

# CWA



## Larry Cohen, President, Communications Workers of America Speech to ver.di Convention, September 22, 2011

***Thank you very much. I bring you greetings from the 700,000 members of the Communications Workers of America.***

It is my privilege to be here representing them and our many courageous leaders working to build a new union among 36,000 T-Mobile USA workers.

With the support of Frank Bsirke, ver.di has redefined what it means to be a global union. Frank's vision and support for Lothar Schröder and the union leaders at Deutsche Telekom and T-Mobile have led to the formation of TU, the first joint international union. ver.di, with Frank as its leader, has set a new international standard for trade union solidarity and cooperation. Thank you, Frank and ver.di.

Global companies need a global union counterpart. TU is such a counterpart.

TU is a new kind of international union — a joint union between CWA and ver.di to represent T-Mobile U.S. workers. CWA is responsible for organizing and daily representation and ver.di for contacts and engagement with management. This work stands as a model for the world and provides the only real hope for 36,000 T-Mobile workers to form a union. They want to join TU because they are joining the largest union in the world — ver.di. They are joining a union where Lothar Schröder and Michael Summer and other ver.di leaders sit on the supervisory board. They are



Ado Wilhelm, head of the Telecommunications Bureau works closely — almost on a daily basis — with CWA on this campaign at T-Mobile.

And Kornelia Dubbel who has used her experience at Deutsche Telekom call-centers as a works council leader to help lead the campaign. Lothar, Ado, and Kornelia have all worked with

T-Mobile USA workers in Germany and the U.S. and that work has made an enormous difference.

joining TU because it gives them confidence that ver.di stands behind them.



This contact and the cooperation means a lot to the workers and gives them strength and motivation in their fight for workers' and union rights.

In our joint effort to build TU, I work most closely with my good friend Lothar Schröder. Lothar always gives us new ideas, encouragement and incredible support.

In the U.S., Ado and Kornelia have tried to introduce themselves to T-Mobile managers so they could peacefully distribute union flyers. Both have experienced the reality for workers in the United States. First, they were not allowed in to any



T-Mobile facilities. When they went to T-Mobile locations to distribute information about the union to workers in Richmond, Virginia, in 2009 and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 2010, they were kicked out of the parking lots at both call centers. “This is private property,” they were told. “If you do not move to the street immediately, we will call the police.” And in Fort Lauderdale, the police escorted Ado and Kornelia to the street.

Under these kinds of conditions, workers at T-Mobile have been trying to build a union for years, and T-Mobile has fought them every step of the way. Despite the cultural acceptance of trade unions by Deutsche Telekom in Germany, DT to date has supported its U.S. subsidiary as it creates a climate of union intolerance at the workplace and fear in the hearts of its employees.

Elvis Alvira, a T-Mobile technician who went to war in Afghanistan told the CWA executive board his story: “I’m a marine. I fought in war and was not really afraid. But before I became active in the TU, we had a family meeting to discuss whether I should be an activist. My wife and I both knew that sadly, in our democracy, there was a real risk to being an activist in a workplace like T-Mobile.” This is the level of fear about joining a union that exists at T-Mobile USA.

Joining a union should not be a decision made in fear. But in the United States today and in the world created by T-Mobile USA and sanc-

tioned by Deutsche Telekom it is exactly that.

Angela, a service rep, attended a roundtable discussion between T-Mobile U.S. and German workers. She explained to the ver.di leaders



that the next day when Kornelia and Ado came to her worksite to leaflet, she would not greet Kornelia because she was so afraid of management reprisals.

Imagine as well, the immigrant mother of a service rep who lived with her daughter and granddaughter. When she learned her daughter was active in TU, she tried to stop her involvement because she feared management would come after her daughter.

Chris Cozza is a TU leader and technician in a workgroup that voted to have a union. Tension was so high after one of many mandatory meetings where management talked against the union that he left the meeting and vomited in the parking lot.



that permits workers to organize without fear and then AT&T voluntarily recognizes that the work group is represented by the union. In fact, under this procedure, 43,000 workers have joined CWA.

Of course, we want to and will follow the recognition procedure. But in order to do that, T-Mobile USA employees who are TU activists need to be able to introduce the union to the workers and develop common goals.

We want workers to be able to talk among themselves about the union without fear and develop the information which leads them to an informed decision to create a union. If we are not able to do that, and if workers are being intimidated, a small group that is in touch with us, will not be able to successfully navigate the recognition process.

T-Mobile USA should behave in a neutral manner so that the workers can decide for themselves, free from fear, whether or not they want to join the union.

This is the daily fear and level of union intolerance that T-Mobile managers practice every day. Our website, [www.weworkbettertogether.org](http://www.weworkbettertogether.org), includes these and other cases.

Employers are able to create a climate of fear to prevent workers from forming unions because the union recognition process is long. Unlike in Germany where union recognition is automatic, in the United States workers must demonstrate majority support in their work unit to create or join a union. With majority support, the employer “recognizes” and bargains with the union. Recognition of majority support can be granted voluntarily by an employer. AT&T, the largest telecom employer in the U.S., for example, has established a procedure





Often other employers require a government-certified election by workers to join the union. These elections take time to process and during that time, a corporation determined not to have a union will vigorously campaign against the union. T-Mobile is not a bad U.S. employer. The jobs it offers are good and employees who join our union are proud to work there. But T-Mobile management crusades against the union in every possible way. And that is why our campaign theme is “we expect better.”

Management uses incentives like a free lunch and other benefits in their campaign against our union. They can assign supporters the worst shift. They require attendance at mandatory meetings where they lecture on the evils of belonging to a union.

They hire expensive lawyers who specialize in anti-union campaigns. They fly in top managers to hold meetings with individual workers.

They isolate union activists from their co-workers. They assess each employee, their strengths and weaknesses. They will stop at nothing to achieve their goal of preventing workers from forming a union at T-Mobile.

Workers at T-Mobile USA live in a constant state of fear — fear of losing their jobs if they mention the union. Or fear that they will be passed over for a promotion if they mention the union. Or mandatory meetings where they must listen to management attack the union.

Sadly, this is all legal in the U.S. for anti-union employers. And DT supports its U.S. subsidiary in their campaign of intolerance.

But a U.S. company doesn't have to behave this way. U.S. management has a choice. They can legally re-

spect employees' right to a choice without intimidation. They can tell supervisors the company will not campaign against the union; the choice appropriately belongs to the employees. In fact, this is how AT&T behaves as I described earlier.

But Deutsche Telekom has not made this choice. They've chosen to accept and support anti-union practices of U.S. management, rather than practice the same level of union tolerance as AT&T or DT in Germany.

And that is why ver.di and CWA asked the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and UNI Global Union to launch a campaign — “we expect better” / wir erwarten besseres. Our website is [www.we-expectbetter.org](http://www.we-expectbetter.org) in English, German, French, and Spanish.

We Expect Better from T-Mobile U.S. management. The union choice is the workers' choice.

We Expect Better from Deutsche Telekom management who justifies despicable T-Mobile U.S. behavior as “a corporate free speech right.”

It is not free speech when corporate management directs managers and supervisors to propagandize against the union. That is not free speech, no, this is interference with the free speech of the workers.

When U.S. management directs its supervisors to provide facts to employees about the union, they do not tell employees that ver.di is the largest service sector union in the world and represents T-Mobile workers. They never mention that the DT supervisory board has ver.di leaders sitting on the board. They do not share the fact of how ver.di achieved improvements in working conditions or wage increases. Management does not offer the fact that the CWA has 300,000 telecom members in the USA and works with them to achieve shared policy goals. They do not share these facts because they do not want unions to exist. They want total control.

And unfortunately in the USA, they and other employers have nearly succeeded. Private sector bargaining coverage rates have fallen from a high of 35% in 1960 to below 7% today. Meanwhile the war employers are waging has spread to the public sector where elected officials are trying to eliminate unions there too.



But we are fighting back in the United States where millions have mobilized against the attacks on collective bargaining and organizing rights. With the support of ver.di, we can also prevail at T-Mobile USA.



Partnership starts with you and building bonds of sisterhood and brotherhood. In March of this year, for the second time, ver.di invited T-Mobile workers to visit Germany. These eight workers told their stories of workplace intimidation. And they met with German workers, ver.di leaders, and political figures. They brought back stories of inspiration, about a different future. These bonds sustain us in our dark times and continue to be a source of support. Just last week, for example, the Düsseldorf Works Council sent a statement of solidarity to their colleagues who had visited earlier in the year. Now they communicate almost daily through Facebook at [www.facebook.com/loweringthebar](http://www.facebook.com/loweringthebar). Each of you can join this dialogue.



ter... of a leading company owned 31% by the German government.” The leadership of Deutsche Telekom received many letters saying “we expect better... of a company which has adopted the highest corporate social responsibility standards.” Deutsche Telekom investors in Europe and the United States are also telling Deutsche Telekom management, “we expect better.”

Together through these bonds we seek to build a global partnership to ensure the dignity of working people — in Germany, the United States, or elsewhere.

ver.di’s work has been incredible. In May of this year, just like May of last year, hundreds of ver.di members

attended Deutsche Telekom’s annual meeting of shareholders to demand that management end the fear in the United States. They formed a human chain around the building in Cologne, releasing black balloons as symbols of their mourning for the lack of workplace freedom of their American co-workers. Meanwhile, Lothar Schröder said at the rally in front of hundreds of ver.di members: “We want workers at Deutsche Telekom to be able to work free from fear when supporting unions,

free from fear when taking a leaflet from an organizer. We expect better from Deutsche Telekom.”

With this campaign at Deutsche Telekom, ver.di and all of us together, have been an inspiration to workers and unions around the world.

Thank you for that.

***United, together we will make a difference.***

This campaign has now become a global campaign. Through UNI Global Union and the International Trade Union Confederation, the world labor movement is now focusing on Deutsche Telekom in the United States and around the world. Many unions visited German embassies to tell them, “we expect bet-

