

Conciliation talks between The Chronicle Herald newspaper and the union that represents its 61 newsroom staff have broken down after the company walked away from the table after just two days. "We believe that the company, from the beginning, intended to lock us out," said Ingrid Bulmer, president of the Halifax Typographical Union, Local 30130 of CWA Canada.

A lockout could happen before the end of January.

The Halifax Herald Ltd., concluded conciliation talks late Friday afternoon by calling for provincially appointed conciliator Peter Lloyd to file his report with the Labour Department.

"The Herald left the negotiation table abruptly, leaving the union to digest a total rewrite of the contract that would set us back 20 years," Bulmer said.

The company's concessionary demands would:

- * Cut salaries and increase working hours
- * Significantly reduce benefits in our defined benefit pension plan
- * Mean layoffs are no longer by seniority, but at the whim of management
- * Eliminate the contract clause that says: "The company at all times recognizes the principle of equal pay for equal work for male and female employees."

"As we face more deep cuts to the newsroom, we feel very strongly that the company is leading us toward irrelevance: Less depth, less journalism, fewer compelling stories, more rewrites of news releases and more sponsored content," Bulmer said.

At about this time last year, the Herald eliminated 17 newsroom jobs through layoffs and buyouts that staff felt compelled to take under the threat that either they or a colleague would be laid off. At the same time, the company continues to expand its advertorial and paid-content products, run by the advertising department, and which include its growing stable of free weeklies distributed across the province to compete with real community newspapers with a long-standing presence in their areas.

"The company has informed us that 30 per cent of our newsroom staff will be laid off even if we were to accept all of its concessionary proposals," Bulmer said. "It's an insult to us and to all Nova Scotians who rely on The Chronicle Herald as a respected source of news."

The company has said it intends to get rid of its photographers and reclassify reporters as multimedia journalists. It would also lay off almost its entire editing staff: the news desk editors who produce three print editions daily and the web editors who publish online content. Their jobs would be outsourced, possibly within the company to its non-unionized advertorial department, for a fraction of the pay and benefits.

For an employer who so eagerly embraced the findings of the Ivany report, it's curious that the Herald wants to eliminate good-paying jobs, Bulmer said.

The bargaining unit is made up of reporters, photographers, editorial writers, editors, columnists, page technicians, library and support staff in Halifax and in bureaus across the province.

For more information, contact:

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