



AT&T CWA workers begin picket in region over unfair labor negotiation practices

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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BELLEVILLE - Around 11 a.m. Thursday, members of AT&T's Communications Workers of America (CWA) Union walked off and started picketing.

Today, there were pickets in Belleville, East St. Louis and O'Fallon. Travis Young, Local 4217 CWA President Travis Young said the strike is based on unfair labor practices and the fact that AT&T has negotiated directly with members.

“The strike officially started across five states today - Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana,” he said. “I am the president of this local, but a working president in the field.”

Young described most of the workers as field technicians.

“We provide DirectTV service and internet service,” he said of some of the roles of the union workers. “We are just asking for the company to be fair to us. We think we have been fair; we worked long and hard hours and it is nothing for us to get a call at 2 or 6 in the morning and go out on overtime. We have always done a good job.

“Unfair labor practice is the main issue and the attempt to bargain directly with members and try to divide members with their plan and not give full details. We want the bargaining team to sit down with the corporate people. What we want is our members to have job security and we want to stop so much outsourcing.”

AT&T Illinois spokesperson Jim Kimberly said the following:

“This contract currently covers good-paying U.S. jobs averaging over \$120,000 a year in pay and benefits, with some making over \$200,000,” he said.

“After over 10 weeks of negotiations, we have presented a final offer to the union’s negotiating team at the bargaining table with a goal of bringing this process to a close and reaching a fair agreement for our employees.

“We’re offering a generous package including annual wage increases, continuation of job security provisions that are virtually unheard of in the U.S., and comprehensive healthcare and retirement benefits. In addition, the offer includes a commitment to hire 1,000 people in the region. All employees covered by the offer would be better off.”

Young disputed the figures provided by the AT&T spokesperson and that they were actually much lower than that.

One of the questions for customers would be what happens with service. This was the response by Kimberly:

“We’re very prepared to continue serving customers,” Kimberly said. “We’re a customer service company and we plan for all contingencies, whether related to weather, natural disasters, or even work stoppages.”