

UNION NEWS JAN. 2007

Hopes for the company to show a new attitude about bargaining in the new year under the guidance of new leadership grew dim on Jan. 4 when T&G management proposed a wage hike of 2 percent **WITHIN THE WAGE SCALES** meaning a net raise of less than 2 percent for all those many employees at the top step of their wage scale. Further, employees within the wage scale would have to wait until their anniversary dates for the raise and not receive it retroactive to Sept. 1, 2006 (the point from which we are bargaining). The company's measly offer comes with the provision that the Guild drop all other wage-related proposals. Those proposals include applying the raise to real wages, not just in the wage steps; making all raises retroactive to Sept. 1, 2006; increasing part-time wage scales to 85 percent of the full-time rate (the scale is now 80 percent); differential pay for district managers called upon to work outside regular territories; dues check off; an increase in mileage reimbursement to equal current IRS reimbursement rates of 48.5 cents per mile; and a \$2,000 signing bonus. The Guild lowered its initial proposal for 5 percent raises to 4 percent, but let all other provisions stand in the face of the company's proposal, which guild negotiators rejected when put on the table. When Guild negotiators asked company reps whether the union proposal would cause the T&G to lose money, the company replied, "No." Now if we can just get them to say "Yes" to a wage package that conveys the sort of value the company claims it has for its employees.

News of staff reductions rocked the T&G late Thursday. A memo from publisher Bruce Gaultney indicated no voluntary buy-outs would be offered to T&G employees in the Guild bargaining unit. The upshot of that seems to mean staff will be reduced by normal attrition. Six positions in inside circulation may, however, be turned over to a sub-contractor. The union contract cannot necessarily save the positions, but the people affected may need to be offered other jobs.

The new year has likewise brought on a new round of grievances, many affecting the circulation department. In two cases, employees received letters of reprimand that the Guild believes were unwarranted. Both cases are in the second stage of the grievance process. Another grievance was filed in regards to district managers' schedules and management's attempts to heap on extra hours. It's worth noting that the company is making 19 district managers do the work once handled by a staff of 25 DMs. DMs are salaried and not eligible for overtime. Meetings are ongoing between the Guild and company regarding DM schedules.

The Providence Newspaper Guild's annual Follies is happening Feb. 23 at the Venus De Milo in Swansea. The evening is full of song, dance, and skewering of the past year's news events. Ticket order forms went out in the mail. Any interest in putting together a T&G table? Contact Bronnie Kush or Scott McLennan in news.