

Long Road to Union Recognition for MCI Workers

A chronology

On August 10, 2008 union leaders reached a tentative agreement with Verizon to extend union recognition to 600 former MCI technicians at Verizon Business who had been seeking representation for nearly two years. These workers, who perform the same or similar jobs as the union workforce, received strong support from CWA and IBEW members in a two-year campaign to "tear down the wall" between union and non-union sectors at Verizon. Below is a chronology of the former MCI workers' long road to union recognition.¹

December 1986 -- A majority of workers at a 400-person MCI call center in Southfield, MI petitioned the NLRB for a representation election. Just weeks before the NLRB vote was scheduled, MCI closed the call center. Workers came to the call center only to find signs on the door telling them to report to area hotels where they were informed that the office was closed. No notice, just two weeks severance. The NLRB ultimately ruled that it was a "business decision" and thus not an Unfair Labor Practice.

1987 -- MCI workers at a call center in Richmond, VA face threats by management to close if they form a union.

1998 -- MCI bought by WorldCom, with its own history of aggressive union avoidance.

July 21, 2002 -- WorldCom filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in the largest such filing in United States history. Workers pay the price of huge management fraud with massive layoffs, loss of retirement security etc.

April 14, 2003 -- WorldCom changed its name to MCI, and moved the corporate headquarters from Clinton, Mississippi to Dulles, Virginia.²

February 14, 2005 -- Verizon Communications agreed to acquire MCI for \$7.6 billion.

January 6, 2006 -- The Verizon MCI deal is closed and company renamed to Verizon Business.

¹ Founded in 1963, MCI Communications Corp grew to be the second largest long-distance provider in the U.S. It was purchased by WorldCom in 1998. WorldCom's financial scandals and bankruptcy led that company to change its name in 2003 back to MCI. The MCI name disappeared in January 2006 after the company was bought by Verizon.

MCI was instrumental in pushing for legal and regulatory changes that led to the breakup of the AT&T monopoly of the American telephone business and ushered in the competitive long distance telephone industry.

WorldCom was founded as Long Distance Discount Services, Inc. (LDDS) in Hattiesburg, Mississippi in 1983. In 1985 LDDS selected Bernard Ebbers to be its CEO. The company went public in August 1989 when it merged with Advantage Companies Inc. The company name was changed to LDDS WorldCom in 1995, and later just WorldCom. The company's growth under WorldCom was fueled primarily through acquisitions during the 1990s and reached its apex with the acquisition of MCI in 1998.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MCI_WorldCom

September 2006 -- Union organizers mail letters to former MCI techs with information about their right to form a union and how to contact CWA and IBEW. Organizers get a strong response from the techs.

September – December 2006 -- Organizers hold small informational meetings with interested techs throughout the Northeast. Leaders from the meetings are recruited to serve on organizing committees in New York and New England.

October 2006 -- CWA files grievance claiming that VZB techs are doing bargaining unit work protected by the job security provisions of the contract.

December 20, 2006 -- Over 3,000 IBEW and CWA stewards and officers sign statement distributed to all VZB techs: "We Support Our Fellow Techs at Verizon in Their Organizing Campaign at Verizon Business."³

December 22, 2006 -- CWA notifies Verizon that it will arbitrate the grievance regarding VZ employees doing bargaining unit work.

January 2007 -- VZB techs organizing committee goes public with a mission statement signed by 150 techs outlining their goals and objectives.⁴

January – July 2007 -- Three thousand Verizon union members participate in "Tear Down the Wall" trainings using 100-page workbook about changes in the telecom industry and Verizon's anti-worker strategy to evolve into a nonunion company.

January 26, 2007 -- Hundreds of unionized Verizon workers in New York City rally at VZB building to support techs.⁵

January – April 2007 -- Management interferes in the tech's organizational campaign by holding mandatory meetings where it disparages the union, spreads misinformation about the benefits of collective bargaining, and tries to intimidate workers from joining the union effort.

January – September 2007 -- Over 60 elected officials (including eight Senators and twenty-six Representatives) write letters of concern to Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg.⁶

February 12, 2007 -- Techs in NYC and the entire Northeastern U.S. celebrate achieving majority support on signed union cards.⁷

March 4, 2007 -- VZB workers' majority in New England certified by Sen. John Kerry, Reps. Stephen Lynch and John Tierney, and Lt. Gov. Tim Murray in Boston.⁸

³ http://www.freechoiceatverizon.com/supporters/#solidarity_statement

⁴ <http://www.freechoiceatverizon.com/workers/>

⁵ www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9Si9qkCmfQ

⁶ <http://www.freechoiceatverizon.com/supporters/>

⁷ www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4D1GDZWEfA

March 18, 2007 -- VZB workers' majority in New York certified by NYC Comptroller William Thompson, Rep. Jerold Nadler, and Rep. Anthony Weiner.⁹

May 3, 2007 -- VZB tech John Elia speaks out at a huge rally in Pittsburgh, PA and later addresses shareholders and Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg at the company's annual meeting.

May 14, 2007 -- VZB Tech Roger Reece speaks out about union busting at Verizon at a forum for workers with presidential candidate Barak Obama in Trenton, New Jersey.¹⁰

June 2007 -- VZB techs complete bargaining surveys to determine their contract priorities.

June 28, 2007 -- VZB tech John Sweeney speaks at union rally at Verizon's corporate headquarters in New York City.

August 2, 2007 -- VZB tech John Elia speaks at rally at Verizon's New England headquarters in Boston.

August 28, 2007 -- Following up on the bargaining survey, 65 VZB techs sign a letter to VZB President John Killian about their concerns regarding outside contracting and unfair administration of wages.¹¹

August 30, 2007 -- Region 2 (NY) and Region 6 (PA) offices of the NLRB issue complaints against Verizon Business (VZB) for violating federal labor laws by spying on workers, suppressing free speech in the workplace and issuing illegal warnings to union supporters.¹²

October 22, 2007 -- American Rights at Work releases report, "*Broken Promises: Verizon Neglects its Commitment to Provide Good Jobs and Quality Service*," documenting how Verizon used illegal tactics and a dubious corporate structure to thwart workers' freedom to form unions.¹³

November 2007 -- Verizon members sign petitions "We'll Fight for Good Contracts and for Our Co-Workers Rights"

November 19, 2007 -- Early bargaining with Verizon management begins in Rye, NY.

December 11, 2007 -- Negotiations break off due to lack of progress

⁸ www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULxC44aFBnE

⁹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJce_LFuUz8

¹⁰ www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywiRzNBz0a0

¹¹ http://files.cwa-union.org/national/freechoicetvz/070828_VZBTechs_to_Killian&Toohey.pdf

¹² http://files.cwa-union.org/national/freechoicetvz/2007-08-30_NLRB_complaint_VZB_NY.pdf; http://files.cwa-union.org/national/freechoicetvz/2007-08-30_NLRB_complaint_VZB_PA.pdf

¹³ <http://www.americanrightsatwork.org/publications/general/>

December 12, 2007 -- John Linder testifies in Congress about how management has interfered in the tech's efforts to form a union and how the Employee Free Choice Act would help remedy the problem.¹⁴

December 2007 -- Union members send thousands of "All I want for Christmas is a union" cards to Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg.

January 30, 2008 -- VZB Tech Terry Skiest protests the removal of his American and Massachusetts state flags. "Put up the flag" website launched (www.putuptheflag.org).

February 22, 2008 -- Thousands of Verizon union members nationwide show support for Terry Skiest by displaying flags in the workplace. Workers rally to support Skiest at his VZB facility in Acton, MA.

February 25, 2008 -- First of many editions of rank and file newsletter "Signal and Noise" published.

February 29, 2008 -- Virginia Arce testifies at NYC city council hearing. The Council's Labor Committee votes in support of the Employee Free Choice Act.¹⁵

March 6 and 13, 2008 -- Verizon union members rally at locations nationwide to demand that management honor the contract and Tear Down the Wall.

May 1, 2008 -- Supported by dozens of union members at Verizon's Shareholders Meeting in Lincoln Nebraska, Dave Rogol from VZB's Operations Support Center in Charlton, Mass. tells Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg, "Why does Verizon compensate us with considerably lower pay and lower benefits than union members? Are we some sort of third class citizens? Why won't you recognize our union based on the card check process? After all, Verizon allowed a simple card check with customer service reps in 2000. Why not us?"¹⁶

May 12, 2008 -- Arbitration hearings begin on CWA grievance claiming that VZB techs are doing bargaining unit work.

May 27, 2008 -- Bargaining resumes followed by more than 30 sessions with management.

June 23 – 25 2008 -- VZB Tech Roger Reece receives a standing ovation after speaking at the CWA national convention in Las Vegas.

July 21, 2008 -- Top-level negotiations begin in Washington, DC.

August 10, 2008 -- In a breakthrough agreement, Verizon agrees to extend union recognition to 600 former MCI technicians at Verizon Business.

¹⁴ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHoNat48_hE

¹⁵ www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiZTYcEcVaE

¹⁶ <http://freechoiceatverizon.com/diary/080502.html>