Kingston Newspaper Guild

July 23, 2010

Back to the Table …

By Kyle Wind, 31180 Secretary, Newsletter Editor

The Guild and JRC met Tuesday to begin negotiating a new contract, with the company putting its initial proposal on the table. The changes the company proposes would strip away many of our basic job protections and benefits.

One of the publisher's key proposals would allow the company to “subcontract, consolidate, or outsource any work performed by bargaining unit employees” to non-union workers. Management is asking for the unfettered right to outsource and subcontract our jobs as well as no limitations on reassigning us within the workplace.

The current contract, which expired in 2008 but remains in effect until a new agreement is negotiated, allows the publisher to use content from other sources only if it does not cause layoffs.

But management kicked off the current set of negotiations by also proposing an unrestricted right to use outside content, whether or not it results in layoffs.

The proposal also would eliminate the requirement that management lay off least senior employees first.

When we are laid off, the publisher wants us to take less severance pay. The proposal calls for pay equal to one week for each two years of service, capping the severance pay at 26 weeks' wages.

For reference, the current contract pays employees one week's wage for each six months of service for the first eight years, then one week's wage for each year for a maximum severance payment of 48 weeks.

Furthermore, under the proposal, we could only collect our severance pay upon signing a waiver that would involve us giving up our right to sue the company.

In addition to the set of changes involving layoffs, management's opening contract offers us no raises. Additionally, it would reduce the minimum salary of salespeople from 110 percent of a reporter's salary to 100 percent.

The publisher's first proposal would have Guild members only able to participate in the same health insurance plan as non-union employees. The terms of those plans could be “revised from time-to-time.”

Management also wants us to no longer receive time and a half for the first 2.5 hours per week of overtime. Now, the publisher wants to only consider overtime on a weekly basis instead of a daily basis – only compensating us for working more than 40 hours a week rather than time in excess of our first 7.5 hours in a shift. Overtime would also be contractually limited to “emergency” situations.

The publisher also asks that differential pay for working out of classification only apply to the paper's print product.

Management also wants to limit the Guild's ability to file grievances to 30 rather than the current 60 days. Not filing a grievance within 30 days would result in the Guild waiving its right to grieve, but management also wants to “advance the grievance to the next step in the procedure” rather than automatically settle in the Guild's favor if the publisher does not respond in time.

The proposal would also expand the probationary period for new employees from 90 to 120 days.

Management wants the length of the contract to be for only one year, so we would be back to the table again soon.

The Negotiation Committee next meets with management and its Chicago-based lawyer Michael Rybicki on Aug. 19. In our corner is Jim Schaufenbil, the Guild's sector representative.

At that meeting, the Guild will make its opening contract proposal.

On a separate note, local Guild leadership wants to keep its members informed and up to date. As such, we would like to compile a list of members' personal e-mail addresses with which we will contact them outside of work when appropriate with e-mail blasts or otherwise.

Please send an e-mail to Patricia Doxsey, president of the local Guild chapter, at pdoxsey@gmail.com.

There will be at least one more general membership meeting before the next negotiation session. The time and date will later be announced.