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El Diario Crisis Comes to a Head

The NiLP Network on Latino Issues (June 22, 2014)

National Institute for Latino Policy (NiLP)

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With the laying off of 12 of its employees, eight of whom are union members, on what has become known as "The Friday the 13th Massacre," labor relations at El Diario-La Prensa have reached a new low. This action by management as finally gotten the Newspaper Guild of New York doing some organizing and the issue has begun to get some traction with Latino community leaders.

"ImpreMedia's new management says El Diario was 'ghetto journalism' before they got there. They want to get rid of the veteran journalists who know our neighborhoods and the issues facing our communities, and replace real journalism with a cheaper product," [said Oscar Hernandez, El Diarios union Unit Chair](#). "That's not what our readers want, and that's not what the Spanish-speaking community needs." [Capital New York's Nicole Levy](#) reports that "The tabloid newspaper's circulation has been declining for years, and over the six-month period ending in March, average weekday circulation fell 12 percent to 30,955, according to the Alliance for Audited Media." This is in a city with more than 2.4 million Latinos.



El Diario's City Hall Reporter, Marlene Peralta, in solidarity with fired co-workers



El Diario staff supporting union demands

The Guild has brought charges of anti-union violations in the form of 11 grievances to the National Labor Relations Board. During Friday's edition of WBAI radio's The Jordan Journal, union representative Nastaran Mohit announced that El Diario workers planned a picket against the paper this Thursday. There was also talk that the union was recruiting the support of Council Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito. However, some El Diario staffers are concerned about Viverito's role because of Erica Gonzalez', the paper's former Executive

Editor, current position as a senior advisor to the Speaker. Many feel that Gonzalez betrayed the staff when she cut a deal to leave El Diario to go to work for the Speaker, making it difficult for them to believe that she will now be an ally.

El Diario's employees have denounced the hostile work environment and abusive behavior specifically of two of the paper's managers, the Vice President of Content Juan Varela and Metro Editor Claudio Remeseira. Varela is a Spaniard and Remeseira an Argentinian, who have reportedly continually harassed and made life miserable for the paper's remaining staff. Both are widely viewed as arrogant elitist managers who are out of touch with the city's Latino community.

At the same time, the newspaper's "Publisher Emeritus," Rossana Rosado, is credited by some as paving the way for the weakening of the union and putting the employees at risk as she negotiated a deal that put her in her current no-show job with the paper. Some are wondering if, as "Publisher Emeritus," she will be playing an active role now in coming to the defense of the paper's management despite widespread Latino community and union opposition. Many have not forgotten that during the investigation of the National Puerto Rican Day Parade Rosado as the then actual Publisher she wrote and published a major defense of the then corrupt Parade leadership.

In addition, in the process of attacking the union, El Diario's Varela also made what many consider racist statements about Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. The union charges that he told staff that he wanted to make sure that El Diario was no longer covering "the ghetto" and was making changes to go after a more upscale readership. It has been noted that since the purchase of El Diario's parent company, impreMedia, by the rightwing Argentinian newspaper, La Nación, in 2012, El Diario has fallen under the control of a tiny Argentinian-Spanish clique that has forced out specifically Puerto Rican, as well as other Latino staff members.



El Diario's HR Dept.



impreMedia CEO Francisco Seghezze's Labor Relations Philosophy

At a staff meeting called this Friday afternoon by the paper's CEO, Francisco Seghezze, to answer their questions over the controversy, he denied that they violated the union contract and called on the cooperation of the remaining staff in making the paper successful. He explained the problems faced by the paper and the pressure they are

under to be profitable by their investors. A staff member suggested that the paper publish a response to the union's charges, and there was some talk about publishing an editorial on the paper's position, but it was not clear if this would occur.

The management's racist remarks and actions have prompted Latino leaders to denounce them. [NYS Senator Ruben Diaz Sr. is calling for a possible picket](#) in front of El Diario next Thursday by a group of evangelical ministers and Latino elected officials. He told a reporter, "We cannot just cross our arms and permit this type of insult and disparagement of our community."

And, as already mentioned, Council Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito has also expressed interest in intervening on behalf of the union. They will be meeting with her sometime this week.

Some are wondering where Latino media advocacy groups like the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, the National Association of Hispanic Publications, and the National Hispanic Media Coalition stand on the situation at El Diario and impreMedia in general. impreMedia also owns La Opinion in Los Angeles and other publications throughout the United States.

While the union will be working to restore the jobs of those employees that they argue were laid off illegally, others are calling for the firing of what they consider racist managers like Varela and Remesiera. But even if these issues are resolved, will El Diario survive as a viable publication? Some in the Latino community even feel that at this point it would be a plus for the community if El Diario, after 100 years of publication, would finally simply close down.

Only a couple of weeks ago, El Diario announced its redesign in an effort to cut costs and make it more online-friendly. While the new design seemed uninspired (its masthead now uses a tired stenciled type), it makes the newspaper look more like a "penny saver" publication that is just an excuse for ads. The articles in the paper are getting shorter and shorter, are being dumbed down and politically may be increasingly under the editorial control of their parent conservative paper, La Nación, back in Argentina. Regardless if there is a settlement with the union or it closes down or not, this is the end of El Diario-La Prensa as we knew it, whether they ultimately make it fit in a smart phone or not.



The End of El Diario?

Note: To follow developments at El Diario, on Facebook go to [Save El Diario](#), and on Twitter follow [@eldiarionyguild](#) and [#saveeldiario](#).

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