

Our Voice

Guild News -- March 2007

The past several months have been a busy time for members of the Worcester Newspaper Guild family. Like any good family, many members have stepped forward to help out with everything from ongoing talks with the company about our long overdue 2006 cost-of-living wage adjustment, pending legal matters and planning for a new contract to replace the current one which expires on August 31.

Negotiations

Talks regarding our cost-of-living wage adjustment that was due on September 1, 2006, have dragged on because of the T&G's refusal to offer a fair modification to our paychecks which have been losing buying power to inflation in the past two years. The company is refusing to budge from a 2 percent offer even though the consumer price index rose 2.5 percent in 2006. This comes on the heels of our members giving the company a substantial break in 2005, when we agreed to accept a 2.25 percent cost-of-living adjustment even though the consumer price index jumped 3.4 percent.

The T&G's approach, in essence, amounts to a pay cut. We have all seen the results of this economic disparity at the supermarkets, the gasoline pumps and in heating bills. Our buying power is noticeably eroding, causing economic pain for our hard-working members who are simply trying to feed families, as the price of orange juice and bread skyrockets, and warm their homes, as heating oil prices approach near all-time highs.

The loss of purchasing power is even sharper for some because the company wants to cap the adjustment at the top of the wage scale. This means those being paid above the top scale would receive a flat increase pegged to the dollar figure adjustment at the top of the wage scale, which would amount to less than 2 percent.

Members of the Guild negotiating team - as well as many rank-and-file members - believe the company's offer and actions are unfair, unreasonable and perhaps even greedy in light of the fact that profits continue to be made by the millions.

The income of the New York Times Company was about \$302 million in 2003, \$293 million in 2004, \$253.5 million in 2005, and \$192.5 million in 2006 - income that all of you and your hard work helped to make possible. (The 2006 figure excludes a one-time write-down charge of the value of the Boston Globe.)

The T&G's unfairness is best exemplified by the actions of other nearby newspaper companies, who have dealt with cost-of-living adjustments in these times of escalating food and fuel costs in a more reasonable manner. In Providence, Guild members received a 3.5 percent adjustment in 2006 and are getting a 3 percent adjustment in 2007; in

Quincy, Guild members received a 3 percent adjustment in 2006 and 3.5 percent adjustment in 2007.

And please don't believe the company's rhetoric about the hard times that the newspaper industry has fallen on because of the Internet. History shows this is the same hyperbole that greedy newspaper owners used in the 1920s and 1930s with the advent of radio and in the 1950s during the infancy of television. "The newspaper world is coming to an end," the companies proclaimed. We all know what happened. Newspaper companies adjusted and their endless stream of profits continue to flow until this very day, becoming a river of profits with no end in sight.

The reason why some newspaper companies are having trouble with the Internet is because they have simply ignored using it as a valuable business tool to enhance sales and extend their market reach. In the past decade, when companies like retailers and banks were reinvesting their profits to integrate their operations with the Internet, some greedy newspapers companies were instead using their millions in profits to fatten their own wallets and inflate their stock prices through buy-backs. They chose the greed route as opposed to the reinvestment route. They chose short-term profits over sound long-term business practices. And now, because of short-sighted approaches, when they don't make enough millions to satisfy their managements and stockholders, they make up for it by cutting staff and wages.

The hard-working members of the Worcester Newspaper Guild family - and their children and grandchildren - deserve their fair slice of the economic pie. That is why our negotiators, and the many rank-and-file members who have attended bargaining sessions to voice their concerns to the company, continue to press the T&G for a reasonable cost-of-living adjustment.

Contract Renewal

The current contract expires on August 31, and preparations are already under way for the renewal process. By mid-April, members will receive a survey about the renewal talks which will begin during the summer. The survey is being done to determine the issues that members want to focus on at the bargaining table. So please make your voices heard and your ideas known. Do you want more vacation and holiday time? Do you want better health insurance coverage? How about stronger job security contract language? Please participate when you receive your survey and make your thoughts known. The results will help shape what we propose at the bargaining table.

Legal Actions

1. A grievance has been filed with the T&G regarding severance pay the company is refusing to pay to an Inside Circulation employee who is one of six people whose jobs are being outsourced. The contract provides that employees whose jobs are outsourced receive 10 weeks notice and 3 weeks of pay for each year of service. In this case, that

amounts to about \$10,000. The company is saying the employee left prior to the scheduled layoff date, therefore is ineligible to receive the pay. The union believes the employee is entitled to receive the severance package since she, in essence, was forced to leave to take a new job because her job at the T&G was being eliminated.

2. A grievance has been filed regarding time being worked by 19 district manager in the Circulation Department. The district managers have been routinely working extra hours on Sundays without being compensated or receiving compensatory time off.

3. A grievance has been filed regarding a district manager being disciplined. The company says the district manager acted inappropriately and intimidated a supervisor, even though the supervisor seemed to have no problem continuing on with a conversation the two were having after this so-called inappropriate action took place.

4. Arbitration has been requested regarding the company's unilateral change to the pension plan. The company made an alteration that will reduce benefits by as much as 27 percent for anyone hired as of Jan. 1, 2007. The change has no effect on those hired prior to Jan. 1. The union believes the company is obligated to bargain such as change, while the company maintains it can make the alteration without bargaining.

5. Arbitration has been requested regarding the company's refusal to honor the "me too" clause in our contract. The pressman and composers unions have received 2 percent cost-of-living adjustments for 2006. The union believes our members are entitled to receive that 2 percent adjustment immediately under the "me too" clause. The company, however, is refusing to institute the adjustment because it says negotiations with the Guild are ongoing, therefore it can ignore the provision.

Lend a Hand

Please remember: "We are the Union."

Many have expressed a desire be more involved with union activities but feel a little timid or overwhelmed because they are new employees or they already have their hands full trying to balance their busy work schedules with family obligations. These concerns are understandable, but the good part of being a member of our union family is that we welcome help in all forms. Some rank-and-file members are more activist, attending negotiating sessions to voice viewpoints to management, while others prefer to help by doing things like contributing information to this newsletter, keeping members informed via e-mail groups, sharing ideas and offering moral support to each other.

All of these actions make our union family stronger, so please continue to do them. Whether they are done in an activist way or in a more subtle way, those little things really do mean a lot.