

Progressive opponents of the AT&T/T-Mobile merger can't understand why their lefty brethren at the Communications Workers of America are supporting a corporate marriage that, in their view, would make an anti-labor company even stronger.

For instance, AT&T was, according to the National Institute on Money in State Politics, one of the top donors to the campaign of Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, who successfully stripped public employees of most of their collective bargaining rights earlier this year. And the Baby Bell led the charge on a telecom deregulation bill in Wisconsin that the union opposed.

"It's a terrible long-term political play. You're making a company stronger that's going to turn around and invest its money to destroy unions," said Gigi Sohn, president of the public interest group Public Knowledge, which opposes the merger.

But CWA spokeswoman Candice Johnson said AT&T doesn't "work to destroy unions." But she acknowledged that, like many corporations, the company's politics trend conservative.

"We're not going to change AT&T's politics, but we can hope that people in any of these new businesses can have a union voice," Johnson said. "What AT&T has demonstrated in terms of workers' rights is that workers get to make up their own mind (about whether to join a union) and that's a rarity."

AT&T is the largest unionized wireless company, she said. The failure of the merger, Johnson said, would mean that Sprint, which outsources much of its work, would likely try to buy T-Mobile -- a result that would do little to benefit union workers.

Sohn, a union fan, said she understands that whatever jobs are left when the companies merge will be unionized, but that the merger is still going to lead to job losses as the unified company eliminates redundancies.

"Even if it leads to more union jobs," she said, "it's going to lead to less American jobs."