**After 565-Day Strike, Halifax Journalists Ratify Contract**

*Workers Stood Their Ground on Job Security, Union Protection*

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“It was an endurance test of almost 19 months, but the Halifax Typographical Union stood its ground on the key issue of job security.”

That’s how CWA Canada summed up a marathon strike after HTU members voted 94 percent in favor of ratifying an 8-year deal that ended their 565-day walkout against the Chronicle Herald. The local, which represents composing, editorial and pressroom employees, is part of CWA-Canada and The NewsGuild-CWA.

The “defensive strike” became necessary when the company informed the union, soon after bargaining began, that it was going to impose its final contract offer, withdraw the union’s exclusive jurisdiction over news-gathering work, end seniority in layoffs, and immediately terminate 18 people.

“We would have been a union in name only” if workers allowed the company to deny the union jurisdiction over its primary work, said Ingrid Bulmer, who was president of the local before and during the strike.

In the end, HTU won some key battles, protecting its jurisdiction and retaining seniority for layoffs, but also made some significant concessions.

“It’s not a great deal, but it’s the best we could get in the circumstances,” Martin O’Hanlon, president of CWA Canada, said of the final contract. “Now we have to try to put this behind us, heal the wounds, and bring quality journalism back to the Herald.”

“I can’t express enough how proud I am of our members who stood together for so long to defend quality jobs and quality journalism,” he said.

“Our members in Halifax showed incredible tenacity in fighting a publisher who was determined to destroy them,” said NewsGuild President Bernie Lunzer.

**How’d They Do That?**

How *did* Chronicle Herald workers stand together for so long?

The strikers won tremendous support from the labor movement and the community.

Labor unions across Canada donated money to help pay strike benefits and defray other costs associated with the strike. The Nova Scotia Nurses Union, with 6,900 members, set the record with a contribution of $40,000.

As a result of the contributions from the CWA’s Members Relief Fund and donations from other Canadian unions, the workers received strike benefits of almost $600 (Canadian) per week, which turned out to be only slightly less than they would have taken home if they were working.

“The money side of things would have been quite tight without them,” Bulmer said.

Many smaller gestures of support helped keep morale up as well, she said. Members of other unions and community residents frequently stopped by picket lines with sandwiches, dropped off pre-loaded debit cards for groceries and other necessities, and lifted their spirits with words of support. A nearby church let them use their facilities to warm up and wash up.

**Publication, Pickets**

Another decisive factor was Local Xpress, a news site strikers created to compete with the Chronicle Herald. Approximately half of the strikers worked on the publication, while the others walked picket lines.

“Radio stations used us as a source for news,” Bulmer said. Union members signed up “subscribers,” who made ongoing voluntary contributions to support the effort.

Local Xpress strengthened the strikers and weakened management.

It also was a source of pride — especially after Local Xpress was nominated for six Atlantic Journalism Awards — twice as many as the Chronicle Herald, Nova Scotia’s “paper of record,” which was being produced by strike-breakers.

Eventually, the Local Xpress moved to a format where it could make money. Strikers sold advertising, further increasing their clout and further diminishing the company’s power.

Strikers engaged in secondary picketing at businesses that advertised in the Chronicle Herald to persuade advertisers to stop placing ads, and in many cases, they were successful. (Secondary picketing is legal in Canada, but not the U.S.)

**Conflict Resolved**

More than 18 months after the strike began, a tentative deal was reached on Aug. 5, following just two days of mediation by Arbitrator William Kaplan, who had been appointed by the Nova Scotia government in mid-July to lead an industrial commission to look into the dispute.

Throughout the strike, the HTU had made three separate requests for an “industrial commission of inquiry,” but the requests were rejected. Finally, after a fourth request, the one-person commission was appointed. It was the first time in more than 20 years that such a commission had been established in Nova Scotia.

“This should show the government that, whenever there is any sort of extended strike, they should be using this legislation because again, it accomplished in two days what couldn’t be accomplished in 18 months,” O’Hanlon said.

**Drawbacks**

Despite the language protecting union jurisdiction over news-gathering, the seniority-in-layoffs provision and limits on layoffs in the future, less than half the former staff returned to work in mid-August. Of the 61 newsroom members who went on strike on Jan. 23, 2016, only 27 returned to work. A half dozen had left for jobs elsewhere as the dispute dragged on; the rest, including Bulmer, were laid off.

The amount of severance for the departing staff was a major bone of contention during the fitful negotiations that opened in the fall of 2015. Those who left received enhanced severance of 2.5 weeks of pay for each year of service with a cap of 68 weeks. The company also dropped its insistence on a non-compete provision and other restrictions on those taking severance.

Although a 5 percent wage cut, which the union offered early in bargaining, became part of the agreement, it was tempered with pay increases over the next seven years.

O’Hanlon issued a “huge thanks to all the unions and labor groups who supported us and donated hundreds of thousands of dollars” during the strike. Those labor organizations stood firmly with the HTU, organizing rallies, collecting money and other donations, supporting and publicizing boycotts, and rallying public opinion against companies that continued to advertise in Nova Scotia’s paper of record.

“Martin [O’Hanlon] has always told us to fight the good fight,” Bulmer said. “Even though it was a year and half, I think we fought the good fight.”

*For more on the strike and the settlement, visit* CWAcanada.ca.

Cutline:

Strikers braved the cold Canadian winter.