

Teamsters call off Pittsburgh Post-Gazette strike, resulting in all members losing their jobs

Samuel Davidson
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Last week, Teamsters Local 211/205 announced that it was ending its strike after over 18 months, dissolving the local union and accepting a small severance payment for the striking members who are now completely without jobs.

The announcement by the Teamsters set off a wave of criticism and accusations from the other unions still on strike against the paper. In a statement, the Newspaper Guild, which represents the majority of the remaining strikers, blasted the Teamsters decision.

“After 18 months on strike, standing on the picket lines all day and late into the nights with Teamster drivers represented by Local 211/205, it’s extremely disappointing to see this unit fall for the company’s divide-and-conquer strategy,” said Zack Tanner, Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh president, in a press release.

Teamsters trustee and business agent for Local 211/205 Joseph Barbano placed the blame for the defeat of the strike on the Newspapers Guild, telling a local radio station that it was the Newspaper Guild which had undermined the strike.

“To be honest with you, the Guild, [around] 50 percent of their membership crossed the picket line,” Barbano told WESA. “And they wrote for the Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette*, and they were able to get a paper out because of that.”

Mike Davis, CWA District 2-13 vice president, complained that the Teamsters had worked this deal out in secret.

“By selling out in secret, the Teamsters have not only damaged their own credibility but have also jeopardized the possibility of a fair settlement for all the unions involved,” Davis told WESA.

The Teamsters first went on strike against the *Post-Gazette* on October 6, 2022, citing unfair labor practices by the paper, along with distribution, production and advertising workers, who had not had a pay raise in 16 years.

About two weeks later, the Newspaper Guild, which is part of the Communication Workers of America, voted to join the strike. Guild members, in addition to supporting the other unions, had seen their own pay unilaterally cut as well as vacation time. In addition, the paper cut their health benefits.

Since voting to strike, about 30 guild members crossed the picket line and went back to work.

While local officials are blaming each other for the failure of the strike, the fact is that both the Communication Workers of America and the Teamsters, which represent 700,000 and 1.3 million members respectively, both left the *Post-Gazette* workers isolated.

Both unions have tens of millions in their strike fund and control assets approaching billions, yet none of these resources was mobilized to support the strikers to win the strike. Instead they have collaborated with the companies to cut costs at the workers’ expense.

The *Post-Gazette* is driven to break the strike by the newspaper’s need to cut costs but also by its push for stricter editorial control.

Like print newspapers throughout the country, the *Post-Gazette*’s paid circulation and advertising have been declining for years. It cut publication to five days a week in 2018 and three days in 2019 and is considering cutting down to just one day of print publication.

In breaking the strike, the paper is also seeking to

complete the paper's editorial transformation. Once considered a liberal paper, the *Post-Gazette* has increasingly become a mouthpiece for the right wing, supporting Trump and giving voice to many of his right-wing positions if not his out-and-out fascist views.

In 2020, two journalists were barred from coverage of the ongoing protests over the police murder of 46-year-old George Floyd. Journalist Alexis Johnson and photojournalist Michael Santiago were barred because management accused them of biased reporting.

Santiago was part of the team that won the Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the 2018 fascist massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.

In June 2018, the paper fired longstanding editorial cartoonist Rob Rogers, who was a critic of conservatives in general and Trump in particular. Rogers had worked at the *Post-Gazette* for 25 years and was a runner-up for a Pulitzer Prize.

In March of 2018, Block Communications, Inc., the family-owned company that runs the Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette* and its sister paper, the Toledo *Blade*, merged the two papers' editorial boards.

The last major strike at the *Post-Gazette* lasted more than nine months in 1992-1993. The company hired scabs workers to keep the newspaper publishing. The strike ended on June 27, 1993, with a settlement that included wage cuts and layoffs, but the union was able to preserve some of its benefits and working conditions.



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