

Hundreds of New York Times workers stage walkout to protest job cuts

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Hundreds of *New York Times* employees staged a brief walkout on Thursday afternoon to protest the newspaper's plans for major staff cuts through buyouts and layoffs. The main focus of the demonstration was the plan to eliminate the freestanding copy desk and do away with the jobs of dozens of copy editors.

The newspaper plans to "streamline" its editing process. The elimination of a separate copy desk will seriously diminish the role of copy editors in the preparation of the final version of articles. There are currently several stages in the preparation of copy, including one in which editors work directly with reporters, followed by copy editing, including the choice of headlines, fact-checking, correcting grammatical and spelling errors and other tasks. The *Times* plans to replace this with a single editor responsible for a given article.

By management's own account, more than 100 copy editor positions are being eliminated in one swoop, while applications are then being taken for about 50 positions after the reorganization of the department. This technique, increasingly common in the corporate world, will enable the company to pick and choose its rehired editors without regard to seniority.

The Thursday walkout, apparently aimed by the union representing *Times* editorial employees at appealing to the "conscience" of the *Times* owners, is only a pale expression of the outrage felt by the copy editors and other *Times* employees.

Employees marched outside the *Times*'s modern office building on Eighth Avenue in midtown Manhattan with signs declaring, "Without us it's the New York Times," "This sign was not edited," and "Copy editors save our butts." Workers said that while there had been other rounds of layoffs and buyouts, this "is something different in kind."

Earlier this week, the copy editors wrote an open letter to the paper's executive editor and managing editor, stating, "We have begun the humiliating process of justifying our continued presence at the *New York Times* ." They added, "We only ask that you not treat us like a diseased population that must be rounded up en masse, inspected and expelled." Donald McNeil, Jr., the *Times* science reporter, told the *New York Daily News*, "If they come for the copy editors today, they will come for the reporters later today."

The editors' letter stated that they were "the group that protects the institution from profoundly embarrassing errors, not to mention potentially actionable ones."

There is an obvious contradiction between the *Times*'s editorials claiming to decry corporate callousness and indifference and its treatment of its own workers. This hypocrisy is not primarily a matter of corporate greed. It reflects the dictates of Wall Street, where stock prices increasingly determine whether even giant firms live or die.

The *Times* editorials, reflecting well-founded fear of a social explosion in the face of growing inequality and struggles of the working class, are largely aimed at refurbishing the liberal image of the Democratic Party. As far as its own business decisions, however, it takes its cues from the giant banks and hedge funds, which demand ruthless attacks on every section of the workforce, even somewhat better-off white-collar workers such as the *Times* editors.

There is a connection, moreover, between the disinterest in copyediting and the more basic elements of news reporting. The journalistic content of the *Times* has steadily declined over the years, mirroring broader processes in the bourgeois media. The *Times* in particular contains almost no serious investigative

journalism, with its articles on US politics and foreign policy serving as conduits for various state and military officials.

Moreover, along with the entire newspaper industry, the *Times* has been hit by steady declines in advertising revenue and circulation. The ongoing economic crisis is one factor in this process, and the exponential growth of social media and the Internet another. According to a report in the *Washington Post*, newspaper jobs across the US have been slashed by more than 50 percent, from 412,000 to 174,000 in the past 15 years.

The *Times* found itself forced to turn to the Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim, one of the world's wealthiest men, for a \$200 million loan some years ago. Slim now is the *Times's* largest stockholder, although the newspaper remains, through its ownership of all the Class B Stock, under the control of the Sulzberger family.

Looming over all these developments is the financialization of the economy. In generations past, the Sulzbergers articulated the interests and formulated policies for the ruling class. To a great extent this was backed up by their own leading position within the corporate establishment. Today, however, the weight of this one still-wealthy family has been drastically reduced within the ruling class.

The *Times* remains the private property of the Sulzbergers, but there are scores of hedge fund multimillionaires and nouveau riche billionaires who could easily snatch it up—if it becomes available—as Amazon chief Jeff Bezos has done at the *Washington Post*. To that extent, there is a bit of truth contained in Donald Trump's tweets about the "failing New York Times," as he lashes out in hysterical fashion at his bitter political opponents within the ruling elite.



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