

Editorial workers mount one-day strike against publisher Ziff Davis

Kevin Reed
25 April 2021

Approximately 70 media workers at the New York City-based publisher Ziff-Davis staged a 24-hour strike on April 15 to demand that the company address their “paltry wages.”

The online strike began at 9:00 am and was launched as part of the campaign by the NewsGuild of New York to negotiate its first contract since being voluntarily recognized by Ziff Davis as the bargaining agent of the employees.

In a tweet posted on the day of the job action, the Ziff Davis Creative Union stated the employees walked out “in protest of management’s egregious and insulting wage proposals. After over two years of bargaining, management has not worked with us in good faith to secure a fair contract for our members. #WereWorthMore”

In response, the company denounced the strike and claimed, “We have and continue to make enormous progress and have reached tentative agreements on a wide range of issues.”

Ziff Davis is a content property of the publicly traded technology and media monopoly J2 Global, Inc. with a market cap of \$5.34 billion. Along with its numerous publications, the corporation also owns dozens of cloud service platforms such as eFax, Onebox and eVoice.

Among the online publications impacted by the job action were Mashable, PC Mag, Ask Men, and Geek.

While the CEO of J2 Global Inc., Vivek R. Shah, earned a reported \$45 million in 2019, one of the media workers described their income at Ziff Davis as poverty wages, “The free food in the kitchen wasn’t just a nice perk, it was the daily source of two out of my three meals every day.”

One employee, who is a reporter for Mashable, tweeted, “My coworkers and I walked out today because management continues to underpay us,

refusing to implement salary minimums that would literally change lives. We’re worth more.” Hundreds of others posted messages of support for the editorial workers, including one who wrote, “Solidarity to my former colleagues as they take action for fair pay! I sure as hell didn’t get it when I was there. It’s one reason I left!!”

Content and tech workers are increasingly fighting back against the corporate consolidation and financialization of the publishing and media industries. Beginning with the acquisition of TimeWarner by AOL in 2001, a convergence of the tech and publishing industries has created enormous monopolies that have simultaneously carried out an assault on the jobs, incomes and working conditions of the workers.

According to a report in Axios, a record number of journalists—approximately 1,800 at 30 publishing companies—organized into unions in 2020, a 20 percent and 50 percent increase over 2019, respectively and another 200 employees have been organized so far in 2021. Among the publications where unions have been formed include Vice, Slate, Vox, BuzzFeed and Insider.

Among those who recently joined the NewsGuild of New York are 650 technology employees at the *New York Times*. The group of software engineers, designers, data analysts and product managers—who are part of increasingly valuable aspects of the 170-year-old publisher which has morphed into a multimedia empire over the past two decades—announced on April 13 that they had formed The Times Tech Guild with a series of demands related to pay equity, health care costs, job security and career advancement.

On Thursday, The New York Times Company said that it would not voluntarily recognize the tech workers union, which means that a vote will likely be organized by the National Labor Relations Board to determine if

the NewsGuild of New York will be authorized to start contract negotiations with the employer.

A representative of the NewsGuild said that the *Times*' decision not to voluntarily recognize the union was "deeply disappointing" and "a sign of disrespect" to the company's union members. The NewsGuild already has 1,400 members in the newsroom and business office staff at the *Times*.

The move exposes the staggering hypocrisy of the *New York Times*, which heavily promoted the unsuccessful unionization effort of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) at Amazon's BHM1 warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama. This demonstrates that the *Times*' campaign was not motivated by any concern for workers' rights, but definite class interests. The newspaper supported the RWDSU because they saw in it, above all, a means of controlling opposition among Amazon workers.

Such considerations permeate the *Times*' writing on the trade union bureaucracy. Earlier this year, the *Times* ran a fawning profile of American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten as "The Union Leader Who Says She Can Get Teachers Back in Schools." The push to reopen schools, which began under Trump but deepened under Biden, was motivated above all by financial considerations, reopening the economy and sending parents back to work producing profits. The paper cited favorably Weingarten's claims to spend 15 hours per day on the phone "trying to figure out how to reopen the three-quarters of school systems that remain fully or partially shuttered."

The fact that NewsGuild attempted to get the *Times* to voluntarily recognize it suggests it was making a similar pitch to the *Times* as regards its own internal operations. Its response is to concentrate workers' attention on the working out of byzantine US labor regulations, rather than to organize a struggle. This is in keeping with its calling harmless, 24-hour walkouts designed to have limited to no impact.

The NewsGuild of New York is affiliated with the Communications Workers of America (CWA) as Local 31033. The CWA has a long history of collaboration with the telecom industry in slashing jobs and increasing productivity. Over the past decade, the union has isolated and shut down multiple strikes by tens of thousands of workers at AT&T, Verizon and Frontier

Communications and forced through sellout contracts.

As with the rest of the American trade unions, the CWA is tied to the capitalist Democratic Party and fraudulently tells workers to place their confidence in politicians such as President Joe Biden, Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio who are the representatives of the corporate and financial elite.

Highly exploited media workers need organization, but they cannot find it from the CWA. Instead, they must take matters into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees, independent of the union officialdom, to develop their own independent initiative in opposition to the behind-the-scenes horse trading between management and the union.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact