

Verizon Condemned for Trampling Rights in Independent Report

A blistering report from American Rights at Work (ARAW) denounces Verizon for interfering with workers trying to organize, taking a "low-road" approach to what were once good jobs, and letting service quality deteriorate for millions of customers.

"Broken Promises: Verizon Neglects Its Commitment to Provide Good Jobs and Quality Service," details how the company uses aggressive and illegal tactics to stop workers from exercising their rights to associate and organize.

"This report documents the lengths to which a corporation will go to trample its employees' rights, even to the detriment of quality service to millions of its customers and the future of good jobs in the industry," CWA President Larry Cohen said. Read the report at www.americanrightsatwork.org.

ARAW will be sending the report to members of Congress, all the presidential candidates and politicians around the country that have expressed support for the Employee Free Choice Act and have condemned Verizon's actions.

The report by the independent workers' rights group provides first-hand accounts of management's abusive and intimidating behavior from Verizon Business technicians who have tried to organize through CWA and the IBEW. It describes how a technician at a Verizon Business facility in Monsey, N.Y., was disciplined and made an example of for posting a pro-union advertisement. To keep an eye on the worker, the company assigned a manager to sit directly behind his desk.

"I remember sitting in the parking lot, horrified, my stomach turning . . . My manager is sitting right behind me. I gotta worry if I hit the wrong key stroke. It was a horrible experience," described the worker, Christopher Bloncourt. Verizon faces NLRB hearings shortly for its anti-union tactics in this and another Verizon Business location in Pennsylvania.

Verizon's assault on workers was so fierce at an Orangeburg, N.Y., Verizon Wireless worksite in 2003 that management banned employees from talking about the union even while on lunch breaks. The NLRB later found the company guilty of that and other abuses. In Long Beach, Calif., where 170 DSL technicians were determined to organize in early 2007, a senior executive flew in from New Jersey just before the vote. The night before and day of the election, the official went cubicle to cubicle telling workers—illegally—that there'd be no raises if the union came in.

Verizon's threatening—and following through on threats—to shut down worksites if employees organize is a common tactic, the report found. In 2001, Verizon said it would close down its Woburn, Mass., call center if the workers voted to unionize. Faced with NLRB charges over these threats and other illegalities, Verizon settled the case and posted a notice agreeing not to break the law. Yet soon afterward, it shut down the facility and moved the work to South Carolina. The report said the company closed down two other call centers where workers were organizing—in Orangeburg, N.Y., and Morristown, N.J.—moving the work to South Carolina, North Carolina and Arizona, all states with "right-to-work" laws that weaken unions.

The report says Verizon management has followed a "textbook example of 'double-breasting,'" since its creation in 2000, to keep workers in its union-represented division separate from workers at Verizon Business and Verizon Wireless. The company refuses to honor the card-check results that show at least 65 to 75 percent of Verizon Business's technicians in New York and New England want to organize.

ARAW found that the company's customers aren't treated much better, stating that Verizon management has "shirked its responsibilities as a public utility, pursuing a race-to-the-bottom, low-road business model that is detrimental to both employees and customers." The report criticizes Verizon for failing to maintain or upgrade service for its landline operations while it is diverting its resources to the more profitable fiber optic, or FiOS network. It also slams the company for threatening future service quality to millions of its existing customers by selling off its rural landline access lines.

"Under Verizon's current business model, tens of thousands of secure, well-paying jobs are at the risk of disappearing," ARAW concludes. "The consequences of Verizon's actions go beyond its workforce, as communities lose good jobs, and customers suffer poor service while missing out on the benefits of high-speed broadband.