

Television technicians in US reject ABC ultimatum

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Members of Local 16 of the National Association of Broadcast Employees (NABET) in New York have voted overwhelmingly to reject ABC television's 'final comprehensive package proposal.' The vote took place between December 18 and December 22 in six separate union meetings of workers in the various occupational subdivisions in the industry. The stated purpose of the meetings was to inform the membership of the company's ultimatum, leading to a formal ratification vote at a later date. However the union rank and file were so infuriated by the company's 300-page proposal that they spontaneously decided to reject the offer at all the meetings.

The union's statement on these meeting said in part: 'Almost 800 members of Local 16 met to examine and discuss the ABC Package Proposal.... At all six meetings, the members present in a non-binding vote, showed their displeasure with the Company's arrogant position and voted nearly unanimously to reject the package without a ratification vote.'

Approximately 2,400 technical workers, with nearly half that number in New York, have been locked out by ABC for over 55 days following a nationwide 24-hour surprise strike called by NABET. The workers have been without a new contract since March 1997, with job security and productivity being two of the most contentious issues. The two sides are still negotiating under the auspices of a federal mediator, and have agreed not to release details of the negotiations to the press.

The WSWs spoke to a number of workers on the New York picket line the day following the last meeting.

An editor with 24 years said: 'The contract was unacceptable for a variety of reasons. Job security goes out the window. They are trying to get rid of seniority. They have a clause where they can dismiss you without

severance pay. It's a 300-page document, and all company-sided. The union has already compromised on several issues, but ABC has not given up anything.

'They say that we have to face up to the changes in the industry with the developments of cable, amongst other things. I have personally gone through many technological changes in the 24 years in which I have been employed by ABC. I have worked in buildings that no longer exist.

'Michael Eisner--the man who runs Walt Disney, which owns ABC--makes \$90,000 a day. He hates unions, and is determined to bust this one. He wants to get a large percentage of per diem workers with no benefits, and no job security.

'ABC made a devil's pact with NBC, CBS and FOX that these companies will not hire us during this lockout. The workers there support us because they know that this is a system-wide problem.

'At my union meeting, there was no single individual who asked to reject the company proposal. It just emerged from the way the discussion was evolving. From what I can remember, at least 90 percent of the membership voted to turn it down.'

A graphic artist with 14 years at 'World News Tonight' commented: 'ABC is trying to bust the union. This company is spending a lot of money to keep us out here. They must have a long-term plan. I heard that Walt Disney wants to get rid of 20 percent of the managerial staff at ABC. It is even possible that Disney will sell ABC. There is more money in cable. Of one thing, I am certain: the contract that they offered us is really terrible.'

Steven Corn, a graphic artist for 11 years, stated: 'By the time the union meeting was over, and everyone heard what ABC was offering, very few people wanted to vote for it. The contract would destroy everything

that the union is supposed to stand for, which is to protect us.

'ABC is still trying to convince us to accept their offer. They sent us some literature in an attempt to change our minds. But they are mainly trying to convince us by keeping us out here in the cold.'



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