

On the march in
Eugene, Ore.
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PHOTO BY STEVEN GEORGES/LOS ANGELES NEWSPAPER GUILD

Hitting the bricks in Long Beach

While several dozen Guild members hold a rally outside the Press-Telegram in Long Beach, Cal., others deliver a petition to publisher Jack Findley signed by 79% of the unit supporting the union's bargaining proposal for a union shop. Although contract negotiations started 19 months ago and both sides agree that most other issues have been resolved, Findley repeatedly has rejected union security and dues check-off proposals as coercive. "I want to assure you that I have no intention of succumbing to the selfish demands of the Guild," Findley wrote to employees in mid-September.

But as Press-Telegram employees noted, "We are the union." Dismissing Findley's posturing, petition signers noted that the law does not permit forced union membership and that employees who don't want to use a check-off system can choose other forms of dues pay-

ment. "We believe the Guild's proposals for a union shop and dues check-off are neither 'selfish' nor 'ridiculous' on our part and we fully support our bargaining team's position on those issues," petition signers averred.

The growing militance of Press-Telegram employees comes nearly two years after William Dean Singleton bought the paper and promptly slashed the payroll—eliminating approximately 200 jobs—slashed wages, raised health insurance co-payments and eliminated sick leave, pensions and other benefits.

But while the staff has had a 50% turnover since the sale, says TNG-CWA rep Bruce Meachum, new employees have been quickly convinced that the only way they'll improve their situation is by sticking together. "There aren't many workplaces in this country where 80% of the people will sign up for a union shop—that's incredible," he marvels.

Gannett plan on ice

Star-Bulletin gets reprieve as state AG sues, Justice Department investigates

Memo to headline writers: the future is beyond your grasp.

Consider the Editor&Publisher headline, "Honolulu paper to fold," or the even more precise prediction by the National Newspaper Association, "Honolulu Star-Bulletin closing by Oct." Both stories ran in response to a September announcement by Liberty Newspapers that it was terminating its Joint Operating Agreement with Gannett and would stop publishing the Star-Bulletin on Oct. 30.

Weil, not quite.

Public response to the announcement—especially when it was disclosed that Gannett, publisher of the competing Honolulu Advertiser, is paying Liberty to close—was fast and furious, from the man on the street to Hawaii Governor Ben Cayetano. The sweetheart deal is a "perversion" of the 1970 Newspaper Preservation Act, Cayetano charged.

But when Hawaii Attorney

General Earl Anzai sought a temporary restraining order to block the closure, he was outdone by U.S. District Judge Alan Kay, who issued a more stringent preliminary injunction. Noting that Liberty had made no effort to sell the Star-Bulletin, in effect selling a monopoly to Gannett, Kay added that closing the Star-Bulletin would be counter to the public interest and "virtually impossible" to reverse.

News of the federal court ruling—the first time a federal judge has blocked a newspaper from buying out its JOA partner—was hailed by TNG-CWA officers as a triumph for free press advocates (see column, page 7). "This is a real coup against large media companies," exclaimed TNG-CWA President Linda Foley. "Obviously we still have a long fight ahead of us, but this is a small victory along the way."

While Gannett and Liberty are

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Interpreters: Si, oui and jawohl to TNG-CWA

By Stephanie Moore
Bay Area Court Interpreters

In an overwhelming show of support for union representation, 93% of the voting membership of the San Francisco-based Bay Area Court Interpreters' Association (BACI) cast their ballots in favor of affiliating with TNG-CWA. The election adds 200 foreign- and sign-language interpreters to the union's rolls, one of the largest unionized interpreter groups in the country.

The affiliation agreement was signed earlier this month, making BACI a unit of the Northern California Media Guild.

"The need for interpreter services is growing and the profession is developing at a fast pace," said BACI chairman M. Paz Perry in explaining the group's enthusiastic endorsement of the Guild. "Interpreters have realized that to be serious participants in having control over our profession we must ally ourselves with a union, and we are happy that union is TNG-CWA."

"We are delighted that BACI is joining TNG-CWA," responded Eric Geist, the Guild's director of field operations and key negotiator in the affiliation talks. "BACI members' efforts over the past four years represent and exemplify

the two areas—-independent contractors and interpreters/translators—that TNG-CWA sees as a growing group of workers in need of a collective voice."

With the addition of BACI, TNG-CWA is quickly becoming a leader in representing interpreters and translators. Its Translators and Interpreters Guild Local 32100 already counts members nationwide, including a court interpreter unit in Boston, while Cook County court interpreters in Illinois are organizing for a representation vote.

BACI was formed almost four years ago to advocate on behalf of Bay Area court interpreters who had gone almost 10 years without

a raise. The battle over wages culminated last year, when BACI staged two walkouts—the first ever for interpreters in California—virtually shutting down interpreted proceedings in Bay Area courts. TNG-CWA representatives joined BACI in walking the picket lines.

Finally, after months of intense lobbying in Sacramento, BACI's efforts bore fruit and interpreters statewide received raises of between 7% and 50%, with Bay Area interpreters' fees rising 35%.

Although BACI's most prominent success has been the wage increase, it also has fought consistently for better working condi-

tions and high professional standards for interpreters. Moreover, with its membership now extending throughout northern California, BACI has developed into a national leader on educating and organizing interpreters around labor issues.

The increasingly multilingual nature of the United States has spurred growing demand for interpreters, with courts nationwide among their largest employers. California courts, for example, require interpretation in more than 100 languages every day. Yet most interpreters are classified as independent contractors and denied many workplace rights, resulting in relatively low pay, no benefits or job security and demeaning work conditions which undermine their professional standards.

BACI's affiliation with TNG-CWA represents a powerful step toward reversing such exploitation while strengthening the union overall.

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'Unprecedented' buyout leads recent settlements

Guild-represented employees of the Victoria (British Columbia) Times-Colonist overwhelmingly ratified a four-year contract that includes an "unprecedented" buy-out plan.

Prompted by an ownership change, the Times-Colonist sought to eliminate approximately 32 full-time jobs, including 10 each in the newsroom and advertising departments. But instead of blithely whacking away, the company and the Victoria-Vancouver Island Newspaper Guild negotiated a voluntary buyout that TNG-CWA President Linda Foley calls "unprecedented" and "the most lucrative plan of this sort that we have ever seen": six weeks of severance for every year of service, plus an additional \$25,000 for employees covered by a job guarantee, to a maximum of \$150,000 per person.

Several part-time employees also will be offered pro-rated buyouts, while all remaining part-timers will be assigned a minimum number of hours per week.

Meanwhile, the unit also agreed to a four-year contract—retroactive to Jan. 2, 1998—that includes an \$1,100 signing bonus and raises of 3% effective Jan. 2, 1999; 2% next January; and 3% a year later. The company also agreed to pay 90% of health and welfare benefits, upgraded the pension plan and agreed to consider requests for job-sharing and telecommuting arrangements.

Other recent contract settlements include:

Erie Times and News

Guild and company negotiators for the Erie (Pa.) Morning News and Daily Times agreed to a one-year extension of the existing contract with a 3% increase to all employees. The agreement also includes a couple of job reclassifications and voluntary changes in compensation for advertising account executives.

The Tribune-Star

Guild members in Terre Haute, Ind., voted 35-to-1 to ratify a four-year agreement that offers 2.5% increases each year. The union succeeded in defeating an attempt to institute a two-tier set of wage scales but paid for it by taking hits on step increases. Among contract gains and losses:

- The company—Thomson Newspapers—will pay the administrative costs for Guild members to participate in its 401(k) plan, but will not provide a match.
- Non-unit employees will be allowed to perform unit work, with Guild assent, provided such work is performed outside Vigo County.
- An extension of the probation period to 90 days from 30.
- An increase in bereavement leave to four days from three.
- A new overtime provision that allows employees

to refuse overtime based on seniority.

- Increases in mileage allowances and differentials.

York Daily Record

A three-year contract with the York (Pa.) Daily Record, calling for annual increases of 1% to 2% for first-year employees and up to 3% for reporters and copy editors, was ratified by a vote of 27-to-9. The agreement also provides for a signing bonus of \$150 for employees eligible for health insurance and \$75 for all others. Other details:

- An agreement that Guild members will decide at a later date between their current pension plan or a matching 401(k).
- Full-time employees to receive three days of vacation their first year.
- The exclusion of up to three interns from the unit.
- The addition of "gross misconduct while on duty" to the list of exclusions from severance pay upon dismissal.

Macomb Daily and Daily Tribune

The good-news/bad-news story out of the Newspaper Guild of Detroit is that it has negotiated "the best contract we've had at these papers in at least 15 years," according to local President Lou Mleczo—but both Michigan newspapers are back on the auction block for at least the fourth time in 10 years.

The five-year pact marks the first raises for approximately 165 Guild members in eight years and includes a 3.2% increase retroactive to Jan. 1, plus increases of 3.1%, 3.0%, 2.9% and 2.8% each January thereafter. It also eliminates several concessions made by the Guild and other unions when the papers filed for bankruptcy, including unpaid holidays. Other details:

- A doubling of dental coverage, to \$2,000 annually.
- New language providing fully paid health insurance coverage for up to 52 weeks to employees on extended sick leave.
- An increase in extended sick or accident leave payments to 60% of an employee's salary, up from 50%.
- A new \$6 meal allowance for reporters, photographers and outside sales staff working more than two hours of overtime.

As for the uncertainty caused by the potential sale? If there's one thing the local won as a result of all the changes in ownership, Mleczo says, it was "an ironclad successor clause" in the contract.

Bulldog still has teeth

Just because the Guild has been decertified at the San Diego Union-Tribune doesn't mean its members have died or gone away—as witness this month's resurrection of its newsletter, the Bulldog.

Popping up like a mushroom after a long rain, the Bulldog assures its readers it will "print the kind of news you'll never see on the tightly locked corporate bulletin boards here at the U-T." It then itemizes just some of the issues:

- No cost-of-living raises for eight years, although the Union-Tribune is in its third year of record profits.
- Nine hikes in ad rates over eight years, ostensibly to cover "higher costs"—although the price of newsprint has been declining.
- A doubling of co-payments by employees for medical exams and new charges for dental and vision benefits.
- Arbitrary and inconsistent vacation policies, including the elimination of Christmas as a day off for employees who used to have it as a holiday.
- The implementation of a two-tier wage scale in classified sales and some other departments.
- Frequent changes in commission plans for ad sales.

But the most macabre innovation Copley management has instituted may be a defacto quota system in the newsroom. "These journalistic 'goals' are all numbers, like how many bylines you must have, how many A-1 stories, how many stories with nice, big photographs, etc.," the Bulldog reports. "The goals say little about journalistic achievement, like winning the Pulitzer, exposing corruption at the border, examining the troubled juvenile justice system. It's a system that sets reporters up to fail, which is the point, because news can't be managed by numbers."

Not that the Bulldog is all about raised hackles, as evidenced by the following helpful translations:

"Join our fast-paced company"—We have no time to train you.

"Must be deadline oriented"—You'll be six months behind schedule on your first day.

"Some overtime required"—Some time each night and some time each weekend.

"Seeking candidates with wide variety of experience"—You'll need it to replace three people who just left.

"Problem-solving skills a must"—You're walking into a company in perpetual chaos.

In brief

SF librarians win parity with news

It took more than two decades, but librarians at the San Francisco Chronicle finally have won pay equity with reporters, artists, photographers and copy editors. The new pay scale, one of the Guild's key issues during the 11-day newspaper strike of 1994, appears to be unique in the industry and acknowledges the growing complexity of a highly computerized job that once consisted largely of clipping newspapers to maintain a morgue.

Examiner death prompts petition

Approximately 140 staffers of the San Francisco Examiner petitioned management to overhaul its use of "on-call" employees following the death of copy editor John Lynch, 46. Although officially an "extra," Lynch had worked virtually full-time for the Examiner for two years, often six or seven days in a row and sometimes on consecutive shifts, but was never offered the permanent job he repeatedly requested. "He was exhausted and sick because of the erratic schedule," the petition noted, adding that his abuse "was not an exception on the copy desk, but a typical example."

Web site blasts Consumer Union

After almost two years of working without a contract, 300 or so Guild-represented employees at Consumers Union launched a Web page headlined, "Consumer Reports Exposed!!!"—and almost immediately won the settlement that had eluded them for so long. The site contrasted the lack of pay raises for CU employees for more than two years with top managers' salaries, which have risen to the top 10% among non-profit organizations. Contract details were not available as the Guild Reporter went to press.

Dow Jones says no to overtime

Wall Street Journal reporters, represented by IAPE/CWA Local 1096, don't always put in for overtime. But with contract negotiations stalled over pension issues, the overtime claims started flowing—and publisher Dow Jones started backpedaling, claiming that recent court decisions exempt reporters from over-

time. The truth is that the nation's courts have been divided on the question, but that's irrelevant anyway because the IAPE contract—which includes the newsroom—specifies a 35-hour workweek and requires prior approval of overtime. IAPE has of course filed an unfair labor practice charge with the NLRB, but meanwhile the Journal's reporters are getting *really* steamed.



Crossed spoons for a real trouper

Tom Thibeault, who stepped down earlier this year as a TNG-CWA regional vice president, was honored with a somewhat unusual plaque during the New England District Council meeting: a pair of crossed spoons. Don't ask. Something about the principle of levers and fulcrums and how to make a piece of metal fly into a glass, but you really have to be there to appreciate it.

Raymond Dick dies at 73

Raymond G. Dick, a former assistant managing editor at the Washington Star who left to join the staff of the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild, died Sept. 21 at his home of pancreatic cancer; he was 73. He had served as the local president in 1969, was a delegate to Guild conventions, chaired the Star unit and was named Guildsman of the Year.

Guild Reporter snags 2 awards

The Guild Reporter received second place for general excellence in the annual competition sponsored by the International Labor Communications Association; it also received an honorable mention for Linda Foley's Feb. 13, 1998 column, "Democracy requires reporting what's real." The judges cited the GR's "good crisp writing" and "sound makeup and artwork."

Governor saw 'how smelly that deal was'

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expected to appeal Kay's ruling, that's not the only legal battle they face: SOS (Save Our Star-Bulletin), a citizen's group supported by CWA and the Hawaii Guild, also has asked a federal judge to rule the agreement illegal "because it violates federal antitrust law." The group's seven founding members include former lieutenant governor Jean King, the lead plaintiff, as well as former Congressman Tom Gill and Kekoa Kaapu, a former Honolulu city

councilman. Closing the Star-Bulletin, they argue, will give the Advertiser "an uncontested monopoly" on Oahu.

Such legal challenges, regardless of their outcome on appeal, are crucial because they buy time. Or as Donald Baker, the group's attorney and former head of the U.S. antitrust division, puts it, the lawsuits create an opportunity for an 800-pound gorilla—the U.S. Justice Department—"to get into the game before it's over." While there is no assurance that Justice will in fact

get involved, especially after its lack of intervention in Chattanooga, Seattle and Nashville when those JOAs were abridged or terminated, the political heat in Hawaii has been turned up higher and the department is known to be reviewing the situation.

"This is the most blatant example to date of a shutdown-for-pay agreement in the newspaper industry," Baker observed. "It is hard to imagine how Gannett and [Liberty's general partner] Rupert Phillips could claim that

they are doing something legitimate."

Delaying the closure also is important because despite an Oct. 30 target date, local administrative officer Wayne Cahill reports that Liberty started dismantling its distribution system before the injunction was issued, raising fears it would irretrievably gut the operation. As many as 20% of the Star-Bulletin's blue street-sale racks had been pulled by early October and were being repainted Advertiser white.

Credit for the state's swift response goes in large measure to Cahill, who says he met with Cayetano within three hours of the Sept. 16 announcement "and in that meeting he could already see how smelly the deal was."

The smell dates back to 1993, when Gannett owned the afternoon Star-Bulletin but wanted to buy the morning Advertiser. Because it couldn't own both papers without violating anti-trust rules, it turned once again to Rupert Phillips, who has long proven himself a willing accomplice in Gannett's market maneuvers (see sidebar, at left). Gannett reportedly sold the Star-Bulletin to Phillips for \$15 million, then bought the Advertiser for \$250 million—and revised the existing JOA, which dates back to 1962, to eliminate a 60%-40% profit split in favor of a 20-year payout schedule. Under the new terms, Gannett runs all departments of both newspapers other than editor-

ial and pays all expenses, while Liberty gets a guaranteed payout totaling \$30.5 million.

Yet despite owning what amounts to a bullet-proof annuity, Phillips announced to the Star-Bulletin staff that he has to close the newspaper because Hawaii's economic decline had undercut earnings. Approximately 85 Guild members would be affected by the closure, with some possibility that 20 or so might be offered jobs at the Advertiser. The rest, says Cahill, would have to relocate to the mainland—3,000 miles away—if they want to stay in journalism.

Phillips' questionable rationale for closing the newspaper makes more sense, Cahill explains, when factoring in the financial inducements Gannett waved under his nose: according to comments made by Phillips to Star-Bulletin employees, Gannett will pay him its savings from not having to compete with the afternoon newspaper. As Cahill interprets it, that includes not only the annual payout—\$1.86 million this year, rising to \$2.51 million in 2012—but all the other expenses of producing and distributing the Star-Bulletin. "I've said outright that he's a shill, and I believe that to be case," he adds.

Joining SOS, the Guild and other grassroots protesters has been the International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

More up-to-date information can be found online at www.savestarbulletin.org.

The other man from Hope

So who is this Rupert Phillips, variously characterized as a newspaper broker, a "man of mystery" and Gannett shill? Maybe all of the above.

A reclusive man in his early 50s who shuns interviews and reportedly takes a hands-off attitude toward his newspapers, he apparently first made his mark in the business in 1975 as publisher of the weekly Mountain Echo in Yellville, Arkansas. He soon owned several more weeklies in the state and then acquired some dailies, including the Hope Star. In 1988 he moved to Florida and established Phillips Media Services, which provided newspaper consulting and brokerage services, but soon thereafter started a series of deals with Gannett:

- In the late '80s, Phillips buys several small dailies from Gannett in the Midwest, then buys its Spanish-language newspaper in New York City, El Diario-La Prensa.

- In 1990, the Graphic in Richmond, Indiana is sold to Phillips rather than Gannett because Gannett owns the competing Palladium-Item. Two years later, Phillips sells the paper to Gannett anyway—which shuts it down.

- In 1991, Phillips acts as broker for Gannett to sell the Little Rock (Ark.) Gazette to the owner of the rival Arkansas Democrat, who promptly shuts it.

- That same year, Phillips buys the Journal Newspapers—a chain of weeklies and dailies around Washington, D.C.—from Gannett, which is forced to sell the group because it already owns a TV station in the market.

- In 1993, Phillips buys the Honolulu Star-Bulletin from Gannett.

- In 1995, Phillips buys the Daily Commercial of Leesburg (Florida) from the New York Times Co. after a deal to sell the paper to Gannett falls through.

- In 1997, Phillips sells Army Times Publishing—spun off from the Journal Newspapers group he acquired in 1991—back to Gannett.

- Early 1999, Phillips closes the Mountain Home Daily News in Arkansas. Originally a weekly, the paper was converted into an afternoon daily by Phillips in 1994—and forced to compete with the Gannett-owned Baxter Bulletin.

- Sept. 16, 1999, Phillips says he'll close the Honolulu Star-Bulletin.

In Eugene, the devil is in (contract) details

By Janelle Hartman
Eugene Newspaper Guild

Carrying the message that union-busting has no place in Eugene, Ore., members of the Eugene Newspaper Guild were greeted with rousing applause and shouts of support when they marched in a city parade last month.

The parade's theme was "harmony," but Guild members let the community know that the union-busting tenor at The Register-Guard—which has hired notorious Nashville lawyer Louis Michael Zinser as its chief negotiator—has led to anything but a harmonious workplace.

Zinser, who brags about his record of busting unions, brought with him a radical package of pro-

posals aimed at stripping union jurisdiction from jobs that have been represented by the Guild local since 1946. Among his efforts: the elimination of union pay scales for part-time employees, who are not represented under the Eugene Guild's contract. The Eugene local unsuccessfully attempted to organize part-time workers in 1997, losing the election by five votes, and has since seen the company increase its part-time workforce by 30%, to 123 employees.

Other Zinser proposals include a sweeping "management rights" section that, among other things, would empower managers to split full-time jobs into part-time ones.

The company also is proposing an "incentive" pay program for circulation district managers that includes an 8.5% pay cut. The plan would allow supervisors to unilaterally impose employee goals for subscription sales, customer service and collections.

Contract negotiations started in February, three months before the previous pact would expire, but virtually no progress has been made toward a new contract for the 157 represented employees. Instead, company officials called in a federal mediator—even though several of Zinser's proposals had



This car has legs—and so do Guild-represented employees at the Register-Guard in Eugene, Ore., as they show their support for their contract bargaining team.

yet to be discussed at the table.

Through its parade entry, numerous speaking engagements before community groups and at least one radio interview, Guild members have been publicizing their battle in hopes of bringing public pressure on publisher Tony Baker and his relatives. The family-owned 76,000 circulation daily

bills itself as "A Citizen of Its Community."

Although Guild members were serious about their parade message, they delivered it with a healthy dose of humor. Several members constructed a cardboard model of a "Humvee" to lampoon the gas-guzzling para-military vehicle the company bought to

promote its website. One executive committee member donned a devil's outfit, complete with a pitchfork bearing a sign identifying him as a "Union Buster."

Thirty Guild members, spouses, children and retired R-G employees carried signs, banners, and the Hummer as they chased the demon and shouted "Get Out of Town!"

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Labor coverage?

By Frank Swoboda

Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild

Guild members who are reporters or editors wear at least two hats, as journalists and as unionists. But in their attempts to avoid bias in news coverage, some may have gone too far—resulting in a near-blackout of news on organized labor and the working class. Two noted observers of unions and the media offer slightly contrasting but nonetheless downbeat views of labor coverage today.

The lack of labor coverage in the so-called mainstream press is not a new subject of discontent within the American labor movement.

In a 1970 speech at Cornell University's School of Industrial Relations, former ILPA [International Labor Press Association] President Ken Fiester, one of the most canny and energetic labor-press strategists I have known, put the problem of labor-reporting this way: "The biggest trouble with labor coverage in the news media today is that there isn't any. This is not mere hyperbole. It is not even much of an exaggeration."

Fiester accurately pointed out that what hurt labor the most was not hostility but neglect, a neglect that often resulted in stories that did get covered being reported and edited by "uninformed professionals for an uninformed audience."

And those were the good old days.

From 1951 through 1968, the number of labor editors listed in the annual Editor & Publisher directory of newspapers dropped from 164 to 12, according to Fiester's research. By 1970, that number had dropped to 10. I don't know how many labor editors are listed today, but if Ben Bagdikian was willing to offer a dime in 1965 for every editorial you could find supporting a strike, I'm willing to offer a dollar for every labor editor you can find listed in the E&P directory today.

We know what hasn't changed—but do we know what *has* changed?

In the last decade, both the name of the beat and the focus of labor reporting has changed dramatically. I would guess that there are more people covering the labor force today than at any time in the last quarter-century. But their focus and their interest is not in labor unions. They are "workplace" reporters and their focus is on the vast majority of the nation's workforce that is non-union.

Workplace reporters focus on everything from sexual harassment and employment discrimination to 401K savings plans and cash-balance pensions. They write columns offering helpful hints to job seekers or investment advice for employees who must make their own retirement decisions in a world of growing market uncertainty.

Few workplace reporters have any idea what the labor movement is all about, nor do they really care. In most newsrooms today, unions are viewed as irrelevant relics of the past—institutions with glorious histories that few young editors and reporters are aware of and dwindling economic clout in the workplace.

When I first started covering labor in Washington in June, 1966, unions were still a powerful economic force in the nation's

economy. Although labor's membership at the time was barely 20% of the workforce, the wages and benefits set at the union bargaining table quickly became the pattern for non-union employers and labor's contract gains rippled throughout the economy. And what labor couldn't get at the bargaining table it often gained in Congress, through legislation.

That was 33 years ago, when the major newspapers and magazines felt the need to assign someone at least to keep an eye on what the unions were doing. Today, right or wrong, there's a much different perception of organized labor in the newsroom. The prevailing view is that labor's greatest achievements are behind it—a perception you all must deal with.

Changing of the guard

Let me tell you a story about a 35-year-old editor at The Washington Post last spring that may be helpful to you as the keepers and promoters of the labor flame.

During the early stages of the bombing in Kosovo, I was talking to this editor—a mother of twins—about the horrifying pictures of young children that were on the front pages of all the newspapers. As we talked about the horrors of the war, she said to me: "You know, the first war I can actually remember first-hand is Desert Storm." Then she went on to describe how she and her husband would come home from work each night and eat their dinners in front of the TV, absorbed in the docudrama of live war coverage.

I was speechless. Here was a young woman on a fast-track career path at The Washington Post with Desert Storm as her reference point for judging national defense issues. If the Vietnam War is something she doesn't remember first-hand—she was 9 when it ended—what in the world do you think she remembers about organized labor or the civil rights struggles of the 1960s or even the economic turbulence of the early 1980s?

It doesn't stop there. Our new managing editor was 15 when the war in Vietnam ended, and there isn't much of labor's past that he can remember, either.

When I first started out in journalism, in 1960, newspaper editors came from an entirely different generation. These were men—and a few women—whose views of national defense were forged by World War II, of economics by the Great Depression and of government by the New Deal. In the 1980s, a new generation of newspaper editors emerged whose views on national security had been shaped by the war in Vietnam and their perception of government by Watergate.

Now there is yet another leadership change in the industry, but this generation is young, affluent and not particularly interested in the historical events that helped forge the values of the labor movement. These are people who have grown up with the Internet and the "new economy."

As media turn away, the working

By Matt Witt

As the Labor Day weekend approached, the news media were filled with advertisements for back-to-school sales, reports on holiday traffic deaths and recipes for backyard barbecues. What we didn't see much was reporting on the lives of people who labor in the nation's offices, factories and service industries. There wasn't much coverage of how jobs are changing in America, or of the growing gap in wealth between those who do the work and those who profit from it.

Issues of work and class are largely invisible in the American media, not just on Labor Day but year-round. Rarely do we see stories exploring important questions facing working families. For example:

- Why is the average entry-level wage at least one-fifth lower than it was 20 years ago, with starting pay declining even for new college graduates?
- What corporate strategies are leading to the shift to "contingent" labor—the part-time, temporary or subcontracted jobs that make up 30 percent of the work force?
- What has forced the average married couple to work 326 more hours per year than 20 years ago to maintain its buying power?
- With polls showing that at least 30 million American workers who don't have a union would like to form one, what keeps them from doing so? Could it be anti-union pressure from supervisors? Such pressure occurs in 91 percent of cases in which employees try to form a union, according to a Cornell University study.

Nurses facing staffing cuts that don't leave them enough time for patient care, teachers who are left out of education-reform decisions, service workers who are paid poverty wages without health benefits—all rarely appear in media coverage.

A study by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a liberal media-watchdog group, found that the evening news programs of CBS, ABC and NBC recently devoted only 2 percent of their total air time to workers' issues, including child care, the minimum wage and workplace safety and health.

During a full year, the broadcasts reportedly spent a total of 13 minutes on job safety and health, while an average of more than 16 workers die daily from work-related injuries and more than 650,000 annually suffer back, wrist or other injuries from poorly designed work stations and repetitive motion.

Though local television news shows are full of "how-to" consumer stories—how to find good eyeglasses, how to choose a baby sitter, how to stay fit—they rarely give advice on problems at work. There are few reports on how to get your employer to provide adequate staffing or equipment, or what to do if your boss wants to contract your work to an outside firm, force you to pay more for health insurance or put you on part-time duty.

Not only are work-related topics missing in the media, but so are workers. Studies of ABC's "Nightline" and PBS' "News Hour" found that almost all the guests were corporate

or government officials, politicians or professors, while fewer than 1 percent were non-elite workers or their representatives. An examination of four months of news reports in The New York Times and The Washington Post found that not one of 201 sources mentioned in reporting on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was a worker or union representative.

ABC reporter Sam Donaldson was candid in a magazine interview about the media's practice of turning mainly to the corporate and political elite instead of working people for on-camera comment. "We know [the elite] provide a succinct response," he said. "You can't come to me and say, 'Sam, I know you're on deadline, you need a comment on such and such, go out and take a chance on Mr. X.' No, I'm sorry, folks, I don't have time to take a chance on Mr. X."

Working people are also nearly invisible in television entertainment programming. Heads of households were working-class characters in only 11 percent of prime-time network family series from 1946 to 1990, according to a study by Rider University professor Richard Butsch. When working-class characters are shown, they often are portrayed as "dumb, immature, irresponsible or lacking in common sense," Butsch noted, referring to shows such as "The Honeymooners," "The Flintstones," "All in the Family" and "The Simpsons."

Public television doesn't do much better, according to a study of two years of PBS prime-time programming by City University of New York's Committee for Cultural Studies.

Witt teaches at the American University School of Communication in Washington, DC, and is a senior fellow at the American Labor Education Center. A slightly different version of this article appeared in the Baltimore Sun on Aug. 22 and in excerpted form in other newspapers.

Forget about it!

To be fair, the way labor has been going until recently, editors such as my friend at the Post really have little reason to pay attention to the labor movement. Union-represented employees have shrunk to 16% of the workforce overall and less than 10% of the private-sector workforce.

As I mentioned earlier, when I came to Washington in 1966, unions and labor relations were still big news. Union contracts set the wage and benefit patterns for much of private industry. Those were the days when unions could routinely shut down whole industries, all with enormous impact on the economy. When the United Auto Workers struck General Motors for nearly two months in the fall of

1970, the federal government publicly anguished over the impact on the economy and the strike was headline news from start to finish.

But last summer, when the UAW struck a key parts plant and effectively shut down GM for 54 days, nobody in government seemed to care and the action was hardly noticed by the public. What was bad for General Motors was no longer necessarily bad for the nation. At most newspapers, the connection between organized labor and the fate of the economy has largely been broken. The dwindling economic impact and shrinking membership of the American trade union movement have consigned the labor beat to the fringes of newspaper coverage.

There are some signs that may be starting to change. Recent settlements in the aircraft and automobile industries by the International Association of Machinists and the UAW may be the beginning of a resurgence of labor's economic voice—but it's still early in the game, and the gains are for the comparative few still employed in their respective industries.

Seeking critical mass

On the other hand, labor has begun to focus on its economic clout as it steps up its organizing efforts. The key to labor's future success is not just in the numbers of new members it organizes, but *where* it organizes new members. Can it organize enough workers in an industry to give it economic leverage?

The biggest lessons of just how this works are in the contracts I just mentioned with Boeing and the auto industry. For the first time in recent memory, union workers in autos and aerospace are getting base wage increases as well as signing bonuses, large pension increases and additional job security protection. The lessons are clear. With an adequate

concentration of jobs in these industries, unions can once again push their power at the bargaining table—but before you get too excited, let me remind you that much of that concentration has come through the permanent loss of thousands of jobs in those two industries. And the good pay and benefits are for the survivors, not for the newly organized.

The new focus on where to organize is a major development for labor, and the new resolutions on jurisdiction and organizing that were approved by the AFL-CIO Executive

Council last August will be a major test of labor's future success. Today, the story of labor is once again the story of organizing. It is almost a throwback to the 1930s,

when labor coverage was essentially a police or civil rights beat, depending on your view of history. It is the story of low-wage workers struggling to organize and of the obstacles thrown in their way by employers determined, for the most part, to keep the unions out. But it still is very much a work in progress.

Since John Sweeney's election, the AFL-CIO has focused much of its efforts on national politics. Labor has raised millions of dollars for the upcoming elections, in an effort either to win back Democratic control of the House or at least to keep the majority's margin too thin to do bad things to workers. And so far that strategy has worked. Despite their majority in both the House and the Senate, Republicans have been unable to pass a single piece of legislation that truly hurts organized labor. Labor is beginning to be noticed. But it's the political reporters who slowly are giving credence to the labor movement, not labor reporters.

Progress on the organizing front also shows signs of resurgence, but the going is much slower. Much like the industrial organizing drives of the 1930s, labor has targeted the swelling ranks of low-wage workers—largely immigrant and female—with some very hopeful results. And at the other end of the organizing spectrum are the nation's doctors, who recently voted to form a union for those working under managed-care contracts. But while that captured the news media's attention, such coverage still falls into the "man bites dog" category and doesn't necessarily signal a resurgence of labor coverage.

Moreover, organized labor's greater concentration on low-wage workers means most newsroom residents—more often than not college graduates, often with salaries close to or at triple-digit levels—don't have much of a context from which to evaluate what they're seeing. In my newsroom, for

example, the average Guild wage is close to \$85,000 a year.

As newspaper circulation continues to drop and news holes shrink, today's labor stories must compete even more with a wide range of stories seen by editors—and therefore by reporters—as more relevant to contemporary lifestyles. Keep in mind that the "new workplace" reporters work, for the most part, on a newspaper's business desk, not on the national or local reporting staffs. This makes an enormous difference in their perspective on the news and, perhaps more important, on how much space they can get for labor stories even when they are interested in covering labor.

And now, the Internet

And now there's the Internet. Perhaps the best indication of how rapidly things are changing was the announcement last week that Bill Kovach, the veteran reporter and editor at The New York Times, was stepping down as curator of the Nieman Foundation to make room for someone younger and more familiar with the technological revolution now sweeping through our newsrooms.

As newspaper readership shrinks and circulation drops, newspapers increasingly are looking to the Internet as their salvation. They're not sure what it is they or their readers want, and they still haven't figured out a way to make money with it, but major newspapers across the nation are experimenting with the Internet in a way that is apt to change my life, and yours, forever.

In the transportation industries, especially the airline business, the Internet is being credited by federal mediators with the sudden rise in contract rejections. Within hours of a contract settlement, and often long before a union has released the terms of a tentative agreement, settlement opponents can post their dissent on websites that allow instant access to the membership.

Reporters greeted with a "no comment" from union officials are quick to turn to the Internet for whatever information they can glean. Unembargoed stories for a morning newspaper become fair game for the Internet the night before the paper is published. Union public relations people who fail to have a rapid response will quickly find themselves behind the news curve, chasing after a story already long out on the Internet.

Most unions have done a wonderful job of keeping up with the new technology for internal communications, but now they have to come up with better ways to communicate with the outside world if they hope to again become a significant newsroom beat. It's a new world, and we're in it. Be prepared.

class has become all but invisible

Only about one hour per month dealt with the lives and concerns of workers, while nearly 10 times that much focused on the upper classes.

In the few cases in which work and class are featured in the media, the role of corporate decision-making in workers' lives is rarely included. A recent feature in The New York Times on how families with an income of about \$50,000 per year are coping with economic uncertainty and decreased buying power filled more than a full page in the paper without probing the forces that are putting the squeeze on middle-class workers. Layoffs, cuts in benefits and other attacks on workers' standard of living are reported by most of the media as if these corporate actions are like the weather—they just happen, without anyone being responsible.

Unions ignored as workplace solutions

Workers joining together to seek solutions seems to be a taboo subject as well. A weekly "On The Job" question-and-answer column that The Washington Post started a year ago has never suggested that the solution to a workplace problem might be the formation of a union. A recent column that addressed ways to persuade an employer to provide health insurance and other benefits advised that "the best strategy is to start with low-cost suggestions." Readers were never told that, on average, America's 13 million unionized workers have negotiated 44 percent more in employer contributions for health insurance than nonunion employers provide.

When unions are mentioned in the media, it usually is in a negative light. Elected labor leaders often are called "bosses," while corporate officials who actually boss other people

are called "business leaders" or "executives." Management is described as making "offers" in contract negotiations, while workers make "demands." Disagreements are called "labor problems" or "labor disputes," even if it is management that is insisting on cutbacks, refusing to invest in new equipment or threatening to move to another state or country if it doesn't get its way. Workers' wage rates are usually mentioned, but not executive pay or stockholder wealth.

A number of factors contribute to media bias on issues of work and class. One is that the news media are owned by big corporations, with strong interests and opinions. NBC, for example, which might be expected to inform working people about international trade agreements that make it easier for U.S. corporations to exploit foreign workers in cheap-labor havens such as Mexico, is owned by General Electric—one of the companies practicing such exploitation.

A second factor is the influence of advertisers, who insist on a "positive environment" for their ads—meaning one free of controversial issues or opinions that clash with their corporate agendas.

A third is the class background of editors, producers and others who make decisions about media coverage. Many live like corporate officials and have little contact with working people. A Los Angeles Times survey found that 54 percent of newspaper editors said they generally took business' side in disputes with workers, while only 7 percent generally sided with employees—a contrast to polls that show that most Americans generally side with workers.

A fourth consideration is that working people usually do not have the time, money or training to compete with corpo-

rate media-relations operations. Union workers have greater resources, but many labor organizations have only recently begun to use modern communications practices.

Some reporters overcome obstacles

While these factors generally combine to produce media coverage that either ignores or is biased on work and class issues, some reporters have managed to overcome the obstacles. In recent months, the Los Angeles Times has published various articles that explore the causes of problems working people face.

One Times story looked at the shift to temporary work—what it means to workers, why employers are doing it, and how unions and other organizations are responding. Another article discussed the irony that some Catholic hospitals do not follow church teachings requiring respect for workers' freedom to unionize. A third story painted a vivid human portrait of how working families benefit from "living wage" laws that require companies receiving local government contracts to provide health benefits and pay levels above the minimum wage.

Imagine how public debate in this country would change if topics such as these were given the same intense media attention that is given to crime (coverage of which has gone up in the 1990s, even as crime rates have dropped) or the Dow Jones stock average (which is given as the daily measure of economic well-being, though a broad majority of the population owns little or no stock).

Imagine if the news media gave priority to the daily concerns of working Americans—on Labor Day and every day.

Labor round-up

NLRB flashes green light for organizing

In a 4-to-1 decision, the National Labor Relations Board has ruled that unions may include organizing costs when computing the agency fees that nonmembers must pay under contracts with a union-security clause. The majority held that organizing expenditures are properly charged to nonmembers under the National Labor Relations Act because "there is a direct, positive relationship between the wage levels of union-represented employees and the level of organization of employees of employers in the same competitive market."

"[O]rganizing is both germane to a union's role as a collective-bargaining representative and can benefit all employees in a unit already represented by a union," the majority concluded. "Unions are able to negotiate higher wages for the employees they represent when the employees of employers in the same competitive market are organized, and unions are less able to do so when they are not organized. Thus, represented employees, whether or not they are members of the union . . . benefit, through the results of collective bargaining, from that union's organization of other employees. . . ."

Big Blue workers see red, turn to CWA

Long the computer industry's aristocrats, IBM employees recently discovered that even they were not immune from arbitrary management decisions when the company announced it was changing its pension plan. The ensuing hue-and-cry forced IBM to revise its plans somewhat, but by then the die was cast: in late September, employees at the computer giant announced the formation of Alliance@IBM/CWA, an advocacy group that will press toward full union representation and bargaining rights.

AFL-CIO creates Web portal

Noting that 49% of union members now have access to the Internet, the AFL-CIO plans to introduce its own Web portal similar to the service provided by AOL—Dec. 1 and will finance the sale of personal computers to union members at prices starting around \$600. The federation also is negotiating to provide an internet service provider to union members at a monthly rate of \$14.95. The initiative is seen as a way of enhancing membership mobilization and organizing campaigns, as well as improving overall communication.

Good news, bad news on economy . . .

The good news is that continued strength in the economy lifted 1.1 million Americans out of poverty last year, lowering the percentage of those still below the poverty line to the lowest level since 1989. The bad news is that the official "poverty line" is bogus, set so low that those edging above it—\$16,655 for a family of four in 1998—still have less than subsistence incomes. Moreover, despite such gains the gap between rich and poor, and between the rich and the middle class, remains as wide as ever. And today's poverty rate is still higher than in any year in the 1970s.

. . . but minimum wage still contested

As the Senate prepared to take up legislation that would raise the minimum wage by \$1 to the princely sum of \$6.15 an hour, conservative think tanks and various business lobbies were once again warning that higher wages would mean fewer jobs. But the same arguments were trotted out a few years ago, when the minimum was raised by 90 cents, only to be followed by further declines in unemployment. And while the anti-raise lobby also argues that the chief beneficiaries of a higher minimum wage would be middle class teenagers, a bit more than 70% of minimum-wage workers are adults, about half of whom are slaving at their jobs full-time.

Those skies are less friendly still

Nearly two decades after Ronald Reagan signalled a new era in labor relations by breaking the air traffic controllers' union, a related organization has ended its pioneering effort at a cooperative labor-management relationship by calling it a "sham partnership." The Professional Airways Systems Specialists, AFL-CIO, which assures aviation safety, formally severed its participation in cooperative programs with the Federal Aviation Administration because of FAA "mismanagement" and willingness to cut costs by reducing staff and inspection programs.

Publishers nicked by freelancers' lawsuit

Implications for Guild contract negotiators

A landmark intellectual property case with implications for all writers and photographers was won Sept. 24 by the National Writers Union, extending standard copyright protection to electronic publishers.

The federal appeals court ruled in *Tasini v The New York Times* that freelance work purchased by print publishers cannot be reproduced electronically—either on CD-ROMs or as part of a computer data base like Nexis—without prior copyright purchase of such use. In general, publishers have viewed electronic versions of freelance material as mere "revisions" that did not require separate payments to the authors, even when electronic publishing generated additional revenues. Jonathan Tasini, lead plaintiff in the case, is president of the NWU, an affiliate of the United Auto Workers.

"This is indeed a full victory for freelancers," TNG-CWA attorney Barbara Camens said after reviewing the decision—but how much of an impact it will have remains to be seen. The decision is binding only within the jurisdiction of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, although that includes the powerful publishing houses of the

Northeast. But it's not clear whether even in the Second Circuit the decision will apply to website republication, "so my guess is that this pivotal issue will be further played out in the courts," Camens observed.

Meanwhile, she added, the decision should provide ammunition for contract negotiators seeking increased compensation for republication of work done by Guild members. "The Tasini ruling recognizes the commercial possibilities which adhere in the emerging electronic marketplace," Camens said. "Equity argues for giving our members a fair share of the pie."

The decision also heartened the International Federation of Journalists, with which both TNG-CWA and the NWU are affiliated. "This verdict reaffirms the position of journalists' unions worldwide that publishers do not automatically have the right to recirculate freelance work," commented Aidan White, the IFJ's general secretary. "We urge all publishers to look again at their policies and to start negotiating with journalists and their unions on the conditions for use of electronic databases and websites."

Britain's National Union of Journalists likewise cheered the

decision, saying it would meet with Tasini this month to coordinate a cross-Atlantic campaign to extend the decision's impact. "In the era of digital publishing we need global standards," NUJ freelance organizer Bernie Corbett said. "We want an end to bullying by publishers seeking all rights for a single low fee, and we're sure British and Irish judges will follow the strong lead given by the U.S. court."

The defendants in the six-year-old lawsuit—which besides the Times include Newsday and Time Inc.—reportedly are considering an appeal and are grouching that the decision could result in wholesale removal of freelance stories from their data bases, creating gaps in their archives. But Tasini and the NUW say the simple solution is for publishers to negotiate freelance contracts with the union.

More problematic may be the industry's increased efforts to coerce freelancers to sign "all-rights" contracts, under which the writers and photographers surrender any claim to their work regardless of how it is used. Freelancers working under such contracts lose all the advantages of their independent status without gaining any of the benefits of full-time employment.

AFL-CIO—no surprise—backs Gore; boosts organizing, too

Despite some dissent—from opponents of the administration's free-trade policies, from those who said it was coming too soon, from those who believe labor should no longer be joined at the hip to the Democratic Party—the AFL-CIO delivered an expected endorsement of Al Gore's bid for the White House at its biennial meeting in Los Angeles.

The endorsement had been strongly urged by federation president John Sweeney and provides Gore with access to telephone banks, volunteers and communications networks. The CWA—where president Morty Bahr frequently has described Gore as a personal friend—and the International Association of Fire Fighters had already thrown their support to Gore prior to the convention, but several industrial unions have been critical of the administration's support of free trade because of its impact on their members. In the end, half-a-dozen of them abstained, most notably the Teamsters and the United Auto Workers.

Following the endorsement, President Clinton said he will more aggressively seek stronger safeguards for labor and the environment in upcoming trade talks. The most visible opportunity for him to

do so will be next month, when the World Trade Organization meets in Seattle to draft new trade agreements. (See facing page for a column by Liz Brown describing how unions are preparing for the occasion.)

But while most news reports predictably focused on the presidential endorsement drama, an equally significant story at the convention was the labor movement's deepening commitment to grassroots organizing. "We have brought our unions from the rim of disaster to the cusp of greatness, but this is a fragile moment that will shatter if we do not finish the job we started," Sweeney told more than 800 delegates as he ticked off numerous achievements but warned of the large amount of work that still lies ahead.

Responding to the challenge, the delegates called on all member unions to intensify their Change to Organize programs and to double the number of trained organizers. They also backed the Voice@Work campaign, which has been exposing employer interference with unionization drives, and called on the country's labor councils to back the Union Cities initiative and to solicit community support.

Convention-goers also continued a tradition of direct activism

by walking a picket line in support of workers at the New Otani Hotel, who have been denied a union for more than five years—and, in an unusual twist, were served a continental breakfast as they marched.

The drive to build community coalitions got a big shot in the arm from a pre-convention gathering of labor and religious leaders, which drew representatives of a wide range of faiths to discuss how to forge partnerships between the labor and faith communities. On Sunday, labor leaders carried a message of economic justice to pulpits throughout Los Angeles.

The Newspaper Guild International



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

1-888-893-3650

hcoleman@cwa-union.org

LOOKING AHEAD

Profit making trashes 1st Amendment

By Linda Foley, President



There's no such thing as a free lunch—or a free press. Since the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1789, publishers have construed "free press" to mean a press free of government interference. That certainly was foremost in the minds of the framers when they drafted the First Amendment guaranteeing various freedoms of expression. But their draft was drawn in a time when political, not economic, power threatened to censor ideas and their dissemination.

In a fledgling 18th century democracy, a free press allowed publishers to print and distribute newspapers, books, pamphlets and other printed material to promote their convictions and viewpoints. Publishers competed for ideas, not dollars. The rewards for doing so weren't reflected on a balance sheet, but rather on an election tally sheet. The press promoted candidates and political parties, not advertising and subscriptions. Today's editorial pages are the direct descendants of that tradition.

The press in the 21st century, however, is no longer free. It has been bought and paid for by those who want to preserve the establishment, not disrupt it. Instead of fostering dissent, today's press more often than not stifles it.

Rather than appeal to a narrow group of like-thinking colonials, the modern press strives to have something for everyone

without offending anyone. Readers have become customers, and customers prefer non-controversial to provocative.

The evolution of the press from an institution of free expression to a profit-making enterprise isn't all bad. It has resulted in better delivery of information and a generally well-informed electorate. It has led to technological advances that permit both greater volume and frequency of news. It has attracted a skilled workforce to produce and market the press (leading, of course, directly to the need for The Newspaper Guild-CWA and other unions to represent those workers).

The commercialization of the press also has created a high value for balanced and accurate reporting. A marketable newspaper article or news broadcast is one that has credibility and reflects many sides of an issue. All of that has benefited our society and helped continue our democratic processes.

However, when a commercialized press winds up in the hands of a few powerful corporations that use the First Amendment's guarantee as an excuse for otherwise unethical behavior, it constitutes a perversion of the press's special role envisioned by the Constitution's framers. The accelerating concentration of media ownership is at least as threatening to our democratic rights today as a government-controlled press was in the late 1700s. It doesn't matter whether a few government officials or a few corpo-

rate CEOs control the press. It's a dangerous development when a handful can pull the plug on information provided to millions.

That's why we support the efforts of the Attorney General of Hawaii and the citizens of Honolulu who are fighting to save the Star-Bulletin. Gannett Co., which owns the morning Advertiser, has offered to pay Liberty Newspapers more than \$26 million to close the competing afternoon Star-Bulletin.

Under the cloak of the Newspaper Preservation Act, the two papers received public permission in 1962 to operate as a joint venture to produce and sell the papers—but in exchange for that exemption from anti-trust laws, agreed to continue publishing the two newspapers in Honolulu through the year 2012.

To close one paper 14 years early because—as Gannett and Liberty have stated—more money can be made elsewhere does more than violate the public pact made in the JOA. It also violates the responsibility they assumed to promote and foster the diversity of information the First Amend-

ment's free-press protections carry.

Ironically, Gannett is using the First Amendment to attempt to block the Attorney General's efforts to save the Star-Bulletin. It is unconstitutional, Gannett argues, to require a newspaper to publish when it doesn't want to.

The press in the 21st century is no longer free. It has been bought . . . by those who want to preserve the establishment, not disrupt it.

The attorney general's office, meanwhile, argued in a recent motion for an injunction to stop the announced Oct. 30 closing that it is illegal to pay a competitor to go out of business. As Deputy Attorney General Rodney Kimura quoted from an earlier case, *Associated Press vs. U.S.*: "Freedom to publish is guaranteed by the Constitution, but freedom to combine to keep others from publishing is not. Freedom of the press from governmental interference, under the First

Amendment, does not sanction repression of that freedom by private interests."

The judge agreed with Kimura, granting the injunction.

A free press means an unencumbered, uncensored, diverse exchange of views and information. It doesn't mean that media corporations get off scot-free.

Guild members prepare for Seattle protest

By Liz Brown
Pacific Northwest Newspaper Guild

In 1919, union leaders in Seattle declared a general strike and thousands of shipyard, dock and other workers walked off the job—but instead of thronging the streets they stayed at home, making the city eerily quiet.

In 1999, on the other hand, union workers intend to fill the streets in what may become Seattle's biggest demonstration of civil disobedience since the 1919 strike. We'll be marching in protest throughout the city Nov. 30 as world leaders gather here for a meeting of the World Trade Organization, the first time the group has met on U.S. soil since it was established, in 1995.

Because the organization rotates meetings among its 134 nation-members, it may be years before the WTO meets in the United States again—so we intend to make this a memorable occasion. And although labor is leading the charge, we won't be alone. Thousands of environmental organizations, religious groups and advocates for human and consumer rights will join the protests planned during the week-long meeting.

What's the issue? While in Seattle, the WTO's members, represented by world leaders and trade bureaucrats, plan to adopt additional ground rules for international business. Thus far, however, the WTO's rules have ignored the rights of people to work for a living wage under safe and humane conditions, and there's no sign that this round of talks will be any different.

The purpose of the WTO is to promote and enforce unfettered trade among its members. The problem is that almost any attempt to foster human values can be interpreted as a barrier to trade, including protection of workers' rights to form unions, to



earn a living wage, and to have decent working conditions and hours; protection against the exploitation of child labor; protection against discrimination, and consumer and environmental regulations.

Although the WTO endorsed the idea of having at least some labor standards at its first ministerial meeting, in 1996, the organization has since sacrificed those standards to safeguard the rights of multinational corporations to earn unrestricted profits.

Rulings by WTO panels—stacked with appointed trade attorneys—already threaten the application of the U.S. Endangered Species and Clean Air acts. Moreover, in an ongoing and costly trade dispute the WTO has ordered European nations to eliminate food-safety regulations that ban the sale of hormone-treated beef from the United States.

In a case headed to our Supreme Court,

Japan and the European Union sued the commonwealth of Massachusetts after its legislature passed a law to prevent corporations who do business with Burma from contracting with the state. The International Labor Organization has cited Burma as one of the worst abusers of forced labor.

In the Seattle round of negotiations, the WTO will push for new agreements to increase the deregulation of trade in services such as banking, insurance, data management and health and education services. Workers in those industries fear this will increase privatization and result in a decline of service quality.

While huge transnational corporations—with the money and ability to export, contract out and invest abroad—gain enormously from the WTO's emerging international system, workers all over the world are facing increasingly bleak prospects.

Because our employers have gone global, we must unite with workers in other nations to counter the corporate agenda.

In Seattle, our challenge has been to mobilize workers to take a day off Nov. 30 and join the planned protest. Our progressive central labor council has led the effort, while the AFL-CIO has devoted money and people to the cause. We urge you to join us.

We will demand that the nations of the world, through the WTO, reverse course and place fundamental human values above the interests of corporations.

We will demand that nations and the WTO put into practice their professed support for workers' rights, and that they extend trade benefits only to nations that respect those rights.

We will demand that the WTO be accountable to the people throughout the world whose lives it affects.

For more information about the Nov. 30 protest, call 1-888-811-2986 or check out www.aflcio.org/wto.

[The opinions in this column are Liz Brown's and not her local's; research assistance was provided by Sylvie Pondolfino of Teamsters Local 174, Marti Schmidt of SEIU Local 6 and the King County Labor Council Education Committee.]

By TNG Convention action, letters to the editor shall be limited to 200 words and shall avoid libel and subjects detrimental to the Guild. Members subjected to personal attack shall be given opportunity to reply in the same issue, but publication of either attack or reply shall not be delayed longer than one issue.

Deadline: Friday before publication. (Next deadline: November 12.)

NLRB rejects Free Press exclusion bid

Noting that a hearing officer's ruling was "free from prejudicial error," a regional director of the National Labor Relations Board has rejected a unilateral decision by the Detroit Free Press to remove 26 positions from Guild jurisdiction.

Issued Oct. 14, the 30-page decision by William C. Schaub, Jr., regional director of Region Seven, denies a unit clarification petition filed by the Free Press nearly three years ago. The NLRB delayed a response "due to pending unfair labor practice charges arising out of an unfair labor strike," but the Free Press apparently couldn't wait for a legal response to its hopes for swelling management's ranks: on April 24, 1998, it removed the positions from the bargaining unit anyway.

The unilateral move, as well as a Free Press decision to convert the affected employees' compensation from wages to salaries, are the subjects of separate, still-pending unfair labor practice charges. The affected job classifications included eight assistant metro editors; three assistant business editors; two assistant sports editors and a prep sports coordinator; four assistant features editors; two deputy design directors; two deputy copy chiefs and a handful of other positions.

"Management creep," essentially the reverse of using contingent workers or "independent contractors," is a growing management strategy to exclude employees from the protection of the National Labor Relations Act. Although the act doesn't mention "managers," its 12-point description of who qualifies as a supervisor is confusing and vague enough to tempt a growing number of

employers to take advantage of its ambiguity.

For that reason, Schaub's opinion may provide a handy road map for other TNG-CWA locals facing similar jurisdictional challenges. Schaub notes, for example, that the NLRA defines supervisors as exercising authority "not of a merely routine or clerical nature" but requiring independent judgment. Moreover, he adds, the act's legislative history "indicates that Congress intended to distinguish between employees commonly referred to as 'straw bosses' or leaders, who may give minor orders and oversee the work of others, but who are not necessarily perceived as management, from those supervisors truly vested with genuine management prerogatives."

"Straw bosses" is an apt description of the positions the Free Press tried to exclude. For example, it argued that its assistant metro editors assigned work, evaluated employees and interviewed job candidates—on their surface, all duties that seemingly qualify them as supervisors. But as Schaub notes, their authority to assign work "is mainly a collaborative process between the reporter and assistant editor" requiring "little independent judgment."

Similarly, while the assistant editors prepare initial drafts of evaluations, "they are approved, and can be modified, by five high-ranking supervisors before they are presented to the employees." And job applicants at the Free Press are interviewed by 20 or more individuals, including reporters, with the assistant editors' participation chiefly "one of self-interest to assure that the candidate is suitable as a working companion."



Barbara Camens

PEOPLE

TNG-CWA attorney **Barbara Camens** has been appointed to the Board of Directors of the Office of Compliance, an independent Congressional watchdog that ensures various civil rights, labor and workplace laws are applied to legislative employees. Her five-year term starts next May.

Camens' appointment was announced by Speaker of the House J. Dennis Hastert, who described her as "an accomplished attorney with a reputation at the bar for intelligence and integrity." Camens, he added, "brings to the board many years of direct, substantial litigation, arbitration, negotiation and advisory experience."

* * *

Bernice Strange, president of the Retiree Members Club of TNG-CWA Local 38010, is running for at-large alternate of the CWA RMC Executive Board in a bid to become the board's first Guild member. Her club was the first chartered Guild unit in the CWA RMC.

An active Guild member for the past 26 years, Strange has led numerous Knight-Ridder campaigns, began a newsletter for retired members and negotiated with Philadelphia Newspapers for a refund of Medicare B money. She also is vice president of the Philadelphia Retiree Council, AFL-CIO, and a board member of Action Alliance of Senior Citizens of Greater Philadelphia.

Ballots, mailed Oct. 19, are due back Nov. 16.

DAYBOOK

TNG-CWA Executive Council,
Oct. 21-23, Baltimore

Journal Register Council,
Oct. 23-24, Fall River, MA

Western District Council,
Oct. 30-31, Los Angeles

TNG-Canada Representative Council, Nov. 6-7, Hull

Great Lakes District Council,
Nov. 5-7, Buffalo, N.Y.

Midwest District Council,
Nov. 12-14, Chicago

New York and Southern District Councils,
Nov. 20-21, New York City

Working Women Conference
2000, March 11-12, Chicago

Leuchter scholarship deadline Dec. 1

Before Liz Brown went to Harvard earlier this year, "I didn't have enough time to think about the labor movement, let alone my vision of it and how to move toward that vision."

Four months later, after 10 weeks of study—and a few misadventures—with 29 other union activists from around the world, she could write: "Now I'm back on the job, with all that entails. But I notice a difference. I believe I'm part of something greater."

Indeed, Brown, formerly a feature writer for the Eastside Journal in Bellevue, Washington, is now the assistant administrative officer of the Pacific Northwest Guild. And while her stint at Harvard didn't cause the career change, winning last year's Irving Leuchter Memorial Scholarship clearly had a profound influence on shaping her perceptions of her new job and of unions overall.

Now the opportunity exists for another Guild member to share in that experience, with scholarship applications being accepted until Dec. 1 for the residential seminar that runs Jan. 3 through March 10. The scholarship includes a \$10,000 stipend plus travel expenses to and from Harvard, with any additional expenses—such as lost time—to be made up by the recipient or his or her local.

Twenty-three Guild members have already participated in the Harvard Trade Union Program, which trains union leaders in executive and administrative responsibilities, as well as their community roles as trade unionists. Core courses include economic analysis, labor law, union administra-

tion, long-range planning, industrial relations in transition, labor history, and arbitration and dispute resolution. Seminar topics cover such issues as political action, employee ownership as a union strategy, unions and new technology, new tactics for union organizing, public relations, and labor and the global economy. And related subjects, such as collective bargaining, affirmative action and pay equity, are interspersed throughout the seminar.

Unlike nominees for the Guild Service Award, scholarship applicants need not be nominated by their locals but must be members in good standing. And while there are no academic prerequisites, recipients must be deemed capable of meeting the program's instructional standards and of benefiting from such a course of study.

Application forms should be obtained directly from the program, not the Guild, by contacting: Dr. Elaine Bernard, Executive Director, Harvard Trade Union Program, 1350 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 731, Cambridge, MA 02138; or by fax at 617/496-7359.

Half of the funding for the scholarship is provided by TNG-CWA and half by interested locals, with the Twin Cities Guild—which first proposed that such a scholarship be established, in 1973—contributing \$500 annually. The fund balance currently is \$9,285, and additional contributions are being solicited.

Irving Leuchter, in whose memory the scholarship is named, was a Guild attorney noted for his "lifelong dedication to enlightened unionism."

FROM THE MORGUE

Fifty years ago this month:

Socialist Norman Thomas writes a full-page article for The Guild Reporter, rebutting American press criticism of the British Labor party and "to refute anti-labor propaganda." . . . The first Guild contract covering the Associated Press system-wide is signed; it covers some 1,500 employees in 100 bureaus and has a top minimum of \$110 after six years. . . . The Guild is expelled from the International Organization of Journalists, ostensibly for failure to pay dues, as its British and Australian counterparts quit the organization amid claims it is dominated by communists.

Twenty-five years ago this month:

Citing "severe economic conditions," the AP warns it might have to trim or end its minority-training program. . . . The Guild's longest-lived strike paper, the Maple City Reporter, is discontinued after nearly two years in favor of accelerated strike activity. . . . The New York Guild files a class action lawsuit against The New York Times in federal court, complaining of "a continuing pattern and practice of discrimination" against minorities.

Ten years ago this month:

The Guild joins 16 other organizations from four nations insisting that "immediate preventive steps and remedies" be taken in response to the widespread incidence of repetitive stress injuries. . . . San Francisco Chronicle staffers recount how they produced their newspaper—which had no backup power supply—in the wake of that city's massive earthquake. . . . Twenty-one Guild locals are represented at TNG's Pay Equity Conference, at which TNG Human Rights Director Anna Padia emphasizes that wage disparities for women and minorities remain "an intransigent part of our wage and compensation systems."

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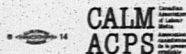
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