

THE GUILD Reporter

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San Jose settles, minimizes lay-offs

As more than 400 union members waited by their phones to hear which 69 of them would lose their jobs, the San Jose Guild and management at the Mercury News reached tentative agreement in the early morning hours of Dec. 4 on a new two-year contract.

While delivering less than the company sought and taking more than the Guild wanted to relinquish, the new contract—product of a final, grueling 20-hour push—was followed by an announcement that only 28 Guild employees would be laid-off. Earlier, the MediaNews-owned company had said that if the Guild met its demands it would realize enough of a savings to lay-off only 42 workers instead of the promised 69.

Union negotiators refused to yield, noting that MediaNews wouldn't give assurances that there would not be more lay-

offs next month. The new agreement, on the other hand, includes a no-layoff pledge that's good until July 1 of next year. And once ratified, the contract will provide wage and benefits security until Oct. 20, 2008, giving everyone a little breathing room while the newspaper industry in general and MediaNews in particular sort things out.

That same night, however, management started notifying employees that they had been terminated, including three non-union workers and several part-timers. The cuts included 16 positions—including the part-timers—in the newsroom and 25 from business offices.

Among the Guild's negotiated gains are a 2% annual

wage increase plus a \$1,000 signing bonus. Although less than the rate of inflation, the increase is a notable turnaround from the company's ardent efforts to create a two-tiered wage system that would have slashed new employees' pay scales by a third; that proposal is now defunct. The Guild also preserved its evergreen clause, which will help see it through the next round of what undoubtedly will prove to be contentious negotiations.

On the flip side, in addition to losing 28 full-time jobs outright, the Guild also agreed to

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DAVID BACON/NORTHERN CALIFORNIA MEDIA GUILD

AT THE BARRICADES Journalism as a tool of protest

By David Bacon
No. California Media Guild

MATAMOROS, TAMAULIPAS,
Nov. 5, 2006

While turmoil in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca has been in the headlines for weeks, little media notice has been given to the crusading newspaper at its center, *La Noticia* (The News). Jaime Medina, the daily's leading sportswriter, is now a leading spokesperson for the teachers, doctors, nurses, newspaper workers and others who have joined in a call for

greater democracy, as well as for a new economic direction to provide a future other than migration north. David Bacon interviewed Medina in northern Mexico, where the writer was seeking support from the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras.

David Bacon: What's it like being a reporter in Oaxaca?

Jaime Medina: I work for the Oaxacan daily newspaper *Noticias*. I'm a sports writer. I'm going on 23 years now, and all those years I've covered

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Democracy Depends on Journalism
THE NEWSPAPER GUILD/COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA
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The loss of more than 44,000 news industry jobs—and the prospect of still more layoffs ahead—prompted TNG-CWA to call for a national day of protest Dec. 11. The event was so popular that the Guild soon ran out of bumper stickers and wristbands, as requests poured in from around the U.S.; various locals, meanwhile, planned their own activities. See page 3 for more.

Philadelphia walk-out threat over pensions

Having pushed past one informal strike deadline Nov. 30 when marathon contract negotiations made some progress, the Philadelphia Newspaper Guild was back at the brink of a walk-out at the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Daily News as The Guild Reporter went to press Dec. 7.

Guild leaders warned their members the night of Dec. 6 to be prepared to strike at any moment, following talks that deadlocked over management demands that it be given complete control of the employees' pension plan. The plan currently is administered by a board of three union and three management representatives.

Publisher Brian Tierney, who heads a consortium that bought the two newspapers earlier this year, has said he wants to freeze the pension plan. Guild officials say that would cut future benefits for some members by as much as \$1,000 a month.

"This is a damn sad situation," said local president Henry Holcomb in a statement posted on the local's website. "The company's position threatens to undo all the good work we have done and put us on strike."

The renewed strike threat was a sharp step back from the cautious optimism that had surfaced earlier in the week, following a 14-hour bargaining session Dec. 3 that culminated in an agreement to preserve seniority on layoff for all but a few. Seniority was a key issue for the Guild, which also achieved an acceptable agreement on sick leave.

But while the Dec. 3 talks resolved virtually all non-economic issues, wages and benefits remained on

the table. And once the non-economic issues were resolved, the company turned to negotiating with its nine other unions, which are bargaining under the umbrella of the Philadelphia Council of Newspaper Unions. The Guild withdrew from the council earlier this year, creating the potential for inter-union conflict—and, indeed, there were questions whether council members would cross Guild picket lines.

Resumption of negotiations Dec. 6 with the Guild followed tentative agreements with the council's members that reportedly include two years of wage freezes and a wage increase of \$25 a week in the third year.

In addition to being pressured by the company's agreements with the other unions, Guild officials had to keep one eye on the calendar because a strike loses much of its effectiveness once the advertising-laden Christmas holidays are over. Moreover, the Guild is laboring under the threat of newsroom layoffs of as many as 150 jobs, or more than a third of the staff, as the new owners try to squeeze out enough money to service acquisition-related debt.

But the Guild is not without its own means of applying pressure. CWA officials, for example, have enlisted the political intervention of Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell and U.S. Rep. Bob Brady, who heads Philadelphia's Democratic party. And the strike threat has been amplified by the preparation of 3,000 cardboard signs emblazoned in red with "STRIKE," as well as creation of an on-line strike paper at www.philapapers.com.

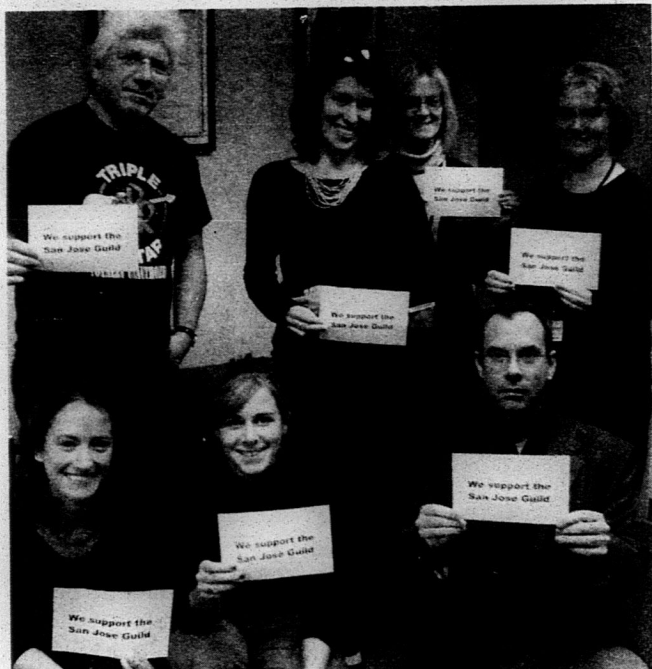
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Expressions of support for their San Jose colleagues from members of the York Newspaper Guild, which knows a few things about dealing with the penny-pinching ways of MediaNews.

San Jose settles

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allow 45 jobs in finance and the classified call center to be moved to San Ramon, where MediaNews is clustering common operations for its numerous northern California newspapers. Affected individuals, however, will have the option of taking a buy-out of two weeks' pay for every year of service, capped at 10 weeks, and two months of paid health care.

Other Guild give-backs include a freezing of the pension plan, which is to be replaced with a 401(k) matching contribution of up to 3% of salary if an employee contributes 6%; a new health plan that will require members to pay 20% of premiums for Blue Cross and 30% for Kaiser coverage; and the loss of vacation accrual for one year.

Guild members receiving news of the settlement were almost all dressed in black in anticipation of

the layoff news, which management—apparently unable to face the people it was firing—had said would be telephoned to each targeted employee's home. The unusual procedure prompted a complaint from Guild attorney Robert Jesinger, who days earlier sent a letter notifying MediaNews that it was violating the federal

WARN Act by not specifying at least 60 days in advance which employees were about to lose their jobs.

While Guild officials scrambled to assist those who had been laid off, a court challenge to the sale of the Mercury News gained some traction in San Francisco. A U.S. District Court judge, reacting to a previously undisclosed letter in which MediaNews and

Hearst Corp. discuss combining some of their operations, ruled that its increased "the likelihood that the transactions at issue here were anti-competitive and illegal."

Although denying a petition for a temporary restraining order to prevent MediaNews from consolidating its back-office operations, the court did bar Hearst—which owns the ostensibly competing San Francisco Chronicle—and MediaNews from merging the operations described in the previously undisclosed letter. More tellingly, the order noted that the letter "casts serious doubt on several key findings" in the court's earlier findings, portending trouble for MediaNews when the entire case goes to trial this spring.

Correction

The "Looking Ahead" column in last month's Guild Reporter ("Esprit de corps? It's history, now") incorrectly stated the number of impending layoffs in Denver. The correct number was 90.



Brent Hopkins, the epitome of black.

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Guild briefs . . .

Forced-labor camps, anyone?

Remember when only Communists were "red," Mao Tse-Tung (now Zedong) was viewed as a despot and anyone clamoring for change was advised to "love it or leave it"? Here's how much things have changed: the Toledo Blade, which thinks a good negotiating tactic is to lock out its unionized workers, has been running full-page ads topped by a full-width, color photo of Mao beaming over a Shanghai skyline and the headline: "China has changed—can Toledo change?" Values, yeah—that's the ticket.

Layoffs at Dow Jones, Bee

The Wall Street Journal is shutting down its Canadian bureau, resulting in the loss of Guild-represented jobs for three full-time reporters and two part-time news assistants. Parent company Dow Jones plans to continue a newswires operation in Toronto, but will assign the "Canadian beat" to a Journal reporter in Chicago. The Sacramento Bee, meanwhile, has laid off 20 following reorganization of its advertising and circulation departments.

Osprey 'offer' spurned

Members of the Northern Ontario Newspaper Guild decisively rejected a concession-loaded contract offer from Osprey Media, voting 93% against an "offer of settlement" Nov. 20. More than 80% of the local's 50-plus members, who work in all departments at the Sudbury Star, attended the meeting. Osprey's offer, made Nov. 16 after two days of mediated talks, was recommended for rejection by the Guild's bargaining committee because it didn't address key Guild issues, including job security/severance, pensions, wages and vehicle allowances.

CNS workers save pensions

Guild-represented employees of Catholic News Service won raises totaling 7.4% over two years while preserving their defined benefit pension plan. The 19 members of the Washington-Baltimore Guild had worked for 311 days under an expired contract and had just two rounds of talks with CNS since the end of April, finally breaking the logjam with a series of public demonstrations supported by other unions in Washington, D.C.

Another daily on the ropes

Employees of the King County Journal in Washington may be out of a job soon, following purchase of the paper by a subsidiary of Black Press of Canada. Black Press bought the Journal as part of a package that includes seven non-dailies—and it's the non-dailies that it prizes. Company representatives said they will decide within a few weeks whether to close the struggling suburban Journal, whose editorial employees are represented by the Pacific Northwest Guild.

Cognitive dissonance at work

Carolyn Tuft, a highly regarded reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, was suspended for two days last year for an allegedly error-filled series about a local ministry. But while Tuft is currently awaiting the outcome of her arbitration, Post-Dispatch owner Lee Enterprises has awarded her an "excellence in news reporting" prize of \$5,000. Tuft's winning series, on which she collaborated with reporter Joe Mahr, was selected by an outside jury panel; the series for which she was disciplined contained such egregious "errors" as labeling as "hefty" the \$900,000 annual salary pulled down by a televangelist who demanded—and got—a lengthy published "apology" from the paper.

Laurin takes CBC reins

Marc-Philippe Laurin has been elected president of the CBC branch of the Canadian Media Guild, filling the last year of predecessor Arnold Amber's term; Amber stepped down last month to become TNG Canada's first full-time paid director. Laurin drew 382 of 937 votes cast, with Barbara Saxberg receiving 332 and Pierre Claveau receiving 213. The election also saw Gail Young outpoll Kathryn Atkinson, 330-277, to become the new CBC branch secretary.

Gingrich gets an earful

Members of the Manchester Newspaper Guild, the union representing more than 150 reporters and other employees of the New Hampshire Union Leader, picketed the hotel where the company was holding a banquet Nov. 27 to protest stalled contract talks. Former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich was the featured speaker inside. Outside, local president Norm Welsh said 11 months of negotiations have failed to find agreement on health insurance and the use of part-time employees.

Beating the drum in Buffalo

Alarmed at the declining circulation numbers of the Buffalo News, the Buffalo Newspaper Guild has launched a membership-driven subscription drive. The unprecedented campaign urges every local member to sign up at least two new subscribers—and offers several inducements, including a \$500 prize for the top sales person and a raffle for a grand prize of a 26-inch high definition TV, with members receiving one raffle ticket for every two subscriptions sold.

Herald wage freeze okayed

Unionized commercial employees of the Boston Herald have voted 61-46 to accept a 26-month pay freeze, following the lead of their editorial department co-workers, also represented by TNG-CWA. The Nov. 28 vote reversed an earlier rejection of the freeze, which company officials insisted is essential for the Herald's survival.

CDN damages trial underway

A jury trial to determine damages in a wage and hour class-action lawsuit against the Chinese Daily News, in which a summary judgment on behalf of the plaintiffs was delivered earlier this year, is underway in Los Angeles. The newspaper's workers say, however, that they expect the company will appeal both the verdict and the award. Meanwhile, parent company UDN is making headlines in Taiwan, where it abruptly closed one of its three newspapers without prior notice to employees, 65% of whom were fired.

Thumbs down in Rochester

By a decisive 51-to-4 vote, members of the Rochester Newspaper Guild have rejected a contract offer that the Democrat & Chronicle described as its "firm, final and best." The rejection paves the way for the Gannett-owned newspaper to declare impasse and impose the offer, but at press time the company hadn't announced its plans. The local's leaders were hoping the one-sided vote would send a message that management should "return to the table and find a middle ground on outstanding differences." The Guild also was requesting that Gannett keep a federal mediator at the table if it resumes talks.

New hat for Hatfield

Percy Hatfield may have stepped down as a TNG-CWA vice president earlier this year, but it turns out he was just swapping one elected post for another. Hatfield was one of two top candidates in a field of eight in recent elections for two seats on the Windsor, Ont. city council, getting the nod from 9,080 new constituents while losing 25 pounds in his door-to-door campaigning. The next highest vote-getter polled only 1,956.

Hudson News leader dies

Balal Ahmad, 57, who had chaired the Hudson News unit of the New York Guild since its inception in 2000, died November 18 of a heart attack. An invaluable key organizer in the drive to sign up more than 300 Hudson News workers, Balal resisted company harassment, threats, and even tearful appeals in his apartment by a management agent. He later helped negotiate the shop's original and renewal contracts, was a member of the local's executive committee and served as a delegate to several Newspaper Guild conventions. A U.S. resident for more than 20 years, Balal was buried in his native Pakistan.

Coping with buyouts and a pension assault

While MediaNews has made its best Visigoth impersonation in northern California (see page 1), employees at the fourth of the former Knight Ridder newspapers it acquired this year also are reeling from budget cuts, pared payrolls and assaults on benefits packages.

Some 30 workers at the St. Paul Pioneer Press have taken buyouts, including 21 newsroom staffers—roughly twice the minimum needed, raising eyebrows—averaging nearly 25 years apiece with the paper. Also eliminated was a group of “on-call” employees who filled-in on the copy desk.

At the same time, the Pioneer Press unit of the Minnesota Newspaper Guild rejected a proposed pension freeze that management said it had to have if additional staff cuts are to be avoided. The company—technically owned by Hearst, but managed by Media-

News under a complex ownership transition that is being reviewed for antitrust implications—asked Guild representatives to agree to a freeze of all future pension benefit accruals in return for a one-time allocation of \$1.4 million, roughly equivalent to the future annual cost of maintaining the existing plan.

The MediaNews proposal would have distributed the \$1.4 million to Guild members' 401(k) accounts in proportion to their years of service—but with each employee receiving only one-fifth of the payout each year over the next five years. Employees leaving the company before the five years had elapsed would have forfeited the unpaid balance—not that the individual amounts were all that great, starting at \$200 a year for employees with

less than 10 years.

MediaNews also offered to create a 401(k) matching program, in which it would contribute 50 cents for every \$1 employees contributed to their 401(k) accounts, capped at 3% of each employees' pay.

The combination of staff cuts and pension assaults stood in stark contrast to the effusive assurances given to Pioneer Press employees April 27, when MediaNews chief executive Dean Singleton gushed, “You’ll be happy after the closing. You will barely know it happens.” So perhaps it’s not surprising that once they’d had a chance to collect themselves, the unit’s 450 members essentially told MediaNews to stuff it on the pension plan proposal. As pointed out in a membership communication, the pension is only one part of a

comprehensive contract that the company refused to discuss in its entirety.

“This sort of ‘a la carte’ bargaining would have hamstrung our ability to improve the contract in 2007,” the unit noted. In a similar vein, a company refusal to discuss alternatives to its proposal was irksome, blocking “any talk about more creative options” to cut costs.

While unit members now ready themselves for a renewed attack on their pension plan next year, the more immediate loss is a 10% cut in newsroom staffing spanning all job classifications, from reporters and editors to clerks and photographers. “The institutional memory that’s walking out the door tomorrow is just staggering to calculate,” copy editor Cheryl Burch-Schoff, a Guild officer, told a Pioneer Press reporter writing about the buy-outs for his own paper.

Guild leads protest of industry gutting

A nationwide protest against continued slashing of newsroom jobs was being planned by TNG-CWA for Dec. 11, as this issue of The Guild Reporter went to press.

The “Day of Action,” to be marked by a variety of activities coast-to-coast, was intended to publicize the loss of 44,000 news industry jobs—34,000 at newspapers—in just the past five years. The cuts, made by newspaper owners trying to maintain profits at record-high levels at a time of declining advertising and circulation, have unusually widespread social implications.

“Throughout the country these cuts mean there are fewer journalists, less diversity of media voices, less news and a public that is increasingly more under-informed,”

explained TNG-CWA President Linda Foley. “That’s why we’re asking the public to join us—for democracy’s sake—to say no to cutting the jobs of journalists and all workers whose jobs support good journalism.”

As part of its mobilization, the Guild distributed more than 10,000 bumper stickers, 25,000 lapel stickers (above) and 8,000 wrist bands, many to non-Guild members. And because the “Day of Action” coincides with a Federal Communications Commission hearing in Nashville on the issue of media consolidation, Guild members were expected to show up in force, including a contingent from the St. Louis local.

Other locals were planning various riffs on the event, from color-coded attire—black seemed espe-



cially seasonable—to periods of standing silence to leafletting of one kind or another. But the most innovative observance may have been planned by the York local, which borrowed a page from the Book of Seinfeld to put on a Festivus Celebration. There’s no room here to detail all the activities, but here’s a snippet of the Festivus Song (sung to “Jingle Bells”) that sets the mood:

*Festivus! Festivus!
Grievances galore,
We’ve been jerked around
enough,
We won’t take anymore!*

Agreement reached on 1st EFE contract

Negotiators for the News Media Guild and the EFE News service reached tentative agreement Dec. 4 on a first contract covering the Spanish news agency’s journalists and administrative employees in Miami, Los Angeles, New York and Washington.

The three-year agreement, retroactive to this past January, would increase wages by 3% in the first year and 2.5% annually thereafter. It also includes a cost of living adjustment that would boost 2007 wages by as much as an additional 3%, depending on inflation.

Other critical features include card-check recognition of the Guild in new U.S. bureaus; Guild shop and job security provisions; a union-administered 401(k) plan to which EFE will make a 1.5%

matching contribution in 2008; and an improved medical plan—also administered by the union—and improved holiday and vacation benefits.

A ratification vote was being scheduled at press time.

“This agreement represents a big first step for EFE and its unionized workers,” said Tony Winton, president of the News Media Guild and a member of the negotiating team. “It will serve to secure quality journalism in the Spanish language and is, we hope, also the beginning of a mutually beneficial employer-employee relationship.”

EFE employees voted for Guild representation in September, 2005 after overcoming—with help from Spanish union members—an initially strong anti-union campaign by management.

What makes a solid Broun Award entry?

The last Friday of each January (this coming Jan 26) is the postmark deadline for submitting entries for the Heywood Broun Award. That makes the holidays a good time for reviewing the past year’s work—but what is the elusive quality described in the call for entries (see www.newsguild.org) as journalism “in the spirit of Heywood Broun”?

Sixty years ago, Lewis Gannett, book critic of the New York Herald-Tribune and a long-time friend of Broun’s, attempted to answer that question as follows:

What was “the spirit of Heywood Broun”? First and foremost, Heywood Broun was always a newspaperman. “There is no reason why a first-rate man on any newspaper should yield precedence to every novelist and minor poet and little essayist,” he once wrote. “Last year’s novel is just as dead as last year’s newspaper.” He had a religion of his craft. He had been a good general reporter, a great baseball reporter, an exciting book and drama critic, and he wrote the most variously good-natured and furiously provocative “column” in New York newspaper history.

He was never stuffy; there wasn’t an ounce of pomposity in his great, lumbering frame. He liked people—all sorts of people, including those he scarified. I remember his drawing comment when a former boss of his and mine boasted of having refused to shake hands with a public man he despised. “I don’t believe,” he half-stammered, “there is anyone . . . no, not anyone . . . with whom I wouldn’t shake hands. . . . The more I hated a man, the more curious I’d be to know what he was like.”

He seemed slow-moving, endlessly affable, but he was as ardent when crusading as when playing poker.

He loathed unkindness, but when he saw an issue clearly, as he saw the Sacco-Vanzetti case, he would stop at nothing, even when he knew it would cost him his job. Long before Hitler came to power he co-authored a book on anti-Semitism—in America. In the dismal breadline-and-Hooverville days, he haunted the breadlines, bankrupted himself by his generosity, and organized a show on Broadway to help the unemployed. He ran for Congress on the Socialist ticket, against his boss’ request. He was the only daily newspaperman in America with the courage to accept the presidency of a news-writer’s union in the bleak days before F.D.R., Paragraph Seven and the American Newspaper Guild transformed the shape of management-employee relationships in American city rooms.

In the early days of the New York Guild he was the Guild, and the Guild became Broun’s whole life. Those who had known him only as a playboy were amazed to see him night after night on the picket-lines. The New York Guild was organized in Broun’s apartment and, gin-glass in hand, he was the inspiration and steady force of its early meetings. No one questioned his leadership. American newspapermen inevitably made him the ANG’s first president. Factionalism faded in his genial presence. Among speakers at the Guild’s dramatic memorial meeting for Heywood Broun were John L. Lewis and Fiorello LaGuardia, a Catholic priest, a taxi-driver, a lawyer, a waiter from “21” and, of course, a host of newspapermen, including executives.

Analyze that if you can. Among the sure elements in the spirit of Heywood Broun are geniality and fire, love of people, hatred of injustice. No one since has matched him in his unique art of posing as a clown to preach a furious—and effective—sermon.



Heywood Broun, who once described himself as an unmade bed.

In Oaxaca, conflict transforms

Continued from page 1

sports. After only three years I received state recognition for being the best sports reporter in Oaxaca. Originally I wanted to play professional sports. I got on a soccer team after I finished school, and played two years as a pro. I say "pro," but I actually had to work full-time in a film-processing lab to support myself. But I injured my knee, and when I wasn't able to play anymore I decided to write about it. I love it. At *Noticias*, you have to be a reporter and a photographer. I was the first photographer in Oaxaca to use a high power telephoto to get good action shots, and got an award for my work. Now, everyone does it.

I'm not really an activist. I'm involved in this struggle because it is for something just, and because we're defending our paper and our rights. But I hope to eventually go back to just writing and photographing sports. Nevertheless, this has been a very memorable experience, and I wouldn't change it for the world.

Why did your newspaper become the center of this turmoil of social protest?

The newspaper has been fighting government persecution because it's the only independent newspaper in the state. A lot of papers work with the government and they control what is printed. That's not the case with us. We report on what we feel is necessary. It started with former Governor Jose Nelson Murat. Two years before completing his last term in office, he tried buying control of our paper. He was denied, and that's when government persecution began. First they suspended government advertisements, but we continued to function with private ads. Then Murat ordered an invasion of the newspaper's warehouses.

Before Murat left office, we were publishing articles regarding corruption in Murat's administration. That did not mean that the newspaper was against the government, it was simply writing about an administration that was clearly taking advantage of its position. But what a coincidence that Murat is

now one of the wealthiest men in Mexico.

After the present Governor Ulises Ruiz took office, while he was giving his inaugural speech, officials once again raided the warehouses. Still we managed to survive. I think he also manages the federal aid to the poor to his benefit. That is one reason why the people want to crucify him now. *Noticias* has always been critical of the government, all the while just giving the facts. That is why we are the best-selling newspaper in the state and also why we've been on the government's bad side.

As workers of the newspaper you belonged to a labor union, right? Why didn't the union help to defend you?

We belong to a union [he calls it a *sindicato de protección*, or protection union, a pejorative term for a sellout union] known as CROC [Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Farmers.] These labor organizations are very common in Mexico. Their purpose more than anything is to protect the employers and the government. Usually when an employee complains, he is fired without the union even getting involved.

When the attacks on us began, it had been nine years since we'd had any communication with the union. Many workers didn't even know who the leaders were. In nine years we never even had a union meeting, to let the CROC officials know about our needs. The local CROC leader is a member of the PRI [PRI, the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution, was Mexico's ruling party for 70 years, until it was defeated nationally in 2000. Oaxaca is still governed by the PRI.] He is so close to state PRI leaders that he was given a position as deputy in the state legislature.

So when the newspaper took an independent approach to reporting, the CROC wasn't in agreement?

Of course not. The PRI was used to operating in a closed-door fashion, with little interference from outside. The CROC com-



Jaime Medina, outside the Oaxaca offices of *Noticias*.

pletely violated our rights by not taking our opinion into account, even when they were supposed to be protecting us.

After Ruiz became governor, the union contract at *Noticias* came up for renegotiation, and the state government sought to use this to close down our newspaper. The union announced it had made a decision to strike. No one asked for our opinion. There was no vote by us, the workers. Even though we were unhappy with our pay, we saw the game they were playing, and we didn't want any part of it. We took no part in their decision to strike.

I was involved in one discussion with the CROC leaders, because I represented the workers. A second meeting was open to all workers, but the CROC again paid no attention to us. Then the union decided to strike, without our support. On the day it began, the CROC leaders came in with military personnel dressed as civilians.

I saw them coming through both

entrances. I left because I was afraid of being hurt. There were more than 300 people that came in to take over. Thirty-one of my coworkers stayed behind, because they were getting ready to print the paper. Other reporters were still finishing up last-minute stories. The newspaper's editor and assistant editor also stayed behind. They were basically kidnapped. We could see them through the windows as they were being assaulted. They were there 31 days and on July 18, 2004, they were let go by the military personnel inside, but beaten once again on their way out.

How did they survive 31 days?

The people in the neighborhood saw the injustice being done and gave them food through open windows.

At the moment the military came in, its intention was to stop the paper from printing, but workers were able to get two more editions out, that day and the day after. But

... while in Iraq, information

By Andy Zipser
Editor, The Guild Reporter

In the litany of journalists casually, even deliberately, shot at in Iraq, no tale stands out as starkly as that of Giuliana Sgrena, the Italian reporter who was shot by American soldiers as she was being delivered from her Iraqi captors. Gravely wounded, she nonetheless fared better than the man whose body shielded hers, Major General Nicola Calipari, the number-two man in Italian military intelligence.

The aftermath of that encounter, like so much of what has happened in Iraq, was a barrage of contradictory statements in which the U.S. once again held itself blameless. U.S. officials said the car approached a U.S. checkpoint at a high speed and its driver ignored repeated attempts—including hand and arm signals, flashing white lights and warning shots—to have it stop. Sgrena and the driver, on the other hand, have contested almost every element of the U.S. story: they were driving slowly in preparation to make a turn, there were no warnings given, there was no checkpoint.

What there was, Sgrena and the driver have maintained, was a tank parked at least 30 feet off the road that opened fire after they had already passed, shattering the rear windows and giving the lie to statements that the

American troops had shot out of fear for their lives. When a U.S. military investigation nevertheless cleared the troops of any wrongdoing, Italian officials participating in the investigation refused to endorse its findings. Italian prosecutors launched their own probe and announced, this past summer, that they were filing charges of murder and attempted murder against Mario Lozano, a soldier with the 69th Infantry Regiment.

Now Sgrena has published "Friendly Fire," her own account of what transpired on the fateful night of March 4 as well as during her month of captivity. Snatched off the streets of Falluja after two years of reporting from Iraq, she was held in Baghdad as a bargaining chip by mujahideen seeking a withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq. Ultimatums were issued, deadlines set, videos of Sgrena in captivity aired. Then the deadlines would pass, triggering thoughts of how she was about to die, only to be followed by a new video, a new deadline. . . .

Because she was held in near-total isolation, "Friendly Fire" doesn't have much to say about Sgrena's captivity outside of her inner life, resulting in a somewhat claustrophobic account. At the same time, the book is strangely unmoored in time, shuttling back and forth among events with a dream-like logic that undoubtedly mirrors Sgrena's own interior monologue. The result, for anyone

Friendly Fire, by Giuliana Sgrena.
Haymarket Books, Chicago, IL, 2006.
215 pp, \$20 (hardcover).

seeking a better understanding of these events than can be gleaned from news articles, can be frustrating.

But what "Friendly Fire" does accomplish is to present the kind of unembedded insights about the Iraqi war that are rarely published in the U.S. press. Sgrena is no tyro, having reported frequently from Afghanistan and Iraq—as well as Somalia, Algeria and other global hot-spots—and her account is interwoven with reflections on what she has seen, much of it deeply disturbing.

A section titled "An Iraqi Chernobyl," for example, details the toxic devastation inflicted on Iraq, not unlike the continuing legacy of Agent Orange that haunts Vietnam to this day. Approximately 3,000 barrels of radioactive waste and enriched uranium were looted from warehouses at the Tuwaitha Center for Nuclear Research, the waste strewn across the landscape so the emptied (and radioactive) drums could be used for water storage. Although Iraqi scientists subsequently found radioactive contamination of local groundwater, crops, livestock and homes, "the danger has already been forgotten, before the full effects have even been measured."

Or consider the steadily rising incidence of domestic violence, and especially of "crimes of honor," those deaths that frequently are acknowledged in autopsy reports as "killed in order to cleanse her disgrace." The killing of women who endured abuse at Abu Ghraib—some of whom killed themselves, before anyone else could "avenge" the dishonor, Sgrena reports—are only the most extreme example of a growing religious intolerance that has converted a formerly egalitarian society into a misogynistic one. "The security for women that everyone calls for in Iraq means protection against the violence of the occupation, against terrorism, abuses of power, kidnapping and rape," Sgrena writes. "But how can you protect the women who are beaten, tortured, and raped in their own homes every day?"

Yet another Iraqi development that only recently has received sustained attention is the inexorable increase of Iranian influence. Sgrena notes, for example, that the pre-eminent religious leader in Iraq, the Shiite Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, is himself an Iranian (in contrast to the Sunni fundamentalists, who look to the Wahhabists in Saudi Arabia for inspiration). And it was the Iranian Revolutionary Guards who trained the Badr brigades, which have posed the greatest organized resistance to occupation forces while also escalating ethnic tensions

journalism into activism . . .

they blocked the exit that second day and were no longer able to print. That still didn't stop the paper. We were able to rent out space for six months from another paper in the neighboring state of Veracruz. In the beginning, we were working out of internet cafes and sent our articles to the editor by email for two months. It was very stressful. After that we moved to a location in Guerrero for four months.

Even though it was very expensive to produce, it was being printed daily and people were waiting for it. The newspaper would arrive in Oaxaca between one and three in the afternoon. People understood we were still getting the paper out, and would form lines to buy it. We, the workers, were very thankful to the people of Oaxaca, because they helped us survive.

I never stopped writing my sports section, although I became more involved in politics because of this incident. But that's not my strength—I think I'm going to die writing sports.

Why did the conflict with the teachers arise during the same period Noticias was being attacked?

Oaxaca is a tourist state, so the cost of living here is very high. The teachers had been asking for a pay increase for many years now. When they asked Ruiz, they were offered the same as in years past. He said that if the federal government wanted to give the teachers more, that was up to them, but the state didn't have any more to give. So in May, 2005, the teachers decided to strike and they took up residence in the Plaza at the center of town.

The federal government is always raving about its educational system, but here in rural parts of Oaxaca, a typical school consists of four poles and palm leaves for a roof. Students sit on rocks, logs or anything else they can find. The country's educational department does nothing to improve these conditions. A typical teacher earns about 2,200 pesos every two weeks (about \$220). From that they have to purchase chalk, pen-

cils and other school supplies for the children. The life of a teacher is very difficult, so the demands they are making are fair. Unfortunately, we have a deaf and blind government. If the federal and state governments cared more about their people we wouldn't be in this situation. People are fed up with the promises made every election, because they get nothing afterwards.

So there was a lot of anger among teachers?

I don't think it started that way. They asked for what they needed, but the government's denial infuriated them. When they decided to strike the first time, they almost didn't complete the 2005-2006 school year. But teachers have such a love for their students and profession, they decided to return to class and finish out the term. That year they stopped the strike for that period. But then the government tried to force them to do the same during this spring. The teachers refused.

On June 14, the government sent in the military to force them out of the main plaza. Two helicopters dropped tear gas and Molotov cocktails from above. This made all labor unions and organizations throughout the state unite in one organization, the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca [Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca]. They came to the rescue of the teachers and were able to continue to occupy the plaza. They all agreed that they wanted Ulises Ruiz to leave his post as governor. The protesters put up barricades blocking entrances to the plaza for fear that they would be attacked, as they had been in the past.

What was Noticias doing during this time?

Noticias was reporting the truth, unlike other papers in the state. Radio stations wouldn't allow the teachers time to state their demands and reasons for their actions, because they were basically under the control of the government. So the teachers first

took over Channel 9, and then others.

Meanwhile, they were being assaulted and shot at by police in plainclothes. Finally, a U.S. reporter was killed. He was covering the story in Santa Lucia del Camino, a neighboring town, when demonstrators were fired on. The protesters defended themselves with what they could, rocks and sticks. After that, federal police were called in.

First they sent in the marines and army—3,500 officers arrived to take over the plaza. They said they would come in peacefully, but they arrived with tear gas, water [guns] and pepper spray, and attacked the residents who were protecting the teachers standing their ground in the plaza. When the Federal Preventative Police (PFP) reached the center of town, the confrontation turned violent. The protesters held off tanks with rocks and sticks, the only arms they had against the guns. During this confrontation, a nurse was killed when he was attacked with tear gas. When federal officials came in to channel 9, a 16-year-old protester was killed. All told, since the attack on the plaza on June 14, 16 people have been killed, the majority teachers. Not one government official.

Were Noticias journalists or photographers subject to reprisals from the government during this time?

A fellow journalist, Luis Ignacio Velasquez, and two others are fighting charges of defamation of character and libel. I've been singled out by the government for supposedly overstepping my boundaries. We've been persecuted, and four of my coworkers have been assaulted.

But we have been successful in obtaining something that has never been obtained by a group of journalists in Latin America. The Human Rights Commission of America told the federal government to protect us and take responsibility for our lives. Unfortunately, they still haven't guaranteed us protection, although they have the manpower to attack our entire state.

Now we're based on Independence Street in front of La Merced church, where we've

already faced aggression from the state government. About a month and a half ago, two armed individuals came in and fired guns. Four workers were injured. One worker still has a bullet lodged close to her heart.

But you continue to publish the paper?

I think we've overcome the most difficult and violent battle. The challenge now is to keep staying true to our stories and maintaining the newspaper in the top spot in the state. We also have to keep fighting for our constitutional rights and pressure the pro-government union to give us back our offices. And we are in the process of trying to form our own independent union as well.

This country is experiencing so many problems with our ability to freely choose our government. Felipe Calderon is not recognized nationally, because of the way he came into power [there were many charges of election fraud, and there was no full recount of the ballots]. It was the same with Ulises Ruiz. Oaxaca is now experiencing what could well happen nationally. Since the days of the Revolution, Oaxaca has been in the forefront of change and a picture of things to come.

People here are not looking to win or lose, but to improve their way of living. I think that if it means Ulises Ruiz resigning for the good of his people, then he should definitely resign. Something has to give. It sometimes seems like Oaxaca and southern Mexico aren't even part of Mexico, the way they're ignored by the federal government until some big crisis erupts.

This could definitely affect the U.S., because we are such close neighbors. If the United States spent more money on the poorest neighboring regions instead of for wars, we wouldn't need a fence to divide us. What is dividing us is the economy. We make millions of dollars exporting petroleum to other countries, yet the people don't see that money. If that money went to the people, we wouldn't see the need to migrate elsewhere. It's incredible that many of our people get an education here only to spend their days working as farmhands in the U.S.

becomes 'another victim of war'

with the minority Sunnis.

But Sgrenna's most telling insight may be regarding the devalued role of journalists in today's age of instantaneous communication, a realization flowing out of her initial confusion over being abducted.

Although she concedes the possibility had occurred to her, "I hadn't seen how very possible it was." She had, after all, been well received in the past, able to move about freely and greeted with hospitality wherever she went. And the refugees she interviewed were universally willing—

even desperate—to tell their stories, to give the world an unfiltered look at the brutality unleashed against them on behalf of... what, exactly?

So to be grabbed from outside a mosque in Falluja, site of the most unrestrained use of American firepower in Iraq, was a shock. "But why did they seize me, in particular?" she broods. "The question torments me day and night. If they truly want to liberate their country, as they say they do, is it possible they don't see that it would be better to let me do my job? Is it possible that the 'resistance'—as my abductors define themselves—doesn't care about documenting the conditions of the refugees in Falluja? When I pose

the question, my abductors respond dryly: 'This is war.'"

In time, staring at the walls of her room with little to distract her, Sgrenna comes to understand the horrific inclusiveness of war today. Soldiers' lives, even those of civilians, are just a down payment on conflicts that ravage the environment, strip away centuries of social development and pave the way for regimes that have little use for the free flow of information. "No one wants witnesses: neither the occupiers, who went to war on a pretext of lies, nor the occupied, who fear any revelations about themselves as they fight the occupation," she writes. "Information becomes the enemy, another victim of war."

Which, of course, makes the information gatherers dispensable at best, an opposition force at worst.

Also of note:

The unceasing march of the digital revolution is shaking up the once insular world of book publishing as much as newspapers. On-demand publishing technology, for example, allows individual authors to print works that might never gain a major publisher's attention.

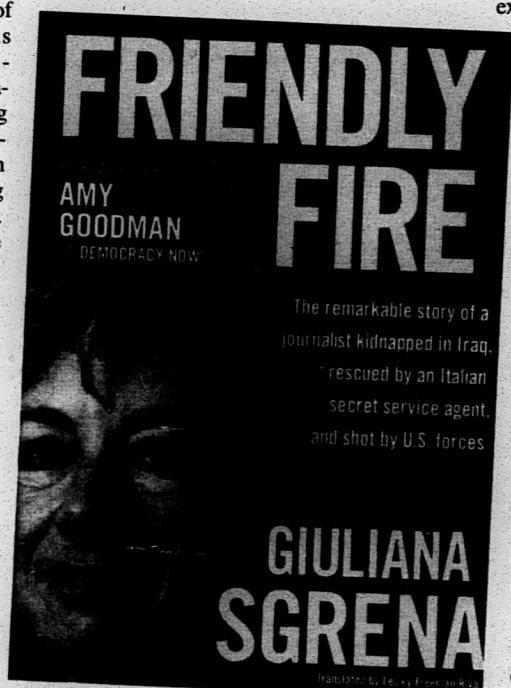
Case in point: For just \$2,500—half of which he borrowed—76-year-old former reporter and editor Jack Stone has been able to

underwrite a book he's had in the works for the past eight years, "Why Mass Unemployment? Its Hidden Causes and Outrageous Consequences and What Can Be Done About It." (Also credited with contributing to the book is Joe McCraw.)

The subject certainly is timely for the swelling ranks of unemployed journalists, and once the reader gets past a largely forgotten history of failed full-employment legislation, the list of root causes will ring all too familiar, from advanced technology to the exporting of jobs to mergers and acquisitions. But Stone goes beyond mere description, seeking to explain why capitalists as a class are opposed to full employment, the consequences of this class-based opposition and how it might be defeated.

Unemployment today is like cancer in previous generations, rarely discussed and typically suffered in silence. As Chris Townsend, political action director for the United Electrical Workers, observes in a review, the book "is a reminder that unemployment is still a painful part of our economic scene, albeit one that commands virtually no interest among the contemporary mainstream news media or our political elites." Perhaps "Why Mass Unemployment?" will redress that neglect.

Priced at \$20, Stone's book may be ordered directly from the author at 510-206-3070 or via e-mail to jakstone1@comcast.net.



News round-up

Newspapers losing credit-worthiness

Buffeted by shareholder demands for higher profits even as their readers turn to digital media, newspapers are likely to see their credit-worthiness downgraded in the months ahead, according to the Fitch Ratings service. "The outlook for the traditional media segments continues to be negative for 2007," New York City-based Fitch said Nov. 30, with newspapers among those "most pressured due to operational issues associated with their business models." Because lower debt ratings make leveraged buyouts more expensive, the recent flurry of newspaper mergers and acquisitions may already have peaked.

Union hors d'oeuvres for a banquet

More than 50 Santa Barbara News-Press staff members and supporters celebrated their employer's 18th annual banquet with picket signs and chants of "McCaw, Obey the Law." The protesters were criticizing management and News-Press owner Wendy P. McCaw for violating labor law by firing 21-year veteran reporter Melinda Burns, ostensibly because of "biased reporting." Supporters say she was dismissed because of her support for the Graphic Communications union, which won a representation election after more than two-dozen employees quit or were fired.

Just what Canada needs: more ads

CanWest MediaWorks, which owns more than 65 Canadian newspapers, TV and radio stations and their associated websites, has an American problem: the U.S.-produced TV shows it likes to broadcast have as much as 50% "dead air" in them to make room for commercials, but Canadian regulations limit advertising to 12 minutes per hour. So CanWest is asking the Canadian Radio and Television Commission to relax the limits—and while it's at it, CanWest also has filed a motion to overturn Canadian regulations that ban direct-to-consumer advertising of drugs. If it succeeds, Canadians finally will get the kind of informative programming about Viagra and Cialis that U.S. viewers take for granted.

Fewer media owners = less diversity

It may seem intuitively obvious that media consolidation results in fewer choices, but now the Benton Foundation and the Social Science Research Council say they have empirical studies that prove the point. While the Federal Communications Commission deliberates rule changes that would ease media ownership restrictions, the two organizations say their studies suggest that ownership restrictions should be tightened, not relaxed—if, that is, the goal is to have more local news and more diverse media content. These and other ideas were advanced at an unofficial hearing Nov. 30 in Seattle, attended by the two Democratic FCC commissioners, who have consistently opposed relaxing the rules.

NLRB decided fewer cases last year

The National Labor Relations Board needs a shot of caffeine: it issued 477 decisions in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, down from 508 decisions issued the previous year. The good news? Despite its slower pace the NLRB still managed to cut its backlog, to 305 cases pending at year's end compared with 484 at the start—although that drop indicates an even sharper decline in complaints filed.

Wanted: 12,600 workplace inspectors

With 2.2 million people killed on the job around the world every year, the International Labor Office (a permanent secretariat of the International Labor Organization) says that "industrial market countries" like the United States should have one health and safety inspector for every 10,000 workers—or about one-seventh the existing ratio. Meeting the ILO standard would require another 12,600 inspectors or so, at an annual cost of roughly \$1.5 billion—which sounds like a lot until you compare it with the Liberty Mutual insurance company's estimate that employers pay almost \$1 billion a week to injured employees and their medical care providers.

Medicaid spending hits historic first

Spending by Medicaid, the federal health insurance program for the poor, declined this year for the first time since the program was created, in 1965. Spending was down 1.4% in the first nine months of the year compared with the same period a year earlier, and down 5.4% after adjusting for inflation, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. The historic reversal will free up billions of dollars in state budgets, but it's unclear how much of the reduction is due to true cost-savings and how much to unrecognized cost-shifting.

'Hope for the Holidays' begins at home

With holiday shopping in full swing, retail labor unions and their supporters have launched a campaign to remind the public about the retail giant's abusive business practices. More information about the campaign, "Hope for the Holidays," and how to support its efforts can be found online at WakeUpWalMart.com.

Despite Fed assurances, 2007 recession possible

Federal Reserve chairman Ben S. Bernanke did what he was supposed to do Nov. 28, seeking to calm jittery markets with a speech to the National Italian American Federation in which he assured that the U.S. economy is heading for a soft landing—in short, that the economy is cooling sufficiently to rein in inflation without tipping the country into a recession. The biggest risk he foresees, Bernanke added, is that tight labor markets might push inflation higher, forcing the Fed to once again start raising interest rates.

Newspaper workers, buffeted by waves of layoffs and uniformly regressive employer demands for wage cutbacks and health- and pension-plan cost-shifting, may be wondering what labor markets Bernanke was referencing. Nor is the newspaper industry unique. But Bernanke also didn't mention two economic reports, issued just hours before he made his remarks, that likewise undercut his remarks: orders for long-lasting durable goods fell sharply in October, and consumer confidence likewise headed south in November. That came on top of economic expansion in the third quarter of only 1.6% at an annual rate, down from a 2.6% rate the previous three months.

In other words, there's reason to worry about 2007. Meanwhile, in a masterful bit of timing, Dean Baker, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, D.C., followed the Fed chairman's comments a day later by releasing a rather gloomy 20-page report titled, "Recession Looms for the U.S. Economy in 2007." The central element of Baker's prediction is the collapsed speculative housing bubble, which not only has cut the legs

Baker's Predictions	4th Q, 2006-4th Q, 2007
GDP growth	-0.7%
Job growth	-1.2 million
Nominal wage growth	3.4%
Inflation (CPI)	2.6%
Residential const.	-12%
Consumption	-1.2%
Investment	2%
Exports	4%
Imports	-2%
Gov't. budget deficit (fiscal '07)	\$370 billion
Trade deficit	\$750 billion
End of Period	
Unemployment	6.3%
Federal funds rate	4%

out from under the most vibrant economic sector of the past several years but—more significantly—means an end to the equity borrowing that fueled the economic recovery that began in late 2001.

The result, Baker writes, "will be a downturn in consumption spending, which together with plunging housing investment, will likely push the economy into recession. The economy will see a substantial net loss of jobs, with nominal wage growth slowing as the labor market weakens over the course of the year."

Although Bernanke and others have minimized the economic importance of housing deflation, Baker notes

that the ratio of homeowners' equity to market value stood at a record low earlier this year, despite a phenomenal spiking of house prices. That means consumers have sucked the equity out of their homes to finance their lifestyles. Now, following a run-up in credit card debt earlier this year, it's not surprising that consumption growth started putting on the brakes in the second quarter. That argues for lowered interest rates—not the possibility of higher rates envisioned by Bernanke—and Baker believes such cuts may start as early as the Fed's first meeting in 2007, ending the year with rates 1% to 1.5% lower than today.

But interest rate changes take time to filter through an economy that is already on course, in Baker's view, for some unhappy developments. Among them: the shedding of as many as 1.2 million jobs, with the unemployment rate marching upward to 6.2% from the current 4.7% by year's end. That in turn will put downward pressure on wages, with wage growth slowing from its current 4% to less than 3% by the end of 2007.

Minimum wage heads agenda

By Mark Gruenberg
Editor, Press Associates Inc.

Raising the federal minimum wage for the first time in a decade "will be the first order of business" when the new Democratic-run 110th Congress opens in January, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) declared Nov. 16. Moreover, added AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney, the Democratic leadership has committed to pushing for passage of the Employee Free Choice Act in its second 100 days in power.

Kennedy made the minimum wage promise at a packed press-conference-turned-pep-rally of minimum-wage raise supporters in a Senate hearing room. He drew strong support from Sens. Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton (both D-N.Y.).

Surrounded by AFT members in blue T-shirts and ACORN members in red T-shirts, Kennedy declared of the minimum wage that "We're going to raise it and raise it and raise it," to repeated cheers, applause and "amens." ACORN was another key player in the six successful state minimum wage hike campaigns this year.

Sweeney made his comments, citing incoming House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), in a brief chat with PAI after the pep rally. He said Pelosi gave the EFCA promise at a post-election reception the federation hosted for the 41 new Democratic representatives and eight new Democratic senators.

Kennedy is the lead Senate sponsor of the wage hike, which would raise the minimum to \$5.85 an hour from its present \$5.15 an hour 60 days after the bill becomes law, then to \$6.55 a year later and \$7.25 two years after the initial increase. As incoming chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, he will be in a prime position to push it through.

The breadth and depth of support for raising the minimum wage was illustrated in two ways Nov. 7. One was that voters in six states that had voted "red"

in 2004—Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada and Ohio—passed statewide wage increases. The other was that Missouri voters approved their hike by a 3-to-1 margin, taking at least 58% of the vote in every county, said Lenny Jones, Missouri's campaign director and the Service Employees' state political director.

But the Rev. Paul Sherry of the Let Justice Roll campaign—a joint effort by 60 groups, including the AFL-CIO and ACORN, to push the minimum wage hike in Congress and the states—added that minimum wage advocates must keep working.

Because the GOP trails by only 51-49 in the Senate, Sherry told PAI, it could try to attach anti-worker amendments to the minimum wage hike. "We have to keep the pressure on to stop both a filibuster and killer amendments," he said. "And the next step is to have indexing," which already has pushed state minimum wages above \$7.25 in Washington, Oregon and Connecticut, he added.

What's minimum wage worth?

Year	Nominal	In 2006 \$	% of non-supervisory average
1947	\$0.40	\$3.04	35%
1952	0.75	4.80	49%
1957	1.00	6.03	53%
1962	1.15	6.46	52%
1966	1.25	6.54	46%
1971	1.60	6.84	44%
1976	2.30	7.13	39%
1981	3.35	7.04	45%
1986	3.35	5.83	38%
1992	4.25	5.94	39%
1998	5.15	6.31	40%
2000	5.15	5.98	37%
2002	5.15	5.73	34%
2004	5.15	5.46	33%
2006	5.15	5.15	31%

LOOKING AHEAD

A holiday lump of coal from MediaNews

By Linda Foley, President



It was Monday, Dec. 4. The holiday season had just gotten underway, and the members of the San Jose Guild were facing a mass dismissal of 69 co-workers at the Mercury News by the paper's newly installed owners, MediaNews Corp.

The bosses told employees the layoffs were necessary because their union wouldn't agree to a contract that would end their retirement security, devastate job protections and invoke a two-tiered wage scheme that would pit them against one another. So the company had no choice, the bosses said. MediaNews needed the savings and there-

fore had to destroy any chance that 69 families would have a Merry Christmas.

What MediaNews didn't count on was a bargaining committee and a membership that wasn't about to flinch in the face of such a cynical power ploy. They held their ground. And they prevailed.

On that Monday, Mercury News employees, dressed in black to protest the anticipated massacre the next day, no doubt expected an emotional day of tears. Instead, they learned their bargaining committee had reached a deal after 20 hours of marathon bargaining. The company, it seemed, had blinked.

The problem for Mercury News management was that it couldn't live with its own proposal. Cutting nearly 40 people from a 280-employee newsroom would have made putting out a daily newspaper almost impossible. So after months of pressing for so-called necessary concessions, company

negotiators had to get serious about what they really needed. The result is a contract that, while riddled with many cost-cutting measures, preserves Guild members' protections and dignity.

That said, 28 Mercury News workers still face a holiday of unemployment. The contract agreement obviated merely two-thirds of the proposed job cuts. For those employees, there is no joy, no sense of relief.

The bosses sing a common refrain these days. They tell us, "The newspaper industry is struggling. Revenues are declining. Circulation is way off. Our costs are too high."

We know that. We're the ones who sell the ads and circulate the paper. We're the ones who talk to movers and shakers in the community and hear their complaints about news coverage. We're the ones who struggle with less and less every day to produce the best paper we can.

We know it's tough.

But we see decisions being made that we know will make the future more—not less—challenging. And we know they'll want us to pay the price then, too. Shared sacrifice, like shared rewards, has become a lost notion in the newspaper business. Lots of pain but no gain, at least not for rank-and-file employees.

Jay Harris, former publisher of the Mercury News when it was owned by Knight Ridder, quit his job several years ago because he had had enough of cutbacks in the service of shareholder profit. His statement of principle sent shockwaves through the newspaper industry. We were hopeful his resignation would cause newspaper owners to focus more on building, rather than tearing down, their valuable newspaper assets.

Then again, once upon a time we believed in Santa Claus, too.

Morale stinks, but we have to push on

By Bernie Lunzer, Secretary-Treasurer

Monday was decision day on taking the buyout at the Pioneer Press, my home paper. I talked with a couple of folks who were trying to make that tough decision, potentially ending long careers at a paper that once was a calling for so many of us. The paper defined our community, which ever since we were kids put St. Paul ahead of Minneapolis in the place name others used for the Twin Cities.

I was feeling quite guilty. I was careful to tell those I talked to that the decision was a personal one, and that I couldn't make it for them. My sense was they already knew in their gut what their choice was.

I told them that the restructuring around us will take several years to sort out. None of us knows how it will play out. I said I expected

the economics to continue to be difficult for some time, and that those who stay at the paper will work harder. You say all of these things out loud that people already know.

This particular paper had been vibrant in its day—Pulitzer-Prize winning, a remarkable powerhouse of writers who often way outdid the competition. But that was then. Now the news-hole for the first section is often reduced to a scant eight pages, not enough to showcase great writers.

Last summer I attended a retirement party that had many PP folks in attendance. Ironically, you almost knew without being told why there was a group of happy folks while others looked down-trodden. The happy ones had already left the newspaper and taken new careers elsewhere. Some had taken jobs they once would have sneered at. But invariably, they would talk

about how it was the best thing they had ever done.

I'm not surprised when I hear stories of the "owners" of our papers saying they wouldn't want their kids going into journalism. In the most recent round of Guild District Councils I heard over and over again how salespeople are under attack. The company sets up unattainable goals as a "performance improvement plan," sets them up to fail and spits them out. I worked for many years with incredibly professional salespeople who understood that the business is about relationships. Now the papers want them "young and hungry," as if they'll be able to create new accounts out of the very dirt—ignoring the fact that there is a finite amount of ad dollars out there and most of the ground has been tilled.

Morale stinks. But we can't leave it there. Those of us who are left are here because

we've always believed in the product, even when management hasn't. We know of the incredible contribution newspapers make to the community. Yes, it's become a cliché to say that democracy can't succeed without us. But it's true.

So as we congratulate those who are moving on, and wish them well, we'll grumble a little bit, with survivor's cynicism. But we need to reach out to each other and build some hope. We can get through this. We can absorb the economic hits, and fight for the other things that matter. There was a time when none of the contractual rights we have even existed. For those of us at union papers, who understand the connection between quality and union, it's hard to imagine.

This is a tough time, and it's going to get tougher. But we need to focus and get through to the other side. There's so much left to do.

How a 'destination paper' lost its way

By Nishad Majmudar
Former Democrat & Chronicle Reporter

A few weeks back, City [a Rochester alternative weekly] wrote about the Newspaper Guild of Rochester, the union that represents many newsroom employees at the Democrat and Chronicle ("Remaking Media: the D&C's Hazy Future," October 4). I am among the reporters mentioned in that story who recently left the D&C.

I wanted to tell you why I left the paper, and why I think it's important that the public support the Guild in this crucial time for journalism in Rochester.

I first worked for the D&C business desk as a college intern in 2003, and the paper hired me after I graduated in 2005. As a reporter there, I worked with people who are among the most respected reporters and editors in the Gannett company. Each was ready to offer help and advice when this rookie needed it.

Yet ironically, the place where I first affirmed my love for journalism is also the place where my passion for the field died.

The work environment was stifling. Countless veteran reporters used to tell me before I left in August that Rochester was a "destination city" for Gannett reporters. Now, it is a place many are looking to leave.

Since my departure in August, the D&C has lost, by my count, at least seven full-timers from an already depleted editorial staff. And the absence of a 401(k) plan and other incentives that would otherwise lure more talent to the D&C is just the beginning. If you're a D&C reader, you've undoubtedly noticed the paper's more profound changes.

The sections have thinned out. Stories are shorter. Reporters and editors, left scrambling to "feed the beast" with a shrinking staff, are more prone to fatigue, burnout, and even errors.

The well-to-do east side of Monroe County gets relatively more comprehensive coverage; Rochester's urban core and the towns west of the Genesee get less. Areas we once called neighborhoods were lumped together and dubbed "zones," a stark reminder of the sterile, geographic market-driven approach the D&C and other newspapers have taken in order to survive—or, in other words, maintain favorable profit margins for distant, faceless parent corporations and their stockholders.

In the process, the D&C confused its identity. Gimmicky flavor-of-the-month stories and target-market niche publications often seemed to take precedence over the in-depth hard news stories that print outlets do

best. It's not that the paper's management has shunned depth and quality news. But ask other former D&C staffers and they'll likely tell you that there was little incentive to continually pursue the big stories.

For example, one of my stories about a Bausch & Lomb Inc. product recall earlier this year got bumped up to page 1A. But because of the story's placement, it lost half its length and carried a sensational headline that understandably irked a few readers and B&L itself.

The day the story ran, I got e-mails from some B&L employees and even workers from competing companies lamenting that my story was unfair to B&L. They told me it was too short, too simplistic, too much like a "gee-whiz" TV sound-bite. Explaining to those readers why space limitations caused my story to run about as long as a couple of movie listings in the D&C's Insider didn't do much to soothe their concerns.

Or take my final story for the D&C, an analysis of job creation at companies that got tax breaks from Monroe County.

Had I known of the internal bureaucracy my supervising editors and I would face in preparing the story—which, for transparency, needed to mention the D&C's own inability to retain jobs despite receiving county incentives—I probably never would've even

pitched the story in the first place.

I'm not denying the economic realities confronting newspapers, particularly those in stagnant markets like Rochester. Nor am I downplaying the value that the aforementioned flavor-of-the-month stories can have for readers. But in the process of a newspaper redefining itself, it should never lose sight of what it does best. Nor should it lose sight of the reporters, photographers, editorial assistants, and others who breathe life into the paper, especially those who eschewed ambitions of moving on to bigger newsrooms to instead adopt Rochester's historic daily as their own.

So what can you do? Make it clear to the D&C that you demand better coverage of the issues that are most important to you. More importantly, call or write Publisher Michael Kane and demand that the D&C's reporters and editors get the time and resources to do it.

The looming exodus of young reporters and seasoned veterans from the D&C has done little to spark the paper into action. If the paper's higher-ups aren't getting the message, then readers must send it.

Reprinted with permission from the Nov. 8 issue of City; Majmudar is now involved in public-policy work in Washington, DC.

The mission of The Guild Reporter, approved May, 2004 by the TNG-CWA Executive Council, is as follows:

"As stated in the TNG-CWA Constitution, 'It shall be the duty of The Guild Reporter to promote in every legitimate way the policies of TNG-CWA.' The Guild Reporter belongs to the rank-and-file membership of TNG-CWA.

"Guild Reporter content will be of interest to the members,

and its first priority will be current news affecting the locals. The members of this union expect The Guild Reporter to inform, motivate and challenge its readers.

"To maintain its journalistic integrity and traditions, The Guild Reporter must never become a personal political platform or be misused for internal political purposes by the elected leadership of TNG-CWA."

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 for letters and articles: Friday before publication. (Next deadline: January 19.)

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

AIDS awareness can't wait a year

By Debbie Thomas
TNG-CWA Human Rights Director

December 1 was World AIDS Day, marking a quarter-century since the first case of Acquired Immune Deficiency was reported. According to the United Nations, more than 25 million people have died from AIDS in those 25 years.

But that's only the beginning. More than 39 million people currently have HIV, the virus that is a precursor to AIDS, and 4 million more will become infected this year alone. Although two out of three new infections occur in sub-Saharan Africa, this is a global pandemic. UNICEF, for example, has declared a public health catastrophe in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where 270,000 people have been infected, 90% of them due to intravenous drug use. Meanwhile, the country with the largest number of HIV infections is India, with 5.7 million victims.

The unrelenting spread of the HIV virus has led to worldwide attempts to raise public awareness of a disease that has receded from public consciousness. World AIDS Day was part of that effort, marked by rallies and prayer services but also by such attention-grabbing events as "the world's longest condom chain" in Bangkok and a "condom fashion show," featuring outfits stitched together with condoms. And in Beijing, where Chinese authorities have been reticent about the disease, 5,000 taxi cab drivers handed out AIDS information to their passengers.

In the U.S., AFL-CIO President John Sweeney called attention to the International Labor Organization, which in 2001 adopted 10 principles on HIV/AIDS and the world of work. These principles recognize HIV as a workplace issue, seek an end to bias and stigma against HIV victims and

support the need for a healthy work environment. Sweeney called for a recommitment to the principles, making HIV/AIDS a union priority and holding ourselves accountable for ending the epidemic.

We are all beginning to realize this is not just a "gay disease" or a "drug users" disease; we are all touched by the devastation. So what can we do? Educate! Let's not wait until next December 1 to raise workplace awareness of the problem. Educate yourself and then educate others. Wear a red ribbon, an international symbol of AIDS awareness. Protect yourself and your partner. Get tested.

Update on the Human Rights and Equity Committee:

Since the committee was formed this past summer, we have developed a network to keep everyone informed of human and civil rights action and information. If you are interested in being a part of the network, drop me a line at dthomas@cwa-union.org.

We are considering a request for a stipend for one person in the U.S. and one in Canada to attend a minority journalism conference or an AFL-CIO constituency meeting (or Canadian equivalent). If approved, the rules for this will be published in the Guild Reporter. We also are working on a lending library/outreach program in the New England area. We'll pass along the details as they get firmed up and if this program proves successful, will present it at the various district councils for implementation elsewhere.

I'm hoping our website will be up and running the first of the year, as we de-bug the prototype. Also be on the look-out for a new brochure from the committee to help in internal and external organizing, and a survey of the membership is forthcoming. Talk to you next year.

Will they, won't they?

Sometimes it seems every newspaper is in play

For an industry avowedly in its death throes, newspapers are getting an inordinate amount of attention as possible takeover candidates.

New York Times Co., which is insulated from such grabs by its two-tiered stock structure, nonetheless has been pressured by Morgan Stanley Investment Management to change its governance structure so it, too, could be put in play. Why the Times should do something so foolish hasn't been adequately explained, but that hasn't prevented the rumor-mongers from going to work. Among the latest and most unlikely scenarios: that insurance mogul Maurice "Hank" Greenberg will make a run at the company, presumably so he can bring an end to all the (deservedly) unflattering coverage he's been getting for various questionable deals.

Meanwhile, Tribune Co., which can only wish it had the same kind of two-tiered stock structure, really is in play but now says it won't finish reviewing the buyout proposals it has received until sometime in early 2007. While chief executive Dennis FitzSimons has explained the delay—Tribune originally said it would finish the review by year's end—is needed to ensure "thorough consideration" of the "strong interest

from a number of parties," skeptics are saying that the reality is there's been only tepid bidding. If true, the real reason for the delay is to give management time to figure out how to sell individual assets.

To date, at least, Tribune has been unwilling to slice and dice. In late November it rebuffed an inquiry from a Baltimore consortium, which wanted to examine the company's financial records so it could craft a bid specifically for the Baltimore Sun, by saying it is still seeking a single buyer for the entire company. Several such buyers have emerged—including Ron Burkle, with whom TNG-CWA was working in its failed effort to buy nearly a dozen former Knight Ridder newspapers—but apparently none of those bids were high enough.

Also among the rumored bidders was Gannett, which itself is the subject of speculation as the next big takeover play, once Tribune is sold.

If Tribune does find a single buyer, it appears likely the company nonetheless will be dismembered—as Knight Ridder was by McClatchy—and perhaps even more widely because of its more diverse portfolio. Among its holdings are 11 daily newspapers, 23 TV stations and the Chicago Cubs.

NEWSDOKU

Newsdoku is played like Sudoku: just fill in the grid at right so that every horizontal row, every vertical column and every 3x3 box contains nine different letters.

However, in addition to filling in the squares, the nine letters may be used to spell one or more words that answer or describe a clue. Some letters may be used more than once. For example, if the Newsdoku letters are A-C-E-F-H-L-R-T-Y and the clue is "Watered down the NLRA," the answer is TAFT-HARTLEY ACT.

The clue for this month's puzzle: He founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, is held largely responsible for desegregating the military and was director of the Aug. 1963 March on Washington that was immortalized by Martin Luther King Jr. Who was he?

There is only one solution to Newsdoku, based on reasoning and logic, but you've also got to answer the clue to win a prize.

Entries postmarked no later than Jan. 29 may be mailed to: The Guild Reporter, 501 Third Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001. If there's more than one

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MIDDLING DIFFICULTY

correct set of answers, the winner will be chosen at random from the correct entries. The answer to this puzzle will be published in January; the winner will be named in February.

The October Newsdoku apparently was too tough for most of you: the only correct entry was from John Fendrich of Peoria, IL, who received a copy of "Remembering Cesar."

THE GUILD Reporter

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DAYBOOK

IMedia Reform Conference,
Jan. 12-14, Memphis, TN

Deadline for Broun, Barr entries,
Jan. 26 (postmark)

New Local Officers Training,
Feb. 16-19, Meany Center, MD

CWA Legislative-Political Conf.
March 25-28, Washington, DC

Labor's Voices III conference,
April 26-28, New York, NY

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NOVEMBER NEWSDOKU SOLVED

November's clue asked for the
Guild's first executive secretary. The
answer: JONATHAN EDDY.

FROM THE MORGUE

Seventy years ago this month:

San Francisco becomes the first all-Guild city, as all four of the city's dailies post wage and hour agreements with the union. . . . In what is billed as a once-in-a-lifetime event, Heywood Broun tap-dances for several minutes at the Headliner's Ball in Washington, D.C. to settle a bet. . . . The Guild's executive secretary, Jonathan Eddy, draws condemnation from AF of L President William Green for a speech at the federation's annual convention criticizing suspension of voting rights for CIO unions. Green calls Eddy's remarks "the basest of crimes."

Fifty years ago this month:

A survey of Guild Reporter readers finds it took between four and 25 days for the Nov. 9 issue to reach them via the U.S. postal system. . . . "Newspaper publishers give their children in college as much allowance as they pay to reporters as starting salaries," the managing editor of the Louisville Times tells a meeting of the Associated Press Managing Editors. . . . The Philadelphia Guild grants Daily News management numerous concessions as the "only alternative" to "immediate extinction."

Twenty-five years ago this month:

The trustees of TNG's International Pension Plan boost monthly pensions for future retirees as much as 32%. . . . The U.S. Secretary of Labor seeks a court order for a new election of New York Guild officers, following complaints filed by five losing candidates. . . . The Justice Dept. concludes that Hearst failed to demonstrate that the Seattle Post-Intelligencer is a "failing newspaper" that qualifies for a joint operating agreement.