NABET-CWA Reaches Agreement at Albany’s WRGB-TV

Mobilization Campaign Pressured Company

NABET-CWA Local 21’s dynamic mobilization campaign quashed WRGB’s contract demands, and paved the way for a new contract and an end to the six-month-long, contentious negotiations.

On April 8, WRGB-TV/CBS 6 photographers, engineers and technicians voted 26-5 for the company’s contract offer. The new contract, which runs until June 2008, keeps wages frozen at their current level for most employees. Employees will receive a $2,500 signing bonus in the first year, as well as guaranteed incentive bonuses every year. Severance pay was doubled. The Union agreed to a compromise that cuts the minimum number of full-time jobs due to advances in broadcast technology. Fifteen full-time jobs were lost. Four employees also volunteered for buyouts.

The company — Freedom Communications, Inc. — backed off on earlier proposals to cut wages by 15% and leave bargaining unit employees out of enhanced (401(k)) benefits. The company had threatened to implement these and other provisions on April 1. However, the Union declared its willingness to continue bargaining and, at the same time, garnered more support from state and local labor officials and politicians.

When told about Local 21’s fight for a fair contract at WRGB, New York Democratic gubernatorial candidate Eliot Spitzer pulled an advertising campaign that had been running on CBS 6. Senator Hillary Clinton and several labor unions — the New York State United Teachers, CSEA, the New York State Public Employees Federation (PEF), and United University Professions (UUP) — also refused to advertise on the station.

NABET-CWA believes the lost advertising dollars, spurred by the strong mobilization by Local 21 members, made the difference. (Continued on page 2)
Independent Report

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issues are jurisdiction and wages. On May 7, members wore t-shirts with “Let’s Talk” on the front and the mobilization website name — 10NEWSunfair.com — on the back as they handed out flyers at the Cinco de Mayo celebration at the Del Mar Fairgrounds. The station had a booth at the event. The Local also has asked the public to boycott the station and its advertisers. Local 54 President Dennis Cilligan, Rob Buchanan, Tony Veliz, Frank Castillo, Jr. and NABET-CWA Staff Representative Don Jernigan are negotiating the contract for the Union. Bargaining began in January.

WJLA-TV — Washington, D.C.

The company has made a final offer to the NABET-CWA Local 31 unit. The bargaining committee is recommending that the members vote against the contract. The main sticking point continues to be arbitration for discharges. The Company wants to unilaterally determine whether a discharge grievance will be arbitrated, made enhancing severance payments to employees in cases where it declines to go to arbitration. The union vows to continue its mobilization campaign as the ratification process proceeds. The negotiating team includes Mike Forcucci, Alton Morris, Edwin Wilson, Sector President John S. Clark, NABET-CWA Staff Representative Don Jernigan and Local 31 President Mark Peach.
NABET-CWA has two very special, long-time members — one who recently retired after 50 years and one who continues his decades-long work for the Union. Both Local 212 member Bill Cullum and Local 21 member/RVP 2 Fred Saburro began their careers in 1953 and have since brought many years of faithful service and expertise to their jobs and their Union.

Before his retirement on March 10, Bill Cullum worked for WTRF-TV in Wheeling, W. Va., for five decades. He began his television career on February 10, 1953, when television was still black and white and only film was used. All of the commercials were live and “going live” for breaking news was not possible.

“To talk to Bill about the ‘old days’ is like going back in time in an industry that technology has taken over,” says Tom Allietta, Local 212 Secretary-Treasurer. “He tells of the days when it was exciting to work, when everything was live and you never knew what would happen next.”

Cullum became a NABET Local 212 member in 1976, when the Union organized the station and then held a five-week walkout for a starting contract. Since that first contract, which brought raises of 7%-27%, Cullum has had to adjust to the constantly changing technology. But now, says Allietta, “Bill finally decided to watch TV instead of making it at the age of 80.”

Fred Saburro has been a member of NABET-CWA for 52 years and continues to work for the Union in many capacities. Saburro became a camera operator for WRGB-TV in Schenectady, N.Y., on December 7, 1953, and ended his television career there in February 1989 as a lighting director.

WRGB-TV was the first television station in the world and Local 21 is one of NABET’s oldest locals. “Looking back,” Saburro says, “is very disappointing to see what television has become today. Technology has taken away so many jobs.” Saburro notes that he also “hates computers and cell phones.” Saburro’s first position in the Union was

2006 CWA Legislative Conference

(Left to right): Sector Vice President James Joyce and local 11 Vice President Jose Endara spoke with Senator Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) about the NBC and NPR contract negotiations during CWA’s Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.

The report stated that CWA’s finances could be managed and directed more effectively by changing the annual Convention to a triennial event, as well as decreasing or combining meetings and conferences. Sharing resources, or even real estate, should also be considered: “From headquarters to the smallest local, less expensive and smaller office space should be a priority.”

NABET-CWA has already adopted a resolution to undertake CWA’s challenge at the 2005 NABET-CWA Triennial Conference, the Union has been soliciting ideas from members and officers to identify, review and consider current programs, priorities and structures. The Union has identified areas of common concern.

According to NABET-CWA Sector Vice President James Joyce, most of the Union’s locals participated and a variety of viewpoints were heard — from both network and independent locals. In March, these issues were discussed at the Regional Advisory Board meeting — which included 20 locals from Regions 2 and 6 — and were compiled into the report.

The “Ready for the Future” Subcommittee consists of Local 41 Vice President Charles Braico, SVP James Joyce, RVP 2 Fred Saburro, and Local 42 President and RVP 6 President William Wachenschwanz.

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NABET-CWA has already adopted a resolution to eliminate non-essential group meals, hold meetings in conjunction with other conferences and meetings, use less expensive hotels and destination cities, and reduce the length of meetings.

The report concluded, “In order to be truly ‘Ready for the Future,’ we must approach our task with open minds while being attentive and deliberative of our past.”
After just three days of meetings, NABET-CWA Local 45 reached a tentative agreement with the Company. The new four-year agreement with the Hearst-Argyle station was ratified by the membership 5 to 4. The contract calls for wage increases of 2.5% each year and a 1% increase in the current wage stepladder. Significant improvements were made to the layoff/recall language, and union leave language was included for the first time. The major hurdle was the Company’s proposal to increase the number of part-time employees from 7 to 8 and expand the use of vacation relief employees. The committee came up with a proposal for a pool number of hours, instead of a hard number of part-time employees and the elimination of vacation relief. The bargaining committee consisted of Local 45 President Dennis Ricketts, Kris BeeBee, Chad Mayer and NABET-CWA Staff Representative Eric Seggi.

National Public Radio – Washington, D.C.

Since the Company implemented its last, best and final offer in mid-January, the two sides have altered the offer. A majority of the bargaining committee and NABET-CWA are recommending the most recent version for ratification. Two unit meetings were held in early May to discuss the contract, which will be voted on by mail. The votes were scheduled to be counted on May 25. Since the implementation, NABET-CWA Local 31 members mobilized through ads, t-shirts and pressure inside the building. They received support from AFTRA members, who overwhelmingly signed a petition of support for NABET-CWA and presented it to the National Public Radio Board of Directors at a public session in February. AFTRA filed a grievance over the assignment of NABET-CWA’s work to its members, and in an expedited arbitration, successfully defended its position and won a cease-and-desist order. AFTRA also met with CEO Kevin Klose and reached a signed agreement as part of its own bargaining that the Company would not assign NABET-CWA work to AFTRA members unless the Company reached an agreement with NABET-CWA. The negotiating team includes Local 31 President Mark Peach, Vice President Barbara Krieger, Flawn Williams, Joe Mills, Sue Klein, Frank Nelson and NABET-CWA Staff Representative Paula Olson.

WSKG-FM/TV – Binghamton, N.Y.

In May, a one-year contract extension was ratified between NABET-CWA and WSKG-FM/TV. The contract, administered by NABET-CWA Local 26, calls for a 3% raise and a “grossed-up” signing bonus of $350. The contract covers 22 full-time radio and TV technicians and on-air personnel. NABET-CWA Staff Representative William Murray negotiated the extension with the station’s general manager.

PBS – Washington, D.C.

The NABET-CWA Local 31 unit at PBS voted for the company’s proposed contract in April. The agreement, which runs from July 1, 2004, to June 30, 2007, calls for a 3% raise as of July 1, 2004, and 2% each year thereafter. There also are merit increases of $500 and $1,000, which would be added to the employees’ base salary upon annual performance reviews. Members of the bargaining team included Cashe Mitchell, Robert Futschker, Valerie Smith and NABET-CWA Staff Representative Don Jernigen.

KVEA-TV – Los Angeles

After a stormy series of meetings in February, NABET-CWA Local 53 and KVEA reached a tentative deal in mid-March, two days prior to the contract termination period. The contract includes significant pay increases for current employees, increases to daily-hire compensation and increases in meal periods and other penalties. The Union held its ground on jurisdiction and lay-off language. The pay increase does not include retroactivity (the contract expired December 2004), but provide for increases over the next 28 months in 6-month increments, designed to compound increases by nearly 20% over that period. The membership ratified the agreement the following week. The bargaining committee included Carlos Flores, Joe Ayala, Leysier Parada, Marco Ayala and NABET-CWA Staff Representative Paula Olson.

KGTV – San Diego

The NABET-CWA Local 54 unit at KGTV reached in a “full-blown” mobilization that is aimed at getting the McGraw-Hill Broadcasting station back to the negotiating table. The Company declared bargaining over after the 60-member group, which includes engineers, technicians, directors, photographers, editors and artists, voted against a proposed contract in April. The main