

Something in the Air

Verizon, Raytheon Strikes Highlight Revived Spirit, Changing Issues in Negotiations

For more than a decade, observers of the labor movement noted the declining incidence of strikes, citing it as proof of fading strength. How times have changed—again.



The challenges posed by a changing economy and the pressures of international competition have changed the focus of bargaining in many cases. But one thing that doesn't change is the need for strength and solidarity in dealing with management. Two sets of negotiations this summer and fall, both mostly involving members in the IBEW's Second District covering New England, drive these points home.

Groundbreaking Victory at Verizon

It took a display of rock-solid solidarity in a strike that lasted 18 days, but more than 73,000 workers at Verizon Communications, Inc. broke new ground in organizing rights and job security.

Verizon is the name of the telecommunications giant formed by the merger of Bell Atlantic and GTE. On August 4, 2000, contracts expired that covered some 15,000 IBEW members of System Council T-6 (composed of 10 locals in five New England states), Local 2213, Syracuse, New York, and one unit of technicians in Local 827, East Windsor, New Jersey. Also expiring were contracts



Striking members of Local 1505 show their spirit at the Raytheon front gate in Andover, Massachusetts.



Local 2222 Assistant Business Manager Dave Reardon addresses rally outside Massachusetts state house during Verizon strike.

covering members of the Communications Workers of America (CWA) from New England to Virginia. All work in the former Bell Atlantic portion of Verizon.

"From day one, we knew that economic issues would not drive these negotiations," said Myles Calvey, business manager of IBEW Local 2222 in Boston and chairman of T-6. "We wanted to make sure that our members in the Northeast would not see their jobs shifted to lower-paying and/or nonunion portions of the new corporation, and wanted our people to have access to opportunities in fast-growing areas of the business like wireless."

Verizon Wireless has some 32,000 employees now and is expected to undergo rapid expansion. It currently has 25 million cell phone customers, compared to 14 million at AT&T Wireless, the nation's second biggest.

The IBEW and CWA did win a solid economic package, but the real news in this strike, which earned intensive media coverage, was in the non-economic issues. Bargaining unit members are assured of no layoffs for the duration of the contract and less than 1 percent (0.7 percent) of bargaining unit work can be

transferred to new locations. The company opened negotiations offering to limit transfers to 6 percent of jobs.

The contract also provides that management will be neutral in organizing drives and will extend recognition if 55 percent of employees in any Verizon Wireless unit sign union authorization cards.

The maximum for involuntary overtime was cut from 15 hours to 7.5 hours per week for customer service workers and to 10 hours per week for technicians and operators now, with another drop to 8 hours next year. Customer service workers also get 30 minutes of "closed time" per shift to get off the phone and catch up with paperwork.

"The job security provisions are nothing short of astounding and will provide a big leg up in future negotiations," said IBEW President J.J. Barry, who said the achievement was possible only because of the tenacity of Calvey, Local 2213 Business Manager Mary Jo Arcuri, and Local 827 Business Manager Bill Huber and other members of the bargaining team.

Two Cornell University industrial relations professors told reporters that the settlement will have a major influence on future collective bargaining. The agreement is by far the largest number of workers ever afforded card check recognition, the professors said, and it underscores how unions are looking to the future to fight for job security and growth provisions as well as the traditional economic issues. It was also hailed as a landmark for employers on how to recruit and retain a skilled work force in a period of nearly full employment.

Striking Back at Raytheon

Leaders of IBEW Local 1505, Waltham, Massachusetts, could hardly believe their eyes when they saw the contract proposals of their employer, defense contracting giant Raytheon Corporation. The company proposed numerous takebacks and betrayed the cooperative spirit that existed when Local 1505 helped Raytheon lobby for tax breaks to improve its competitive position in the industry.

The company's proposals were so bad that 89 percent of the 2000 local members present at a contract meeting on August 27 voted to strike. And strike they did. The key issues of contention were proposed cuts in pensions and health benefits and an attack on job security.

Local 1505 ran 10 picket lines during the strike and received outstanding support from the IBEW International and locals (including a donation to their food bank from Verizon workers from Local 2321), and other unions. Key political figures such as Sen. Edward Kennedy (D) and U.S. Rep. Martin Meehan (D), whose district includes the Raytheon facilities, also tried to help settle the dispute.

On October 2, Local 1505 members ratified a four-year contract proposal and agreed to return to work by a margin of 86 percent to 14 percent. "The company moved on all three [major issues]... enough to get us back to work," said Stan Lichwala, Local 1505 president. The contract raises monthly pension benefit payments and increases health care coverage. Raytheon also promised to keep existing missile and radar assembly jobs in Massachusetts for the life of the contract. ■

The planning for organizing Verizon Wireless workers has already begun. At a meeting at the IBEW International Office to map strategy are: (from left) Joe Penna, IBEW Telecommunications Department International Representative; Bill Davis, IBEW Telecommunications Department director; Gary Heald, IBEW Special Projects Department director; Frank Carroll, Second District International Vice President; Myles Calvey, chairman of System Council T-6 and business manager of Local 2222, Boston; Carol Fitzgerald, IBEW Second District International Representative; and Bob Morrison, chairman of System Council T-3 and assistant business manager of Local 2222.

