

Newspaper Guild rejects concessions demands

Boston Globe to impose 23 percent wage cut

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Workers at the largest union at the *Boston Globe* voted down a concessions proposal from the newspaper's owners that would have slashed \$10 million in wages and benefits. Members of the Boston Newspaper Guild (BNG) voted 277 to 265 on Monday to reject the offer.

Within about an hour, *Globe* owner The New York Times Co. announced it would unilaterally impose a 23 percent wage cut on Guild members. The pay cut is to take effect in the financial period beginning June 14, to be reflected in paychecks issued June 25.

In a letter faxed to BNG President Daniel Totten late Monday night, *Globe* Senior Vice President Gregory Thornton wrote, "We regret that the Guild membership voted to reject the *Globe's* multi-faceted Final Record Proposal to achieve \$10 million in savings, and hereby withdraw that proposal."

The BNG represents nearly 700 editorial, advertising and business office workers. The concessions demanded by *Globe* management included pay cuts and mandatory unpaid furloughs, amounting to a more than 10 percent wage cut. The proposal also included cuts to health and retirement benefits, a pension freeze, and the elimination of lifetime job guarantees for about 170 senior members.

Speaking to the media shortly after the vote was announced on Monday, Guild President Totten said, "With today's vote, members of the Boston Newspaper Guild have said that the New York Times Co. must do better than the offer that was presented," and that the BNG "is committed to resuming good-faith negotiations with the New York Times Company and *Globe* management to reach an agreement."

Although further talks are not ~~planned~~ included, management has given no indication that it is willing to negotiate a deal better than the Final Record Proposal or the 23 percent pay cut, commenting simply in its letter to the BNG, "If you have any questions or wish to meet with us to discuss the 23% pay cut before it is implemented, we are available any day this week."

The Guild had stated that it would file an unfair labor practices case with the National Labor Relations Board if the pay cut were unilaterally imposed. Past precedent, however, including the bitter Detroit newspaper strike that began in 1995, indicates that the NLRB is unlikely to challenge the pay cut during litigation.

In April, the Times Co. threatened that it would shut down the *Globe* if it did not receive a total of \$20 million in concessions from union members, and that half of that had to come from the BNG. The *Globe's* owners say the paper lost \$50 million in 2008, and they claim it will lose another \$85 million if they do not extract the \$20 million from *Globe* employees' wages and benefits.

The Boston Newspaper Guild was the last of the four major unions to vote on a concessions contract, and the only one of the four to reject the newspaper's demands. Unions representing mailers, press operators and delivery truck drivers have approved cuts totaling nearly \$10 million combined.

The mailers union approved concessions totaling about \$5 million. Last Sunday, Teamsters Local 259, representing about 220 delivery truck drivers and platform workers, voted 89 to 69 to accept \$2.5 million in cuts to wages and benefits.

The Machinists Union Local, a small union representing only 30 *Globe* workers, was the only other union to reject concessions. The Times Co. has said that vote would not impact the overall concessions

demands.

Speaking to the *Globe*, the presidents of both the mailers' and pressmen's union said the concessions deals agreed to by their members were contingent on Guild members giving up the full \$10 million. "If they don't, then we don't have a deal," mailers union President Mary White said.

Gaining the \$20 million in concessions also provides no guarantee that the Times. Co. will not shutter the newspaper. The bitter experiences in the auto and other industries has demonstrated time and again that workers' sacrifices to "save jobs"—no matter how great—have been followed by widespread closures and job losses. In the case of General Motors and Chrysler, even deeper cuts have been demanded as a condition of bankruptcy protection.

As with the leaderships of the other unions representing *Globe* workers, the BNG has actively promoted the conception that the newspaper's workers have a responsibility to sacrifice to "save the *Globe*." In a letter to the BNG membership on the eve of the vote, Daniel Totten wrote, "Guild members haven't seen a pay raise in four years. And they are well prepared to take a pay cut to help preserve the *Globe* and its mission."

The Guild leadership presented the *Globe*'s final proposal to BNG members without recommendation, saying that each Guild member faced "an intensely personal decision" in the June 8 vote.

The rejection of the *Globe*'s offer in the face of the threat of closure is an indication of both the outrageous nature of management's demands, as well as the growing sentiment among workers that enough is enough, and a stand must be taken. The journalists, office workers, pressman, mailers and delivery drivers are not responsible for the financial debacle at the *Globe* or for the wider crisis of the capitalist profit system that lies behind it.

The union leadership's strategy, however, begins from the standpoint that some concessions are necessary, and that the interests of *Globe* management are aligned with the workers. The rejection vote by BNG members should be the starting point of a new strategy among *Boston Globe* workers, beginning with a break with these old organizations that have no interest in defending workers' jobs, working conditions and benefits.

Independent rank-and-file workplace committees should be organized, linking up workers in all areas of the newspaper's production—from the newsroom to delivery. A real fight to defend jobs at the *Globe* requires new forms of struggle—including mass demonstrations, strikes, and occupations to defend workers' jobs against any threats to close down the newspaper. This struggle must be guided by a socialist perspective, which bases itself on the interests of working people—not the profits of big business.



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