

Claude Cummings, Jr. Responds to CWA 7250



CWA 7250 Question #1:

Last year our Local organized a major campaign to keep the Work from Home (WFH) option at AT&T. Our members found that WFH was safer, saved them money on commuting and childcare, gave them more time with their families and more time for rest, and more control of their work space. With the help of a few other Locals, we were able to organize actions, press conferences, a petition with over 8,000 signatures, and major media attention. We didn't get much support from the CWA national or districts though, and we were unable to win WFH for our Legacy T Call center Workers in Minneapolis.

What was with the disconnect between the Union and our members' urgent demand to keep WFH? Going forward, how can we win good WFH jobs and maintain a strong internal union organization?

Claude Cummings, Jr. Responds:

Thanks for this question. First of all, I signed the petition. I recognized early during the pandemic that our members were enjoying WFH. It is a proven fact; mobilization is only effective when Districts and Sectors stand united in support of each other's issues. This starts at the top. As President, as I have as Vice President, I will always remember I work for the members, the members don't work for me and I will try my best to deliver for them on change they would like to see as long as it does not conflict with the CWA Constitution, and negotiated contracts. It is extremely important to implement an effective platform that provides ALL, Districts and locals an avenue where concerted activity is taken seriously. A platform where strategic plans and timelines are developed, encouraged and aggressively implemented throughout our UNION, should be in place. This is a process that every local regardless of need, regardless of size, should be a part of and have the opportunity to utilize that would include the critical, unwavering support of the National.

Work from Home jobs can be accomplished through contract negotiations, EFFECTS bargaining and a strong mobilization effort for WFH during contract negotiations.

However, when we do achieve WFH we MUST have a better internal Union Job steward structure with a strong and effective network. This must consist of dedicated and active leadership teams which

includes empowering our Job Stewards in every step of this process. Proper tools, training and education is essential to the success of this process. Zoom membership meetings and quarterly gatherings such as Union Days that include educational programs along with outreach helps keep our members engaged and connected to their unions.

CWA 7250 Question #2:

The experience of our Local and many others across the union is that we wait months and months - sometimes over a year - for grievances to be heard at District/National level. This lack of movement stalls any momentum and lets management know they can deny at first step and then it will effectively disappear. It's not uncommon for workers to leave the job while waiting for grievances to be resolved. This only breeds frustration, distrust and cynicism among rank & file members towards the union.

*What can be done to aggressively expedite grievance movement? Would you support an *expectation* that grievances are heard within 60 days at the higher levels?*

Claude Cummings, Jr. Responds:

In an attempt to correct this problem, it is imperative to investigate to find the root cause. Based on the findings I would focus on a viable solution. For example, if shortage of Staff is the problem, one solution would be to hire more Staff. On the other hand, some delays are caused by management's refusal to adhere to the negotiated contractual language. It is my belief that unnecessary delays in the scheduling and hearing of grievances is totally unacceptable. Every contract has defined time limits for filing, scheduling and the appeal process. Anything short of that is a violation of the contract which will not be tolerated and every avenue available should be utilized to correct this injustice. Our contracts are not worth the paper they are written on if we do not police the contracts and make sure they are enforced accordingly.

CWA 7250 Question #3:

We are bleeding members at AT&T and DirecTV. The company has whittled down union presence to only 20% of its retail stores, more and more tech work is being outsourced and our Legacy T and DirecTV Call Centers face heavy attrition with no new hiring.

What can we do to stop the bleeding?

What is your plan to organize the unorganized sectors of AT&T and DirecTV?

What is your overall plan to build the Union?

Claude Cummings, Jr. Responds:

We must first alert our telecommunications employers we have contracts with, that the days of CWA helping them pass legislation and providing assistance in the regulatory arena are over, if there are not

direct hires involved. We also must have serious negotiations with management about authorized dealers taking out work, and closing our stores, it has to stop!! We must lobby our counties and city municipalities to make good working standards a part of their RFPS when they are soliciting for broadband deployment,

Secondly, we must promote the importance of a unionized workforce, providing the buildout of broadband. CWA must use every means of communication possible, especially now, during the start of broadband buildout, due to the infrastructure resources provided to states to promote unionized workers in the deployment. This will cause an increase in membership.

In order to accomplish this, we must capitalize on the major difference in benefits, wages, job security, safety and working conditions in a unionized versus nonunion environment. Stress the importance of having a voice at the workplace.

At the same time, we need to launch serious campaigns in support of a US Based Workforce that requires corporate America to keep our jobs in the US or face serious tax implications.

We have to get back to basics. We must launch intense organizing campaigns with organizers that are hands on and reflective of the groups they are attempting to organize. Successful organizing, in my opinion, is more about relationships, than methodology. Organizing is difficult work and successful organizers must be committed to their campaigns which at times seem never ending. Organizers must build relationships and understand both the work and the problems that the workers have in the workplace. CWA must continue to provide guidance and direction until newly organized members become self-sustaining and understand the logistical responsibilities of all three sides of our CWA Triangle,

We must focus on Internal Organizing first. The percentage on nonmembers within some divisions within our Union is not good. Applying both grass roots tactics along with modern proven techniques which includes education and member outreach is essential. We must have better up to date communications technology to engage our younger and more seasoned members faster and with sound messaging.

We must also capitalize on every External Organizing opportunity. In order to do that, we must secure enough Organizers, at our Locals level to meet this demand. CWA has countless organizing opportunities that we can no longer afford to ignore. We must do a better job of organizing our Mobility members. In my opinion, we still have unorganized workers in industries similar to units we organized like, Dish, T-Mobile, Verizon wireless, etc. that we should again focus on. The Public Sector and Airline Industry, both Passenger Services and Flight Attendants, are some of the fastest growing sectors in our Union we must continue to support organizing in those sectors. We must continue to grow our Union through as many organizing campaigns as possible.

CWA 7250 Question #4:

Open bargaining means that contracts are negotiated with transparency for the membership that will have to live under them. Open bargaining lets the members see what we are fighting for at the

bargaining table and what the companies are trying to low-ball or take away. In Minnesota, the Nurses union and the Minneapolis Teachers union are using open bargaining and have won major gains.

Will you support expanding open bargaining for CWA contracts?

What would you do to make Open Bargaining the "norm" in CWA?

Claude Cummings, Jr. Responds:

Every contract I have negotiated has been based on transparency, trust and leadership ability. When bargaining is taking place in District 6, we send out bargaining reports, we have Officer meetings to give updates and we have town hall calls to give updates to the membership.

That said, bargaining logistics are local decisions that are often dictated by contractual language or mutually agreed to rules that are negotiated at the table by both the union and the company prior to bargaining kickoff. I believe what we need to do differently, in CWA, is better preparation, better coordination between district bargaining committees and meetings with the members on what we are trying to accomplish at the bargaining table based on the member's bargaining proposals. We need a national mobilization committee that will support and train activists, in districts or sectors, to support bargaining taking place regardless of the district or sector. There should be nationwide mobilization for any district or sector that is in bargaining.

I would like to add that I am extremely open minded and a firm believer in keeping current with changing times. However, I believe the way we bargain now works well when there is transparency, reports are given regularly, and when we have members involved in strong mobilization activities.

I want to be transparent: I have not personally experienced Open Bargaining in my District. I am open minded about this change, however a commitment to change the present bargaining process at this time, without further evaluation, and understanding language in other contracts would be deceitful. My District 6 members know this about me, and you will learn quickly when I become President, I will not lie to you and I am VERY transparent. I am open minded, I am willing to look at ANY changes members would like to see within the confines of the CWA Constitution and our present bargained contracts.

I will be the President, not a dictator. I am one that strongly respects district boundaries. I believe this is an issue that will need to have input from the new VPs, and Sector Officers, their members and bargaining committees - because they are the signatories on their agreements. The commitment I am willing to give is, I will have a discussion with the Executive Board about this issue.

CWA 7250 Question #5:

CWA brags about its power and influence within the political system - especially the Democratic Party - but when politicians stab workers in the back (like Biden did with the railroad union workers) there is little said or done.

Meanwhile Trump and the fascist right organize using fake-populist rhetoric and are a serious threat to unions and the community.

Do either party really represent working-class interests?

Are Corporate politicians any real protection against fascist threats?

Why should we continue to pour millions of dollars and time and energy into corporate-controlled politicians?

What percentage of movement building should be put into efforts outside of the political system?

Claude Cummings, Jr. Responds:

I have a cousin that is a Passenger Train Engineer. Although he was very disappointed in what happened during their negotiations, he was also concerned that a railroad strike, coming out of an already fragile economy, would be devastating for this country, and adversely affect many workers and Union members.

I am moving away from Party Politics. If a candidate supports Unions and working people, I have no problem talking with them about support. If they don't support Unions or workers, they don't get my support. I am very disappointed in Democrats that vote like Republicans and Republicans that don't do anything to help pass legislation to help working people, build worker power on this job by joining a Union. Both Parties have failed us on the Pro Act.

In D6, I have gotten away from Party Politics and support candidates that support working people issues. I have reduced my direct contributions to candidates by a large percentage. I am a proponent of Independent Expenditure (IE) that work to Get Out the Vote (GOTV). Our GOTV efforts have been great in electing worker friendly candidates because our resources are spent strictly on door knocking, media and phone banking. I am frustrated at candidates that spend our money, on signs, consultants and fundraisers.

As President I will encourage our Political Department to educate Districts and Locals on the need to put resources on the ground through IEs, for worker friendly candidates, not in their pockets, in order to get them elected. I also have great relationships with wealthy donors, that donate to our IE GOTV efforts which has helped reduce the amount of resources used by CWA. I will solicit more wealthy donors for our GOTV programs to support our financial efforts to elect Congress Members and Senators to pass the Pro Act. I also believe we should collaborate with other organizations to increase our capacity in our GOTV efforts.

CWA 7250 Question #6:

The strike is the traditional weapon of the working-class - and the method where we have won most of our benefits and rights - but some union leaders seem afraid to use it, or even plan for it. At a time when striking workers were winning significant gains our AT&T Legacy T contract was extended

without a strike vote, and the DTV and Mobility Orange contracts were settled without a strike vote, and at the 2021 CWA Convention a resolution to simply research and plan for a strike at AT&T was ruled unconstitutional. AT&T has CWA divided up into a dozen different contracts with different expiration dates - we are divided, they are ruling.

What would you do to overcome the division of AT&T and DirecTV workers into different contracts?

Claude Cummings, Jr. Responds:

AT&T did not request or ask for our opinion, ideas or suggestions on this move [to spin-off DirecTV]. I was very clear prior to the start of bargaining that CWA wanted ONE contract. We had no input in the formation of DTV - this breakout was entirely a decision by AT&T management.

Despite these facts, when AT&T approached CWA at the National level requesting to enter into negotiations to consolidate the 10 DTV contracts, we were clear we wanted all the contracts absorbed into one. CWA at the National level held discussions with the company and ultimately agreed to enter into negotiations. Unfortunately, the company did not uphold their end of the bargain. Almost immediately after kickoff, DTV demanded four different contracts instead of one for the members they transitioned into DTV.

After numerous unsuccessful discussions to advise the company that we were not willing to divide our members. CWA clearly stated our position: "ONE COMPANY ONE CONTRACT" which is what we agreed to when we entered into negotiations. Unfortunately, the company refused to live up to their end of the bargain so we walked away from the table refusing to agree to divide our members.

District 6 also filed a lawsuit on the Constructive Discharge of our members when the company terminated their employment with AT&T by forcing them to DTV with no regard to their contractual obligations.

Through mobilization, we must hold the company's feet to the fire and make them understand that this is truly one company and the members should have one contract.

The Civil Rights movement often defied unjust laws to win justice for the community - would you be willing to challenge unjust labor laws that handcuff workers the same way?

Yes, I would. I have already been active in the political arena fighting for the rights of workers. I have been active in lobbying Senators and Congress members on the need for the Pro Act to be passed to stop the intimidation and adverse action towards workers that want to build worker power on the job by forming or joining a Union.

During the Obama administration I was asked by President Cohen to address the Congressional Black Caucus on Capitol Hill to address how the Trans-Pacific Partnership would further destroy workers in this country by shipping more jobs overseas. Also missing in the TPP language was language to protect workers in other countries. Now deceased, Congressman John Lewis, stopped me after my presentation, shook my hand, and agreed with me that TPP would be devastating to all workers. He

committed to me that he would urge the members of the caucus to vote against the bill, and they did. Although all of Labor was lobbying against the TPP bill, I think that meeting turned the tide. President Obama was the first President in our lifetime who failed to have a trade bill passed. I would like to think, since the vote was taken shortly after my presentation, that I played a large part in it failing. I will do everything I can to use the political clout I have earned over my continuous thirty-six years as an officer of CWA, to stop bad worker legislation and work to pass worker friendly legislation.

-End-