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Message to Winnipeg Free Press Inside Workers From Your Union Local

The financial situation at the paper appears to be sliding from bad to worse with no end in sight. In December, I cautioned that we can expect further cuts at the Free Press despite the strong national and local economy. While management dismissed the Local's concerns as alarmist, we are indeed facing further cuts.

Principal owner Ron Stern and his partners have drawn millions of dollars out of the Free Press every year since 2001. With revenues continuing to decline, now the owners want you to pay their bills for them. Since January, 11 members have been laid off and/or quit and management has now targeted multiple classifications in several departments for more layoffs. Layoffs have become the Company's default response to its sliding revenues.

With the release of the latest financials from FP Newspapers Inc (the Free Press parent company) we officially know that revenues continue to fall amid declining ad revenue and fewer subscriptions to the physical paper.

Before the financials were released senior management requested a meeting with the staff of the Local as well as the National Rep. While initially to deal with concerns on contracting out of our carrier workforce the managers then dropped the bomb – they want to re-open the inside workers collective agreement and roll back wages and benefits.

The Company asserts they need a 10% reduction in its labour costs and that this dictum comes from principal owner Ron Stern. It is clear to all who work at 1355 Mountain that life is not the same. We have seen colleagues leave, many laid off without choice. And regardless of what the Company says about rollbacks we believe that more layoffs will come whatever cost savings we may decide to do. The managers made it clear if we did nothing the layoffs would be deeper.

When the same demand was made to the carriers, they answered with a resounding NO. At a recent meeting, carriers voted unanimously to reject re-opening their contract.

Opening the contract presents many risks: Once opened, everything can be up for grabs. The Local is not prepared to do this.

Our Collective Agreement is in effect until June 30, 2018. In the 2013 negotiations serious concessions were made to the Company in terms of pension, length of contract and wage grids to provide an opportunity to find savings; annual wage increases were frozen or substantially less than inflation. Despite these concessions, we have continued to experience layoffs in all departments every year. That's not a plan --that's self-destruction.



Management wants us to open our contract and take rollbacks while they rely on wishful thinking to turn the paper's financial situation around. That's NOT a plan. Eliminating jobs is NOT a plan. Cutting our wages is NOT a plan -- that's simply a means to maintain profits before the entire enterprise collapses.

It's time to stop cutting at the Winnipeg Free Press and time to start building.