

New York Times workers stage a one-day strike

Our reporters
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More than 1,100 *New York Times* editorial and support staff staged a 24-hour strike on Thursday. The strike, the first since the 1970s, came after over one-and-a-half years of unresolved negotiations between the company and the NewsGuild of New York.

Strikers are demanding wage increases to protect them from inflation, no cuts to their pensions and adequate employer contributions to their health care fund. They are also calling for remote workplace policies to protect their health amid the ongoing pandemic.

The *Times*, which recorded \$220 million in net profits last year, is insisting that workers take a massive pay cut in real terms, offering raise guarantees of just 2.75 percent per year amid 7.7 percent inflation. New York City was recently designated as the most expensive city in the world to live.

Among the chants by the 300 workers and supporters at the afternoon rally in front of the *Times* headquarters was, “We make the paper, we make the profits!” Newsroom workers were joined on the picket line by striking workers at the Murdoch-owned book publisher HarperCollins and The New School, Starbucks workers, and Columbia University workers.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team attended the rally and spoke with striking workers.

Ainara, who has worked at the *Times* for seven years, said, “We’re fighting for fair wages. The *New York Times* is doing well as a company, given how poorly we as a whole are doing and have been doing. Our management has been getting raises over the last two years. None of us have been getting raises, so we’re fighting for the pay floor to be raised.

“We’ve been fighting for other things like what happens to our health plans, how much the company contributes to the health plans, work from home versus in person, how that’s going to be going into the future. Those are the big ones. The pension plan was gutted in favor of a 401k many years ago. A pension still exists. We were able to push for the company to keep the pension, at least, for the next cycle.”

Marcus, a photo editor, said, “The company’s making a lot of profits, which is their business. We’re not asking outrageous demands. We just would like to stay a little bit ahead of inflation. We don’t appreciate the fact that you [the *Times*] want to cut back on your health care benefit contributions. You killed our pension plan a few years ago, and we have an adjusted pension plan, which only pays 3.7 percent last year. And they want to get rid of that for a 401k plan that they wouldn’t contribute as much to.”

One common concern is the attempt by the *Times* to institute pay tiers, as has been done already in many industries. Marcus said, “One of the main things is the two-tier employment status they want to do now. They want to codify that new employees are in a second tier, so like, people are always behind. It’s just not equitable. It’s unconscionable that a company would do that.”

Maria, a reporter, expressed the need to fight for improvements for all work categories. “I’ve been working at the *New York Times* for three years. I’m a travel reporter. I was a breaking news reporter. The reason I’m here is to stand in solidarity with my fellow Guild members. We are not just fighting for contract raises, for raises that are in our pay, but we’re fighting for our lowest-paid workers to have some sort of living wage. Many of them, you know, live in the city, an expensive place to live. They’ve been working here for years, and they make far less than a lot of the reporters that work here. We are here for them as much as we are here for everybody else.”

Sirra is a software engineer in the New York TimesTech Guild, a separate bargaining unit not currently on strike. She was on the picket line during her lunch in support of the strikers. “I’ve been at the *Times* for four years. I work on the backend systems and applications. These workers are a sibling unit and we are bargaining with the same employer on things like returning to working in the office and things that have to do with the building. If they can get the company to move in a direction that we would also like, that can impact our bargaining as well. We won our election for a union in March and have been bargaining already for six

months. The *New York Times* is using a lot of the same tactics, stalling, only giving us short bargaining sessions when really we need many hours and sessions a month if we're going to have a contract in a meaningful timetable.

"Some of the most important demands for us a pay equity. Pay transparency is something we have been asking for a long time and now that we have a union we can ask to see if there are inequities.

"It is not so much that the higher-paid employees want to make more as that we want to make sure that all the workers are being paid equally for the same work and lower paid employees are getting paid a fair share. Compensation packages are based on level, so we want to make sure we are getting equal pay."

The importance of working class solidarity was a common theme. When asked about uniting the growing number of working class struggles, Marcus responded that he welcomed the support the *Times* workers have received from HarperCollins and New School strikers. "Right, we've had a lot of those people come to support us. We really appreciate that. If you think about people that work, we need to unite. Sooner or later, people are not going to take this."

Asked about the expanding worker strikes and the possibility of uniting all these struggles, Sierra said, "This is a real exciting time in labor. I definitely think, seeing so many people coming out in solidarity, seeing so many people from CWA [Communications Workers of America], coming together to be with us, and the Teamsters saying they refuse to cross the picket line. There are so many ways to show solidarity, spread the message that this fight is everyone's fight, Our sibling unit winning helps us, all of labor winning helps the industry.

"I would love to see a general strike in New York. I think that it is something that we have a solidarity committee between us and our newsroom and our wire-cutter unit and I would like to see more of the executive committee also get together and talk about like coordinated action. That is obviously the way we win."

Maria also spoke of the importance of working class unity. "I think we are stronger when we are fighting together, these are important rights. We have a great tradition of union, of labor in this country and it's taking a real beating over the years and it's inspiring and it's encouraging to see people fighting for basic wages, basic living wages and stand strong. We have power, but we only have power when we are together."

Ainara summed up the basic sentiment that workers, not corporations, are the foundation of society. "They're saying they can't afford to raise our wages, but we make the paper every day. Without us, there wouldn't be a paper."

The strike at the *Times* is indeed part of a growing wave of

struggles from the HarperCollins and The New School strike in New York City, to the nearly month-long strike by 48,000 academic workers at the University of California, the two-month strike at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, and the week-long strike at the *Ft. Worth Star-Telegram*.

At the same time, 120,000 railroad workers are in a fight against the Biden administration and the US Congress, which outlawed their strike and imposed a pro-company contract, which workers previously rejected. The struggles in the US are part of a global resurgence of the class struggle. In the UK, railroad workers, ambulance drivers, nurses and other workers are fighting threats by the Tory government to dispatch the military to suppress their struggles.

The biggest obstacle to uniting these struggles, however, is the trade union bureaucracy, which in the US is politically allied with the Democratic Party and its program of austerity and war. These are the same policies promoted by the *New York Times*.

Toward the end of the rally, Stacy Cowley, a chief negotiator for the NewsGuild, told the crowd, "We will work hard for a contract. But if talks stall again, we will be asking you for your trust and support for further actions. We will not settle for anything less."

In fact, the trade union officialdom has repeatedly settled for less. That is why newspaper workers must follow the lead of railroader, autoworkers, teachers, nurses and other workers who are building rank-and-file committees to transfer power from the union bureaucracies to the workers themselves.



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