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Globe negotiations continue

The Boston Globe

Pressmen's union, Boston Newspaper Guild still seeking an agreement

By Robert Gavin and Keith O'Brien

Globe Staff / May 4, 2009

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WEYMOUTH - Boston Globe management was continuing to negotiate concessions with its major unions well past a midnight deadline, but said it was prepared to file a plant closing notice with the state today if they failed to reach agreement. That would allow the paper's owner, the New York Times Co., to follow through on its threat to shutter the 137-year-old newspaper.

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Shortly before 4:30 a.m. this morning, the Teamsters Local 1 president Mary White, representing 245 mailers at the Globe, said the union had reached a tentative agreement that included \$5 million in concessions and changes in the lifetime job guarantee protecting 145 of its members.

"There was some modification to the job security language," White said, adding that newspaper management seemed to want that concession just as much, if not more, than the financial givebacks. "I think they wanted it bad enough that this was the only way we were going to finish up our negotiations. I think it was necessary in closing the deal."

The mailers' agreement followed another post-deadline deal reached with Teamsters Local 259, representing 210 Boston Globe drivers, according to Ralph Giallanella, the union's secretary-treasurer. Giallanella would not disclose the details, but said union leaders came to an agreement worth about \$2.5 million in concessions.

Still, Globe unions, negotiating almost five hours after the deadline passed, have more work to do. The lifetime job guarantees will likely continue to be an issue with the final two unions still seeking an agreement - the pressmen's union and the Boston Newspaper Guild. And both are now negotiating under growing pressure to meet management's demands.

Talks had intensified after Globe management, just before 10 p.m., issued an ultimatum to the four major unions: Agree to major financial and contract concessions, including the abolition of lifetime job guarantees for some workers, or the Times Co. would begin the shutdown process.

"We have provided our unions with a copy of a notice that we are prepared to file tomorrow if we are unable to reach an agreement by the midnight deadline," Globe spokesman Robert Powers said yesterday. "This notice is

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required under the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act, which requires 60 days advance notice before the closure of a business. Filing the WARN notice is a difficult step that we would like to avoid but, unfortunately, given the state of the negotiations, it is one we must be prepared to take if negotiations are not successful."

If the notice is filed, Powers said, the paper would continue to publish through the 60-day period. In addition, according to state labor officials, such a notice is not irrevocable. At times, financial conditions change during the 60-day period and companies don't go through with the plant closing.

The ultimatum, issued shortly before 10 p.m., came after just over a month of intense negotiations with unions over \$20 million in financial givebacks and concessions on contract language, particularly the elimination of the job guarantees that apply to about 450 union workers. It was issued after Globe management summoned union leaders to the offices of the Labor Guild of the Archdiocese of Boston, where negotiations had been underway with the paper's largest union, the Boston Newspaper Guild.

The Guild, in a statement, decried the management move: "This tactic, while expected, is representative of the bullying manner in which the Times Company has conducted itself during these negotiations. Despite the Company's hostile tactics, we continue to negotiate in good faith and work diligently toward an acceptable outcome."

An official of one of the Globe's unions summed up the situation bluntly: "Do or die."

Any tentative agreements would still need to be ratified by union membership in the weeks ahead. Under the Local 1 agreement, White said, some employees, previously protected by job guarantees, "could be vulnerable to layoffs."

But given the Times Co.'s threat to close the newspaper - a threat that the mailers' union took seriously - White said they had no choice but to give in to management's demands.

"We want to keep the newspaper open," she said.

Still, White said, the paper could face a shutdown, if the two remaining major unions -- the pressmen's union and the Boston Newspaper Guild - do not come to some kind of agreement with Globe management. Both were still in negotiations, or waiting to negotiate, with management early this morning, with the talks expected to last at least several more hours.

The Guild represents more than 600 editorial, advertising, and business office workers; the Boston Newspaper Printing Pressmen's Union Local 3 represents about 90 press operators. The Times Co. is seeking \$10 million from the Guild and \$2.2 million from the pressmen.

"It's not good for any of us," Martin Callaghan, president of the pressmen's union, said of the company's ultimatum to file for closure.

"It's not good news. But all we can do is continue to do our job, representing our members as best we can."

The Globe is projected to lose \$85 million this year without significant cost reductions, according to the Times Co. Like many newspapers, the Globe has been hit hard by the migration of readers and advertisers to the Internet, and by the nation's deep recession.



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As the midnight deadline approached, union officials said they had essentially agreed to the \$20 million in financial concessions that the Times Co. was seeking. The Guild, in a statement, said the union had "presented the New York Times Company and Globe management with a proposal that exceeds the \$10 million in cuts demanded. This proposal was the product of arduous deliberations. These tremendous sacrifices, across virtually all categories of compensation and benefits, are more than adequate to continue The Boston Globe's mission of quality journalism."

A source close to the union said the Guild proposal included cuts in 20 different pay and benefit categories.

But the key issue still dividing management and unions was the elimination of the lifetime job guarantees, a step that management has sought since the start of the bargaining, and which would give management substantially more flexibility in reshaping the newspaper and shrinking its staff in the face of declining advertising revenues. Advertising revenues for the Times Co.'s New England Media Group, dominated by the Globe, declined by more than 30 percent in the first three months of this year from the same period in 2008.

Unions have resisted giving up the guarantees, arguing they paid for the guarantees with major concessions in years past. For example, the Guild gave up a no-layoff clause and made other concessions to gain the guarantees.

Globe management has been locked in intense negotiations with the unions since the beginning of April, when the Times Co. set a May 1 deadline to gain the concessions. After a marathon session Friday with the Guild, Globe management reported progress and the deadline was extended until midnight last night.

On Saturday, management bargained for 16 hours with the other three major unions. These four unions account for about 90 percent of the Globe's union workers.

Throughout the negotiations, the future of the Globe has seemed to largely turn on the outcome of negotiations with the Guild. The two sides have tangled over figures and contract language, with progress seeming to come only slowly.

With Guild officials still negotiating with the Times Co. well after 8 p.m. yesterday, a stream of other union officials began to show up in Weymouth. These officials walked in past a bank of television cameras and reporters shouting questions. They toted jugs of coffee and flashed weary smiles.

And then, awaiting their turns at the table with the Times Co., they lingered in the hall, laughing and eating, standing and waiting.

Globe staffers who followed the progress of the talks like most everyone else through sporadic news reports were wary yesterday evening about what proposals the negotiations would finally produce. Robert Alabiso, who does Web support and training in the Globe's advertising department, said he was worried about the pay cuts that might be coming.

Depending on how steep the cuts are, Alabiso, who lives in Plymouth, said, "I'd have to weigh whether it's worth it to keep making that commute everyday."

Marisa Pirrera, a 34-year-old Burlington sales representative selling online ads on [Boston.com](http://www.boston.com), said she too was worried about potential loss of salary. Pirrera, who has been at the Globe for two years, hoped that any union offer would cut

lifetime job guarantees before wages.

"Why should people have lifetime job guarantees?" Pirrera said. "Your job is based on your performance and your input into the company."

Beth Daley, a Globe reporter and Guild delegate awaiting a resolution in Weymouth last night, said the union is trying to do its best to weigh the needs of all employees, even though different people want to preserve different items.

"Some are worried about healthcare," Daley said. "Some are worried about their pensions. Others are more concerned about lifetime job guarantees. And union leadership is trying to come to an agreement where everyone will share the pain equitably." ■

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rossigirl wrote:

"Throughout the negotiations, the future of the Globe has seemed to largely turn on the outcome of negotiations with the Guild. The two sides have tangled over figures and contract language, with progress seeming to come only"

How about you get rid of the copy editors who consistently miss blatant errors such as incomplete sentences? They're certainly not doing their jobs. Oh wait - you probably can't - they probably have a LIFETIME job guarantee.

We get poor grammar, lousy sentences, duplicate items, the same tired stories over and over and over again (how many have we seen about revitalizing Downtown Crossing?) while some employees sit back, do a lousy job, and know they are invulnerable.

No wonder The Globe's in trouble.

5/4/2009 6:08 AM EDT

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Virlyn wrote:

Wow - lifetime job guarantees. Nice to know that your employer is forced to keep you.

5/4/2009 6:10 AM EDT

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rick259g wrote:

The Globe is in trouble because there's so many more options for folks to get their information these days. Both the Globe and NY Times should shut down, or just keep an online version. Why buy the paper when you can get quicker updated news from the online versions?

5/4/2009 6:12 AM EDT

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cicx wrote:

I'll bet the Globe wished it never supported liberal ideas like the perpetuation of archaic and useless unions. Listen Globe why don't you touch Kerry and the Kennedy's, and Dukakis, and Bonnie Fwrank and all the other rich liberal pols who claim to be spokesmen for the poor. Because I guess, your among poor as well. Get them to front you a few bucksefor all the slanted one sided media support you gave them.

Remember that scene in the Godfather where Woltz is told that for a small favor his union problems would disappear. Ah, those were the good old days before liberal came along and mucked up everything.

5/4/2009 6:14 AM EDT

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