

Setting The Record Straight – Update For Free Press Members

January 27, 2017 – At the recent series of town hall meetings, publisher Bob Cox made several statements that require further clarification from the Local's standpoint. Comments like, *'There was no request to re-open the contract,' 'there was no ask for a specific dollar savings,' 'the Local has been uncooperative in the Company's search to chart a way through these difficult financial times.'*

These comments are, at the very least, misleading. You cannot chart a new course without re-opening the contract; you cannot "share the profits and the risks" without re-opening the contract. We do not

understand what the Company wants or how it expects to achieve its 'made in Manitoba solution' without re-opening the contract.

However, we have not stopped talking to the Company and more meetings will occur. What follows is a list of meeting dates the Local has had with the Free Press executive management team and what transpired at those meetings. In the meantime, anyone who has questions can contact me directly or come to the next general membership meeting – **Sunday, Feb. 26, 1 pm, at the United Way Winnipeg offices, 580 Main Street.**

Aldo Santin, President

Oct. 29, 2015: Local 191 met with publisher Bob Cox, Dan Koshowski, Laurie Finlay, HR director Dian Trinkaus. Cox et al reviewed the paper's dismal financial situation, stated the future was uncertain and bleak if revenues continue to decline; said they were told owner Ron Stern told them to find \$4 million-\$5 million in savings for 2016, the equivalent of 60 inside positions. Demanded the carrier contract be re-opened and the Local agree to a series of reduction in carrier income; if this did not happen, the Company would take away a portion of the insert business and have it delivered by the Flyer Force.

Nov. 17, 2015: After the carriers rejected the Company's demand to reduce their income, Local 191 met with the executive management team, where they said they would explore contracting out newspaper delivery, either in total or portions of the city.

Nov. 29, 2015: The carriers instructed the Local they do not want to re-open the contract and expect the terms of the collective agreement to be honoured until expiry.

Oct. 26, 2016: Local 191 met with publisher Bob Cox, Dan Koshowski, HR director Dian Trinkaus. Much of the same information that would be later presented at the Jan. 19, 2017 town hall was shared with Local 191. There was continued vague talk from the Company about changing the way they operate; Cox said, "the pension plan is the biggest burden we face." Cox said given the bleak financial projections for 2017, "the traditional solution" would be a 20 per cent salary cut but the owners prefer another solution. "It's not easy to see what that is," Cox said, and asked the Local to help them find a new solution. We told them we needed time to consider the information they presented but promised we would get back to them with some follow-up questions.

Nov. 8, 2016: Local 191 emailed a set of questions to Cox involving the amount of operational savings and pension savings the Company is looking for; how much had been paid out in dividends since Stern bought the paper; how much had been paid to any Stern-related company for services to the Free Press; salaries paid to management.

Dec. 2, 2016: Cox responded in an email. Again, no specifics were given for the amount of operational savings they were seeking. Other financial questions were directed to published data; they refused to disclose salaries paid to management. However, Cox was very specific as to his concerns with the pension plan; this is what he told us: ***"In the world's low-growth environment which is forecast by many economists to continue indefinitely, the current defined benefit pension is not sustainable for the long term. We believe it is in the long-term interests of all stakeholders to close the defined benefit plan."***

Dec. 13, 2016: Ron Stern, Bob Cox, Dan Koshowski fly to Toronto to meet with Unifor National President Jerry Dias and other senior national officials.