



‘Will we have to give up X to get Y?’

The answer: No.

Management has been claiming that we’ll have to give up X to get Y after we win union recognition, so we asked leaders at other recently organized NewsGuild units about their experiences in contract negotiations. **Here are their responses.**

JUAN CARLOS RODRIGUEZ, Law360, Portfolio Media, First Contract Ratified



“We didn’t give up anything. We set high bars for things like salary and benefits because we felt that’s what the company owed us. And we won on almost everything. Some of the biggest fights we had were about preserving the integrity of our unit by creating clear boundaries about when the company could use subcontractors and things like that. But if you don’t bargain, you just get what the company gives you.

“Your leverage is your shop’s unity. We found that’s what really swung things to our side in negotiations. So you’ve got to understand that the company will test that unity at every turn. And it’s a battle to keep people together. But again, that’s your leverage. It just depends on how hard you want to fight.

“In short: Hell yes, you’re going to get more than you give up as long as you stay committed, keep people involved and plan good mobilizations.”

DANIELLE SMITH, Law360, Portfolio Media, First Contract Ratified

“We didn’t lose any benefits we already had. People were really concerned we’d lose our right to work from home, but that’s enshrined in the contract now.

“Shortly after we unionized, our company decided to switch healthcare providers and we got to have a pretty big say in what would otherwise have been a unilateral decision.

“People always say, ‘What if we unionize and they take away x,’ but people should really be thinking about ‘what if we don’t unionize and they take away x.’”



ERIN DUFFY, Omaha World-Herald, Berkshire Hathaway, First Contract in Progress



“We had at least 3 rounds of layoffs in the 2-3 years before we organized. This year, after organizing, they did another staff reduction, but offered buyouts with a max of 26 weeks of severance.

“Do I still think the reductions were fueled by greed and completely unnecessary? Yes. But at least some of our people got a choice and we got advance notice, instead of people being stopped at the back door on their way into work and told they were being laid off.”



‘Without a union, nothing is guaranteed.’

BROCK VERGAKIS, Virginian Pilot, Tribune, *First Contract in Progress*

“I bring up what happened at The Salt Lake Tribune all the time because they don’t have a union. They lost their 401k match. Salaries were frozen. Health care premiums tripled. Nothing to stop that from happening in Arizona. Without a union, nothing is guaranteed.”

SETH KLAMANN, Casper Star-Tribune, Lee Enterprises, *First Contract Ratified*

“We lost nothing we had before. The ‘we’ll lose X if we do this’ line is super common. But not true. Anything you could ‘lose’ in bargaining/unionizing, you can lose much easier without a union.”

ANTHONY PESCE, Los Angeles Times, LA Times Communications LLC, *First Contract Imminent*



“Broadly, we have been able to lock in what we have and do better in many, many areas.

“ZERO benefits have backslid from what we had when we certified the union.

“We’ve already won the first newsroom-wide raises in years, higher minimum salaries (which gave some staffers 25% raises or more) and improved healthcare options.

“But we actually have spent a relatively short amount of time talking about benefits.

“The VAST MAJORITY of bargaining is about how much control we gain over our working conditions — pay, layoffs, scheduling, ethics, security cameras, etc.

“They must consult you, they must listen to your ideas, they have to address a lot of your concerns. You get in on the process.”

ANDREW PANTAZI, The Florida Times-Union, GateHouse, *First Contract in Progress*

“We aren’t close to a contract yet, but we’ve only had to give up a few of the aspirational parts of our first proposal. We have not given up anything we had before that we liked.

“The only horse-trading we’ve done has been: ‘We’ll give management the right to change employees’ schedules with less than a week’s notice if it’s due to one of these specific conditions defining breaking news,’ which is a new right we didn’t have before but is maybe more deferential to management than we would have liked.”



CODY BOTELER, Baltimore Sun Media, Tribune, *First Contract in Progress*

“Right now, the company can do whatever it wants to you and you have no recourse. If you have a union, you have status quo protections and bargaining.”