

UAW announces pro-company tentative agreement with publisher HarperCollins

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United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2110 announced on Thursday that it had reached a tentative agreement with major publisher HarperCollins. The announcement marks a significant step in the union's effort to end a months-long strike of about 250 workers on terms favorable to the multibillion-dollar company.

The tentative agreement includes an increase in minimum salaries for various positions and a one-time bonus of \$1,500 to members of the union. Beyond this, neither Local 2110 nor HarperCollins released further details about the terms of the deal, a clear sign that the terms of the contract are favorable to the company. If ratified, the agreement would last until the end of 2025.

About 250 workers began a strike at the publisher's New York headquarters on November 10. They include employees in the editorial, design, sales, marketing, publicity and legal departments. The workers are demanding that starting salaries be raised to \$50,000 per year. Their other demands include better family leave benefits and a formal commitment to diversity on the part of the company.

HarperCollins is one of the Big Five English-language publishers and the second-largest trade publisher in the United States. In fiscal 2022, the company reported \$2.19 billion in revenue: an increase of more than 10 percent over the record \$1.98 billion it reported in fiscal 2021. The publisher is owned by News Corp, a multinational mass media company run by right-winger Rupert Murdoch, who is among the richest 100 people in the world.

The UAW has deliberately isolated and weakened the HarperCollins strike since it began. To this day, Local 2110 and the UAW have not published a word about the strike on their respective websites. This deliberate silence reflects the union's desire to divide the striking workers from other UAW members—even those in New

York.

When workers at the Brooklyn Museum, who are also members of Local 2110, held a rally in November to demand a better contract, the union made no attempt to unite the HarperCollins employees with them. Nor did the UAW appeal for joint action between HarperCollins workers and part-time faculty at the New School when the latter workers, who are also UAW members, went on strike during the same month. Rather than calling for a united struggle to strengthen the HarperCollins workers, the UAW held futile rallies at the company's headquarters and at News Corp headquarters. Union officials knew full well that appeals to the consciences of these companies' executives and shareholders would be futile.

Because the strike did not affect the company's business significantly, HarperCollins management felt secure enough to show a lordly contempt for the workers. While management refused for months to negotiate, UAW officials sat on their hands. In a transparent effort to wear down and demoralize the strikers, the union strung them along on strike pay of only \$400 per week, which is nowhere near adequate in a city as expensive as New York.

On January 26, the UAW and HarperCollins agreed to federal mediation. This was a clear sign that the union was preparing to end the strike by using mediation as an excuse to pressure workers into accepting an inadequate agreement that they otherwise would reject. The UAW used this tactic to sell out student workers at Columbia University in November 2021 and part-time faculty members at the New School in December 2022.

Last fall, President Joe Biden and both parties in Congress momentarily set aside their sharp political differences to block a strike by 120,000 workers at the

Class I railroads. They imposed an agreement, drafted by mediators that Biden had appointed, that rejected the rail workers' fundamental demands and protected the railroads' profit interests. This experience underscores the fact that the federal government is not a neutral arbiter but an agent of the corporations and banks. Federal mediation is used to enforce settlements that are "fair" to investors, not to workers.

The agreement between HarperCollins and the UAW was brokered by Todd Austin, a commissioner at the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS). Austin, who is assigned to the FMCS field office in nearby Woodbridge, New Jersey, is uniquely qualified for his job. He previously worked in the labor relations department of Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx.

This is one of several hospitals that has just conspired with the New York State Nurses Association to end a strike and impose a rotten contract on nurses. Austin also worked as contract administrator and organizer for health care union SEIU 1199. In this position, he helped develop labor-management committees, which are a tried-and-tested mechanism for supporting union bureaucrats and subordinating workers' interests to those of the major hospital corporations. Austin's credentials speak volumes about the character of the tentative agreement between the UAW and HarperCollins.

Shortly after HarperCollins and the UAW entered mediation, CEO Brian Murray announced that the publisher would lay off 5 percent of its North American employees by end of June. To justify this decision, the company cited slowing print sales and the rising cost of paper, manufacturing, labor and distribution, all of which, it said, were affecting revenue. Yet HarperCollins has promoted several executives in recent months, and management-level employees have received raises.

By announcing layoffs after mediation had begun, the company hopes to intimidate workers into accepting a rotten deal. Workers are understandably worried that they might lose their jobs, even if the strike ends before June. HarperCollins management feels itself to be in a position of strength and knows that it can depend on Local 2110 to suppress workers' opposition. Indeed, the union has not mentioned the announced layoffs on its websites or social media accounts, signaling its tacit acceptance of this attack.

The strike has reached a crucial stage. HarperCollins workers can be sure that the tentative agreement will fall short of their needs, and they must reject it. If they are to continue their struggle and achieve real gains, they must take the initiative away from the UAW bureaucrats who are systematically leading them toward defeat. The formation of a rank-and-file committee that workers control democratically and that is independent of the UAW is the means by which the HarperCollins workers can continue the fight. To strengthen their position, the striking workers must appeal for support to all UAW members, regardless of industry, other publishing workers and the broader working class.



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