

*Communications*

Elizabeth VanDerWoude, President



LOCAL 4250

*Workers of America*

(AFFILIATED WITH AFL-CIO)

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**Following is a statement by the Communications Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers:**

**For release 1 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 20, 2011**

Washington, D.C. – Members of CWA and IBEW at Verizon Communications will return to work on Tuesday, Aug. 23, at which time the contract will be back in force for an indefinite period.

We have reached agreement with Verizon on how bargaining will proceed and how it will be restructured. The major issues remain to be discussed, but overall, issues now are focused and narrowed.

We appreciate the unity of our members and the support of so many in the greater community. Now we will focus on bargaining fairly and moving forward.

CWA and IBEW represent 45,000 workers at Verizon covered by this contract from Virginia to New England.

August 20, 2011

# Verizon Workers Plan to End Strike, Agreeing to Revive Talks Toward a Contract

By **STEVEN GREENHOUSE**

Leaders of the unions that have been on strike against [Verizon Communications](#) announced on Saturday that they were ending the walkout even though the two sides had not reached an overall settlement for a new contract.

Beginning with the evening shift on Monday, the 45,000 striking workers will return to their jobs, posts that they left on Aug. 7 in the nation's largest strike since 2007, when workers at General Motors held a two-day strike.

Union leaders are ending the walkout, they said, because Verizon management had finally agreed to engage in serious bargaining on the contentious issues after the company had originally insisted on negotiating more than 100 proposals for concessions.

Officials from the two unions that called the strike — the [Communications Workers of America](#) and the [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers](#) — made the announcement on Saturday.

The strike was a painful one, forcing thousands of workers and their families to live without paychecks for two weeks and hurting Verizon's image, as many customers complained of major delays for repairs and installations. The walkout involved workers from Massachusetts to Virginia in Verizon's traditional landline operations and in its new FiOS Internet and cable operations, but not workers at Verizon Wireless, which is largely nonunion.

Union officials said they had originally called the strike because they felt they were not being taken seriously and because Verizon was insisting on so many and such sweeping concessions. Verizon was hardly budging from its original position, the unions said, another point of contention. Verizon is pushing for, among other things, a pension freeze for current workers, fewer sick days, an end to all job security provisions, far larger employee contributions toward health coverage, and freedom to do as much outsourcing as it wants.

Larry Cohen, the communications workers' president, said in an interview Saturday that under an agreement reached Friday, the bargaining was being restructured to focus on major issues, with top Verizon officials indicating that there would be real progress in bargaining. Mr. Cohen

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said another factor that helped persuade the unions to return to work was that Verizon had agreed to keep the expired contract in force until a settlement is reached.

“Everybody knew we faced a long list of management demands and that’s why there was a strike, and we would go back into bargaining when the talks could be meaningful,” Mr. Cohen said. “We don’t consider this a victory in any way. We consider it progress toward a good process at Verizon.”

In a statement issued on Saturday, Verizon said the parties had agreed on a process “for moving forward to negotiate the major issues regarding benefits, cost structure, work flexibility and job security.”

Marc C. Reed, Verizon’s executive vice president for human resources, said Verizon believed that ending the strike “is in the best interest of our customers and our employees.”

“The company hasn’t conceded any of its proposals,” Mr. Reed said in an interview. “At the end of the day we still have health care on the table. We still have proposals on job security and moving work on the table.”

Mr. Reed said the unions had ended the strike because of “the pressure of having people not working in this tough economy.” He added, “This is a situation where the purpose of the strike may not have any need.”

Mr. Cohen acknowledged that the bargaining ahead might still be lengthy. He said Verizon initially seemed so dismissive of the two unions’ position and so unwilling to budge from its original stance that union negotiators felt the company was seeking in effect to wipe out the unions’ bargaining rights.

“The unions have been working with Verizon to restructure bargaining in a way that represents progress for everyone,” he said. “We believe that Verizon management shares the goal of meaningful bargaining.”

Jim Spellane, chief spokesman for the electrical workers’ union, said the unions went on strike to get management’s attention and to show that the workers could not be pushed around.

“The workers felt very strongly that their whole standard of living was under attack, that everything we’ve worked for for decades was under threat and wasn’t being taken seriously,” Mr. Spellane said. “They felt backed into a corner and so the strike was called.”

Verizon officials have repeatedly said they needed major concessions from the landline division employees to keep that business competitive and to increase its lagging profitability. The company said its traditional landline business had declines in profits and in its customer base, even though that division was slowly rebounding thanks to growth of Verizon’s FiOS fiber-optic business.

The two unions condemned Verizon’s push for large-scale concessions, saying the demands were inappropriate because the company’s overall profitability had been strong, totaling \$22 billion over the last four years.

While many C.W.A. members voiced relief that they were returning to work, others posted complaints that their union had knuckled under by ending the walkout without a settlement and with Verizon’s concession demands remaining on the table.

Throughout the strike, a big question that union leaders faced was whether Verizon had proposed scores of concessions in the hope of narrowing them down to win just two or three major ones, or whether it was intent on winning dozens of concessions and seriously weakening the two unions.

More than any other union leader in the country, Mr. Cohen has sought to promote and preserve bargaining rights, and he often said that Verizon’s truculent approach to negotiations resembled those of state governors who wanted to abolish collective bargaining.