

## STRIKE FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS:

### VERIZON EMPLOYEES TAKE A STAND FOR THE AMERICAN WORKER

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**The 36,000 workers who have gone on strike against telecom giant Verizon are front-line troops in the struggle for the preservation of the American middle class.**

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One of the largest labor-management battles in years, the strike is driven by many of the economic forces that have destroyed good-paying middle-income jobs with decent benefits while pushing the financial benefits up the chain to bosses and shareholders.

**Verizon is an enormously profitable company, pulling down \$45 billion over the past five years.** During the same period, the firm's stock has climbed almost 40%.

Still, it is seeking great power to outsource jobs with non-union labor, along with higher contributions to pensions and healthcare. Call it greed or call it forward thinking by management confronting radical changes in communications plus the need to compete against players with lower cost structures.

Either way, the relative downward track of the workforce is the same when, for example, **call center employees see their jobs devalued to wage rates in places like the Philippines.**

The strike's passions mirror the emotions that have made the 2016 presidential campaign the most anger-filled in decades.

Without the desperation unleashed by falling standards of living, Donald Trump would be a

blowhard TV personality rather than a blowhard presidential frontrunner, and Bernie Sanders would be the U.S. Senate's cranky throwback to the 1960s.

Reflecting the rapidly evolving nature of the telecom industry, the strike is America's largest work stoppage since the unions representing Verizon workers—the Communication Workers of America and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers—walked in 2011.

Distressingly, the two unions are themselves throwbacks to a bygone era.

**Labor unions helped create the American middle class**—even if only one-third of all workers were unionized at labor's peak. Today, that number has dropped to 11%—and 6.6% in the private sector.

Labor's weakening is also reflected in a steady decline in strikes. Between 1955 and 1970, the U.S. saw an average of 295 major job actions per year—defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as involving 1,000 or more workers. Since 2000, America's big unions have mounted an annual average of only 16 such strikes.

It's hardly a coincidence that labor's postwar high point coincided with rising wages, benefits and economic security. Now, the last remnants of collective bargaining — and the threat of withholding labor—offer far less muscular buffers against swirling, disruptive currents.

**Striking is tough business for all involved —but sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do to maintain the value of your labor.**

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