

Pacific Media Workers Guild
San Francisco Chronicle Contract Bargaining Bulletin
Oct. 8, 2021

In a piece of good news for the Guild, the five Chronicle developers are now members of our union, after the NLRB rejected the company's bid to force them to form a separate unit and allowed a vote on joining. In a ballot count on Thursday held by the NLRB, the vote to join was unanimous. Welcome to our new members!

This week in negotiations with the San Francisco Chronicle, your Guild bargaining team summed up our reaction to the Chronicle's initial contract proposal in straightforward terms, and then delved into our proposals on specific benefits.

Mike Cabanatuan began: "When we come to the bargaining table, we expect intense debate over benefits, wages and working conditions. But our right to exist and function as a union is not part of the equation. Our union has been around since 1936. Our members will never accept a contract that undermines the very core of our organization, as many of your proposed changes do. We've been through many rounds of bargaining, but this proposal was beyond what we've seen in the past.

"In most circumstances, if people were to see a proposal like this, they would call it a union-busting proposal. It's the type of thing one would expect from an anti-union company, not the Chronicle, not Hearst. From big concerns like the open shop provision to seemingly little things like barring information requests -- which would undercut transparency and our right to make informed observations about our workplace -- the company seems to have made every attempt it could see to erode our longstanding and hard-fought rights. Our members will never accept this framework."

Todd Trumbull pointed out that the company says it wants to get rid of parts of the contract because they're "hard to administer" -- but much of what the company is proposing to strike is inherent to protecting our rights as workers. These are not just administrative details to us. While managing a comp day here or there, or recognizing a lost holiday, may be trivial to the company, to the individual whose life is affected, it's significant. The company often says it wants to make the Chronicle one of the best places to work. That's what we want too, and the company's initial proposal doesn't do that.

We're here in the spirit of collaboration, wanting to get an agreement we all feel good about, Todd said.

Company negotiator Vince Floyd responded that he was "disappointed" by some of the comments, and added, "Our proposal really was focused on streamlining the CBA (collective bargaining agreement, or contract) and controlling costs."

In this session, we did a deep dive on several issues in the contract. We were encouraged by the company's willingness to engage with us on many of these proposals, identifying potentially problematic areas and signaling an openness to trade language and suggestions to make them workable.

- Todd spoke about hours and overtime. The company has proposed no longer allowing members the option of taking comp time for overtime. The Guild believes members should be able to choose between overtime pay or comp time, with no pressure from managers.
- Tal Kopan presented on sick time, making a case for a flexible policy for members who need more than the strict 10 days per year and whose circumstances mean they can't receive short-term or long-term disability from the state. Tal pointed out that very few members use up their 10 days per year, and presented data graphics backing that up. She spoke about the needs of parents of young children, and Caroline Grannan chimed in about the kin care needs of members caring for elderly parents. The point, Tal said, was that this would be a very small deal for the company, but a very big deal for the few employees each year it affects. And after the lessons of the pandemic, she added, it's worth reevaluating sick-time policies to ensure they actually work.
- Lauren Hernández presented the Guild's proposal regarding holidays, and shared concerns about The Chronicle's initial proposal, which suggests removing the right of employees whose scheduled "weekend" falls on a holiday to receive a makeup for that holiday. The Chronicle's proposal would unfairly impact a number of employees who regularly work on Saturday and Sunday, including but not limited to reporters, photojournalists, editors, copy editors, digital producers, print designers, and other staff. Also, the Guild is proposing to add the following language to the contract: "Should the company decide to grant additional holidays in addition to those included in this contract, either on an ongoing basis or in a single instance, to non-represented employees, those holidays will also be honored for represented employees." Lauren and Tal noted that the company resisted adding MLK Day in the last round of contract negotiations, despite strong Guild advocacy, then used it later in an attempt to extract concessions from the Guild.
- Caroline addressed the Guild's proposal on vacations, pointing out that vacation isn't a significant cost to the company because most vacation shifts aren't backfilled. The Guild proposes an increase in vacation time, starting with 120 hours a year and rising to 200 hours, with the ability to individually negotiate above that, pro-rated for part time. We propose changing the accrual system so employees would simply receive their vacation time at the beginning of the year. And we emphatically propose revising the current language that causes members to inadvertently forfeit vacation days. Currently, members may carry over only 40 hours' vacation to the following year, and must use those hours by June 30 or forfeit them. That stipulation, agreed to years ago when the Chronicle pleaded that it was near financial collapse, gives us fewer rights than state labor law does, and that's not right. A number of members have been shocked and angry to discover that they'd lost vacation days after the June 30 cutoff. Tal described

how she had inadvertently forfeited a full 40 hours of vacation when she was cobbling together time off after childbirth, despite consultation with HR on the time off.

- Tal presented about the Guild's proposal on parental leave, which would grant 16 paid weeks off to any employee who expands their family, as well as up to 12 months unpaid and the ability to work part-time until kindergarten. The proposal also includes miscarriage leave. She presented graphics showing that the Chronicle's current policy is no longer competitive in the industry or with other Bay Area employers, and explained that leave is an important right of families and makes for happier employees. She also noted that the current policy has a gap in benefits depending on where the employee lives and works, something that should be fixed.
- Shwanika Narayan presented on bereavement leave and military leave. For bereavement leave, we're asking the company to increase leave to five days from three days, and up to seven days if travel is needed and more time is needed for cultural or religious observances. We're also changing the language in the definition of "family" to be more inclusive and gender-neutral. So husband and wife become spouse, mother and father become parents, sister and brother become siblings, etc. We have one addition to military leave, which is mostly unchanged from the previous contract. We're asking HR to sit down with returning service members to facilitate the reinstatement of their benefits. In a recent situation, a returning service member who didn't properly fill out paperwork was left without health coverage for almost a year.

During the presentations, Vince and Sean Kurysh asked some questions of the Guild for clarification and gave some initial feedback. While they expressed hesitancy on some of the items, they also expressed openness to some of the ideas if the parties could agree to language that works through some of the company's concerns. The Guild appreciated the ability to have these exchanges, and looks forward to future collaborative sessions. The company and the Guild will set more dates to meet this month and next.

Negotiators for the Guild:

Mike Cabanatuan
Caroline Grannan
Lauren Hernández
Tal Kopan
Shwanika Narayan
Todd Trumbull
Michael Applegate

For the company:

Vince Floyd, Hearst corporate counsel
Sean Kurysh, Chronicle HR