

# ABC-TV gives ultimatum to locked-out workers

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ABC-TV has given its locked out union employees what it is calling its 'final comprehensive package proposal.' The company decided to take this decision while it has been negotiating a new contract with the union under the auspices of a federal mediator. The 300-page contract offer was handed over to the leadership of the National Association of Broadcast Employees (NABET) last week.

A NABET statement on the contract indicates that the offer is fundamentally the same as, or worse than, ABC's previous bargaining positions on the fundamental issues of job security and benefits. According to the statement, 'the prior contract's job security clause has been omitted.'

The Disney company, which acquired ABC in 1996, has been determined to increase its percentage of temporary and part-time workers in order to compete not only with its two traditional competitors, NBC and CBS, but especially with the new cable networks.

Although details of the offer have not been released to the press, a number of union leaders have expressed their dissatisfaction with the offer by calling it a ransom note, and regressive on the central issues. One union official mentioned that the company proposal, under the name of flexibility, has many productivity clauses. He cited, for example, that ABC workers would lose their right to a lunch break.

Despite their consternation, NABET is holding membership meetings to both distribute the document and explain its content, a process that may lead to a vote on the ABC offer.

The technical workers, including camera operators, videotape editors, couriers, and some writers, have been locked out by the company for seven weeks after carrying out a surprise 24-hour strike November 2 in a dispute over health benefits. The company apparently

feels emboldened because the lockout was declared legal in a recent National Labor Relations Board ruling. A number of workers on the picket line have expressed concern over the latest ABC proposal, particularly on the issue of job security, the most contentious issue in the dispute. One worker stated that he understood that the grievance procedure would be changed, making it easier for management to fire employees.

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