



f o r u m



Local 32035

The Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild

August 23, 2004

Special Edition

The Guild's Political and Community Green Zone

Increasingly, TNG locals are discussing and formulating Green Zone policies to clarify their activism in politics, community and civic affairs, and issue advocacy. The Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild, which represents major newspapers and publishing companies as well as non-profits and staff unions, has long been chewing on the same issue. As yet we have not developed any policy to guide us, and increasingly this lack of guidelines has inhibited us in decision making on behalf of our members.

Our diverse membership encompasses reporters, copy editors, and news-side staff as well as researchers, secretaries, IT workers and custodians, customer service representatives and ad sales staff, and fights for health care, workplace rights, due process, fair ethics policies, and other worker protections. To what extent should the union publicly advocate for these same issues? What role should we play in community struggles for access to healthcare, fair wages, decent housing, and other social justice issues? To what extent should we educate our members about the positions taken by politicians running for elected office? Is the institution we know of as our union a neutral entity or a vocal advocate?

In this special issue of the Guild Forum, we asked Guild members to express their views on the Guild's role in all things political. And, at the September 11 membership meeting, a panel of Guild members will discuss more specific guidelines for the Green Zone.

To create an effective Green Zone that represents the interests of all of our members, please join your Guild brothers and sisters in this important discussion. The Executive Council has appointed a committee on this issue--the Citizen and Community Participation Committee-- which will be making a formal recommendation on the Green Zone in the near future.

Guild Membership Meeting

Saturday, September 11, 2004

Guild DC Office
1100 15th St., NW, Suite 350
Washington, DC 20006

The Guild's Place in Politics and the Community

Featuring panelists: Keith Sinzinger (Post), Darlene Meyer (Post), David Swanson (ILCA), Michelle Amber (BNA), Bernie Lunzer (TNG) and invited others!

10:00 a.m.-12:00 noon

We urge members to actively participate in this discussion--which will lead to a Executive Council policy recommendation to members--on our role in politics, and civic and community activism.

Refreshments provided.

The Citizen and Community Participation Green Zone Committee

Darlene Meyer, Chair dmeyer@wbng.org

Julie Bell lynnp@boo.net

Mark Gruenberg unionnews@hotmail.com

Rick Ehrmann rehrmann@wbng.org

Committee members welcome your email comments!

President's Perspective

Bill Salganik, WBNG President

The Los Angeles Times wins five Pulitzers, and is called "underperforming" by its parent, Tribune Company. Reuters shifts work reporting on U.S. stocks to a newsroom in Bangalore, India.

In some ways, it's a discouraging time to be a journalist.

Most of us in the business are somehow both cynical and idealistic. At times like these, when relentless bottom-line corporations are fostering the cynical side, it's also worth summoning our idealist selves and remembering why we saw journalism as a career that mattered.

There's no better reminder of journalism as calling than the documentary "The Agronomist," which came out this spring. It was assembled by Jonathan Demme, the director who did "Silence of the Lambs" and the recent version of "The Manchurian Candidate."

It tells the story of Jean Dominique, who purchased a Haitian radio station in 1968 and, through the turmoil of Haitian dictatorship and revolution, did all he could to report all the news to the Haitian people. For most of that time, his partner – his wife and the station's editor-in-chief – was Michelle Montas. (Proud disclosure: Michelle was my classmate in journalism school.)

The station was harassed and, from time to time, shut down by the Duvalier government. Twice, Jean and Michelle were forced into exile. Twice, they returned and restarted the station. (On the first return, they were greeted by 60,000 people at the airport, acclaiming them for their efforts to bring truth and democracy to the country.)

Jean Dominique was shot dead outside his station in 2000. Michelle continued the work until she was attacked in 2002 – a security guard was killed – and she went into exile again.

We don't usually do movie reviews in *The Guild Forum*, but I want to say: See this documentary, and remember why our work can be important.

Guild Wins Yet Another Arbitration Against SEIU Local 500

By Cet Parks, Local Representative

Will the SEIU Local 500 management ever learn?

In the Fall of 2003, SEIU Local 500 unilaterally decided to stop paying their Grievance Representatives a car allowance. The collective bargaining agreement called for a \$450 (now \$465) car allowance to be paid to all employees who used their vehicles for SEIU business in excess of an average of 500 miles per month. After eight years of providing the car allowance to the Grievance Representatives without the mileage requirement, SEIU 500 management decided they wanted to enforce the contract because it was time to save money at their employee's expense. We didn't think so!

On July 9, 2004 an arbitrator ruled that the payment of a monthly car allowance to the Grievance Representatives is a binding past practice and that SEIU 500 cannot change such practice without bargaining with the Guild.

The arbitrator also saw that the parties recognized the car allowance as a meaningful economic benefit and SEIU's reliance on the collective bargaining agreement to stop the car allowance was misplaced because of the continued practice of paying the car allowance regardless of mileage.

The arbitrator ruled that SEIU Local 500 management must reinstate the car allowance for the Grievance Representatives and pay retroactively the car allowance that the Grievance Representatives should have received.

Over the past four years, this was the fourth arbitration the Guild has won over SEIU Local 500 management. When will they ever learn?

The **Guild Forum** is published by the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild, 1100 15th St. NW, Suite 350, Washington, D.C. 20005-1707. Tel.: 202-785-3650
Web Site: www.wbng.org

WBNG is Local 35 of The Newspaper Guild; Local 32035 of the Communications Workers of America, AFL-CIO, CLC. WBNG is solely responsible for **Guild Forum** content.

Letters and articles from members are welcome. No material received will be returned. Publication decisions are exclusively made by WBNG.

Send letters and articles to WBNG, attention: Guild Forum, or email to local32035@wbng.org.

LOCAL 32035 OFFICERS

President: Bill Salganik
salganik@comcast.net
Vice President: Darlene Meyer
dmeyer@wbng.org
Secretary: Sheila Lindsay
slindsay@ana.org
Treasurer: Mark Pattison
mpattison@catholicnews.com

WBNG STAFF

Lori Calderone, Administrative Officer
lcalderone@wbng.org
Rick Ehrmann, Local Representative
rehmann@wbng.org
Cetewayo Parks, Local Representative
cparks@wbng.org
Paul Reilly, Local Representative
preilly@wbng.org
Tiffany Harris, Local Representative
tharris@wbng.org
Nancy Banks, Office Manager
nbanks@wbng.org
Elsie Thull, Bookkeeper
ethull@wbng.org

Guild Welcomes New Local Representative

WBNG is pleased to welcome Tiffany Harris as WBNG's newest Local Representative. Tiffany comes to the Guild from the California State Employees Association, an affiliate of SEIU, where she was a labor representative and workplace organizer. Tiffany is a 1997 graduate of Howard University, and earned her J.D. in 2002 from Thomas Cooley Law School in Lansing, Michigan. Tiffany's Guild assignments include The Washington Post, The American Nurses Association, and SEIU Local 500. Welcome, Tiffany!

Guild Members Discuss The Green Zone, Journalism Ethics, and Unionism

Ethics: Disinterested to the core, or a Framework for Decisions?

Julie Bell, Sun unit editorial vice chair

The Newspaper Guild's Washington-Baltimore local joined the NAACP for life in 1973. A plaque commemorating the decision hangs on a conference room wall in our Washington offices. Would we do the same thing today?

Regrettably, I think we would not even consider it. Somewhere along the way, we have been co-opted by the management view that ethical journalism means reporters and editors must be disinterested to our very core. We will stand by as a union on virtually any issue, no matter what's at stake for the future of our craft, the commercial workers we also represent or our world. In 1973, we joined the NAACP and opposed racism in a volatile time. Today, we are in danger of becoming so pious that we are purely irrelevant.

My own view is that this stems from a fundamental misunderstanding, perpetuated by management, of what it means to be ethical. Profit-seeking publishers bent on controlling a work force more focused on justice than margins like to think of ethics as a long list of things that reporters and editors — and, increasingly, even commercial workers — should not do. I think being ethical is more complicated, and frankly more difficult, than that. It is about finding the proper balance between important but **conflicting** values, and that's hard work.

Here is a simple example: I recently covered a medical event at a homeless shelter which has a clinic and a food pantry. While writing about the clinic, I noticed that the food pantry needs food. Our Guild local could organize regular food drives for this pantry and others.

But wait: a legitimate argument against doing so is that journalists generally shouldn't give things of value to organizations they have covered or might cover. That view would preclude us from giving to any homeless shelter or food pantry in the Baltimore area — ever. Is this ethical? I would argue it is not. Instead, my thought is that we could come up with a system of donating food to this pantry and others on a rotating basis that would favor none, preventing charges of bias or favoritism while also preserving our own place in the human race. This would take more thought and more work than simply saying "no." But I would argue that it is the right thing to do.

Other examples are more difficult. Here is another: I am a member, with the written permission of my managing editor, of the ACLU, one of the few organizations that has long argued that I and other gay people deserve the same rights as other citizens. Is that membership ethical? Many people would say no, and I carefully weigh this argument myself whenever my membership comes up for renewal. I am weighing it now, and it isn't easy. **Ethical decision-making almost never is.** That is because **being ethical** is about having a framework for making decisions; it is not about having the decisions already made.

So let's talk. Whatever the outcome, just having the talk will make us a better, and stronger, Guild.

Thoughts on the Green Way

Ken May, BNA, WBNG at-large delegate

Over 20 years ago, I worked at Lawyers' Cooperative Publishing and was involved in an unsuccessful effort to organize the editors there. We asked the people from the union with which we were involved, the UAW, how we'd get a contract if they won the election.

They said that they had organized Prentice Hall, which resisted bargaining a contract. The UAW got the Michigan Board of Education (there are lots of auto factories and auto workers in Michigan) to tell Prentice Hall management that if it did not bargain in good faith, Michigan would not buy Prentice Hall textbooks.

There is a huge and longrunning debate in the Guild about involvement in politics. Bargaining is no longer done just at the bargaining table.

Political influence is a weapon that can help us win better contracts and organizing campaigns. The Michigan Board of Education did not support the UAW out of the goodness of their heart, but because they needed the UAW support to remain in public life.

We don't have that political weapon in our arsenal. In my view, it would be useful if we did.

At heart I am a lawyer. Monroe Freedman, a law professor and expert in legal ethics was once asked how he could commit civil disobedience on behalf of Cesar Chavez, since he was a lawyer sworn to uphold the law. He said, "I was a free man before I became a lawyer."

To me, what I do politically on my own time is not the employer's business. But lots of journalists have a sincere concern about conflicts of interest, that somehow if their union takes a position on something, that will compromise the person covering that candidate or issue.

That's not an unreasonable view. I think there are ways for the Guild to be politically active and accommodate those concerns, such as develop rules indicating that reporters covering an issue or candidate will not be pressured by us to cover it the way we like or to be involved in our efforts to support those issues or candidates. But I think we have to be serious about our political involvement. To me, there's not much point in confronting the difficult issues around political involvement if we don't want to be serious about it. If all we want to do is pass some resolutions, but be too pure, for example, to endorse candidates and give them money, we really shouldn't bother going through this debate.



"A 34% cut in our corporate ethics should return us to profitability."

Guild Members Discuss The Green Zone, Journalism Ethics, and Unionism

Stronger Public Stances Without Outright Endorsements

Mark Pattison, Catholic News Service, WBNG Treasurer

When I first became active in the Washington-Baltimore Guild in 1989, I was told by those with much more experience that the Guild never endorsed candidates — followed by a primer on the aftermath of the Guild's endorsement of George McGovern in 1972. But something the Guild could get behind were labor solidarity matters in Congress or state houses, and First Amendment issues.

The following year, the local endorsed a boycott of Salvadoran coffee. I initially voted for that as an Executive Council member, but was sternly rebuked by members of my unit. I sought advice from leaders at other small units within WBNG, asked for — and got a majority on the Council — for reconsideration of the matter. At the next membership meeting, members of my unit showed up en masse to overturn the decision. In retrospect, the boycott had too tenuous a connection with labor solidarity to make it worth our efforts.

However, labor solidarity as it is played out in our Congress and legislatures — and in the streets of our cities and towns — is fair game, as is First Amendment issues. It's just that at both the local and international levels, the Guild hasn't had the kind of budget to make its voice heard.

TNG did some of the early work on repetitive strain injury, which finally resulted in some watered-down OSHA regulations — which the current (Republican-majority) Congress overturned. Now that the Guild is partnered with CWA, we can make our voice heard, if we choose to speak up.

On the local level, the WBNG Executive Council offered a stinging rebuke of the D.C. judge who was threatening to throw Linda Wheeler, a Post unit activist, into jail for refusing to disclose a source. I may never know whether the judge saw our resolution, but Linda never saw any jail time.

I am more than happy to take part in some of the many "Street Heat" rallies that the Metropolitan Washington AFL-CIO Council sponsors. When the Guild is pounding the pavement in solidarity with other working women and men, their unions will remember it was the Guild at their side. In May, I helped organize a Guild-led "Street Heat" rally outside a Capitol Hill parking garage owned by one of Washington's largest nonunion parking garage owners, which found Guild members from the Atlantic Ocean to the Rockies marching in solidarity.

Without a doubt, we need assert ourselves more strongly in the public arena. And there are lots of ways short of endorsing candidates that we can do that.

Civic Activism and Political Participation

Mark Gruenberg, Chair, At-Large Units

Once again, The Newspaper Guild is confronted by a perennial question: To what extent, consistent with standards or perceptions of "objectivity," should editorial-side journalists engage in civic activism or political participation?

This question has been addressed—and debated—by TNG ever since its inception. Its initial founder, Heywood Broun, was a crusading columnist, campaigning for labor rights in the workplace, among other causes.

There have been other notable, sometimes controversial, instances of political involvement: TNG's first and only endorsement of a presidential candidate, George McGovern, in 1972 (motivated more by President Nixon's attempts to curtail freedom of the press) and the Guild's objections to the Reagan administration's war against the contras come to mind.

Closer to home, The Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild had its own controversy several years ago when one staffer pushed for a payment—and implied endorsement—to the then-nascent Labor Party. The Executive Council initially was favorable to the idea, but the membership rejected it. And hanging on the wall of our meeting room is the WBNG's "Life Membership," dated 1973, in the NAACP. Some would call that "political."

The issue also roils newsrooms and newspaper "ethics codes" nationwide, including at *The Washington Post*, the Denver papers—where the Denver Guild recently beat back an extremely restrictive ethics code—*The Baltimore Sun*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, all TNG papers.

Speaking as a labor journalist and someone who has covered politics for 30 years, and with a background in political science, I believe that TNG has a "green zone," to use the phrase at the recent Tri-Council meeting, where we should get involved politically and civically, but on issues, not on personalities and certainly not on endorsements.

There are issues where unless we speak up, nobody will speak for us. Those are the ones where TNG as an organization and TNG members as individuals might, consistent with our own beliefs and standards, take a non-partisan stand, but in our own interests. Let me offer a few examples:

OVERTIME. The Labor Department's new overtime rules, which took effect Aug. 23, will severely impact overtime pay eligibility for newspaper people and other media members. If you "supervise" an editorial assistant or two for, say, 5 percent of your day, your employer can now declare you exempt from overtime—even at a pay level as low as \$23,660 a year.

Can you just see a starting reporter at the *Sun*, making not much more than that figure, but benefiting from overtime, asking a copyboy or copygirl to fetch a cup of coffee—and an editor telling the reporter: "You're a supervisor...no overtime."?

continued, page 6

Guild Members Discuss The Green Zone, Journalism Ethics, and Unionism

Ethical Journalism and Unionism

By David Swanson, International Labor Communications Association Media Coordinator, ILCAonline.org

Journalistic ethics have become in many ways corporate ethics. When those ethics penetrate journalists' unions the result is, therefore, self-destructive.

The central ethic of journalism today is balance. It is more important to include two opposing points of view than to investigate whether either of them is supported by facts or whether there is a third point of view being left out, or whether the topic is important at all, or whether your reporting is building up or tearing down our democracy. As long as you've got balance, you're ethical.

There are those who cynically employ this ethic to produce journalism that many of us recognize as degraded and degrading. There are others who treat it seriously with the best of intentions. It is, in every case, the ethic of a corporate agenda, because – counterintuitive as this may seem – it is an ethic of shutting out viewpoints, not of letting them in.

When I was a reporter, including at the Bureau of National Affairs, I was sometimes asked to find two opposing points of view, and told what those points of view should be, down to what the quotes ought to say. Working in public relations, I've had reporters call me up, tell me what their story was going to be, and ask me to agree to a prewritten quote. In one sense of the subjective-objective dichotomy, this is wholly subjective. It is a refusal to find anything new. But it is perfectly adherent to the ethic of balance.

If you report on the viewpoint of someone who believes we can best slow global warming through new government investment in wind energy, how would you balance that? With an idea for a different type of government program focused more on solar energy? With a plan to simply use less energy? With an anarcho-libertarian plea to act locally and leave the government out of it? Or with an argument from ExxonMobil that global warming doesn't exist? Or would you build the wind energy program into your article as an unargued assumption and provide a very balanced account of the possible ways to fund it?

The answer to that last question is: of course not. Only corporate agenda items get to be unargued assumptions. Do we want this type of free trade or that type of free trade? That's balance.

The general answer is that you would do what your employer and the general corporate media consensus want. You would treat those claims that the consensus cannot allow to be questioned as unquestionable. And you would find balance on the others by reporting on two points of view equidistant from your employer's. You would not write at all on topics that are not approved. You would seek to make your balance deferential to those in power. And you would tend to favor stories that require less research and ask less of readers.

The bigger problem in our journalism today is not stories on the holocaust balanced by holocaust deniers or stories on human rights abuses balanced by advocates for promoting the use of torture, but rather seemingly harmless and well-balanced stories on the pros and cons of a political candidate's hair style or the drama of waiting to testify on an important issue before Congress. These stories are destructive because they are used as justification for not reporting on anything of substance, on what it would mean to people for a candidate to be elected or a bill to be brought to a vote.

Take as an example important to labor the issue of health care and how it has been covered during the current presidential campaign. The United States is the only industrial democracy without universal health care. We achieve this through our unique system of private health insurance, a system that wastes a huge percentage of our health care spending on bureaucracy, lobbying, and advertising, and leaves millions of people uncovered while providing insufficient and inefficient coverage to millions more. The vast majority of Americans favor universal health coverage. A third of the candidates in the Democratic primaries favored a system of universal single-payer health care under which we would spend less money than we do today but cover over 40 million more people and cover every American with comprehensive and preventive care from cradle to grave. This viewpoint was shut out by balance.

The very few stories that covered health care during the primaries – compared to the huge number that covered polls, bank accounts, endorsements, wardrobes, and other topics that require nothing of the reader – covered it in a balanced way by very evenhandedly reporting how much the plans put forward by the candidates the media preferred would cost and how many people they would cover. This was made especially balanced by quoting what each of these “leading” candidates said about their own plan and what the others said about it. Those candidates who favored getting rid of HMOs and private insurance companies, if mentioned at all, were included at the bottom of the story. But the nature of what they wanted to do was not mentioned, only the price and the number of people to be covered, as if individuals and businesses would still have to pay for health insurance the way they do today and prices would be allowed to continue to soar.

Continued page 6

Guild Members Discuss The Green Zone, Journalism Ethics, and Unionism

Civic Activism and Political Participation, *by Mark Gruenberg, continued from page 3*

MEDIA CONCENTRATION. TNG led the campaign against the Federal Communications Commission's media concentration plans. While we emphasized press freedom, there was also another issue involved that directly affects us: Control. A conglomerate is much more likely to hand down ukases dictating to reporters what they can and cannot cover.

Even more prevalent are corporate decisions, in the name of profits, to cut back on coverage of hard news in favor of such things as features, "news you can use" and—for the broadcast media—"happy talk" and in-house promotions. Media concentration is not just a matter of quantity of jobs or the public's right to know, but quality of jobs. And why should we be muzzled when we want to discuss the quality of our jobs?

GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS. It is in the nature of politicians to want to control information by any means possible, while putting themselves in a favorable light. I mentioned the McGovern endorsement, and that's a prime example: Nixon's attempt at prior censorship of the Pentagon Papers, Agnew's threats to broadcast licensees, and other restrictions led to that. In this modern era, we confront other and sometimes more subtle controls, from "spin" to official misuse of FOIA, to overclassification of records to "embedding" with its accompanying restrictions on travel in combat zones.

These are all professional issues on which, if TNG as our union and we as individuals do not speak up, participate and—yes—lobby, nobody will.

Overtime has drawn everyone's attention, or it will when paychecks start declining after Aug. 23, but nobody knows about its impact on us. Media concentration drew attention only after TNG led CWA in raising hell. But who's talking about the positive—or negative—impact of "spin" and "embedding" and other restrictions on coverage?

So that's where I come down: Lobby on the issues, not on politics and not on personalities. If asked, provide information on what the issues stand and what the impact is. Beyond that, the "green zone" turns gray—and we venture into an area better left undisturbed.

Ethical Journalism and Unionism, *by David Swanson, continued from page 5*

Senator Kerry's position on health care was one of the ones given the most respectful coverage during the primaries, but balanced coverage during the general election will require that his plan go up against the Bush Administration's alleged accomplishments on health care, and too much investigation of the Bush Administration's lies on the subject would be unbalanced and undeferential. Kerry and Edwards will be the tax and spenders to Bush's responsible proven accomplishments. Of course this is possible because military spending doesn't count as spending, and because Kerry and Edwards won't challenge that pretense. But the Democrats' race to the middle of the road (where, as Jim Hightower said, there is nothing but yellow lines and dead armadillos) is no reason for journalists to follow them there. Much less unionists!

Journalists who suppose that they are fooling the public into believing that they hold no point of view and are "unbiased" are fooling only themselves. The public largely understands that an absence of bias is not a coherent concept. The question is what your biases are, not whether you have them. I wouldn't read a word on politics by someone who told me they avoided participating in politics. What kind of an understanding of politics could they have?

I actually do try to avoid reading a word on politics by Washington Post writers like Jim VandeHei or Dan Balz because of their biases. These guys can walk out of a candidates forum in which certain candidates dominated and won overwhelmingly more applause than the others, and write their stories as if the candidates that they themselves walked into the room favoring had dominated. For reporters with that sort of blatant bias to avoid political activism in order to preserve their professionalism is, for many readers, pointless.

The solution is not to avoid bias and politics, but to develop more democratic biases — and a better awareness of them, an understanding that in fact political reporting always is political activism.

On Sunday, Aug. 18, 2002, the Washington Post ran an editorial, an ombudsman column, and three op-eds about a potential U.S. attack on Iraq, with the clear thrust being in favor of such an attack. But it was not necessary to turn to the "opinion" section of the paper to get that message. An article on the top of the front page reported on a memo that "Defense" Secretary Rumsfeld had sent to the White House and the media. "Defense" officials were worried that countries such as Iraq or Iran could use cruise missile technology to attack "U.S. installations or the American homeland." The article admitted that "no particular piece of new intelligence prompted the warning." A second article the same day in effect urged the U.S. "President" to hurry up and argue for an attack on Iraq before opponents of such an attack raised their voices too loudly. The headline was, "White House Push for Iraqi Strike Is On Hold: Waiting to Make Case for Action Allows Invasion Opponents to Dominate Debate." While the article did touch on some of the opponents' arguments, it mainly focused on arguments about how best to persuade the American public and European politicians to support a war. Whether the authors of those articles do their civic duty by participating in politics or not won't make them less responsible for contributing to the needless deaths of thousands.

Continued, page 7

Guild Members Discuss The Green Zone, Journalism Ethics, and Unionism

Ethical Journalism and Unionism, by David Swanson, continued from page 6

Not only should journalists drop the pretense that they don't have opinions, but so should unions. Labor unions serve two major purposes. Or at least they used to. They organize particular groups of workers to win victories over particular employers. And they organize citizens to win political victories for all of us. If it were not for labor, we would not have Social Security, Medicare, the Family and Medical Leave Act, or many of the other political gains of the last century. The minimum wage has declined right alongside the declining labor movement. Neither will be revived without reviving the other.

Unions of workers in the news media cannot be indifferent to legislation on media consolidation, overtime, the right to organize, or the right of John Ashcroft to search your desk. Leaving politics to a struggle between the moneyed and the unorganized is a recipe for disaster.

The labor movement is needed in our national democracy. At the same time, democracy is needed in the labor movement. There ought to be strong political factions vying for power within every union, and every action of the union ought to be arrived at through an open and democratic practice. And there must be action!

One project the labor movement ought to undertake is organizing the reporters, ad-sellers, receptionists, and printers at small newspapers owned by large corporations paying poverty wages. A campaign for a Living Wage for Reporters could win support from countless community and activist groups across a wide political spectrum who are sick and tired of their work and their concerns not being covered. In small towns, reporting suffers as much from high turnover and low skill as it does from editorial decisions. There is often no competition for staff or readers, because the same corporation owns the papers in each of the surrounding counties.

A living wage for reporters campaign could unite the living wage movement with the media reform movement with the labor movement while encouraging local political activism. We have a responsibility to do this. Just think of it as balancing the influence of Rupert Murdoch.

National Labor Relations Board Issues Complaint Against The Baltimore Sun for Failure to Bargain in Good Faith

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which administers and enforces the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), has issued a complaint against The Baltimore Sun. The complaint follows an Unfair Labor Practice charge filed by WBNG on March 31, 2004 alleging The Sun's failure and refusal to bargain collectively and in good faith. The NLRB, having conducted an investigation into the Guild's charge, found merit in the Guild's ULP charge, and issued the written complaint.

The Guild filed the ULP after The Sun completed contractually mandated negotiations on a performance evaluation system in early February. The Guild had requested all documents and forms associated with the company's performance system, and received extensive information including a variety of detailed forms. After the bargaining ended, however—with The Sun negotiator arising from his seat, stating "we have met our legal obligation" and exiting the room—The Sun imposed a system which included a new form neither shared, as requested and required, with the Guild, nor bargained. The Guild asserted, and the NLRB agreed, that this failure to provide requested and relevant information and to bargain in good faith is a violation of the NLRA, the primary federal labor law affecting American workers.

Short of a settlement, which the NLRB historically attempts on behalf of the charging party, an administrative law judge will hear the parties' cases November 16.

Guild Wins Discharge Arbitration Against The Baltimore Sun

Demonstrating again the importance of the union contract to job security, an arbitrator has upheld the Guild's grievance on behalf of a Sun employee fired without just and sufficient cause. The employee was fired for excessive absences, although those absences were covered by sick leave and he brought in doctor's notes for nearly all of the absences. The employee had been verbally warned and later suspended for excessive absences, but in the period preceding termination attendance had improved. The arbitrator found the health condition for which the grievant was absent fell clearly under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) which protects employees from discipline for absences due to FMLA covered medical conditions. And, therefore, since the grievant's absences were covered by earned sick leave and/or the federal FMLA, the arbitrator ordered the Sun to offer the employee reinstatement.

An employee working in a non-unionized workplace facing precisely the same set of facts would have a tough and costly time getting reinstated, even though protected by federal law. She or he would have to hire a lawyer and sue, going up against The Sun's well known wall of lawyers. Unions work.

