

SHOTS FIRED

Created by Theater in Asylum
Inspired by and with text from the 2016 Verizon Strike*

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Dramaturgy, fact-checking, and script footnoting by Samantha Keogh
Directed by Paul Bedard

Performed Thursday, June 9, 2016 at The Artist Co-op Popup
STRIKER: Amanda Ghosh; MC: Joe Marx; COMPANY REP: Katie Palmer

Contextual Sources

- Alex Gourevitch, "Chronicle of a Strike: Verizon strikers are fighting against the oppression and indignity of the American workplace," *Jacobin: Reason in Revolt*, 18 May 2016, 7 Jun. 2016, <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/05/verizon-strike-fios-cwa-union-replacements/>>.
- "Big Gains for Striking Verizon Workers in New Agreement," *Stand Up to Verizon*, 30 May 2016, 7 Jun. 2016, <<http://standuptoverizon.com/big-gains-striking-verizon-workers-new-agreement/>>.
- Michael Wasser, "Strikes 101," *Jobs With Justice*, 12 Apr. 2016, 7 Jun. 2016, <<http://www.jwj.org/strikes-101>>.
- Noam Scheiber, "Verizon Strike to End as Both Sides Claim Victories on Key Points," *The New York Times*, 30 May 2016, 7 Jun. 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/31/business/verizon-reaches-tentative-deal-with-unions-to-end-strike.html?_r=1>.

*Lines lifted from other sources are indicated via footnotes. All other lines by Theater in Asylum.

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[Audience enters on scene with STRIKER and COMPANY REP holding demands across a picket line. Audience stands in a neutral territory, if possible.]

MASTER OF CEREMONIES *[Henceforth referred to as "MC"]*: Ladies, gentlemen, and folks who don't use those labels, we see before us a picket line. On one side we see the striker, holding out her demands to the company. On the other side, the company representative, who has her own demands.

Now, I need a few volunteers to help us make the play. And I have a surprise. I'll give you a notecard with a short line. All you need to do is read it, and I'll hand you a shot of delicious whiskey. That's right, delicious whiskey.

[MC brings out a cart with the lines of the play on notecards as well as pre-poured whiskey shots.]

You read a line and I'll give you whiskey. But there's just one more rule. You must wait to drink until the end, wait for my toast. No one drinks alone tonight.

Now I need a few volunteers who can help me serve the whiskey? Who here is fancy?

[MC ad-libs an ask for volunteer for 1 or 2 helpers from the audience who will give out the whiskey shots. These people will read the scab lines later.]

MC: All right. Let's begin. Who wants the first line?

[MC gives a card to an audience member with a line of text written on it. The STRIKER and COMPANY REP mime the lines as the audience reads them. All numbered lines are intended to be spoken by audience volunteers.]

1. STRIKER: Accept my demands!

MC: See that was easy! Bring on the shots! And remember, no drinking until the end.

2. COMPANY REP: Accept MY demands!

MC: See, that was easy. Bring on the shots! Let's continue.

3. STRIKER: If you refuse to accept our demands we will keep striking! We are on strike to *protect* our jobs, to preserve time with our *families*, and to keep good jobs in our **communities**.¹

¹ Line interpreted from Pamela Galpern interview: "39,000 Verizon Workers Mark Six Weeks on Strike in Biggest U.S. Labor Action in Years," *Democracy Now: Independent Global News*, 25 May 2016, 7 Jun. 2016, <http://www.democracynow.org/2016/5/25/39_000_verizon_workers_enter_sixth>.

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4. COMPANY REP: It's *regrettable* that union leaders have called a strike, a move that hurts **all** of our employees.²

5. STRIKER: It's the *company* that's hurting employees with **unacceptable work conditions**. This strike halts profits, disrupts service, and sounds the alarm.

6. COMPANY REP: Unfortunately, union leaders have their *own* agenda rooted in the past and ignore today's digital realities. Calling a strike benefits *no one*, and brings us no closer to resolution.³

MC: And no closer to taking our shots.

7. STRIKER: It's not right that you want to take so much away from the same workers who helped make this company as profitable as it is now.⁴

8. COMPANY REP: Since last June, **we've** worked diligently to reach an agreement that is good for our *employees*, good for our *customers* and make the business more successful *now* and in the *future*.⁵

9. STRIKER: The company's priorities are only on profits. They prepared an anti-strike readiness team for a year and a half!

10. COMPANY REP: We have an anti-strike readiness team because we care for our customers. We train thousands of non-union employees to fill-in for those who abandoned their duties to walk a picket line.⁶

11. STRIKER: These thousands of non-union *scabs* get lower wages, limited training, no healthcare, and no job security. These scabs are exploited and only take good jobs away from the union.

² Line taken from: "CWA and IBEW leaders call strike against Verizon and its customers," *Verizon*, 13 Apr. 2016, 7 Jun. 2016,

<<http://www.verizon.com/about/news/cwa-and-ibew-leaders-call-strike-against-verizon-and-its-customers>>.

³ Line taken from: "CWA and IBEW leaders call strike against Verizon and its customers," *Verizon*, 13 Apr. 2016, 7 Jun. 2016,

<<http://www.verizon.com/about/news/cwa-and-ibew-leaders-call-strike-against-verizon-and-its-customers>>.

⁴ Line interpreted from: Sam Gustin, "Verizon Says It Has Enough Scabs to Offset 40,000-Worker Walkout, No Problem," *Motherboard*, 13 Apr. 2016, 7 Jun. 2016,

<<http://motherboard.vice.com/read/verizon-says-it-has-enough-scabs-to-offset-40000-worker-walkout-no-problem>>.

⁵ Line interpreted from Marc Reed quote in: "CWA and IBEW leaders call strike against Verizon and its customers," *Verizon*, 13 Apr. 2016, 7 Jun. 2016,

<<http://www.verizon.com/about/news/cwa-and-ibew-leaders-call-strike-against-verizon-and-its-customers>>.

⁶ Line in reference to: "Verizon prepares strike readiness plans," *Verizon*, 12 Apr. 2016, 7 Jun. 2016,

<<http://www.verizon.com/about/news/verizon-prepares-strike-readiness-plans>>.

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MC: Ah yes, replacement workers. Some call them scabs...

12. STRIKER: And one more thing, the company trains those workers for a week or two, and then they're put into a **highly skilled job**.⁷

MC: Does opening a whiskey bottle make me "highly skilled?"

13. COMPANY REP: Replacement workers are carefully selected and trained to bring uninterrupted service to you, our loyal customers.

14. STRIKER: The customers are also loyal to the working class. They're standing with us! Right everyone?

MC: Sounds like solidarity to me.

15. OUTSIDE WORKER / SCAB [*played by the shots helper*]: I'm a replacement worker and this is the first job opportunity I've had in years. My family has struggled and the company offered me a job. So I took it.

16. EX-UNION EMPLOYEE NOT ON STRIKE [*played by a second shots helper, if applicable*]: I used to be a part of the union and the conditions that we had worked fine for me. I wasn't about to lose weeks of pay for a few more dollars a month. So I didn't strike. And now the union is penalizing and demonizing me for just doing my job! How is that "supporting the worker"?

17. COMPANY REP: This week, we gave a last, best, final offer to union leaders. Read for yourself exactly what we propose: great jobs with outstanding compensation and excellent benefits as we continue to work together in an *exceptionally* competitive environment.⁸

18. STRIKER: The company is incredibly profitable, and *yet* you say to us, "You can't share profits." What you're saying to me and my fellow workers is, "You're an antique." No worker in America will be safe from this corporate race to the bottom. We're striking for the good of the whole country.⁹

MC: And the good of our livers...

Now, ladies and gentleman, you've been a wonderful audience. I think everybody here should get a shot. What do you think?

⁷ Line interpreted from Pamela Galpern interview: "39,000 Verizon Workers Mark Six Weeks on Strike in Biggest U.S. Labor Action in Years," *Democracy Now: Independent Global News*, 25 May 2016, 7 Jun. 2016, <http://www.democracynow.org/2016/5/25/39_000_verizon_workers_enter_sixth>.

⁸ Line taken from: Marc Reed, "New England IBEW," *Verizon*, 7 Jun. 2016, <<http://www.verizon.com/about/portal/laborfacts/new-england-ibew-2/>>.

⁹ Line interpreted from Bob Master interview: "39,000 Verizon Workers Mark Six Weeks on Strike in Biggest U.S. Labor Action in Years," *Democracy Now: Independent Global News*, 25 May 2016, 7 Jun. 2016, <http://www.democracynow.org/2016/5/25/39_000_verizon_workers_enter_sixth>.

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Now, we do have a couple lines left, but for everyone to get a shot why don't we do a simple chant?

Who here thinks the worker is right in their demands? Oh yeah? Well you folks repeat after me:
"Strike, Strike, Strike!"

And who here thinks this strike, and this play, have gone on long enough? I know, I know, I want to drink too. So let's sing it. "End the strike! End the strike!"

Great, now everyone together!

[While the chants repeat, shots are passed to everyone in the audience. The MC should encourage as much noise as possible. Ideally, things will get a little out of hand, and people will observe the chaos they're making. Once this point is reached, MC ad-libs to regain control.]

MC: All right, all right. Sounds like we've got some reds in the audience. Well, let's get on with the play. There are only two more lines before we drink.

[The following two lines are given to the actors on the stage.]

COMPANY REP: You've only invested five minutes in this strike and now, thanks to us being productive even during the strike, you have a shot of whiskey in your hand. Company whiskey. Whiskey that you love. Whiskey that has been a part of so many celebrations. It's what our communities are built on. Whiskey fosters collaboration. Now, I know you are with me, and I know you WILL DRINK this delicious whiskey with me when the time comes. I thank you for standing with me and the community we've built, and I urge you to spread the word: End this strike.

STRIKER: *[indicating the audience as part of the "we"]* We will never drink your whiskey while you exploit workers! We're here stand with workers and their families. We know that drinking your whiskey takes food out our children's mouths. The public is on the side of the worker and we're going to hold the line. We're going to DUMP your whiskey. And we're going to strike until you agree to our demands for job security and a living wage.

[MC raises the bottle.]

MC: My friends! The whiskey is in your hands... Cheers!

[End of play.]