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# Cable Workers Unite

MOBILIZING THE CABLE INDUSTRY



July 2004

## "We Can Move Forward Together As a Respected and Fair Company!"

By **Kevin Beallis**  
Member, IBEW Local 21, Chicago

(Excerpted from his address to the Comcast Shareholders Meeting in Philadelphia, May 2004. For complete text, visit [www.ibew.org/eworkers](http://www.ibew.org/eworkers).)

**I want Comcast to succeed. I want to be proud of Comcast, hold my head high, have a decent living. I want more customers, not push them to a dish.**

**Morale is at its worst—in both union and nonunion shops. Our unions and Comcast can have a good relationship. I urge you to get involved.**

Shortly after Comcast took over AT&T in November 2002, in a "Comcast Live" program with Mr. Roberts and Mr. Burke, promises were made about Comcast going back to the basics of being a cable

company. Employees would be offered Comcast services at discount prices so they

### We'll Do Whatever It Takes For As Long As It Takes

**"We have no mission more vital than organizing, particularly in industries that are growing and in workplaces where job satisfaction is low. That defines Comcast. We are proud to join forces with our brothers and sisters at CWA, and we are determined to do all that it takes for as long as it takes for Comcast employees to get a union. "Our job is to show Comcast and the cable industry that a good union contract pays off with high morale, high productivity and the best of customer service."**

**Edwin D. Hill**  
International President, IBEW

can experience Comcast quality and relay that to customers. Morale was high.

But then came layoffs. I understand layoffs are part of any business, but what I don't understand is that Comcast continues to replace highly qualified people with inferior subcontractors – some of whom would not be hired by Comcast!

We cover eight towns with four service technicians and no installers. We are offering more service with fewer employees. We have a standby procedure for emergencies; but the company has understaffed offices so much that the same person is in 24-hour rotation seven days a week for that entire week, creating an exhausted, skeleton crew.

At a recent town meeting on the cable franchise, I was disgusted to hear our company representative tell citizens that if they were unhappy, they should "go buy a dish because the service is what it is."

This is *not* what I would call good customer service or being fair to the employees. ✨

## Comcast Workers Ratify IBEW & CWA Contracts

Workers at four Comcast locations ratified new collective bargaining agreements in the past two months. In Pleasantville, NJ, the contract is for 42 months; in Detroit and Oakland the contracts are for 3 years; and in Arlington, TX, the contract is for 18 months.

Building on existing agreements, the union bargaining teams followed the directions of the membership and raised issues and made proposals that reflected their concerns. Membership mobilization and union-wide support was part of the bargaining process at all of the locations. In Pleasantville, the workers put up a Web site to catalogue their mobilization activities and to communicate with supporters across the country.

The Web site ([www.local827.net](http://www.local827.net))

included a video and several amusing pictures of the activities supporters engaged in at Comcast locations. Officers from the IBEW were demonstrating in front of Comcast Headquarters with the CWA, Jobs With Justice and other members of the grassroots coalition, when they were called inside and offered new proposals by Comcast. They left with an agreement that the members voted to accept.

In Arlington, the workers demonstrated their solidarity with their bargaining team by tripling the number of union members in the unit. In Detroit, cable workers testified before the City Council and the Cable Commission on the extensive use of contractors and the failure of Comcast to live up to the franchise agreement.

"We've had a contract here for 30

years through four different operators in Oakland," says Bill Harvey, Secretary-Treasurer of CWA Local 9415. Comcast is tough at the table, but so are we. We talked with the Mayor, the City Council, and involved the entire community. At the end of the day, it was quite clear to everyone that Oakland was best served by workers being treated fairly." ✨



IBEW members show support for Comcast workers' contract talks.

**YES, Please send me information about IBEW representation!**

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Visit IBEW's Web site for Comcast Cable workers at [www.ibew.org/eworkers](http://www.ibew.org/eworkers)

## Comcast Workers Vote To Keep CWA in Pittsburgh

On June 16, we had our third union election and a larger majority of our unit voted to keep our union, CWA Local 13000. At both Pittsburgh locations, the vote was overwhelming. At Corlis Street, we voted 168 to 108, and at South Hills, the vote was 74 to 39.

We have been bargaining here for three years. After Comcast took over in 2002, they pushed us hard to vote the union out. It was our choice, and so we had another election. We got a third election because Comcast violated fairness rules that U.S. labor laws require.

This time it was quite clear that big majorities in every work group want the protection of a union and the security of a contract. Earlier, the company asked that we give them another chance. We did, but they failed.

With a union we know we won't come to work one day and find that we have been replaced by contractors. When we are protected by our union contract, Comcast cannot change the rules without our input. We have heard a lot about the CommTech program and how the measurements and requirements are changing.

This won't happen when we get a union contract. ✨

## We Have The Ability To Change Our Workplace

**"It begins by first uniting with your fellow workers. By working together, we can bring permanent, positive change for today and tomorrow."**

-- Al Kogler, System Tech

Organizing a union is a process of taking single steps that eventually add up to something much greater than just the sum of the steps. But in order to take that first step, we must be able to envision the last step:

- A workplace where all employees are treated fairly
- A workplace where management is held accountable and where you have input in your working conditions and benefits

■ It's a place where there is a set of written policies, negotiated by you and the company--written policies that cannot be changed just because management feels like it.

This can happen and has happened. Some of our workers at Comcast have already begun this journey. Remember, however, there is no quick fix or silver bullet to getting a union and bargaining rights. ✨

## Once Our Hopes Died, But Not This Time

"Having a union is an ambition we can fulfill. We are making a lot of headway at city and town councils, every place cable hearings are held. The sorry record of Comcast and its contractors on job safety and customer satisfaction is getting known. Comcast is going to change. And it's going to be a whole lot better company and a whole lot better place to work."

-- Jerry Leary

Member, IBEW Local 2222, Boston

## JWJ Workers' Rights Board Condemns Comcast

A new report featuring testimony by Comcast employees and union members indicted the company for systematic abuse of employees' rights. The report by the Jobs With Justice Workers' Rights Board calls on Comcast to end its interference with employees' right to form unions, and to negotiate in good faith with its union-represented workers.

Stopping Comcast's low-road approach to union workers is crucial



Comcast workers and public pack hearing room to hear report of JWJ Workers' Rights Board.

because it is the nation's largest cable-TV and broadband provider, employing 68,000 people in 4,000 communities. The Board said U.S. labor laws need to be modernized, with stiffer penalties against labor law violators, and mediation and arbitration provisions to help workers reach their first union contract. ✨

## Report Calls Comcast "Anti-Worker"

Comcast claims to have a "Pro-Employee" attitude, but the company's actions and practices demonstrate the opposite, says a new study by American Rights at Work, a workers' rights advocacy group. **No Bargain: Comcast and the Future of Workers' Rights in Telecommunications** found the cable giant to be hostile toward employees who try to organize a union. The report examined National Labor Relations Board records and interviewed former and current employees. The report is available online at [www.americanrightsatwork.org](http://www.americanrightsatwork.org).

## "CommTech." A Con Game?

The "CommTech" program, introduced with fanfare in many Comcast systems, is getting mixed reviews from cable technicians. The program promises a clear path to success and higher salaries by increasing workers' skills, but some employees say the program is neither clear nor a guarantee of higher wages. Some say that CommTech has become a quality-control check and monitoring program for Comcast. What's your experience? *E-mail your thoughts to [Telcom@ibew.org](mailto:Telcom@ibew.org).*

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**About the IBEW:** The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) represents approximately 750,000 North Americans who work in a wide variety of fields, more than 100,000 of them in telecommunications, broadcasting and cable TV. Other major divisions are construction, utility, manufacturing, railroads and government. For more information about the IBEW, visit our Web site at [www.ibew.org](http://www.ibew.org).

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