

G U I L D forum



Local 32035

The Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild

March 15, 2005

Battling Hostile Publishers

by Paul Reilly

In recent years, or is it decades, unionized newspaper employees across the country have faced increasingly intransigent publishers who seek to improve their bottom line at the expense of their employees.

Most of these fights go unnoticed, relegated to a couple paragraphs in the Guild Reporter. It's only when one of these publishers pushes too hard - or the employees decide enough is enough - that the struggle gets on the radar screen of the average Guild member.

This is an attempt to look at two of those struggles-- the Providence Journal, and the still unresolved dispute at The Vindicator in Youngstown Ohio- to compare how Guild members attempt to gain leverage over hostile publishers.

The size of the newspapers and the communities they serve differ, but at both papers the publishers would rather pay scabs and lawyers to break a union than pay their own workers to sustain their newspaper.

The Journal has about twice the circulation of the Vindicator, mirroring the sizes of the two communities. The Vindicator also is family owned, while the Journal had been purchased by Belo Publishing prior to the start of contract negotiations in 2000. (While a chain, Texas-based Belo does not compare to Tribune, Gannett, Knight Ridder or the other large chains. Belo's only other major paper is the Dallas Morning News. It also owns 19 TV stations).

There are similarities. Youngstown and Providence are both cities with strong industrial histories and with a history of strong unions. Both Locals are relatively small. And, the employees at the both newspapers both faced employers that sought significant take-backs combined with paltry pay increases. Both rejected "the last best" offer from their publishers.

That's about where the similarities end.

In January 2000, Providence Journal employees overwhelmingly rejected the company's final proposal - and continued working without a contract. But they didn't stop fighting. Over the course of the next four years they carried out countless actions to put pressure on the company, including enlisting community support; informational picketing; rallies (including one in which people spontaneously moved the rally inside the newspaper office); refusal to use personal cars on assignments, taking taxis at newspaper expense instead; an advertiser boycott; and filing scores of Unfair Labor Practice charges - 28 of which were upheld by an NLRB administrative law judge. The Local also launched a radio ad campaign to advertise the Journal's lawbreaking. What did they win when they finally settled in December 2003? An eight-year contract retroactive to 2000 with retroactive pay raises of zero percent, three percent, zero percent and six percent and no less than eight percent over the next four years. Full-time employees got a \$1,000 signing bonus. The Guild also fought off an attempt to allow unilateral changes in health benefits but lost a cap on insurance cost increases. The union stood solidly together, and is solid today still, defending and expanding worker's rights and economic opportunities.

In Youngstown, members didn't start with like informational picketing or anything so tame- they immediately went to the real thing, striking last November. They are out, still. Members rejected a company proposal that- after four years without a raise -would increase wages one percent in each of the first two years and two percent in the last year. It also would change health insurance premiums from a flat rate to a percentage.

Front Page and Guild Service Award Ceremony

Monday, March 28, 2005

AFL-CIO

815 16th St., NW, DC

Reception: 6:30 p.m.

Awards Presentation: 7:15 p.m.

EmCee: Tom Sherwood

NBC Political Correspondent (and
former Guild Member!)

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Sun/Tribune publisher donates to striking Guild members in Ohio

Sun Publisher Denise Palmer has over \$260 to striking Ohio Guild members, and she is expected to donate more.

Of course, she may not have intended to be so generous. But in January, The Sun gave Sun employees, including nearly 600 Guild unit members, a significant reward for their "hard work, dedication and teamwork" in the past year; said Palmer, Sun/Tribune will "as a small gesture of thanks" give each worker a voucher for a free meal in the cafeteria (see the Guild's article "Please Ma'am, may I have some more?" at www.wbng.org/sun/Bulletins/bulletinacurrent.html.)

But Sun Guild unit members felt striking workers in Youngstown deserved their solidarity and support, and donated the value of their vouchers to the cause. After all, Guild members at the Youngstown Vindicator-on strike for four months-watch scabs infect their workplace every day, just as Baltimore Sun Guild members did in spring, 2003, when Tribune decided to spend millions of dollars intimidating their unionized workers—even before they sat down at the bargaining table in "good faith". Donations are still rolling in, and a better use for Tribune crumbs from the table cannot be imagined, since Trib did all it could to take pay away from its own workers in the past year. Sun workers interested in cashing in their company script and donating to striking newspaper workers should contact their steward. Guild members may send a check directly to the Youngstown Newspaper Guild, P.O. Box 1135, Youngstown, Ohio 44501. You can read the Valley Voice, the strike paper, at www.valleyvoiceonline.com/, and better yet, subscribe.

Our thanks to Sun Trib publisher Denise Palmer!

Hostile Publishers, continued from page 1

More than four months later, the 170 or so Youngstown Guild members remain on strike. The community has been enlisted in the struggle, as well as local politicians. The paper continues publishing, with the help of scabs from sympathetic newspapers such as The Times Picayune of New Orleans. Scabs, of course, are a common tool of the publisher's "labor relations" trade. Guild members at The Baltimore Sun/Tribune, greeted scabs day after day in the spring of 2003, when the company brought them in even before the parties started bargaining. Those scabbing at the Vindicator, as with The Sun, are receiving plenty of pay to work at the expense of other workers. The Vindicator, like The Sun and others before it, is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on scabs rather than on its own workers' wage and benefit package (The Sun spent over \$2 million in scab expenses). The workers are publishing a strike paper, widely read in the community (valleyvoiceonline.com).

Salaries at the Vindicator are so low (more than half earn less than \$9 an hour) that the strike benefits of \$300 a week are actually a pay raise for some of the strikers.

What the Youngstown strikers will gain – if anything – remains to be seen. What the Providence workers gained by working for years without a contract – and without any pay raises – is debatable. What is clear, though, is that workers surely can't make any gains without concerted action; and often a long struggle with the publisher. Whether a devastating strike or working without a contract, workers must be ready well before bargaining begins to define how their own labor and their community ties can be united to win. Surely the Publisher has already done the same.



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Guild Service Awards Member of the year

Mark Gruenberg, at-large units

Steward of the year

Michelle Clemens, UFCW

Unit officer of the year

Marshall Brown, SEIU 500

Customer service professional of the year

Ann Marie Ditchey, Washington Post

Unit of the year

Radio Free Asia

Sun Sweeps Front Page Awards

GRAND PRIZES

Bill Pryor Memorial Grand Prize for Writing: **Alec MacGillis**, Baltimore Sun, "Poor Schools, Rich Targets"

Bill Pryor Memorial Grand Prize for Photography: **John Makely**, Baltimore Sun, Body of Work

WRITING

Morton Mintz Award for Investigative Reporting: **Greg Garland** and **Gus G.Sentementes**, Baltimore Sun, "Inmate's Final Hours"

Frank C. Porter Memorial Award for Labor and Business Reporting: **Jamie Smith Hopkins**, Baltimore Sun, body of work

(honorable mention) **Griff Witte, Jonathan Krim, Alec Klein, Greg Schneider**, Washington Post, "\$17 an Hour" series

(honorable mention) **Meredith Cohan**, Baltimore Sun, "Gift Cards" and "Amish Tobacco"

(honorable mention) **M. William Salganik**, Baltimore Sun, "Too Many Choices" and "Selling Quick Fix For Minor Ailments"

Bernie Harrison Memorial Award for Commentary: **Ann LoLordo**, Baltimore Sun, "A Life Worth Living?"

(honorable mention) **Patricia Zapor**, Catholic News Service, "Are Republican Catholic Pols Treated Differently Than Democrats?"

Bargaining Unit Publication: **Rick Weiss**, Washington Post, "Merit Pay at the Washington Post" series

Criticism: **Michael Sragow**, Baltimore Sun, "The Gospel According to Mel"

(honorable mention) **Stephanie Shapiro**, Baltimore Sun, "How Little Films Challenge the Concept of 'Normal'"

Feature Writing: **Jonathan Pitts**, Baltimore Sun, "Private Heinlein's Day" series

Headline Writing (honorable mention only): **Christian Zang**, Baltimore Sun, "Seven Up, O's Lose Fizz, 8-7"

International News Reporting: **Scott Higham, Sewell Chan, Scott Wilson, Dana Priest, Joe Stephens, Josh White, Christian Davenport, Jackie Spinner, Margot Williams**, Washington Post, Abu Ghraib series

Local News Reporting: **Laura Vozzella, Rona Kobell, Howard Libit, Stephen Kiehl, Del Quentin Wilber, Tom Pelton, Jonathon Briggs, Reginald Fields, Frank D. Roylance, Jamie Stiehm, Shiela Jackson**, Baltimore Sun, "Boat Capsizes"

National News Reporting: **Rick Weiss**, Washington Post, "'Data Quality' Law Is Nemesis of Regulation"

(honorable mention) **M. William Salganik**, Baltimore Sun, "Right to Sue HMOs Argued"

(honorable mention) **Patricia Zapor**, Catholic News Service, 2004 political reporting

Non-Daily Specialized Technical Reporting: **Susan J. McGorlick**, Bureau of National Affairs, "NLRB Case on Recognition Bar Attracts Many Amicus Briefs From Interested Parties"

Public Service Reporting: **Alec MacGillis**, Baltimore Sun, "Poor Schools, Rich Targets"

Sports Reporting: **Steve Fainaru**, Washington Post, "Stadium" series

(honorable mention) **Steven Goff**, Washington Post, "The Emergence of a Prodigy"

(honorable mention) **Mike Klingaman**, Baltimore Sun, "Sports History" series

PHOTOGRAPHY

Black-and-White Photography: **Lloyd Fox**, Baltimore Sun, "Amish Men Assemble"

Feature Photography: **Lloyd Fox**, Baltimore Sun, "I Got It!"

(honorable mention) **Christopher T. Assaf**, Baltimore Sun, "The Accidental Artist"

Local News Photography: **Kenneth K. Lam**, Baltimore Sun, "Sad Farewell"

(honorable mention) **Christopher T. Assaf**, Baltimore Sun, "Running Festival A Day to Take Things In Stride"

National News Photography: **John Makely**, Baltimore Sun, "The Hunt for Bin Laden, The Search for Peace"

(honorable mention) **David Hobby**, Baltimore Sun, "A Nation Pays Its Respects"

Picture Story: **Monica Lopossay**, Baltimore Sun, "Reaching for a Cure When Hope Flickers"

(honorable mention) **Lloyd Fox**, Baltimore Sun, "Determination Fuels an Olympic Dream"

Portrait Photography: **Amy Davis**, Baltimore Sun, "Flower Power"

(honorable mention) **Lloyd Fox**, Baltimore Sun, "Follow the Leader"

Sports Photography: **John McDonnell**, Washington Post, "Fumble"

(honorable mention) **Lloyd Fox**, Baltimore Sun, "Brilliant: Smarty Jones"

(honorable mention) **John Makely**, Baltimore Sun, "Horseplay, Afghan-Style"

DESIGN

Advertising Design: **Gene Russell**, Baltimore Sun, "Lilypons"

Illustration Design: **Randy Mays**, Washington Post, "What Makes a Neighborhood Kid Friendly" and "Scared? You Can Fight Back on Taxes"

(honorable mention) **Anthony DeFeo**, Catholic News Service, "Health Kit 2004"

News Graphic Design: **Shirdell McDonald**, Baltimore Sun, "Cicadas Emerge After 17 Years Under ground"

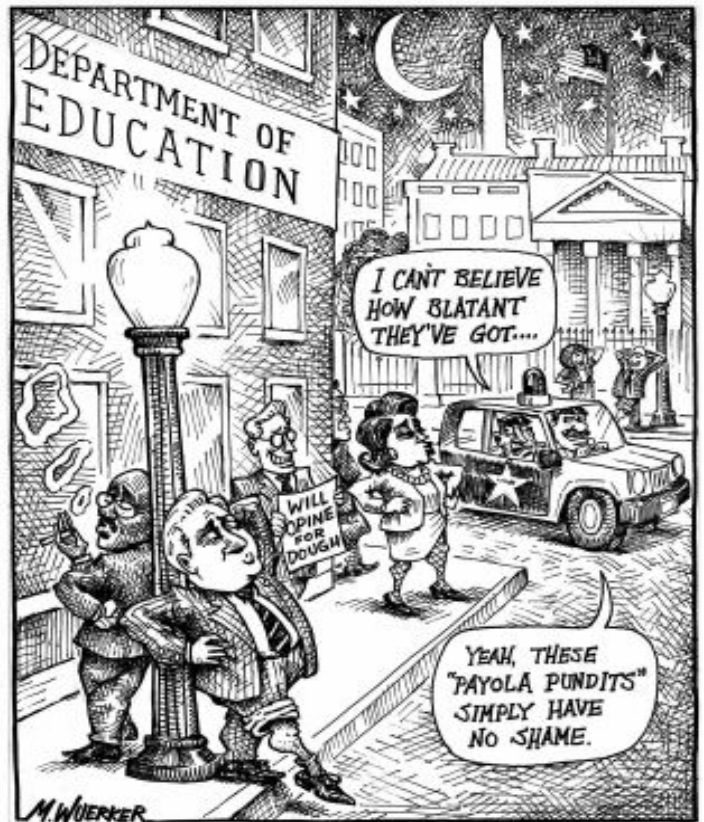
(honorable mention) **Anthony DeFeo**, Catholic News Service, "Archangels" and "Missions of California"

Guild Unionized Worksites Grow by Two

Two employers have granted voluntary recognition to WBNG for their workforce.

Fifteen employees at UNITE HERE Local 25, which represents hotel employees in Washington, DC and Virginia, selected the Guild as their exclusive bargaining agent, and gained recognition in January. UNITE HERE Local 25 recently concluded its own contract struggle days before inauguration day with the major DC hotels. The Guild represents all permanent workers of the local, including business agents, organizers, researchers, and office support staff. Bargaining is expected to commence in April.

American Rights at Work (ARAW), a non-profit education and advocacy organization promoting workers' rights, recognized WBNG this month as the exclusive representative for its seven employees, including research and communications staff. Former congressman David Bonior chairs the organization.



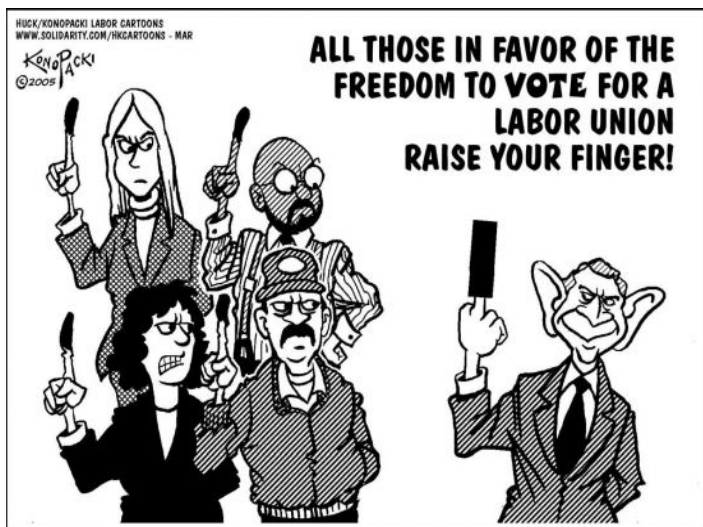
CWA, AFL-CIO SAY: BUY CINGULAR

The Communications Workers of America and the AFL-CIO are urging cell phone-using unionists to go with Cingular, "the nations largest wireless company and the ONLY union wireless company."

Some 22,000 Cingular employees who are CWA members have higher wages than their counterparts at Verizon Wireless, the union says, and have been able to unionize without employer interference.

Verizon Wireless, however, continues to throw roadblocks in the way of workers who want representation. Late last year, the National Labor Relations Board issued a complaint against the company for multiple unfair labor practices including illegally firing workers for union activities and retaliating against other activists, among other things.

The AFL-CIO notes that union members are eligible for discounts on Cingular phones through the Union Privilege program. More information is available at www.unionprivilege.org/jcingular-wireless.cfm.



"It's not fair. We have to make up lies about the union... but they get to tell the truth about the company."

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