



**OTTAWA NEWSPAPER GUILD**  
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## **MINUTES - THURSDAY, JUNE 28, 2012 EMERGENCY CITIZEN UNIT MEETING**

1. Call to Order  
Meeting called to order by Debbie Cole at 12:08 p.m.
2. Approval of Agenda  
M/ by Gord Holder. S/ by Chris Vernell. CARRIED.

### Ottawa Citizen Staff Reductions: Buyouts/Layoffs

President Debbie Cole reported that Citizen management had approached five full-time members and warned them that if they did not apply for buyouts, they would be laid off. Not all of those people worked in the newsroom.

The Citizen's buyout program had been available to any Guild member, but those who were not in editorial had not believed they were vulnerable to layoff, so some did not apply.

The company had also identified five part-time employees as targets for layoffs.

Debbie told the membership that the executive committee had met Tuesday to discuss the job-reduction process. President Debbie Cole, Unit Chair Jacquie Miller and Member-At-large Lois Kirkup then met with company representatives on Wednesday and made some suggestions:

i) Company should reopen buyout process for people who felt they didn't have enough time earlier.

ii) Asked if the company would consider job sharing or reduced work weeks from people offering to do so.

Company representatives did not agree to anything at that meeting.

President Debbie Cole later spoke with Linda Ruhl of Citizen HR, who indicated that company would not do either of those things unless there were first clear indications of interest from members. Debbie recommended that anyone who might be interested in pursuing these options should do so immediately.

iii) Company should abolish the intern program once the current participants had left the Citizen.

iv) ONG executive would ask the members to suggest other cost-saving ideas.

v) ONG would bring to the membership a motion asking Citizen Unit members to give up the 2.5-per-cent increase due in July 2012 if the company would agree to no layoffs for two years. It was estimated that such a proposal would save two or three jobs.

President Debbie Cole then opened the floor to questions and/or comments.

The discussion of these questions/comments included:

- Some people had been notified their jobs were at risk, but nobody had yet been issued a layoff notice.
- There had been 17 buyout applications from the newsroom, including 16 ONG members. One other member had accepted a transfer to the Postmedia operation in Hamilton. It was estimated that the part-timers targeted for layoff were the equivalent of 2.5 full-time positions.
- There had been some buyout applications in other departments.
- No buyouts had yet been approved and probably wouldn't be until the process was further along. The company had threatened to cancel all buyout offers if the ONG grieved layoffs. Unit Chair Jacquie Miller explained that buyouts would yield X amount of savings, and layoffs would save Y amount. The buyout program was a company matter and it was up to management only to decide on applications. President Debbie Cole said an example of the ONG's leverage in this situation was the potential cost for the company of fighting grievances over layoffs.
- The idea of offering to relinquish the 2.5-per-cent salary increase had not been officially offered to the company. President Debbie Cole said ONG representatives had linked this to a proposal for no layoffs for two years. Unit Chair Jacquie Miller said company would not tell ONG if there would be further job cuts down the road.
- Those offering to reduce their workweeks to less than full-time were advised to recognize that this would affect future earnings/pensions.
- Unit Chair Jacquie Miller said the company did not have to agree to job-sharing proposals.
- One member cited a Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild agreement to accept a number of unpaid furloughs (days off without pay) scattered throughout the year. Unit Chair Jacquie Miller said Citizen management had stipulated it was seeking permanent cost reductions, and that was not a permanent move.
- In response to a question about the continued use of freelancers, Unit Chair Jacquie Miller said the ONG representatives had asked about the freelance budget during their meeting with Citizen management, but was told that payroll reduction was the company's goal. President Debbie Cole said the ONG would grieve any layoffs of editorial staff by citing the freelance language clause in the collective agreement.
- There have been five layoffs in non-Guild departments. This was done in advance of the layoff process stipulated in the ONG collective agreement. So far the company has not given official notice, but has warned some members that their jobs are in peril.
- In answer to a question about the time line for the process, President Debbie Cole said company had indicated it wanted bought out members to be gone by July 31, so it was likely that the company was close to issuing layoff notices.
- Vice-President Jeff Parks reminded the members that, even if the ONG could make some kind of deal in this case, it should always fight to protect members' jobs.

- Some members suggested the need for a legal opinion before agreeing to give up the 2.5-per-cent salary increase in return for an agreement not to lay off more staff for two years. Unit Chair Jacquie Miller said the company had been told that the ONG was considering the 2.5-per-cent offer. After more discussion, President Debbie Cole said the ONG would go back to the company and tell management that members did not want to vote on such an offer unless the Citizen committed to no layoffs for two years.
- President Debbie Cole had told company ONG would like to have buyout program reopened and reminded management that we would fight layoffs under the grievance procedure.
- In a previous round of buyouts, some former non-Guild employees on salary continuance and some who took shares were victimized by a drop in share value, etc.
- One member, now part of the intern program, spoke on behalf of maintaining the program because of the valuable experience it provided to participants. President Debbie Cole said it had not been an easy thing to propose ending the program.
- President Debbie Cole told the members that the Citizen was still profitable, but that the ONG could not make business decisions for the company.
- After the discussion, President Debbie Cole told the members that there would not be a vote on the 2.5-per-cent offer at this meeting. Members were asked to ensure that the ONG office had their current home email addresses so they could be contacted if necessary.

1. New Business - none

5. Adjournment

M/ by Gord Holder. S/ by Don Butler. Meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m. CARRIED.