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**NEWSPAPER GUILD OF PITTSBURGH INSTITUTES BYLINE STRIKE
AT THE PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE
IN PROTEST OF CONTENTIOUS NEGOTIATIONS
AFTER 12 YEARS OF ECONOMIC GIVEBACKS**

Until further notice, 145 members of the Newspaper Guild of Pittsburgh, newsroom journalists at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, are participating in a byline strike in protest of 12 years of economic mistreatment--and counting--by the paper's owner, the family-owned Block Communications, Inc., headquartered in Toledo.

Beginning today, all reporters, photographers, videographers, graphic artists, columnists are withholding their bylines from the paper, website and other platforms to express their displeasure with BCI. Additionally, those with desk jobs such as copy editors, page designers, web editors and others, are wearing stickers reading "I Support the Byline Strike." In all, 99.9 percent of the union is participating, an astounding sign of solidarity.

The near universal Guild exposes the frustration with the onerous way in which PG journalists have been treated for a dozen years. During that time, there were wage cuts, benefits cuts, lost jobs. And now, in negotiations for a new contract to replace one that expired March 31, 2017, the company incredibly is seeking even more wage and benefits cuts.

"To my knowledge, there has only been one other byline strike at the PG, in the 1980s, so this is an extraordinary action that we don't take lightly," said Michael A. Fuoco, Guild president. "But these are extraordinary times that Guild members find themselves in as they try to support families in 2018 on 2006 wages."

Guild members' annual wages have been cut nearly at least by 10 percent for each of the past 12 years--that means they are earning 10 percent *less* what they were in 2006. Also during that time, pensions have been frozen, benefits have been cut,

health-care has decreased. Yet the cost of everything--including the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette--has increased dramatically.

It is true that the Post-Gazette, like most newspapers in the country, loses money. But its parent is able to write off those losses and regularly earns more than \$100 million in profits a year. Still, over the last 10 months, in some of the most contentious contract talks at the paper in history, the company is demanding even more concessions.

They include:

- Allowing the company the unilateral right to determine the number of hours in a Guild member's work week, meaning it could be 0 (all members are guaranteed 40 hours now).
- The unfettered right to use stringers, managers and third-party vendors to do the work Guild member have had jurisdiction over for 80 years.
- The ability to lay off anyone for any reason at any time and out of seniority (currently, there needs to be an economic reason and layoffs must be by seniority in work categories).
- The ability to unilaterally change health-care benefits at any time (any changes must be negotiated now).

Moreover, the Guild recently had to file an Unfair Labor Practice charge against the company when, through its union-busting law firm King & Ballou of Nashville, Tenn., it refused to pay a 5 percent increase in the health care premium for 2018, thereby unilaterally cutting our benefits. Companies involved in bargaining are required by federal law to maintain the same level of wages and benefits of expired contracts. No one can ever remember the Guild having to file a ULP against the PG but that's just how intransigent company negotiators have been.

The situation is serious and volatile. Unless the company comes to its senses and obtains a sense of civic responsibility and economic justice for loyal and talented employees, the very life of the 231-year-old PG is at risk. We fear for our beloved newspaper as Allan Block, BCI chairman, and John Robinson Block, his twin brother and PG publisher and editor, ignore the \$100 million a year PG unions have given back since 2006. They demand more with a "Let them eat cake" attitude.

We were hired to provide top-rate journalistic talent and we're performing our jobs in an exemplary fashion, regularly winning national, state and regional journalism excellence awards for our work. The PG was named the Pennsylvania Newspaper of the Year in 2017. But while the company markets our plaudits, it treats us like paupers.

We will not--we cannot--approve another concessionary contract offered by millionaires. The byline strike is but one mobilization in our arsenal. We are prepared to use others. We hope we don't have to do so.