

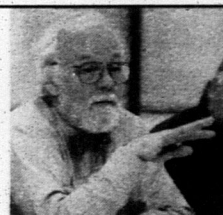
THE GUILD Reporter

January 29, 1999

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TNG-CWA
executive council
meets—and meets.
And meets.

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Hell, no, he wouldn't go

Dwight Biermann was not a union member when he worked for the Herald Palladium in St. Joseph, Michigan. And he clearly had a bright future at the small, Hollinger-owned daily, receiving rapid promotions and salary increases because of his self-taught computer skills.

But when his publisher ordered him to Chicago for training as a potential strike breaker at the Sun Times, also owned by Hollinger, Biermann declined. His carefully written letter of refusal explained that he had been raised in a union environment and that accepting the assignment "would be dishonest on my part, since I have no intention of crossing an active picket/strike line." Half an hour later he was fired—and on his way to making labor history.

That was November 13, 1997; a week later, the Chicago Guild agreed to a new contract without resorting to a strike. And a week after that, Biermann found a new job and now works as production manager at the State News, at Michigan State University.

But the Guild also cried foul to the National Labor Relations Board. And last month Robert T. Wallace, an administrative law judge, agreed that Biermann had been entirely within his rights to refuse the Chicago assignment and ordered the Herald Palladium to reinstate him with full back pay.

"The sole reason for the assignment was to enable Biermann to act as a replacement worker in the event a strike occurred," he wrote in his opinion. "Biermann correctly perceived that by accepting the assignment he was agreeing to cross a picket line if and when asked to do so.... His refusal, albeit anticipatory, was nevertheless protected under the [National Labor Relations] Act since it was made in the context of a strike situation."

Whether Wallace's decision survives an appeal to the full NLRB remains to be seen, but TNG-CWA attorney Barbara Camens is optimistic—even though the ruling significantly expands the rights of sympathy strikers. "Refusing to train as a scab in anticipation of a strike has now been granted the same protection as refusing to cross an actual picket line," she observes.

Moreover, Camens notes, the case is an unusually focused illustration of the moral principles binding the labor movement. "Dwight Biermann was willing to lay his job on the line because he could not 'reconcile the idea of being a scab with what I was brought up to believe in and stand for,'" she says, quoting Biermann's letter refusing the assignment.

"The decision holds that Biermann—or anyone else in his position—should not be faced with that choice."



JACK MILLER/NEW YORK NEWSPAPER GUILD

Rowdy at Reuters

Several dozen members of TNG-CWA Local 3 hand out leaflets Jan. 11 during information picketing outside the New Amsterdam Theater in Manhattan, site of a Reuters groundbreaking ceremony. Reuters is spending tens of millions of dollars to build its new U.S. headquarters in Times Square, but has stalled contract negotiations for more than a year and has more than 90 regressive demands still on the table—including

ing a longer workweek, no pay raises, pay cuts in some job categories, increased health insurance co-pays and out-of-pocket expenses and ending the union shop provision. Guild negotiators estimate the company's proposals would cost each unit member an average of \$13,000 a year. "Reuters is a prosperous multinational company," said local President Barry Lipton. "It's the height of corporate greed for the company to receive big tax breaks at the same time its management is demanding its employees give back hard-won pay and benefits."

Denver Post highlights flurry of year-end pacts

It took some behind-the-scenes discussions at the highest levels, but TNG-CWA and the Denver Post finally shook hands on a five-year pact that—surprisingly—also means wage increases for employees at the rival Denver Rocky Mountain News.

Other year-end settlements

also were announced at the Hawaii Tribune-Herald, Pawtucket Times and Sheboygan Press. And employees at the New England Construction News reached a tentative agreement for their first contract.

Ratification of the Denver pact ended an increasingly rancorous

stand-off that saw editor Dennis Britton spoofed on the Internet and preparations for an advertiser boycott. Wage increases include 4.5% effective at the end of this past December, 3.5% next December and 3% in each of the following two years. Although the agreement doesn't include a 1998 increase, members received a signing bonus equal to 2% of last year's base pay.

Rocky Mountain News staffers, who recently signed off on a contract with a "me-too" provision, are assured of wage parity.

Other features of the Post agreement include a pension benefit increase, establishment of a pre-tax plan for transportation and parking costs and a new drug and alcohol testing policy. Part-timers notched several gains, including a commitment to get first consideration for full-time openings; a provision that allows them to refuse to work more than five days a week; and 70% payment of health insurance premiums by the Post for those who average at least 24 hours of work per week.

FEDERAL JUDGE:

Microsoft 'outrageously arrogant'

An angry federal judge gave the back of his rhetorical hand to Microsoft Jan. 14, blasting the software manufacturer for its "outrageously arrogant" behavior.

Judge John Coughenour's ire was provoked by Microsoft's attempt to coerce its temporary workers into signing new employment contracts under which they would forfeit any money awarded

in a pending lawsuit. The court has already ruled against previous efforts by the software maker to impose such restrictions. Moreover, Coughenour apparently was not informed by Microsoft's attorneys of the new initiative, learning about it from reading an article in The Seattle Times.

"Some might perceive this as being outrageously arrogant," thundered Coughenour in an exchange with Microsoft's attorneys, who argued that the new agreements apply to future judgements and therefore don't run afoul of previous rulings. Recessing the hearing after only 10 minutes, Coughenour ordered Microsoft to return with a more considered response.

As detailed in The Guild Reporter on October 9, Microsoft employs more than 600 "per-

matemps"—full-time employees who work for months or years on various software projects but are classified as "temps" and therefore not qualified for Microsoft's health plan, paid vacations, stock options and other fringe benefits. TNG-CWA Local 37083, also known as WashTech, began organizing the permatemps last year.

Coughenour is presiding over two class action lawsuits filed by

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The Internet has sweatshops, too . . . **Page 8**

Hawaii Tribune Herald

Another contentious set of negotiations ended Jan. 19 as Guild members ratified a multi-year *Continued on page 3*

Sun tries blue-light special approach to contract talks

Like a used-car salesman promising a deal too good to last, The Baltimore Sun proposed on Dec. 10 a four-year extension of the contract due to expire June 22—but only if TNG-CWA members accepted its take-it-or-leave-it package, by Dec. 29.

The members overwhelmingly voted to leave it.

The unusual proposal, floated just as the holiday season arrived, supposedly was made possible by "restructuring funds" from parent company Times Mirror that would vanish at year's end. The sugar-coated version included average wage increases of \$19 a week in each of the four years, a lump-sum payment of four weeks' pay to a maximum of \$2,000 per employee and a \$700,000 injection into the Guild-Sun joint pension plan, bringing it to about full funding.

But the devil, as they say, is in the details. For in return for the

money it was waving about, the company sought contract changes that would allow subcontracting of Guild work and elimination of a contract provision granting Guild jurisdiction over new or additional work requiring similar skills. Moreover, management demanded it be granted the unilateral right to offer individual and group buy-outs, eliminating the Guild's legal negotiation rights.

In short, said Connie Knox, president of the Washington-Baltimore Guild, "in exchange for four weeks' salary they wanted to take away the union—that's the way everyone saw it. And that's the message we put out: accept this package and this will be a jolly good Christmas, but it's also the best you'll ever have."

Given Times Mirror's recent history of hundreds of lay-offs at the Los Angeles Times, Knox's comments were far from hyper-

bolic. But Sun management mounted a full-court press nonetheless, sending letters to all unit members at their homes, posting messages on company bulletin boards and holding "informational" meetings with employees on company time to answer questions. Management also held eight or nine bargaining sessions during the two-week period it allotted for its campaign, but made no meaningful changes from its original Dec. 10 proposal.

And in the end, the gun-to-the-head tactics backfired. Rallied by the efforts of Joan Jacobson, who took lost time from her newsroom job to lead the unit's mobilization drive, several hundred unit members met at a nearby church on the deadline date and gave a thundering thumbs-down to the Sun's proposal. The unit's 550 members now are gearing up for regular contract talks this spring.

Sixty-four years later, Guild pioneer still alive and well

Don Stevens celebrated his 100th birthday over the New Year's weekend with a little bash at the Embassy Suites in San Rafael, California.

Still active as a much sought-after contractor in Marin County, hobbled only by a cane and lousy hearing, Stevens was feted by nearly as many guests as he has years. Most were subcontractors and architects, while some undoubtedly were solid and conservative—and possibly Republican—businessmen.

And perhaps one in ten had the foggiest notion of what was going on when a 79-year-old woman pulled out her guitar and began singing these lyrics:

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night,

Alive as you and me.

Says I, "But Joe, you're ten years dead."

"I never died," says he.

"I never died," says he.

Damn, Wobblies die hard.

Sixty-four years ago, Stevens was a copy editor at the San Francisco Examiner and an

unabashed supporter of the Industrial Workers of the World. He also was a fervent supporter of Heywood Broun's call to arms, but had to contend with a particularly heavy-handed publisher—Randolph Hearst—and a correspondingly fearful newsroom. So he drafted a document that became known as the Hearst Manifesto, scrawled his name at the top of the first of four columns of signatures, and passed it into the night.

As he subsequently wrote in a front-page article for The Guild Reporter, describing the plight of "a most unorganized and most paradoxically voiceless" group: "The economic and spiritual beating which surviving staffs had been through, what with personnel and pay cuts, had left them groggy, scared and bewildered." But all that was needed, it turned out, was

a single rallying point—and the Manifesto, "circulated in bars and latrines," as described by another Guild old-timer, was it.

"He was the spark," says Fred Fletcher, a comparably youthful 79-year-old who paid his respects by attending Stevens' party. "As I told those building trades people, Stevens knew how to build a good foundation."

Indeed, Stevens rapidly became the American Newspaper Guild's vice president for Region 12, then was elected ANG treasurer. But his most distinctive role came in 1936, when he was one of three candidates nominated by the fledgling union to the AFL as its first full-time organizer, a position the federation had agreed to underwrite.

Ironically, the AFL rejected the other two candidates as "too radical."

Former ITU chief dies

Joseph "Joe" Bingel, who led a failed effort by the International Typographers Union to merge with The Newspaper Guild in 1983, died Dec. 30 in Colorado Springs at the age of 90.

The self-made son of Lithuanian immigrants, Bingel started working just before the Great Depression hit, became a

printing apprentice and rose to the ITU's presidency from 1978 to 1984. Although a Guild convention ratified the proposed merger, Bingel's leadership on the issue was rebuffed by the ITU rank and file. Four years later, the ITU instead merged with the CWA—a step the Guild wouldn't take for another decade.



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In brief . . .

Legal services program a winner

TNG-CWA's legal services program, designed to assist locals with arbitrations and unfair labor practice charges, is proving a big success. Thirty-four locals have sought help since the program's inception in April, 1997, for a combined 83 cases: 65 arbitrations, 15 ULP complaints and three that are still being evaluated. All three arbitration awards to date have been won by the Guild.

UPI moves to 'virtual bureaus'

Hard as it may be to believe, there still is a UPI—and it still is scrambling to cut costs any way it can. The latest whack: six of 10 employees represented by the Wire Service Guild in New York, with the survivors reassigned to work in "virtual bureaus"—the company's way of saying they're to work from home. Look for more "virtual bureaus" elsewhere.

Detroit News sacks Guild prez Mleczo

Detroit Newspaper Guild President Lou Mleczo discovered he'd been fired by the Detroit News for "gross misconduct" while going through personnel reports the newspaper routinely sends to the Guild. The unannounced action reportedly was in response to Mleczo's alleged participation in a Nov. 13 demonstration at the University of Michigan, where a Detroit News executive was conducting job interviews. His case now joins the hundreds of others over which unfair labor practice charges have been filed with the NLRB.

NLRB judge shoots down laptop 'deal'

The Albany Times Union thought it had a great deal for its advertising sales staff: each would get a \$6,000 laptop computer, for which he or she would pay \$2,000 in several monthly installments—and at the end get a \$1,000 rebate. Wow! And all the salespeople had to do was sign several pages of restrictions on how they could use "their" new computers—a touchy subject, since the department's next step was to remove all desktop machines. Instead, administrative law judge Joel Biblowitz ruled the company had violated federal law by not negotiating with the union and ordered refunds for all.

Time Warner unit hits 'ethics' manual

Time Warner has concluded its employees need to have their ethics spelled out, so it is requiring them to sign a new ethics manual. But TNG-CWA members are balking, citing overly broad language that prohibits family members from working for competitors and a "tattle" provision that would compel employees to snitch on each other or face disciplinary action.

CBC negotiations focus on workload

The Canadian Media Guild, still smarting from the 1996 negotiations with the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., is seeking salary increases, of course—but workload is an even bigger issue. The current contract gives the CBC some flexibility in assignments, with the understanding that there would be some advantage to Guild members, but that hasn't happened. Now the CBC is trying to hold onto its gains—and filed for conciliation after only seven days of face-to-face negotiations.

ACLU joins noisy fray in Detroit

Locked-out newspaper workers in Detroit often "blow the whistle on corporate greed" during their demonstrations, raising threats of prosecution under a local noise ordinance. Now the ACLU has waded into the fray, filing a federal lawsuit seeking to overturn the ordinance as "unconstitutionally vague."

A little '30s retro in Saskatchewan

Hurting into the industrial age, management at The Leader-Post in Regina has installed . . . a time clock. The move apparently is in response to organizing efforts in the newsroom—where TNG Canada has filed for certification—and by pressroom employees. Not coincidentally, the Hollinger-owned paper was the only one in the province not to award cost-of-living pay increases or Christmas bonuses.

Toledo elects new officers for '99

The Toledo Newspaper Guild elected new officers Dec. 2, including Beverlyann Morris, president; Larry Vellequette, vice president; Lillian Covarrubias, secretary; and Jeffry Hojnacki, treasurer.

The Newspaper Guild
International



For information about your benefits, contact Helen L. Coleman, assistant to the trustees:

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105064.3217@compuserve.com

Labor round-up

Grad students force UC to the table

Teaching assistants struck eight University of California campuses simultaneously Dec. 1, in the largest job action of its kind in U.S. labor history, over the system's persistent refusal to negotiate a first contract. Six days later, with strikers refusing to grade final papers, the university finally agreed to talk—then suffered another setback just as bargaining started when the state's Public Employment Relations Board rejected its argument that such graduate students are not employees. The teaching assistants were organized by the United Auto Workers.

On a related note, 1,900 professors at the University of Cincinnati reportedly are on the verge of settling contract negotiations after barely averting a strike in November. The pact includes salary increases of 2% the first year and 3.5% in the second and third years.

Company videotaping can be a no-no

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia circuit has agreed with an NLRB ruling that videotaping of union rallies by a company violated federal law. The recent decision grew out of a 1993 series of rallies by unions demonstrating outside the main gate of National Steel and Shipbuilding Co. in San Diego. Although the company argued it had a right to videotape the rallies in anticipation of illegal activity, the NLRB concluded there were no legitimate grounds for such a belief and that the taping was meant to intimidate the demonstrators.

Look for increased health givebacks

The cost of U.S. employee health benefits at large companies is expected to jump nearly twice as much in 1999 as in 1998—by an average of 7%, compared with last year's 4%—resulting in increased pressure on union negotiators as their employers try to pass on the costs through higher deductibles and premium co-pays. The increases are attributable to consolidation—and therefore less competition—in the health care industry, higher prescription drug costs and a wringing out of one-time savings.

Flat growth in wage increases

The median wage increase payable this year under U.S. contracts negotiated in earlier years, 3%, is the same as last year's, according to the Bureau of National Affairs. For communications and services except health care it's slightly higher, at 3.3%. There are no corporate chief executives who would be satisfied with so low a return on capital, nor are there any who would find comfort in such a flat rate of growth in income, but of course it's unions that are depicted as greedy when they negotiate for higher wages.

Hold the Cherry Garcia . . .

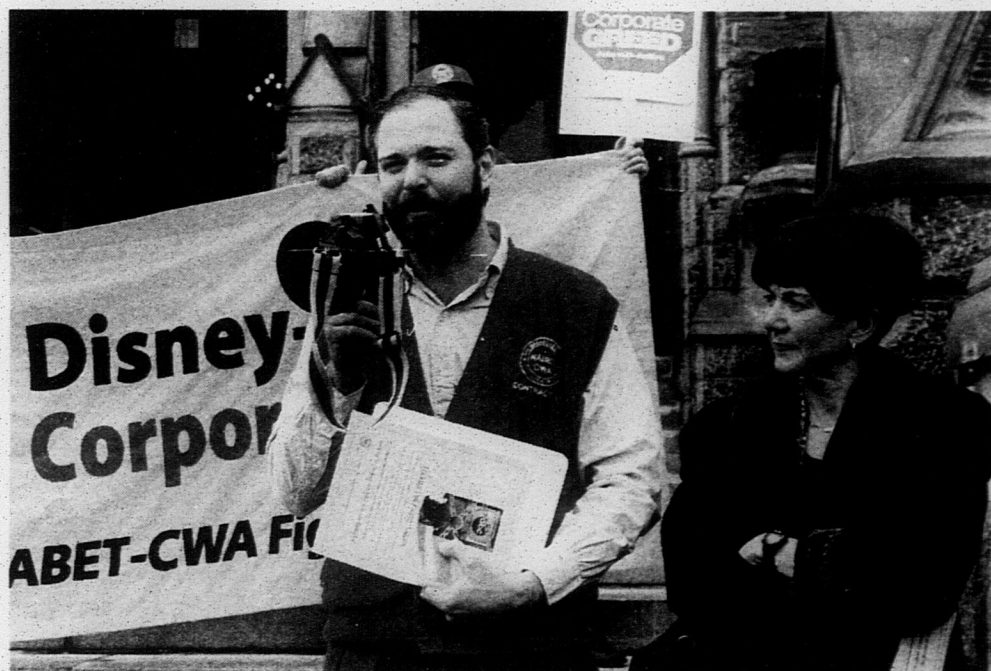
Ben & Jerry's, the Vermont-based ice cream company, was supposed to present a kinder, gentler fact of capitalism—so when the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers petitioned the NLRB to represent 19 maintenance workers, the company was less than thrilled. The first counterpunch came when company lawyers argued that the union vote should be held among all plant workers, presumably because that would defeat the effort. But the NLRB's regional director ruled that the 19 workers were a distinct unit and therefore qualified to stand alone. Now company officials are pondering their next move.

Teamsters still in turmoil

While many Teamsters hoped the recent election of James Hoffa as their president would mark the beginning of the end of Uncle Sam's supervision of their union, fresh allegations of wrong-doing make that unlikely. A court-appointed board has filed charges against two of Hoffa's running mates, and a third has been implicated in separate charges filed against another Hoffa ally. Losing candidate Tom Leedham filed a challenge to the election results just ahead of the protest deadline, claiming the allegations were serious enough to force a postponement of Hoffa's ascension.

A little bit of legislative overkill

Despite repeated defeats of so-called "paycheck protection" legislation—requiring annual approval by union members to permit dues spending on political action—the efforts continue. The latest is in Texas, where state Rep. Harvey Hilderbran has introduced a similar bill—even though Texas already is a "right-to-work" state, which means union-represented workers can withhold their dues any time they want. Of course, that doesn't relieve their unions from representing them, which just goes to prove that even conservative legislators believe there should be a free lunch—as long as it comes out of other workers' pockets.



With TNG-CWA President Linda Foley at his side, Jim Joyce, mobilization director of Local 16 of the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians, leads a January 13 rally at

Georgetown University protesting the lock-out of 2,400 ABC/Disney employees. Georgetown's president, Leo O'Donovan, sits on Disney's board of directors. The lockout ended two days later.

ABC ends lockout, NABET votes on last contract offer

The 10-week lockout of 2,400 NABET-represented employees ended Jan. 15, as Disney/ABC agreed to submit any lockout-related disciplinary issues to arbitration and the CWA affiliate agreed to submit the employer's latest contract to a ratification vote. Results of the mail-ballot vote will be announced early next month.

The uneasy truce is only the latest chapter in a stand-off that goes back almost two years, when the union's last contract expired and ABC took a hard line in bargaining on wages, outside staffing and health and pension benefits. When the company repeatedly refused to provide details about the health plan it was insisting NABET negotiators accept, the union called a one-day walk-out in protest—and found its members locked out the next day.

Disney/ABC subsequently stepped up the pressure by suspending the locked-out workers' health insurance. The union, on the other hand, launched a boycott that saw some of the country's most prominent entertainers—and virtually all top Democrats—shun the network. And the lack of professional production, especially at live sporting events, was widely noted by sports writers and media commentators.

After more than two months, however, stress fractures began to show, including the start of a decertification drive on the West Coast. And some observers noted that the stand-off was symptomatic of deeper problems affecting labor relations in the broadcast industry. Technological advances have whittled away at manning levels and simplified many tasks; competition has driven up the cost

of television programming, leading to increased cost-cutting; and cable systems, now duking it out with broadcasters in a major way, remain largely unorganized—and heavily reliant on subcontracting.

In the end, White House intervention helped push the two sides toward a resolution, with CWA President Morton Bahr acknowledging "the tremendous support we received."

"These employees stood together and fought a valiant battle against a stubborn employer who was determined to break their spirit," Bahr noted. "They deserve a better contract than this one, but I am recommending ratification on the basis that it's the best settlement that can be reached at this time without unduly prolonging the hardship that Disney/ABC has inflicted upon these courageous workers and their families."

Flurry of year-end contracts

Continued from page 1

agreement with the Hawaii Tribune-Herald. The new pact is effective retroactively to November of 1997—the prior contract expired May 1997—and runs through February 2002. Wage increases include a 2% retro, 2.5% effective this month, 2.75% next January and 3% and 1% in subsequent years.

The contract also establishes a shared-work agreement, under which pagination and design of news and ad pages may be performed either by ITU- or Guild-represented employees. Shared work, the agreement stipulates, will not "cause the layoff" or "reduce the number" of employees in the Guild bargaining unit.

Pawtucket Times

A three-year agreement, call-

ing for wage increases of 2% on ratification, 2% on the first anniversary and 2.5% on the second, was ratified in early January—a year-and-a-half after the former contract expired. It also allows the use of no more than eight freelancers a day, excluding special sections, and establishes a joint committee to discuss creation of a 401(k) pension plan.

Sheboygan Press

If some contracts are more notable for what was resisted than what was attained, Sheboygan tops the list. The three-year settlement—which expires next February, following a bitter 22-month fight—includes only one 3% pay increase, a requirement that reporters, photographers and ad sales staff provide their own cars, a 45-day cap on jury duty pay and

and a 120-day limit on moving grievances to arbitration.

On the bright side, the unit dodged a commission-only sales plan, an expansive "merit" proposal for raises, an end to the evergreen clause and a complete ban on picketing and handbilling.

New England Construction News

Reaching a first contract only 10 months after certification, employees at the New England Construction News agreed to a two-year pact that includes annual 3.25% wage increases; a grievance procedure with binding arbitration; layoff and recall by seniority; dues check-off; a "gross misconduct" standard for termination; and an evergreen clause.

Other benefits include 10 paid holidays and personal leave that accrues at five days per year.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETS

Bargaining program heads agenda

January is the time when leaders the world over assess the state of the union—and that includes labor unions.

So it was the week of January 10, as the TNG-CWA Executive Council descended on Washington D.C. for six days of intensive discussions. Kicking off the meeting on an upbeat note, TNG-CWA President Linda Foley exclaimed, "I feel good about where our union is and where it's going." Although a lot of work remains to help locals integrate more fully into the Communications Workers of America, the affiliation also has meant "we don't have to scramble for resources the way we used to. We're not desperate any more."

Moreover, Foley added, the Guild is now positioned to play a leading role within the CWA. "CWA views us not only as an entree into the media, but into the world of professionals," she explained. "The fact that we're here is a reason for other white-collar workers to look to CWA, and they know that."

TNG Canada Director Arnold Amber, meanwhile, presented a more sober view of events to the north, warning that current contract talks with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation stand a good chance of ending in a strike. CBC employees have gone seven years without pay increases, he said, but the company's best offer now is increases of 2%, 2.5% and 3% over the next three years "and that's not good enough." CBC's unwillingness to extend the Guild's jurisdiction to new media also has blocked an agreement.

Those contrasting views aside,



Seated at the head of a paper-strewn conference table, Marian Needham, executive secretary of the contracts committee, leads an

the executive council plunged into a full agenda marked most prominently by a spirited assessment of the Guild's bargaining program, which hasn't been comprehensively reviewed since the mid-'80s.

"When we constructed our merger with CWA, we made sure the Guild continued total discretion over its collective bargaining program," Foley explained. "We did that because, more than paper, our contracts are our identity. In terms of where our union is and where it will be in the future, the revamping of our collective bargaining program is the most important task this council can undertake."

Also high on the council's agenda was a discussion of its own role, sparked by a motion offered by Amber at the sector conference last August. While acknowledging that their role is diminished because of the CWA merger, council members affirmed their determination to play an active part in the union's governance and stressed a need for more frequent and comprehensive communications with TNG-CWA headquarters.

The council also approved, by a vote of 15-1—the single nay cast by Regional Vice President Tom Thibeault—a report to the next sector conference that reads, in pertinent part:

executive council discussion on the bargaining program. (See story at bottom of this page for details.)

"There was a consensus among EC members that the union's top executives and the EC must improve communications between each other—in both directions—and that EC members should be more active.

"EC members said they wanted more—and more timely—information to make the EC function more effectively both as a policy-making and a working board.

"Recognizing the board's evolving role, the EC will continue to analyze the efficacy of board policies to meet the Guild's mission."

Struck from the report, by a vote of 12-4, were two sections that more clearly defined EC members'

roles. One stressed that council members "should play a more active role as a go-between with headquarters and the rank and file." The other read, in its entirety:

"The board said EC members should take a more active role between meetings, such as acting as Headquarters' eyes and ears at the grassroots, spreading the Guild message to the new generation of media workers, implementing EC policies on local and regional levels, and expanding participation in CWA district activities."

The four EC members voting to retain the excised passages were Thibeault, Foley, At-Large Vice President Larry Hatfield and International Chairperson Carol Rothman.

The only other roll-call vote of Guild-wide importance concerned a recommendation from the finance and administration committee that a total of \$110,000 be sent to support the locked-out workers in Detroit. While generally supportive of the motion, several council members objected to language that directed Secretary-Treasurer Bernie Lunzer to tell the local the EC "expects" payment of delinquent per capita dues. On a vote of 8-5, the word "expects" was changed to "demands." Voting in the minority were Thibeault, Amber, At-Large Vice President Percy Hatfield and Regional Vice Presidents Jane Snow and Lela Garlington.

Other business, conducted both in committee meetings and in full session, included the following:

- The executive council, on recommendation of the finance and administration committee, agreed to submit a TNG-CWA budget of \$3,982,979 to CWA. It also directed Lunzer to begin the process of placing The Newspaper Guild Building in Silver Spring, Md. on the market.

'There have to be over-riding principles'

Few TNG-CWA elements are as important to creating an international union as the Guild's bargaining program. And few, as the executive council again underscored, are as misunderstood or as often honored mostly in the breach.

"There are many provisions that my local wouldn't even consider putting on the table—we don't want them," said Western Canadian Vice President Scott Edmonds, complaining about the program's "phone book approach to bargaining."

Added Larry Hatfield, an at-large vice president from Northern California: "We all know the status quo is doing us damage with our membership—they think we're being silly and wasting time. And we're damaging our credibility with managements, because they know we're not going to leave a lot of these things on the table."

Last extensively revised more than a decade ago, the collective bargaining program has been tweaked by various conventions over the past 60 years and has evolved into an exhaustive set of proposals that all locals are supposed to present in their contract negotiations. The purpose of the program has been to provide a uniform structure for bargaining contracts throughout the Guild—but the reality sometimes has been

too grand in its reach.

"The program has allowed both large and small locals to work for and achieve gains in bargaining and establish standards of working conditions or benefits for the industry," explained Field Operations Director Eric Geist. "Unfortunately, the program also became too ambitious and not reflective enough of today's bargaining climate."

Other concerns were more philosophical. While council members readily agreed, for example, that every international union has a legitimate interest in establishing workplace standards, some fretted that it's inherently contradictory to have a national bargaining program for locals that exist to reflect local concerns in local workplaces. Yet as pointed out by Connie Knox, another at-large vice president and chair of the council's collective bargaining committee, the international union is the source of strike benefits, "so there have to be some over-riding principles or program or whatever."

For those reasons, the executive council concluded during its week-long marathon, some sort of bargaining program is essential—but the existing one is overly detailed and too inflexible and in need of substantial revision. A more useful document, EC members reasoned, would comprise a short

list of required proposals that every local should strive to secure, together with a broad-based set of bargaining principles and recommendations for additional benefits and protections.

Some of the bedrock provisions were immediately obvious—those that Hatfield described as necessary "for the maintenance and survival of the union," including dues check-off, job security, jurisdiction, and grievance and arbitration clauses. Others were less so, if only because they don't involve the kinds of pocketbook issues most people think about when they hear the word "contract."

"We're not in business," emphasized Arnold Amber, director of TNG Canada. "We stand for things. So things that are the heart of our union should be at the heart of our contracts, too." Among those bedrock principles, he suggested, are gender equality and journalistic standards of truth and accuracy.

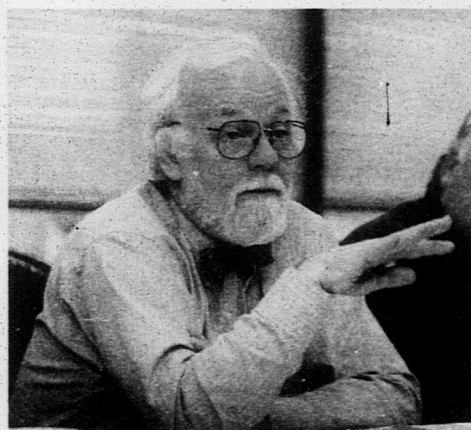
In the end, the council agreed to appoint a 12-person task force to review the bargaining program and propose changes this fall, with final recommendations to be presented for adoption by convention delegates in the summer of 2000. Task force members will include local staffers and rank-and-file Guild members with leadership experience in bargaining.

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Hands on . . .

Talking with more than just their mouths, TNG-CWA officers and staffers discuss some of the issues confronting the Guild. From left and going clockwise: Marian Needham; Carol Rothman and Bernie Lunzer; Scott Edmonds; Russ Cain; Jane Snow and Arnold Amber; and Jack Norman.

ALL PHOTOS ON PAGES 4 AND 5 BY BILL BURKE/WASHINGTON-BALTIMORE GUILD



Continued from page 4

In addition, the finance and administration committee recommended that U.S. locals with union security provisions be reminded to provide TNG-CWA with new-hire information on a monthly basis, and that all locals be directed to make contact with new hires within 30 days of employment.

- The mobilization committee recommended that locals renew their commitment to the 1993 strategic plan, which had as one of its goals a doubling of active members. The committee also urged each local to establish a mobilization structure and plan.

- The organizing committee recommended that each local work with TNG-CWA to establish an organizing program, as is required by both the Guild and CWA constitutions. It also recommended that locals identify members to attend organizing training programs; participate in the CWA Organizing Network, which entitles them to apply for additional funding for organizing projects; and that they use the \$1 per member per month that has been set aside since July, 1997 solely for organizing.

- The collective bargaining

committee, as reported on page 4, secured the executive council's support to create a task force to review the bargaining program.

- The research, information and technology committee recommended that locals use safety and health issues as organizing tools. It also urged locals to review their budgets and make provisions for sending at least one member to the CWA's Occupational Safety and Health conference in the fall. And it encouraged locals to work with TNG-CWA to become eligible to file shareholder resolutions. Locals that join the shareholder fray are encouraged to coordinate with the national office to avoid duplicated efforts and to enhance the chances such resolutions will survive the inevitable company challenges.

Other meeting notes . . .

Delegates attending the Guild's Sector Conference in Ottawa, April 29, 30 and May 1 and 2, may be eligible for a subsidy of up to \$200. First preference will be given to locals sending only one delegate, who must be willing to share a room. For further information, contact TNG-CWA Secretary-Treasurer Bernie Lunzer at TNG headquarters.

- The communications committee recommended that the sector conference discuss the desirability of accepting paid advertising in The Guild Reporter, such revenues to be earmarked for the newspaper and to underwrite other publications.

- The human rights committee, stressing the need for "a more aggressive approach" to human rights issues, urged locals to take greater advantage of available TNG-CWA resources, advice and programs. It also recommended that locals plan now to participate in at least one human rights program each year, as well as consider sponsoring such programs of their own.

A committee recommendation to provide stipends for local dele-

gates to attend such programs foundered, however, over the size of TNG-CWA's financial commitment, with suggested proposals ranging from \$5,700 to \$40,500. In the end, council members directed their human rights and

finance committees to submit new subsidy proposals prior to the sector conference in Ottawa.

Finally, the council meeting served as the occasion for several members to announce their re-election campaigns. Both Foley and Lunzer said they would seek another term as TNG-CWA's top officers, while Percy Hatfield said he would seek re-election as one of two at-large vice presidents. Two other officers previously declared their intentions, with At-Large Vice President Lesley Phillips announcing she is running for a regional vice president seat and Thibeault saying he will step down.

Nominations for all offices will be made at the sector conference in Ottawa, at which time the election date will be set.

Exec calls for public impeachment debate

Meeting in the shadow of the impeachment trial of Bill Clinton, the TNG-CWA executive council called on the U.S. Senate to step up to the plate and conduct its deliberations "in the full glare of media and public scrutiny."

The full text of its resolution follows:

As the U.S. Senate begins one of the most important events in American history—the impeachment trial of the President—it intends to conduct major portions of its deliberations behind closed doors.

The Newspaper Guild-Communications Workers of America vigorously opposes these closed-door proceedings and urges the Senate to conduct its deliberations in the full glare of

media and public scrutiny—no matter how tawdry and embarrassing that may be.

TNG-CWA, representing 35,000 media workers in the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico, urges the Senate to heed the advice of Senators Tom Harkin and Paul Wellstone and keep its proceedings open rather than secret. The people's business is the people's business—particularly when it involves the possible removal of an elected president.

America's democracy can survive these proceedings, no matter what the outcome. But when the people's business begins to be done in secret, that democracy is threatened and Americans are cheated of one of their most fundamental rights—to know what their representatives are doing and to hold them accountable.

When business overwhelms journalism

By John Ripton

Newspapers, like schools, are one of the fundamental institutions responsible for illuminating the issues facing us. The health and progress of civil society depend on responsive, investigative local journalism as much as on good schools staffed by dedicated teachers. That's why I've been a member of a community editorial board of a local newspaper for the past three years.

But I am concerned that preoccupation with advertising revenues is turning local newspapers into mere sales circulars. And I am particularly concerned that national newspaper chains own five of the six largest dailies in my home state of New Jersey. Such ownership concentration should raise the hackles of any newspaper person worth his or her salt, and particularly so when the local papers are bought by the Gannett chain.

In New Jersey, Gannett owns The Courier-News in Bridgewater, and the Daily Record in Parsippany, each serving as it's region's sole local daily, as well as The Vineland Journal, The Camden Courier-Post, the Asbury Park Press, the Home News Tribune and the Ocean County Observer, as well as several weeklies. Aside from the questions raised by such ownership concentration, further concerns arise from the very nature of Gannett itself. As described by Richard McCord in his book, *Chain Gang*, this is a company with a long history of nefarious business practices, many of which are inimical to a competitive marketplace of editorial voices.

At the same time that Gannett uses its economic leverage in the community and pressure on its employees to increase earnings, it refuses to share those profits with either the community or with its own workforce. The strike and lock-out at the Detroit News underscore the point, as Gannett seems willing even to kill the newspaper rather than modify its formula for downsizing, outsourcing and

aggressive re-engineering.

Worse yet, the Detroit strike illustrates management's changed perspective when a newspaper simply becomes one investment in a portfolio of many. In today's investor-driven world, a company like Gannett expects profit margins of 20% or more at all its properties, even though that's the kind of

TNG-CWA's web page for monitoring New Jersey's media may be seen at: njmediawatch.com

return formerly enjoyed only at small-town, nonunion newspapers. Indeed, the bar there has been raised even higher: as McCord reports, Gannett was dissatisfied with 24% returns from one of its southwestern communi-

ty newspapers and demanded profits of 36%-38%.

While such expectations may seem rapacious to some, Gannett and other chains have managed to go an extra step by shaping news coverage of themselves in a flattering way. John Lippert, a former labor writer for the Detroit Free Press and member of TNG-CWA Local 22, reports

that local radio and television stories of the Detroit lockout "mimic the newspapers' anti-union rhetoric."

This past summer, Gannett demonstrated what can happen to news reporting when corporate business imperatives overwhelm journalism. An otherwise excellent piece of investigative journalism at the Gannett-owned Enquirer in Cincinnati, detailing Chiquita's alleged human rights abuses in Central America, was supported by the company's internal voice mail messages—which, unfortunately, had been obtained under questionable circumstances. When Chiquita responded to the series by threatening to sue, Gannett simply fired the reporter, agreed to pay Chiquita millions of dollars and utterly failed to defend the undisputed authenticity of the reporter's findings.

Given all of the above, reporters and other workers at Gannett-owned newspapers in New Jersey—and elsewhere—certainly have reason for concern. But we, as newspaper readers, also should be worried.

The good news is that if we are vigilant and active we can pressure newspapers owned by Gannett and other corporations to live up to their public trust. That's why a New Jersey media watch team recently established a web page to allow the state's residents to communicate with each other and with their newspapers about how the media are covering the news in our communities.

We need to make our communities a good place for our children to learn how to be informed citizens and for all of us to act as informed citizens. We must be vigilant against efforts to pit us against each other for jobs. And we must ensure that in their relentless pursuit of profits, Gannett and other corporations do not rob us of one of the pillars of our freedom, a free press.

[John Ripton is history department chairperson at Gill St. Bernard's School in Gladstone, N.J.]

In the past year, three corporate media outlets, under pressure from powerful corporate/government officials, have fired journalists for writing critical stories about the powerful in the United States. These terminations have sent a chilling message to journalists throughout the U.S.: If you attack the sacred cows of powerful corporate/governmental institutions, your career is on the line.

The most infamous case of the three is the retraction by CNN of the story about the U.S. military's use of sarin gas in 1970 in Laos during the Vietnam War. CNN journalists April Oliver and Jack Smith, after an eight-month investigation, reported on CNN June 7th and later in Time magazine that sarin gas was used in operation Tailwind in Laos and that American defectors were targeted. The story was

Selling out journalists for corporate profits . . .

based on eyewitness accounts and high military command collaboration.

Under tremendous pressure from the Pentagon, Henry Kissinger, Colin Powell and Richard Helms, CNN and Time retracted the story by saying that "the allegations about the use of nerve gas and the killing of defectors are not supported by the evidence." Columnists and pundits across the nation have attacked Oliver and Smith for their alleged unprofessional journalistic actions. Newsweek even wrote on July 20th that the allegations were "proven wrong." There is a big difference between being "proven wrong" and not having provided the new standard of "proof beyond a reasonable doubt," yet both Oliver and Smith were fired by CNN. . . .

What is troubling about this issue is the speed with which CNN/Time withdrew their support for Oliver and Smith, after having fully approved the release of the story only weeks before. Smith feels that CNN capitulated to the Pentagon's threat to lock them out of future military stories.

In a similar case of pressure by powerful institutions, Fox TV news reporters Steve Wilson and Jane Akre were fired by WTVT in Tampa for refusing to change their story on the dangers of Monsanto's

bovine growth hormone (rBGH) in the milk supply in Florida. New scientific research has shown that rBGH, when injected into cows to expand milk production, results in the increase of insulin-like growth factor IGF-I in milk. IGF-I has been linked to breast and prostate cancer. . . . Monsanto put pressure on Fox Television in New York, WTVT's parent company, threatening dire consequences if the story ran. When Wilson and Akre refused to say the milk was unchanged, they were fired by the Fox station general manager, who was quoted as saying, "We paid \$3 billion for these stations; we'll decide what the news is. The news is what we tell you it is." . . .

Mike Gallagher and Cameron McWhirter with the Cincinnati Enquirer, a Gannett-owned newspaper, worked for over a year on a story that exposed Chiquita Brand International's less than ethical practices. They exposed Chiquita's use of U.S. banned pesticides in Latin America that threatened workers' health, involvement in a Colombian bribery scheme, and the smuggling of cocaine on Chiquita ships. In May of 1998, the Enquirer ran an 18-page special section that was a potential Pulitzer nominee. However, based on the assertion by Chiquita that Mike Gallagher illegally obtained internal corporate voice mail recordings, the Enquirer retracted the entire series and fired Gallagher. . . .

These recent firings, each involving critical stories about corporate/government institutions, are cases of major media succumbing to pressures from powerful forces to retract or not report seemingly well documented stories. The rapidity of retraction or the refusal to broadcast seems to give first priority to bottom-line fiscal considerations.

In each case, the media failed to provide support needed to further document the story and instead quickly made decisions to terminate the journalists. The public's right to know was seemingly left out of the decision-making process, and journalists around the U.S. have surely taken note that writing stories about the powerful is risky business.

[Excerpted from a commentary by Peter Phillips, director of Project Censored, which is based at Sonoma State University.]

Code of ethics needed for employer relations

By Ed Bishop

St. Louis Journalism Review

At the turn of this century approximately 1,500 daily newspapers were operating in the United States. They were owned by approximately 1,400 individuals or families. In other words, there was roughly one owner for every newspaper, with a company owning two or three papers here and there.

Today, there are approximately 1,400 dailies in the country. Half of them are owned by fewer than 10 corporations; 80 percent are owned by fewer than 20 corporations. Almost all of these companies own television and radio news outlets as well. And some of the giant corporations are so big

that their media holdings are only a small part of their overall business. The three major non-cable television networks, ABC, CBS and NBC, are all owned by corporations whose main business is not news.

This concentration of ownership of the news business by giant corporations, and especially by conglomerates with business priorities other than journalism, challenges journalists with new and complicated ethical problems.

For example: General Electric owns NBC News. General Electric's main source of profit comes from the sale of airplane engines for jet fighters. So, is it in the best financial interests of the company and its major shareholders for its subsidiary, NBC News, to portray

the world as hostile and war-like, where nations must arm themselves; or is it in General Electric's best financial interest for NBC News to emphasize the success of peace talks and international settlements around the world?

Those are the questions that everyone at NBC News, from the lowest intern to Tom Brokaw, to the president of the news division, must ask themselves every time NBC reports on international news.

The same kinds of questions are raised even in companies that only own newspapers. Let's say there's another jump in the cost of newsprint and let's say that the corporate bosses decide to cut one night reporter and one columnist at each of their newspapers in

order to keep their profits from falling from 25 percent to 24 percent. Do editors tell their readers that services are being cut to maintain quarterly profits for their shareholders? If some other company in town did the same thing it would certainly be reported.

And these are only a couple of examples of the enormously complex new ethical universe that journalists operate in today.

But journalists currently have almost no ethical guidelines on which to base their decisions when it comes to this new media universe. Ethical codes, like that of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), are still, with a few exceptions, based in the media structure of 1900. They concentrate on ethical problems about the

relationship between journalists and politicians, between journalists and the public, and about questions of cultural diversity, technological innovations and gender issues.

All important. But nowhere does the SPJ Code of Ethics even mention the relationship between journalists and their corporate bosses in distant headquarters who often see their newspapers as just another manufactured product, or worse, see the news divisions of their conglomerates as simply support groups for their main business, whatever that may be. . . .

[Excerpted from the Dec.-Jan. issue of The St. Louis Journalism Review. Ed Bishop is SJR's editor.]



LOOKING AHEAD

Leadership the Tao way

By Bernie Lunzer, Secretary-Treasurer

We know that a stronger Guild gets us better contracts and allows us to organize more workers. But where do we start? I think we begin by examining our role as leaders in the union.

Whether you're a steward, a committee member, an officer or a paid staffer, your approach to leadership is what makes the difference in whether the union gets by or gets stronger.

You became recognized as a leader by your ability to get things done. You were the one who often figured out how to take control of situations and solve problems. Leaders have to prove themselves. But now you've been chosen to lead and you recognize that doing everything yourself is neither practical nor desirable.

It's ironic that established leaders have to learn to step back. The first instinct is to continue to lead in the manner it took to establish leadership. After all, people look to you to fix the problems. But continuing to do for others can actually weaken a local, even though in the short term the approach works. But all organizations, and especially unions, benefit from a leader who reaches out and includes others.

One of the most helpful books I've read on the subject is "The Tao of Leadership," by John Heider. In it, Heider interprets and translates the ancient Chinese text, the "Tao Te Ching." This book was written by Lao-tzu in the fifth century B.C., and is the most widely translated book in world literature, after the Bible. The "Tao" philosophy on leadership is perhaps best summed up in a translation by Stephen Mitchell:

*When the Master governs, the people are hardly aware that he exists.
Next best is a leader who is loved.
Next, one who is feared.
The worst is one who is despised.*

*If you don't trust the people,
you make them untrustworthy.*

*The Master doesn't talk, he acts.
When his work is done,
the people say, "Amazing:
we did it, all by ourselves!"*

How we lead is very important. Accepting responsibility for the process and not controlling the results is a critical step in becoming a good leader.

We need to make the union a community, not a contract. Members, and potential members, should know that we genuinely care about them and we're not just there to file grievances. I once heard a steward explain to a new member that paying dues was like buying "Blue-Cross for job security." He explained that you may never need it, but it's there if you do. I was horrified at this definition of a union and realized I had more work to do to make the union vital.

For example, as leaders we have to do more than post notices of meetings. We need to invite people to meetings by talking to them one-on-one. We need to let them know that they are needed at the meetings.

Do you hold meetings close to the worker? Many locals have struggled to increase attendance at membership meetings by providing food and even door prizes. That doesn't work, and it shouldn't be the goal.

provide funds and resources only to political candidates who publicly support the right of workers to organize and who will "take a stand against employers who violate our laws and interfere with a worker's free choice to join a union."

There is no indication that the AFL-CIO sought such a pledge from the candidates it endorsed. In fact, if not in appearance, organized labor had hardly any input in the Democratic Party strategy, except to pay it uncritical allegiance.

In the past 20 years, the Democrats, even when they controlled both houses of Congress and the White House (as they did under President Carter in 1976-80 and under President Clinton in 1992-94), made no serious effort to insure that workers can exercise their legal right to join a union without fear of intimidation and loss of job. Nor have they shown any interest in legislating a ban on striker replacements.

With the opening of the 106th Congress in January, it will take a tremendous effort by union members to get the Democrats and moderate Republicans who were elected with labor's all-out support to enact pro-worker legislation that is long overdue.

[Reprinted from the November/December issue of *The Labor Educator*, an unaffiliated newsletter.]

WHAT IF: POLITICAL ELECTIONS WERE RUN LIKE UNION ELECTIONS?

NO. 1

INSTEAD OF ELECTING CONGRESSMEN WE'D FIRST HAVE TO VOTE WHETHER TO HAVE A CONGRESS AT ALL...

AND THE BOSSES COULD USE ALL KINDS OF SLEAZY TACTICS URGING US TO VOTE NO!



Instead, reach out by having smaller meetings in convenient locations based on smaller work groups. Talk about issues that are pertinent to the group and people will show up. They might even surprise you by attending the next membership meeting.

Do you make decisions in isolation? I've talked with frustrated leaders who are being weighed down by large decisions. If you're lying awake worried about making the right decision, you've skipped the important part of the process. Share decision-making through committees or core groups of leaders. Again, if a union is what it should be, decisions should be made as broadly as is practicable. Some locals have regular grievance committees that review workplace issues and decide whether a matter goes to arbitration. Better decisions are made this way, and these committee members who know their contracts often end up making contributions on the bargaining committee.

Do you make training opportunities available in the local? Many communities have excellent resources, sometimes through the local college or university. The Guild offers a Guild-wide training program every February and subsidizes small locals. Identifying new members to take training is another way to share decision-making. Training can give someone the confidence he or she needs to move from member to activist.

Do you establish a mobilizing structure before bargaining a contract? Many locals mobilize around issues and use the flow of bargaining to determine when to reach out to members. In recent years we've given high priority to establishing a plan and structure well before bargaining begins. With the help of the CWA, we've recognized that mobilizing has to focus on the structure and not just be based on the issue of the day. Like the "Tao" model, pay attention to the process and let the issues come later.

These are just a few ideas, and I'll never suggest that getting others involved is easy or that there is one correct way to do it. People will still call on you to solve problems, and you do have to take responsibility if others choose not to. But your commitment to a style of leadership that recognizes the importance of inclusion is critical. It is a cliché to say that a union draws its strength from its members, but it is true. When we're at our best we work as a vital network of individuals, all drawn together to achieve a common goal. Our ability to reach out and draw others into the struggle is what makes us a union.

The Guild has many challenges before it in the coming years. I am proud of our union, and have been honored to serve it. But I recognize that we need to make more

of an effort to reach out to our members, to other media industry workers, to fellow unionists and to the community. There are a lot of good reasons why we can't always find the time. We become burdened with contract enforcement or bargaining or are under attack by our employer. But until we find the time, our union will only get by—it won't grow. Our merger with CWA was predicated on the belief that getting by is not enough. We now have access to resources that allow us to reach beyond our traditional parameters. We can play a critical role in expanding unionism in the information industry as it expands and changes.

I intend to foster a continuing dialogue on leadership in the Guild, because I believe our strength as a union starts with a commitment to a leadership style that allows a free flow of ideas. I hope that we can share ideas that have worked for your local and I'm seeking your help in this dialogue. We need to be able to reach out to other leaders, activists and members as a regular part of what we do. Then we need to start the important work of reaching beyond our union. Our proper role is to assist all information workers in their pursuit of meaningful jobs with just working conditions.

Or as translated by Heider:

The wise leader does not intervene unnecessarily. The leader's presence is felt, but often the group runs itself.

Lesser leaders do a lot, say a lot, have followers and form cults.

Even worse ones use fear to energize the group and force to overcome resistance.

Only the most dreadful leaders have bad reputations.

Remember that you are facilitating another person's process. It is not your process. Do not intrude. Do not control. Do not force your own needs and insights into the foreground.

If you do not trust a person's process, that person will not trust you.

Imagine that you are a midwife; you are assisting at someone else's birth. Do good without show or fuss. Facilitate what is happening rather than what you think ought to be happening. If you must take the lead, lead so that the mother is helped yet remains free and in charge.

When the baby is born, the mother will rightly say: "We did it ourselves!"

[Other recommended reading:

Tao Te Ching, a new English version, by Stephen Mitchell; Harper Collins

Real Power; Business Lessons from the Tao Te Ching, by James A. Autry, and Stephen Mitchell; Riverhead Books]

Labor gave political support too cheaply

By Harry Kelber
Editor, The Labor Educator

While it played a tremendous role in electing Democratic candidates in key congressional races, the AFL-CIO failed to campaign, as it had promised, on many issues affecting the nation's working families.

In tandem with Democratic Party campaign strategy, the labor federation limited its efforts to three issues, all of them important and popular: Social Security, education and health care. Its 14 television ads dealt solely with these issues, as did virtually all of the literature it distributed.

While Democratic candidates gladly accepted donations and volunteer workers from unions, they said little, if anything, about many issues that affect the nation's working people. They were silent on corporate illegal firing of pro-union workers; the use of striker replacements; the loss of good-paying U.S. jobs in the global economy; the urgent need for more health and safety inspectors; pay equity for women workers; a fair tax system and other issues that are part of the AFL-CIO legislative agenda.

It will be recalled that at its 1997 convention, the AFL-CIO vowed that it would

Amazon.com: high-tech sweatshop

The rocketing growth at Amazon.com has left some employees of the Seattle-based Internet retailer looking for the pod bay door.

Workers say they have borne the brunt of the growing pains caused by the Internet retailer's phenomenal expansion. Customer service representatives (CS reps) express increasing frustration caused by the lack of a clear career path, rising job expectations, a top-down management style and a compensation scale that doesn't reflect their skills. And while such complaints aren't new, longer holiday hours have brought such issues to a head.

Founded just three years ago, Amazon.com has grown to nearly 1,600 employees—including more than 400 customer service workers—according to employee estimates in early December. Compare those estimates to the 667 employees Amazon reported in its 1997 annual report and the company's growth rate—and commensurate growing pains—become obvious. Unfortunately, management often cites such growth as an excuse for the company's problems.

"At some point, you quit being a start-up company and you start being a company with a responsibility to your employees and your community," says one worker who asked that WashTech not use his name (we'll call him Bill). "It's a great place to work," adds Bill, one of several Amazon employees who recently contacted WashTech to discuss workplace issues, "but it could be better."

Customer service often is cited as one of the most important attributes that distinguishes Amazon from other online retailers, thanks to the quality of its workforce. Indeed, Amazon's investor relations literature boasts of its stringent hiring standards, including a requirement that all employees have college degrees. As one worker noted, Amazon employees are "bookstore people."

Adds another—we'll call him Fred—"People are the best part of what Amazon is all about."

But while many CS reps in the first two tiers hold advanced degrees, their pay—at \$10 and \$11 an hour—reflects that of a less skilled and less educated workforce. Moreover, CS reps at the second level are expected to put in at least 10 hours of overtime weekly. Some Amazon workers believe low hourly wages are part of a strategy to make mandatory overtime more appealing.

Their advanced education notwithstanding, CS reps at Amazon perform the same kinds of routine tasks that are done by their counterparts at any catalogue retailer: answering questions, canceling orders, taking credit card numbers over the telephone and tracking down problem shipments. Many persevere anyway, in the hope their jobs will lead to something better, such as editorial work, but for the most the promise will prove illusory.

Instead, the CS reps toil in the e-mail equivalent of a factory floor. In keeping with software industry culture, Amazon employees work in a deceptively relaxed environment, without a dress code and with apparent control over their own schedules. Those who work weekends, however must wear a coat and hat because the two buildings that house CS are not heated on Saturdays and Sundays. And because of Amazon's incredibly fast growth, employees sometimes get jammed four to a cube, packed so tightly they can barely push their chairs back without bumping their co-workers.

Cramped quarters or not, the CS reps must meet weekly quotas for answering e-mail messages—a minimum of 500 per week for workers on the second tier—and can be put on probation and be denied overtime if they fail. That's no small matter for those who need the overtime to make ends meet.

Meanwhile, other job pressures are growing. Because other departments at Amazon also have been nearly overwhelmed by a customer base of 4.5 million,

CS reps have fewer internal resources on which to draw. Amazon eliminated its internal technical help line, for example, and told customer service workers simply to solve most billing problems on their own.

"It's amazing how much stuff I have around my computer and bookmarked on my browser [to do my job]," Fred noted.

All customer service workers start as temps, undergoing extensive training on the numerous tools and UNIX commands they must know. After one month on the job, under the watchful eye of supervisors and a peer mentor (a volunteer position for which the mentors receive no extra pay), the company may decide to hire them full-time.

In return for their labor, Amazon employees receive medical, dental and vision coverage, as well as paid vacations and personal days. Currently, the company grants new CS reps about 100 shares of Amazon stock that vest over five years—or longer than the company has already been in existence. This also contrasts with an earlier practice, when new reps received far greater numbers of options and were granted additional options on moving from Tier I to Tier II, another practice that is no longer observed. And as Amazon.com matures and the stock price continues to soar (recently approaching \$300 a share), the number of shares granted at the time of hire shrinks.

Breaking out of the CS factory floor is difficult, although some manage, but the workers to whom we spoke said they really didn't know how such escapes were managed. "I think there needs to be a clear definition of a career path," says Bill. "Where you go after [CS rep] is unclear. Who helps you get there is unclear."

All these problems are compounded by inexperienced managers and poor communications. Many customer service managers worked their way up in the company and consequently lack outside managerial experience. "I've become disheartened over the

lack of managerial experience in new managers," Fred says. "Many of them don't know how to pass on information in a way that won't feel threatening."

Instead, managers tend to announce workplace changes after the fact, rather than tell employees a major decision is in the works. Communication comes down from the top, like commandments carved in stone, squeezing mid-level managers between the

"I've become disheartened over the lack of experience in new managers. Many don't know how to pass on information in a way that won't feel threatening."

company's sometimes imperious leadership style and its restive employees. The upshot is a workforce with little control over working conditions and limited opportunity to anticipate change in a rapidly changing environment. "They need to get better buy-in," Bill says of the company. "Workers need to be a part of the big picture."

Some grassroots efforts at change have been attempted, although with little success. Management's mantra, for example, has been

that employees who see a problem should offer a solution—but when workers suggested creating a customer service advisory committee, to be elected from the 12 or so quads (groups of 15-20 people), management's response was to announce it would handpick the advisory panel's members.

The irony is that despite all this frustration, the Amazon workers who spoke to WashTech say that for the most part they enjoy their jobs and like working at the company. Some plan to make their careers there; others hope to cash-out their stock options and leave when they can. Yet all agree that they would like to see a more open relationship between management and CS reps, including stronger lines of communication.

Amazon, say its employees, is doing things commercially that no one had ever done before. Too bad it isn't as innovative and revolutionary in the way it manages its workforce.

[Adapted from the WashTech web page, at www.washtech.org]

THE GUILD Reporter

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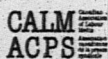
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Western District Council,
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TNG-CWA new officers' training, Feb. 12-15,
George Meany Center

Midwest, Great Lakes,
Southern tri-council meeting,
Feb. 20-21, Minneapolis

New England District Council,
Feb. 27-28, Providence, R.I.

Jobs with Justice annual
meeting, Feb. 26-28,
Louisville, Kentucky

TNG-CWA sector conference,
April 29-May 2, 1999, Ottawa

Int'l Federation of Journalists,
May 13-17, Boston

Unity '99, July 7-11,
Seattle Convention Center

CWA Nat'l Convention,
July 12-14, Miami

CWA Equity Conference,
Sept. 8-12, New Orleans

Judge blasts Microsoft

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hear that this was done by somebody without the advice of counsel, and upon reflection of counsel it was realized that it might be charitably described as ill-advised."

Raising his voice to cut off a reply, Coughenour added: "What was the highest level within the company at which a management person passed on the decision to ask for this contractual provision? And before you respond, let me suggest there might be Fifth Amendment implications" regarding self-incrimination.

To which a chastened Oswald replied, "I think I can fairly say I don't know exactly what level it is." Following the abbreviated hearing, company spokesman Dan Leach said Microsoft "always follows the direction of the court," but added that to his knowledge no worker had "raised concerns about these contracts."

The current campaign to have long-term temps execute 'new' TPA forms is particularly offensive," the plaintiffs' attorneys argued before the court. "It appears to be an attempt to evade both the mandate of the Ninth Circuit and the District Court's December 3, 1998 ruling."

Coughenour apparently agreed. "I have to tell you, counsel, that I've thought a lot about what I might hear today from Microsoft's attorneys," he told company lawyer Jim Oswald. "I thought maybe I would