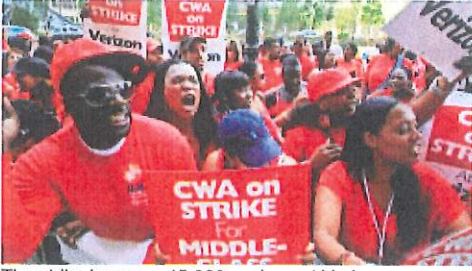
The strike at Verizon Communications Inc. descended into a tense standoff Monday, as workers and management dug in for what is shaping up to be a bitter battle over the future of the

telecommunications giant's work force.

Verizon said it has found evidence of vandalized equipment and said picketing laborers prevented replacement workers from entering or exiting some job sites. The Communications Workers of America, meanwhile, said Verizon's nonunion employees tried to run into strikers with their vehicles.

"This is a strike, there's going to be some conflict," said Bob Master, a legislative and political director for the Communications Workers of America, which represents 35,000 striking Verizon workers. He said the union had instructed members to act legally and professionally on the picket lines.

The two sides have been at odds since Verizon laid out its intention to rein in pensions, require workers to contribute at least \$100 to their health-insurance premiums and make it easier to fire members of the CWA and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, which together represent



The strike by some 45,000 workers at Verizon Communications marked a surprise move from diminished unions in a shrinking industry. Greg Bensinger and Spencer Ante discuss on the digits show.

about 45,000 Verizon workers, mainly in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast.

"We're simply looking to get their benefits in line with the rest of our workers," said Rich Young, a Verizon spokesman.

Verizon hasn't said how much it hopes to save with a new contract. The unions have claimed the cutbacks amount to \$20,000 per worker, or about \$1 billion a year.

Union officials say they are willing to negotiate with Verizon on many of its demands, including a requirement that workers contribute to health-care premiums. But Rolando Scott,

president of CWA Local 1109, says Verizon hasn't engaged in true bargaining yet.

"The ball is in Verizon's court," said Mr. Scott. "They have to let us know what is important to them. We are willing to negotiate on all items." The union said it doesn't disclose counterproposals outside of the negotiating table.

Verizon spokesman Peter Thonis said Monday afternoon that even though formal discussions have been on hold since talks broke down Sunday morning, the company continued to have "high level discussions right now, and discussions have never stopped."

Several union workers followed a Verizon vehicle to a job site and picketed at the site.

Some labor experts say there should be room for the two sides to compromise. The power and size of the telecom unions has been weakened due to customers replacing landlines with wireless, increased levels of subcontracting, and reclassification of workers outside of the union, said Harry C. Katz, dean and professor at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. And Verizon, Mr. Katz said, can only operate for so long with replacement workers before its business starts to suffer.

"They can replace them on a short-run basis, because the technology does not break that much, but in the long run I think Verizon will compromise," said Mr. Katz. "They can't replace all of the technicians. The company has a lot of leverage, but it does not have total leverage."

The vast majority of the unionized workers serve as field technicians or in call centers. The strikers readily admit that they are stepping up their actions, including harassing replacement workers as they go on service calls.

Richard Aulicino, a technician with CWA Local 1109, said he sat outside a Verizon garage in New York City on Sunday and followed a vehicle to a job site in Brooklyn. When the vehicle pulled up to a house, he and three of his union workers got out of their car and picketed the job site. The Verizon workers called the police on the union employees, he said, though the police didn't make them leave.

"We cannot stop them from doing their job," he said. But, Mr. Aulicino said, "We can harass them while they are on the job."

In a statement, Verizon said it had found a dozen acts of vandalism, such as purposefully cut fiber optic lines, and said it had obtained an injunction against unlawful picketing activities in Pennsylvania.

A CWA spokeswoman said the charges were a tactic by Verizon to draw negative attention to the union. "This is step one in the company handbook on how to handle a strike," she said.

The unions leveled their own claims of bad behavior. A local for the IBEW, which represents about 10,000 Verizon workers, posted an update on its website Monday accusing Verizon of injuring two of its members on

Earlier

Union Walks Out at Verizon

Verizon Workers Strike

Verizon, Union Far Apart in Talks
(08/05/2011)

Sunday. "A member out of the Raritan Unit had her foot run over and in the Central Unit a management person drove out of the Howell Work Center striking a member with the side mirror in the head," said the update on the site of Local 827 in East Windsor, N.J. "The member was rushed to Jersey Shore Medical Center with a concussion. The police would not charge him with hitting our member but we will be taking the member to the

Police Station to file charges."

"Our facts are very different from theirs," said Verizon's Mr. Young. "We are aware of a number of allegations, but we have no knowledge of any Verizon workers hitting picketers."

The two sides reached an impasse on Sunday over what the unions said were an unreasonable set of demands.

Verizon is seeking its deepest concessions in years to help offset deterioration of its wire-line division, which comprises the traditional phone business and the FiOS Internet and television services. In addition requiring workers to contribute monthly health-plan premiums, Verizon wants to freeze pensions, tie pay increases more closely to job performance, and make it easier to fire employees for cause. The company also wants to eliminate the Veterans Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Day holidays.

The unions have noted that Verizon remains profitable and said executives are richly compensated. Verizon posted a \$3 billion profit for the first half, though its wire-line unit reported a 1.2% drop in revenue to \$20.4 billion. Revenue at Verizon Wireless, which is co-owned by Vodafone Group PLC, increased 10% for the same period.