Crossing the line: A history of the "Great Falls Tribune" strike of 1974

Dennis Lynn Swibold

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University of Montana
CROSSING THE LINE:
A HISTORY OF THE GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE STRIKE OF 1974

By

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B. A., University of Arizona, 1979

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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This thesis examines the Great Falls Newspaper Guild's strike against the Great Falls Tribune from Oct. 19 to Dec. 20, 1974, a period during which Montana's second-largest newspaper was forced to cease publication for nearly nine weeks.

Primary research sources were union records donated to the University of Montana Archives by the Great Falls Newspaper Guild before and during this study, management records, newspaper accounts of the strike and interviews with past and present Tribune employees who participated in the only documented strike by newspaper editorial employees against a newspaper in the history of Montana journalism.

This thesis concludes that the strike's failure, caused by the introduction of job-threatening technologies and a lack of solidarity within the Guild and with other Tribune unions, crippled the union to such an extent that it has yet to recover in terms of membership or bargaining power.

As Montana's only union of newspaper journalists, the Great Falls Guild set the standard for pay and benefits for Montana journalists from its creation in 1936 to the 1960s, when Tribune salaries began to pale in comparison with national Guild averages. Alarmed by the widening gap between local wages, particularly at the bottom of the union's scale, and national averages, the Great Falls Guild's leadership became increasingly militant, and after several strike threats in the 1960s and early 1970s, voted to walk out in 1974 in an effort to boost wages and benefits. The strike succeeded in shutting down the Tribune for nine weeks, but ultimately collapsed as other Tribune craft unions, along with 15 Guild members, returned to work when management demonstrated it could produce the newspaper without them.

The strike's failure cost the Great Falls Guild its "closed shop." That, coupled with the introduction of new technologies, which allowed the paper to be produced by fewer employees, made it unlikely that any future strike would succeed. As a consequence, the Guild lost members and has failed to prevent reductions in employee benefits. Moreover, the strike's failure, combined with improvements in wages and benefits at Montana's non-union newspapers, has thwarted the Great Falls Guild's hopes of organizing other Guild chapters throughout the state.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my colleagues and friends, Carol Van Valkenburg, Bob McGiffert, Patty Reksten, Joe Durso and Charlie Hood, who provided inspiration and guidance for this project; to the men and women of the Great Falls Tribune, who offered their time and assistance in locating information; and to my wife, Julie Miller Swibold, whose unflagging support made this thesis possible.
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Guild member Mike Morgan (center) tries to prevent strikebreaker Bruce Bartley (second from right) from entering the Tribune building.

Great Falls Newspaper Guild photo
Guild President Carla Beck is hauled away by police.

Photo courtesy of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild.

Strikebreaker Jerry Coonse (third from right) lands what appears to be a punch on the chin of Guild member Jack Remmel (second from right) while police and Tribune General manager Joel Koppang (far left) look on.

Photo courtesy of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild.
INTRODUCTION

On the morning of Oct. 20, 1974, loyal subscribers to the Great Falls Tribune received something of a shock. Since it began morning publication in May of 1890, "the Trib" had become as much a part of many readers' breakfast ritual as the day's first steaming cup of coffee. And this, after all, was Sunday. Readers had little reason to doubt their fat Sunday newspaper would be on the doorstep or in the tube nailed to the mailbox post. For all they knew, this morning, like any other, would be spent browsing through the paper, discussing the stories, noting the births and engagements, arguing about the editorials or wrestling for first crack at the comics.

But on this Sunday, the Tribune did not come. It was not on the doorstep or in the mailbox. It was not on the roof or in the shrubbery; nor had the paper carrier overslept. The scene was the same for more than 46,000 subscribers in Great Falls and outlying regions of north central Montana, and the Tribune's switchboard was overloaded with calls from frustrated readers. They learned eventually that there had been a breakdown; not in the paper's massive mechanical presses, but in the strained relationship between the paper's management and labor.
For the first time in their union's 38-year history, members of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild, which represented the paper's editorial, circulation, advertising and business staffs, had walked off the job. For the first time since the paper's birth in 1885, the Tribune failed to publish a regularly scheduled edition. And for the first time in the history of Montana journalism, a newspaper had been forced to cease publication by a strike of its own editorial employees.

Beginning with the unionization of miners in gold, silver and copper camps, organized labor has had a long and colorful history in Montana. But with only a few exceptions, the state's historians have tended to focus largely on the major blue-collar unions associated with the heyday of Montana's major extractive industry — mining. Few have carried the study into the modern era, and fewer still have chronicled the significant increase in unionization among the state's white-collar workers after World War II, particularly in the fields of government and education.

But if those areas of Montana's labor history have received scant attention from scholars, virtually nothing has been written about efforts to organize Montana's journalists into unions and associations designed to improve pay and working conditions, as well as promote professionalism. The reason the subject has failed to interest historians is simply because Montana newspapers have successfully resisted attempts to unionize their newsroom employees. The single exception is the Great Falls Tribune, where
the Great Falls Newspaper Guild retains a precarious grip on its right to bargain collectively for its membership, a hold it nearly lost as a result of the 1974 strike.

This thesis examines the causes of that strike and its consequences for the newspaper, the Guild and Montana journalism in general. To date, the Great Falls Guild remains the only union representing editorial employees in Montana's newspaper industry. After 55 years of existence, the Guild can rightfully claim to have improved the pay and working conditions for its members, but its failure to unionize a single other newspaper in the state begs important questions about its strength and effectiveness.

Obviously, no single event can answer those questions. Still the 1974 strike offers an unusual window into the hopes, fears, personalities and practices of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild and the Tribune's management. The reaction to the crisis also provides a rare glimpse into how the Guild was perceived by the Tribune's readers, advertisers and those employees who belong to other craft unions at the paper, along with other journalists working outside Great Falls. Those perceptions and comments may go a long way toward explaining why the Guild has failed to expand in Montana.

Finally, this thesis will examine the current status and ambitions of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild in comparison with the pay and working conditions of journalists at other major Montana newspapers. Ultimately, however, the strength of a union must be judged by its power to compel
management to listen to its demands; in other words, its power to strike.

This is the story of what happened when push came to shove in 1974 at the Great Falls Tribune.
CHAPTER ONE

PRELUDE TO A STRIKE: A GROWING MILITANCY

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of the Great Falls Tribune strike of 1974 is that it took so long to happen. In a sense, the Great Falls Newspaper Guild had been preparing for just such a strike for more than 38 years, and, in fact, had come close to walking out on several occasions. Less than a year after its birth in the spring of 1936, Local 81 of the American Newspaper Guild voted 16 to 1 to authorize its executive committee to "close the plant if possible, publish handbills, secure signs and seek the cooperation of other unions."¹ At issue were the union's demands for a five-day, 40-hour week; two-weeks' vacation after a year of service; a 5-cents-per-mile travel reimbursement and equal pay for men and women who did similar work.²

Hardly revolutionary by today's standards, the Guild's demands — especially its call for wage equality for men and women — were ahead of their time.

¹ An official history of the Guild's early trials, written and periodically updated by Barbara Mittal and Bert Lindler, appears in the Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers, University of Montana Archives, Missoula. Hereafter referred to as "Official history." Guild documents from 1936 to 1969 are indexed in the University of Montana archives, but documents donated after 1969, although available to researchers, have yet to be catalogued or indexed.

² Ibid.
day. Joseph Kinsey Howard, one of the Guild's founders, claimed the management of the Tribune and its afternoon counterpart, the Leader, had said "women aren't worth as much as men," and management's offer reflected that bias in proposing salaries for woman that were $5 to $7 per week lower than those offered men holding the same jobs.3

But making demands was not enough, and early Guild militants knew they would not be taken seriously at the bargaining table unless management were convinced the Guild would strike if necessary. With Howard at the union's helm, the Guild threatened to strike twice during the 1937 negotiations. The first threat, signaled by a 16 to 1 vote to authorize a strike on March 15, 1937, succeed in winning a temporary settlement, which the union accepted the following day.4 As negotiations wore on, the Guild sought to strengthen its new-found power by forming alliances with other established craft unions at the Tribune and Leader and with farm and labor organizations outside the paper. In November of 1937 the Guild suspended contract talks and announced that its members would not cross a picket line should the International Typographical Union make good on its promise to strike in the early morning of Nov. 9, 1937. Only a last-ditch compromise reached between the ITU and management just before the day's final edition was published prevented the threatened ITU strike and the Guild's first-ever

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3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.
But the first real test of the Guild's ability to protect its own members came later that month when management dismissed two reporters, both members of the Guild, for what it called economic reasons. Howard, writing in the Guild's monthly newsletter, saw more sinister motives. "The Guild took the position that management was intimidating the Guild due to contract negotiations and exacted pressure from all sources so that eventually [the two reporters who had been fired] retained their jobs."6

According to the Guild's own official history, the "pressure" Howard referred to included a threat to strike, but the American Newspaper Guild, the Great Falls union's parent organization, advised less drastic action. Finally Howard wrote a letter to the publisher threatening to exert pressure through farm and labor organizations and suspend all contract negotiations until the reporters were reinstated. The publisher withdrew the dismissals.7

In its initial skirmishes with Tribune management, the new Great Falls Guild won impressive victories for its members. By demonstrating its willingness to strike, the union not only protected its members' jobs but won for them a five-day, 40-hour work week; vacation; reimbursement for travel

5 Ibid.


7 Official history, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers, op. cit.
expenses; and equal pay for men and women doing similar work.

More importantly, the contract guaranteed a wage scale and the Guild's right to bargain collectively for all editorial employees, a concession tantamount to a closed shop, which the union would formally achieve the following year. The contract required that reporters and editors with three years' experience be paid no less than $45 a week, an increase of 10 percent. Ralph Bidwell, a long-time secretary-treasurer of the Great Falls Guild, wrote in 1969 that as a result of the 1937 contract fight, "the Great Falls Guild pay scale was among the tops in the nation for newspapers." And in a 1972 a letter to Charles A. Perlik, Jr., president of The Newspaper Guild, as the ANG was now called, Bidwell said Guild old-timers believed the top minimum salary for Tribune and Leader reporters and editors in 1938 was the third highest of the national organization's 81 locals.

For Howard, the struggle had clearly paid off. In a speech given to a Great Falls High School class in 1939, he touted unionism, saying, "I figure it this way: My union has won me just about six times as much money in wages as it costs me in dues; and in addition it has won me improved

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8 Copy of the 1938 contract between the Tribune, Inc. and the Great Falls Newspaper Guild, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers, University of Montana Archives, Missoula.


working conditions and security none of us ever even dreamed of until we had a union."\textsuperscript{11} Those gains were due in part, he said, to the Great Falls Guild's association with the ANG, which sent a national representative to help with the 1937 negotiations. Because of its national ties, Howard wrote his Guild colleagues in 1939, the Great Falls local had "quadrupled its membership, won a Guild shop contract with high wage standards and firmly established itself in a corporate-ridden state."\textsuperscript{12}

As a consequence of the 1937 contract battle, the Great Falls Guild had established itself as a power to be reckoned with in Montana journalism. It had demonstrated a willingness to strike, and to back up its threats, the Guild's early leaders carefully cultivated the critical support of other Tribune unions, such as the powerful typographical and pressmen's unions, which had long since controlled the physical production at most of the nation's larger newspapers, and could therefore make or break a strike by editorial employees. Under Howard's leadership, the Great Falls Newspaper Guild also forged links with labor unions outside the paper. Within the national Guild organization, the Great Falls local was quick to align itself with other locals, especially those in trouble. At its first meeting in March of 1936, the Guild voted to assess each of its 12 members $1 a week, 25 cents of which

\textsuperscript{11} Hoyt, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
would be sent to Guildsmen striking the Milwaukee News. In 1937 it joined the Cascade Trades and Labor Assembly, a coalition of 40 unions in the Great Falls area, and Howard won election to the assembly's executive board.

Affiliation with the national Guild and alliances with other trade unions, especially those craft unions working at the Tribune, were more than just expressions of fraternal feeling. Should the Great Falls Guild ever face a strike, it would need all the help it could get. Despite passage of the National Labor Relations Act and other pro-labor New Deal legislation, the national Guild and its locals knew they would have to back up their demands by being prepared to strike, and strikes could only succeed with the help of other labor unions. Though many newspaper reporters, editors and photographers distrusted trade unionism and might have preferred belonging to strictly professional associations, it seemed clear by 1937 that gains in wages and job security could be won only with the support of other unions.

The new Great Falls Guild was only too cognizant of that hard-nosed fact. A bitter 19-week Guild strike against New Jersey's Newark Ledger succeeded with the support of more than 100 union locals, which not only bolstered the Newark Guild's picket line, but enforced a crippling boycott. Newark unions went so far as to fine some members caught reading the

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13 Bidwell history.

14 Hoyt, p. 34.
paper. Closer to home, the 20 members of the Seattle Guild achieved what many thought impossible when they shut down William Randolph Hearst's Seattle Post-Intelligencer, precipitating a violent strike that lasted nearly four months in late summer and fall of 1936. The Seattle strikers received heavy support from local unions, especially the fast-growing Teamsters, led by Dave Beck, who helped broker a settlement. The Seattle Guild's victory over Hearst, perhaps labor's most vociferous enemy in the press, gave the newborn Great Falls local the confidence it needed to threaten its own strike in 1937. Howard said as much when he asked the ANG to send a representative to strengthen the local's hand in forcing the Tribune to recognize the Guild:

It's up to ANG. If we are to save this Guild and prevent this management from providing a 'statement of policy' which in our opinion is as bad or worse than none at all for the Guild at large (although it provides LOCAL concessions and raises some local wages in the lower brackets) ANG must help us because we can't do anything to stop it except strike. We are certain a show of strength from ANG would obviate the necessity for a strike but otherwise I don't know how they're to be convinced.

There are only 15 of us, but there were only 20-odd in

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Seattle.17

Because of its isolation, the Great Falls local depended on its affiliation with the national Guild as well as its friendships with other local and regional unions — affiliations and friendships it would carefully work to retain for decades. But its success in winning recognition from the Tribune without a strike probably had as much to do with the relationship between Howard and the paper's publishers, O.S. Warden and his son Alex, who represented management during the negotiations.

A zealous union man, Howard was nevertheless recognized by his publishers as a first-rate journalist with strong persuasive powers. Despite his battles with management, William James, later the Tribune's editor, called Howard "the brains behind the Leader."18 And the late A. B. Guthrie Jr., journalist and prize-winning novelist, speculated that Howard was kept on at the Leader, despite his labor militancy, because the Wardens respected his brilliance. According to Guthrie, Alex Warden once told him "Joe [Howard] was the smartest man I ever had on my newspapers."19

Nor were the Wardens necessarily opposed to unionism. O.S. Warden, the Tribune's owner and publisher from 1895 to his death in 1951, was a


18 Hoyt, p. 18.

19 Ibid., p. 25.
staungh supporter of the Democratic Party and so was his paper. In fact, Warden for many years served as a Democratic national committeeman.\textsuperscript{20} As a leader of the party that courted labor's vote, Warden may well have felt uneasy about taking too strong a stance against the Great Falls Guild.

Nor could Warden, as a publisher of the city's only daily newspapers, ignore labor's strong presence in his hometown. In a 1937 article for the \textit{Survey Graphic}, Howard wrote that industrial workers and their families made up 65 to 70 percent of Great Falls' population, so businesses had to get along with unions, especially those who represented workers at the Anaconda Copper Mining Company's Great Falls smelter and the coal mines in nearby Sand Coulee.\textsuperscript{21} Great Falls was also the site of several efforts to form a farm-labor coalition, as well as home to the Montana Labor League, founded in 1919 by local trade unions to be a vehicle to support improvements in the state's workers' compensation law. In 1920, the Montana Federation of Labor, the state's umbrella organization for trade unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, held a joint convention in Great Falls with the American Society of Equity, a loose


\textsuperscript{21} Hoyt, p. 41.
coalition of farm groups seeking better prices for their produce.\textsuperscript{22} Great Falls further demonstrated its support for labor in the 1936 statewide elections when local voters endorsed an amendment to the state constitution calling for an eight-hour workday. The measure, which passed by only 3,969 votes statewide, won by a margin of 1,977 votes in Cascade County. Only Silver Bow County, where miners' unions had won the closed shop and eight-hour day following a four-month strike against the Anaconda Company in 1934, contributed more votes to the eight-hour work day than Cascade County.\textsuperscript{23}

Though its birth was far from easy, the fact that the Great Falls Newspaper Guild won its early victories without a strike is remarkable. Within two and a half years of its formation, the Guild had won formal recognition and better wages and benefits for its members. More importantly, it won a closed shop, which required that all non-management employees of the paper's news, advertising, circulation and business departments be members of the Guild as a condition of employment. By increasing its membership, and therefore its bargaining power, the Guild had made a permanent place for itself at the Tribune and its subsidiary publications, which included the afternoon Leader, the semi-monthly Montana Farmer-Stockman and the weekly Treasurebelt News.


Thanks to a combination of favorable factors, the Guild had weathered its early storms without the strikes or labor violence that plagued other attempts to organize newspaper employees. Capable and militant leaders — supported by national Guild expertise, other labor unions, the pro-labor sympathies of the Great Falls community and the Roosevelt administration, and to a significant extent, by a publisher not entirely opposed to unionism — had provided the men and women of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild with the means to improve their lot. And in doing so, they negotiated a more or less amiable labor peace at the Tribune, a peace that was to last for nearly 38 years.

Federal wage and production guidelines instituted at the onset of World War II brought a temporary slowdown in the Guild's ongoing efforts to improve salaries for its membership, which had grown from its original 12 members in 1936 to more than 50 by 1941. The union did add a fifth year to the wage scale for reporters, copy editors, photographers and display ad salesmen, boosting top salaries to $50 a week, but the Guild's gains during the war years were generally limited to improving benefits. During the war years, members won "reasonable time off" for illness and contract clauses protecting the jobs of employees serving in the military. 24

With its own house in order while it waited for the war to end, the Guild tried to unionize other Montana newspapers, particularly those owned

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24 Official Guild history.
by the Anaconda Company, a vast mining conglomerate that protected its political and economic dominance of the state through the ownership of most of the state's major daily newspapers. Organizing the Anaconda papers had, in fact, been an early goal of Howard and other Great Falls Guildsmen. Despite its initial successes, the Great Falls local remained the only Guild local in Montana, yet Howard was convinced employees at the Anaconda papers, which controlled a majority of the state's daily newspaper circulation, were ripe for the union. The Guild's first newsletter, undated but probably published in 1936 or early 1937, reported that several Guild officers "made an organizing trip to Butte," and claim that, as a result, the Montana Standard had increased employee vacations from one week a year to two.25

The Great Falls Guild may or may not have been responsible for increased vacation time at the Standard, but it clearly failed in its bid to organize a Butte local, a failure made all the more conspicuous by the fact that Butte, known as Montana's "Gibraltar of unionism," was by far the most unionized city in the state.26 Nor was the Guild successful in other Montana cities. According to minutes taken at a Guild meeting in the spring of 1940, a committee was appointed to "feel out" the possibility of "an associate organization at Missoula," the home of two more Anaconda papers, the

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26 Calvert, The Gibraltar, p. 11.
morning Missoulian and the afternoon Sentinel.27 Again, in January 1941, the Guild talked about the possibility of organizing the "Butte Newspaper Guild," but no mention was made of the results of such activity there or in Missoula.28

Whether the lack of detailed discussion about the Guild's organizing activities should be blamed on the secrecy surrounding such efforts or a lack of zeal by Guild organizers is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, the Great Falls local did not give up its goal, despite a clear lack of success. Although its efforts were little more than talk, the Guild managed to make statewide organization of newspapers an objective of the Montana labor movement. During its 1945 convention at Great Falls' Rainbow Hotel, the Montana Industrial Union Council resolved:

... that Montana Industrial Council take action to organize the editorial staff and businesses staff of every daily newspaper in the state into the American Newspaper Guild, with the help of all locals affiliated with the Montana Industrial Council located in the cities where the unorganized newspapers exist.29

Efforts to organize other Montana papers continued after the war, and there is some indication that the pressure to do so came from the ANG. After receiving a directive from ANG executives in the spring of 1947, a committee of three Guildsmen — Jack Hallowell, Ed Furlong and Guild President Mike

27 Guild minutes, 26 March 1940, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

28 Guild minutes, 22 January 1941, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

29 Guild minutes, 1 May 1945, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
Mulvahill — was appointed to make confidential contacts with journalists at the Anaconda Company's papers in Butte, Missoula and Billings. A few weeks later, Mulvahill reported the committee's failure, and blamed it on the "company papers' management." According to Guild minutes:

Mulvahill reported on efforts to date toward organizing locals for company papers. He cited the $5 across-the-board raises handed out by company paper management immediately after it became known that organization efforts had been initiated.

By November of 1947, the Guild still hoped to see locals spring up at the company papers, but seemed to recognize that unionization would have to come from within the company papers, not through outside efforts. The Great Falls Guild would support the formation of new locals at the company papers, but it was up to Anaconda Company employees to take a stand. The best hope appeared to be at Butte's Montana Standard, where some employees were keeping in touch with the Great Falls Guild, according to Guild minutes:

President [Bob] Barnes discussed a communication from Butte regarding the possibilities of organizing the Company paper. Barnes read his reply which stated that any legitimate effort made to organize the paper would be wholeheartedly supported by the Great Falls Newspaper Guild.

There was even talk about organizing a student local at the School of Journalism at Montana State University (now the University of Montana),

30 Minutes, 23 March 1947, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

31 Minutes, 12 May 1947, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

32 Minutes, 18 November 1947, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
but the idea was dropped because "this local was not interested in such a plan."\(^33\)

It seems clear from the Guild records that employees at the Company papers were tempted to organize. The pay at Great Falls was substantially better and the Guild had won benefits other Montana journalists could only dream about. Don Bartsch, who would later become chief of the Tribune’s copy desk, recalled persistent rumors about unionization during the 1940s and early 1950s when he worked as a reporter and editor for Helena's Record-Herald and later at the Independent-Record, both Company papers. Bartsch said most of the rumors concerned organizing the Anaconda Company's Butte and Billings papers, but later there was talk of asking the Great Falls Guild to help organize the Independent-Record, where Duane 'Doc' Bowler, later to become managing editor the Billings Gazette and an opponent of unions, led the push. "But nothing came of it," Bartsch said. "I believe the prevailing attitude was 'We'll get fired if we try.' "\(^34\)

Still, the lure of Tribune pay and benefits remained strong, and if it had failed to organize the Company papers, the Guild's increasingly lucrative contracts helped the paper lure journalists such as Bartsch away from the Company papers. "There was quite a disparity in wages," Bartsch said.

\(^33\) Ibid.

\(^34\) Don Bartsch, interviewed by author, 22 June 1991, Great Falls Montana. Bartsch would later become president of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild. He is now retired from the Tribune.
"When I left Helena in 1952, I was making $75 a week. I made $100 a week in Great Falls."  

Bartsch wasn't the only one who made the move to the Tribune. Terry Dwyer, who would later become the Tribune's editor, joined the Tribune in 1953 after seven years at the Independent-Record, where he was making $70 a week. The Tribune had offered him $100. "It looked awfully good," Dywer recalled in an interview. "I thought we would be rolling in the dough."  

William "Scotty" James, another future Tribune editor, was earning $48 a week at the Lewistown Daily News when he decided to join the Tribune in 1946 for $77 a week.  

Indeed, in terms of salary, the post-war years were good ones for the Guild. While during the war the only real gains were in longevity pay, the Guild's 1945 contract created a six-year level, and the top minimum for editorial employees rose to $55 a week. But in 1947, salaries rose at all levels. The minimum pay for beginning reporters increased from $25 a week to $35 weekly. At the top of the scale, experienced reporters and editors were making $65 a week. Benefits improved, too, as the Guild won contract clauses prohibiting the publisher from arbitrarily changing an employee's regularly

35 Ibid.

36 Terry Dwyer, interviewed by author, 21 June 1991, Great Falls, Montana.

37 William James, interviewed by author, 27 April, 1991, Great Falls, Montana.

38 Official Guild history.
scheduled days off and providing 50 cents per shift to those editors and reporters required to work after 9 p.m.

The trend continued throughout the 1950s, despite the death of O.S. Warden and advent of the Korean War. By 1954, the paper's most experienced reporters and advertising representatives were making a minimum of $102 a week. The paper also instituted an employee health insurance plan, with the company paying two-thirds of the premiums; time and a half pay for work on holidays; a third week of vacation for employees with more than three years of service; and two additional paid holidays.39

By 1961, 25 years after Local 81 received its charter, the Great Falls Guild could boast of significant achievements. Along with ever-improving benefits, starting pay for Guild members in the lowest wage classification, covering stenographers, clerks and receptionists, had increased gradually from $18 a week to $52.25, a jump of nearly 190 percent. At the other end of the scale, experienced reporters, photographers and copy editors, who had been paid $45 a week under the Guild's first written contract, were now receiving $128.60, an increase of more than 180 percent.40 Although Tribune salaries no longer were the nation's third best, the Great Falls local was keeping pace with wages paid to Guild members nationwide. In 1950, the top minimum salary at the Great Falls Guild was $88.50 compared to the

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.
international Guild average of $88.62. Ten years later, the Great Falls top minimum was $125.40, while the international average was $127.33.\footnote{Letter from Ralph Bidwell to the American Newspaper Guild, 14 August 1972, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.}

Though the negotiating process was often tedious, the relationship between the Guild and Tribune during the 1940s and 1950s was relatively peaceful. Alex Warden's appointment as publisher after the death of his father in 1951 did not mean major changes in the paper, nor in its relations with the 70-member Guild, which was making satisfactory gains at home, if not in its aims to organize other Montana papers. Neither the Guild nor the Tribune's management employed a professional negotiator during the period, and several staunch Guild leaders during the period, namely Bob Lathrop, William "Scotty" James and Terry Dwyer, had so impressed management that they would become Tribune executives during the next decade. Far from being vindictive toward the Guild, the Wardens generally avoided conflicts, Dwyer recalled. "The Tribune, under the Wardens, never fired anybody," he said.\footnote{Dwyer interview.}

But cracks were beginning to show in the Guild's solidarity as the 1960s began. Negotiations became more difficult, pay raises became smaller and a growing tension began to surface between the Guild's higher-paid editorial members and those in the lower-paid clerical and circulation jobs.
In February of 1960, with Dwyer as president, the Guild voted 42-37 to authorize its executive board to call a strike if negotiations bogged down, but the threat was quickly rescinded after members' tempers had cooled and reality of a strike began to sink in.\textsuperscript{43} Two years later, the Guild faced another crisis when the ANG refused to allow the local's negotiators to submit a contract proposal to the membership for a vote.

Steve Ripley, executive secretary of the ANG's Contracts Committee, chastised Local 81 for even considering the package:

This is the worst money settlement which has come in here in over a year. After you deduct taxes, the reporter has a net gain in take-home pay of about $2.40 a week — less than 50 cents a day. And he is one of the lucky ones. Anyone in the lowest wage bracket has a gain of less than a dollar a week, net. Hardly worth bothering with.\textsuperscript{44}

An ANG negotiator was called in, and after months of wrangling, which included a vote to reject management's offer, a contract was signed, though few were happy with its small increase in wages.\textsuperscript{45} The Guild's top reporters, those with five or more years of experience, were now making $131.40 a week, barely $3 a week more than they had earned in 1961.\textsuperscript{46}

In many ways, 1962 marked a turning point in the Guild's relations

\textsuperscript{43} Hardin, p. 14, and Dywer interview.

\textsuperscript{44} Letter to Don Bartsch from Steve Ripley, 1962, as cited by Hardin, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Hardin, p. 15.
with management. No longer would a handful of Guild members sit down with the publisher and his business manager to hammer out an agreement. With the stakes growing higher, both the Guild and management began to employ professional negotiators. At the ANG's insistence, the Guild retained a local attorney to lead its negotiating team, while management brought in attorneys from the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Association.

If the contract crisis of 1962 demonstrated the Guild's need for more sophisticated bargaining techniques, it also revealed a potentially dangerous rift within the 75-member Guild. Although it began as a union of and for editorial employees, the Guild by now comprised members of the paper's business, circulation and advertising departments, many of whom were in the lower pay brackets and were apt to be more militant in their demands than would better-paid reporters and editors. On the other hand, the Guild's ad salesmen, whose salaries depended, in part, on commissions, were frequently convinced they could make more money without a contract.

The challenge for Guild leaders, most of whom came from the upstairs newsroom, was to keep their brethren working in the paper's downstairs business and advertising offices in the Guild. Bartsch, in a 1962 letter to ANG officials, described the

distinct split among the upstairs editorial crew and the downstairs people. There still is one but it's decidedly narrowed and I think downstairs people have had the idea that we in the editorial department looked down our noses at them and wanted to keep them far down on the scale. It's true this attitude has existed among some editorial people and I think this is
bound to change now.47

To keep its membership, and therefore its bargaining power, intact, the Guild would have to push harder for victories at the bargaining table, and its leaders would need better training in the art of negotiation. The Guild also would need greater assistance from the International if it was to halt the new and growing gap between Tribune salaries and national Guild averages. And even further ANG assistance was required if the Great Falls local was ever to realize its unfulfilled goal of organizing other Montana papers, especially since Lee Enterprises, an aggressive and avowedly anti-union chain of small to mid-sized newspapers based in Davenport, Iowa, had purchased the Anaconda Company's Montana papers in 1959. But most importantly, some members believed the Guild needed to regain the militancy that marked its formative years by electing more aggressive leaders who would fight for those at the bottom of the scale.

Yet even as the Guild sought to rebuild and strengthen its hand at the bargaining table, it found itself facing new management. On April 11, 1965, Alex Warden announced that the Tribune had been sold to the Minneapolis Star and Tribune Co., an out-of-state media corporation controlled by the Cowles family, which counted among its properties the Minneapolis Star and Tribune, the Des Moines Register, the Rapid City (S.D.) Journal and an interest in Look magazine.

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The news was unsettling, but Guild leaders were convinced it could have been worse. They had feared the paper would be sold to the Lee, Hearst or Newhouse chains, all of which were reputed to be vehemently opposed to unions. The Great Falls local also took heart in the fact that the Cowles' flagship paper, the Minneapolis Star and Tribune, was a Guild paper, "and a pretty strong guild paper at that." But the sale also meant the appointment of a new and untested publisher, William A. Cordingley, a Cowles stockholder and former national advertising manager at the Star and Tribune.

Whatever fears the Great Falls Guild had about the new ownership were somewhat assuaged when it became clear that the union's contract would be honored. And though Cordingley had been part of the Star and Tribune's management during a 117-day strike in 1962, he did not appear to be inherently anti-Guild. Cordingley named former Guildsman William "Scotty" James as the paper's editor, and promoted two former Guild presidents, Terry Dwyer and Robert Lathrop, to management jobs as editors. Nor would management's negotiating team change much. Joel Koppang, a Tribune employee since 1947, had participated in negotiations under the Wardens and would continue to do so under Cordingley, with the help of professional negotiators supplied by the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Association, an organization of western publishers.

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48 Letter from Great Falls Guild President Clyde Reichelt to ANG President Charles Dale, 12 April 1965, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers, as cited by Hardin, p. 17.
But if the Tribune's new management expected to continue the amicable relationship the Wardens had enjoyed with the Guild, the Guild was in no mood to settle for the status quo. With the election of Clyde Reichelt as president in 1964, the Guild's leadership became increasingly militant, and strike threats surfaced in every negotiating session during the late 1960s.

Reichelt also renewed the Guild's neglected effort to organize the state's non-union newspapers. In a letter to regional AFL-CIO officials in Portland, Reichelt complained that "negotiations are getting more and more difficult due to the Non-Union status of newspaper plants throughout the rest of the state and it is with this in mind that we hope you can help us."49 The Lee papers, which together controlled more than half of Montana's daily newspaper circulation, were the Guild's prime target. Secret letters were mailed to potential Guild sympathizers in Helena, Missoula and possibly Billings, but the replies were not encouraging.

For example, J.D. Holmes, an Associated Press reporter in Helena and member of the Wire Services Guild, was asked to gauge support for the Guild among employees at the Helena Independent Record. Holmes replied that if the Guild were to organize Helena's daily, 20 to 22 employees would come under its jurisdiction. However, Holmes said it was difficult to say how many Independent Record employees actually wanted a union, and he was

49 Letter from Clyde Reichelt to James J. Leary, director of the AFL-CIO's regional office in Portland, Ore., 26 October 1965, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
reluctant to ask. "It's sort of hard to tell without asking too many questions,"
Holmes wrote Reichelt.\textsuperscript{50}

Jerry Holloron, a young reporter at the \textit{Missoulian}, declined Reichelt's
appeal to help organize a Guild shop at Lee's Missoula daily for a couple of
reasons:

1. I'm just starting and I don't think I should take part in
any such plan. I'm not familiar enough with the Lee papers to
have drawn an opinion as to whether the Guild is needed.
2. My own opinion of the Guild is somewhat mixed.
Although there definitely are advantages in some phases of
working conditions on Guild papers (vacations, etc.), I'm still of
the belief that under some conditions, the Guild can interfere
with initiative of the part of the reporter and benevolence on the
part of the publisher.

Lloyd Schermer [the \textit{Missoulian}'s publisher] has been
more than kind to me and I don't think it would be right for me
to support a project that I'm sure he doesn't approve and one
which I'm not sure of my own opinion.

I hope you'll understand that this opinion in no way
should reflect on the Great Falls Guild. I have no regrets about
my association with it or the work you're doing. My
reservations are based on theory much more than practice.

I'm frankly not sure how I would vote on the question of
afiliating [sic] with the Guild. Right now I'm trying to postpone
such a decision, as this letter indicates.\textsuperscript{51}

Once again, the Guild's organizing efforts failed for a number of
possible reasons, including the fact that both the International and its Great
Falls local did little more than talk about organizing. Neither had the money
or the personnel to do the job. Nor was there any hard evidence to show that

\textsuperscript{50} Letter from J.D. Holmes to Clyde Reichelt, 28 November 1965, Great Falls Newspaper Guild
Papers.

\textsuperscript{51} Letter from Jerry Holloron to Clyde Reichelt, undated but probably written in 1965, Great
Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
Lee employees were willing, much less eager, to defy a company that made no effort to conceal its distaste for unionization. Whether Lee's journalists were frightened of organizing, as the Guild believed, or merely content with Lee salaries and benefits, as Holloron implied, is difficult to ascertain, but it is fair to say that not every newspaper journalist outside Great Falls was impressed with what the Guild had achieved, especially during the 1960s.

Indeed, the Guild was having an increasingly difficult time producing the kinds of big gains many of its own members expected. As long as that was the case, organizing would get little serious attention. At home, the pressure was building to gain raises for "downstairs" employees, particularly district circulation managers, whose starting salaries of less than $100 a week were $43 below those of beginning reporters or advertising salesmen. Rumors were circulating that seven men in the paper's circulation department were considering a break with the Guild. Moreover, the Guild's top salaries were beginning to slip in comparison with national Guild averages. The Guild also complained that city street sweepers and mechanics were making $22.53 more per month than experienced reporters and advertising salesmen, while the average Great Falls teacher made $117 more than reporters with a college degree and same years of experience.

52 Letter from ANG to Clyde Reichelt, 26 October 1965, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers, as cited in Hardin, p. 18.

53 Letter from Clyde Reichelt to ANG's International Executive Board, 26 October 1965, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers, as cited by Hardin, p. 18.
What little honeymoon the Tribune's new management had enjoyed with the Guild clearly had fizzled by the summer negotiations of 1966. When Cordingley outlined a number of "community problems" during a commencement speech in May of that year, the Guild took the opportunity to deliver an unprecedented attack on management in a letter it distributed to community leaders and Tribune advertisers.

The Guild complained in the letter that it had been working without a contract for eight months, during which time it had met with management 30 times to no avail. The Guild wrote:

> Because our grave situation affects you as community leaders and advertisers we feel a keen sense of obligation to inform you of our mutual crisis. As professional people we want to assure you that the Guild does not want to be stampeded into a strike and is doing everything within reason to avoid such a drastic action. But the final action is unfortunately not really up to us. We fear it may well be a decision made in Minneapolis.

The fact that the Tribune and Leader are new acquisitions by a vast communications web undoubtedly colors the Cowles attitude:

1. They expect to enjoy the golden fruits of monopoly in Great Falls. By establishing a low wage structure now they gain more profits to syphon from this community into company coffers elsewhere for many years to come.

2. Although they attempt to tell Guild members that the Tribune and Leader were "marginal" at the time of purchase it must be assumed that a corporation exhibiting such cold business acumen in such varied sections of the nation did not purchase this Great Falls property as a philanthropic gesture.

3. As members of a larger empire they have a vast reservoir of talent upon which they can draw if necessary to fill jobs now held by your friends and neighbors. Even now experts from various outposts fly in to advise we [sic] "local yokels" on phases of their operation.

We have prepared this open letter to advise you of these
facts because we know you won't read them in your local newspapers, or hear them in the Publisher's public utterances.

May we review some of our specific problems?

Men in the Tribune and Leader circulation department have requested special attention. Under recent directives they must assume many new responsibilities, and are expected to be salesmen, bookkeepers and youth guidance counselors. The company has asked they be available from at least 5 a.m. to midnight seven days a week. Statistics available to us show Great Falls Circulation Managers at the bottom of the national Guild salary lists. They are all family men and have been struggling to make ends meet on a base salary of less than $100 a week. Civic Center janitors are better paid without the discomfiture of the responsibilities.

Reporters, editors and advertising salesmen form the foundation of any paper; generally all white-collar stipends are calculated on the "reporter income." College-trained Tribune and Leader reporters, with priceless years of professional experience, receive the equivalent of $22.53 less per month than the man who operates Great Falls' street sweeper. City mechanics also receive $22.53 a month more than Tribune and Leader reporters.

The average teacher in School District No. 1 receives $117 more for each working month than a Tribune-Leader reporter or advertising salesman with the same college degree and experience.

Many persons in Great Falls enjoy profit sharing or pension programs. There are none in the Great Falls newspaper Guild departments. The firm has flatly rejected a pension plan request even though the Guild has paid [for] the preliminary actuarial study in order to present the Tribune with specific information.

Pharmacists, who are materially higher paid than reporters and advertising salesmen, enjoy fully paid health and accident insurance programs. The Tribune is not willing to pay all of the employes' premium, certainly not willing to assume the full family coverage.

Newspaper people are local consumers; salaries paid to Great Falls employes stay in Great Falls. Profits paid to foreign corporations operating here probably won't stay in our community. This is one reason we solicit your interest in our economic problems. Most of us live here by choice even though we recognize that there are now many newspapers in the nation that pay, job-by-job, as much as $250 a month more than the
comparable job on the Tribune and Leader. We seek equity only in relation with other professional and semi-professional persons in Great Falls.54

The Guild eventually settled without a strike, but there were no major gains in salaries that year or in the four years that followed. Benefits, however, did improve. In 1968, the paper began to pay its employees' full health insurance premiums, and by 1969 it agreed to pay dependents' premiums as well. A fourth week of vacation for employees with 20 years of experience was added in 1969, and the eligibility requirement was gradually reduced to 15 years by 1972. Other gains included an increase in the special night pay for employees required to work past 6 p.m., funeral leave and protection against the hiring of part-time workers at the expense of full-time jobs.55

As impressive as those gains might seem, relations between management and the Guild continued to deteriorate, and wages topped the list of union complaints. By 1970, the Tribune's top minimum salary for reporters, copy editors and ad salesmen was $173.09 a week, $18.40 below the national Guild average. By August of 1972, the gap had widened to $44.77, and salaries at the bottom of the scale suffered the most.56

54 Open letter to the public from the Great Falls Newspaper Guild, undated but probably circulated in May of 1966, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

55 Official history.

56 Bidwell letter to ANG, 14 August 1972, Great Falls Newspaper Guild papers.
But while pay was clearly the biggest concern, the Guild had other worries. During the 1968 negotiations, management had suggested the Guild relinquish the closed shop. For every 10 employees hired, management asked that two not be required to join the Guild. The "suggestion" may have been only a bargaining chip — it was quickly dropped in the face of strong Guild opposition — but it nevertheless put the Guild on guard. The Guild derived its organizational and financial power from the closed shop and was not about to give it up.

Another sign of the growing rift between management and the Guild had nothing to do with the perennial arguments over wages and benefits. During the 1971 negotiations, the Guild demanded a say not only in the paper's personnel policy, but in its editorial policy as well. It asked that:

All editorials will be initialed by the writer. In the case of editorials which concern the political life of the city, county, state or nation, the views expressed shall represent a required poll of the newsroom and display advertising employees. In the event the views of the publisher conflict with the results of the poll, an editorial stating his opinion shall carry the explanation: "the views expressed in this editorial are those of the publisher and do not necessarily reflect the views of the employes of the Great Falls Tribune."58

The Guild argued that the policy was necessary because the public had no voice in the paper's editorial positions, but the Tribune's executive editors

57 Minutes, 26 March 1968, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers as cited in Hardin, p. 20.

dismissed the proposal as unworkable and dangerous. Editor William James warned that an editorial policy based on polling "would open an area of anarchy in our newsroom and we wouldn't get a paper out."\textsuperscript{59}

As the 1960s ended, the Guild and Tribune management had moved closer to a showdown. From its standpoint, the Guild saw management as the representative of a wealthy out-of-state media conglomerate interested only in wringing profits from its recently acquired Great Falls property. Alarmed by the widening gap between local Guild salaries and those of the Tribune's craft unions, as well as the national Guild average, a new generation of Guild leaders were convinced they were rapidly losing ground and in danger of seeing their union split apart. Despite a series of strike threats, management "doesn't really think we're serious," they argued.\textsuperscript{60}

For its part, management, and even some Guild members, believed the Guild's demands were increasingly unrealistic. In an interview, Cordingley said the Guild's insistence that Tribune pay keep pace with national Guild averages was based on the false assumptions that the Tribune was "a cash cow," and that Cowles, because it had extensive holdings, could afford to pay local wages commensurate with those received by employees at larger papers. But it didn't work that way, Cordingley said. Each Cowles paper was treated

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 21.

\textsuperscript{60} Open letter from the Great Falls Newspaper Guild to unions affiliated with the Cascade County Trades and Labor Assembly, 21 July 1972, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
as an independent entity and had to live within the parameters of the local market. Salaries, like other expenses, had to reflect local conditions, not national averages. Cordingley, who thought the Tribune's wages and benefits were more than generous, admitted being baffled by the Guild's growing militancy at the bargaining table.

So, too, were some of the Guild's more conservative members, who thought Tribune salaries were good and did not understand their union's growing animosity toward management. Don Bartsch, Guild president from 1962 to 1963, said the character of the Guild began to change as militants were elected to the union's leadership. "In the Sixties, from then on, every year a contract came up there was talk of a strike," he said. "I don't know who to lay it to, but there were new people coming in and a growing movement among the news people to reject this paternalism."

By the early 1970s, the Guild's patience was clearly wearing thin. A strike, it seemed, was just a matter of time.

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62 Ibid.

63 Bartsch interview.
CHAPTER TWO

"NO MORE STALLING"

If anything, 1972 looked like the year the Great Falls Newspaper Guild would finally make good on its frequent threats to strike the Tribune. While benefits improved steadily, wages climbed slowly, increasing by less than 5 percent from 1970 to 1972. And because raises were determined on a percentage basis, they were even smaller for those Great Falls Guild members at the bottom of the ladder.1

After more than nine months of talks, management was offering the Guild another 5 percent pay increase. Convinced that such increases would only prolong its effort to catch up with national averages, the Guild considered the offer ridiculous. Other sticking points included the Guild's long-neglected demand for a pension plan, a dental plan, increased mileage expenses and a fourth week of vacation for employees with 15 years of

1 Bidwell letter to The Newspaper Guild, 14 August 1972, Great Falls Newspaper Guild papers.
service.2

By July, the Guild considered the talks to be all but deadlocked and prepared to strike. Union members, by a vote of 48-6, authorized its executive committee to call a strike, if necessary, and to appoint committees to begin planning picketing schedules, the publication of a strike newspaper, a strike benefit program and publicity.

In a move to secure critical support from Great Falls' organized labor and the Tribune’s own craft unions, Guild President Carla Beck and Secretary-Treasurer Ralph Bidwell issued a letter warning that:

...negotiations are fast approaching a critical point and there are indications the Guild may be forced to strike the Tribune....

While none of us relishes the idea of a strike, there sometimes comes a time when management forces us to the wall to achieve justice in our contract. The alternative would be capitulation — walking to the table with our hand out and taking whatever management deigned to hand out. You don’t need a union to get handouts and we’ve got a union just as the crafts have unions.

Sometimes we think the Tribune management doesn’t really think we’re serious. Their lack of movement at the bargaining table certainly indicates such. One thing that helps assure that there will not be a strike is convincing management that we are prepared for that action. We have been busy for several months preparing for that possibility and the tempo has increased sharply in the last two weeks. We are prepared.3

The letter also asked the Tribune’s craft unions to honor the Guild’s picket line and promised to help pay benefits for those craft union members who

2 Ibid.

3 Letter to Tribune craft unions and the Cascade County Trades and Labor Assembly from Carla Beck and Ralph Bidwell, 21 July 1972, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
honored the line against the orders of their internationals.  

The Guild was itching for a strike or a fast settlement, but a series of delays caused by scheduling conflicts between attorneys for both the Guild and the Tribune, forestalled a showdown. Dick Pattison, a former Tribune employee and now a Guild international representative, had been assigned on July 17 to assist in the Great Falls talks, but on July 28 Pattison requested a four-week recess in negotiations because his wife was to have an operation. After 10 months of fruitless bargaining, Beck and Bidwell were convinced that a strike was inevitable, and the pressure for action was building from the membership. At the time of the delay, the Guild's negotiators believed the talks were within an hour of a formal impasse, after which the Guild could legally call a strike. Pattison told them to wait.

Frustrated and certain that a recess was only delaying the inevitable, Bidwell fired off an angry letter to the Guild's International Executive Board on Aug. 12, saying that during the past five years he, Ralph Pomnichowski, Beck and others had "fired up the membership ... in order to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps, so to speak." And now that the Great Falls local was ready to strike, and had, in fact, been preparing for one since the 1970 contract talks, the International, Bidwell wrote, was dragging its feet:

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4 Ibid.

We were never in a better strike situation. Our membership was so fired up that we had trouble keeping some of the more militants [sic] from getting picket signs and marching. In fact, only a week before our membership censured the negotiating committee for not pushing hard enough. I was crushed and told Pattison so. Several others did, too. At an Executive Board meeting, that finally approved the delay ..., Pattison said International would not send someone else in to help us prosecute a strike. And he said he would not give us strike sanction....

I want to make it crystal clear that when Pattison returns for talks Aug. 28-29-30 that we want no more delaying. We either get a contract or we strike. And we do not want International to tell us that we can't strike and that you will not give us strike sanction and benefits. It's about time the International quit avoiding strikes at all cost. We may be a small local with only 65 full-time and 7 part-time members, but don't forget we've been paying Guild dues and assessments for those 36 years without ever having had a strike and now there comes that time. This is it.

We have to have a good money contract. We could have gotten what management has steadfastly dangled in front of us, $11 on top, scaled down, plus a pension plan, without having a Guild local. Without a Guild we could pocket $3 to $5 a week that we now pay in dues and assessments, for what?

OK, when Pattison comes back, you better tell him to lay it on the line, negotiation-wise. No more stalling. Because if we have to capitulate, I'll lead the fight to have this local decertified....

Our present top scale on a hourly basis is $4.55. The $11 management has offered would raise that to $4.825. Pressmen in our plant currently make $5.01 plus a $1 [per] shift [toward a] pension. ITU's [International Typographical Union] current agreement calls for $5.036 plus $1.85 per shift pension.

Simple arithmetic will show we have to have a minimum of $18-20 in one year and that much again in the second to gain and keep parity with crafts in our own plant, plus $1 per shift for a pension to get started.6

In a flurry on conciliatory replies, International officers pleaded for

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6 Ibid.
patience and at the same time commended the Great Falls local for its militancy. James B. Woods, the International's chairman, tried to assure "Brother Bidwell" that Pattison would see Local 81 through its troubles:

I have found Dick to be a good man and am confident he will work with you in every way to bring about a decent settlement. Not often enough do we have that type of militance in locals which have fallen behind over the years.

TNG [The Newspaper Guild] has no desire to hold locals back or buy peace with managements through inferior settlements. We will be with you when the chips are down.7

Charles A. Perlik Jr., the International president, seconded Woods' assurances in an Aug. 24 letter to Local 81, but bristled at Bidwell's accusation that the International was afraid of strikes, saying:

... it's incomprehensible that anyone in the Guild could write that the "international quit avoiding strikes at all costs." Any organization which in the past five years has spent in excess of ten million dollars in benefits to prosecute strikes on behalf of its membership can hardly be accused of "avoiding strikes at all costs."

We wish you every success in achieving a settlement our Great Falls membership so richly deserves, and you have every reason to expect the full support the international is capable of providing.8

But Robert M. Crocker, the International's secretary-treasurer, warned Bidwell and the Great Falls local against being too eager for a strike:

We want a good settlement in Great Falls almost as much as you do and experience has shown that if such a settlement can be won without a strike everyone concerned is a great deal better


off. I hope and trust that this will be the case but if a strike becomes necessary you may be sure that if sanction is granted by TNG you will have all the support that the International can muster.

There would be little point now in rehashing all of the arguments which you raised in your letter but some of your arguments deserve a reply and at least one of them was, in a rueful way, laughable. If you think TNG is "avoiding strikes at all cost" you should be in my place for a week or so and in a position to be sending out benefit money for as many as 1100 members at a time, as I have had to do earlier this year. Strikes do become necessary, Ralph, and when they do we are not reluctant to undertake them. But I hope you and your colleagues in Great Falls are aware that a strike is a painful experience for everybody involved and nobody comes through one of any length unscathed. It is something to be undertaken only as a last resort and after careful deliberation.

I am sorry to see anyone of your Guild experience talking about decertification and I am sure you have had second thoughts about that by this time....

If your demands were worth fighting for in mid-August when you wrote your fiery letter they are even more so now and I am sure the period of waiting to continue bargaining has not reduced the necessity for a good settlement by one iota.9

The strike never materialized. The Guild's earlier eagerness to strike had apparently cooled during the waiting period, although there was still enough fire to reject management's so-called "last-shot" offer by a vote of 33-25. Finally, with Pattison back and directing the talks, the Tribune and Guild reached a mid-September compromise that, among other things, established an employee pension plan — a goal the Guild had been working toward since 1949. Specifically, management agreed to contribute $1 per shift per

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9 Letter from Robert M. Crocker to Ralph Bidwell, 6 September 1972, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
person into an account designed to get a pension program started.\textsuperscript{10}

On Oct. 9, the Guild and \textit{Tribune} signed a two-year pact, retroactive to Dec. 1, 1971, and set to expire Dec. 1, 1973. In addition to the long-sought pension plan, the contract also included a $1,000 boost in the employer-paid life insurance program (from $2,000 to $3,000); a fourth week of vacation for employees after 15, rather than 16, years of service; a $55 a week raise for two outside classified ad saleswomen; a $40 a week raise over two years for outside circulation managers; and an increase in mileage from 10 cents to 13 cents per mile for those who used their own cars to do company business within the city limits. Management also agreed to abandon its highly unpopular plan to charge employees for parking in the \textit{Tribune}'s lot, and promised to institute a fully-paid employee dental plan by the summer of 1974.\textsuperscript{11}

In terms of benefits, Guild leaders viewed the 1972 contract as a success. In a Sept. 25 letter to Joe Meyer, secretary-treasurer of the Cascade County Trades and Labor Assembly, Beck and Bidwell attributed the gains made to the Guild's threat to strike:

\begin{quote}
We feel we used a strike vote (48-6), a reaffirmation vote (voice) and a rejection of management's "last shot" offer (33-25) to the fullest and obtained far more than we expected without a strike....

And the key thing we feel we gained was management
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Guild contract, September 1972, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
But while they publicly praised the contract and claimed to have gained "far more than we expected," Guild leaders complained privately about the contract's pay provisions, which fell short of the $36 to $40 a week raises it had told the International it needed to gain and keep parity with the Tribune's craft unions. Instead, the Guild's best-paid members, who were making $182 a week at the time the contract was signed, would see their salaries increase by $30 to $212 a week by the time the contract expired in December 1973. At that rate, the Guild could expect its salaries to continue their lag behind those of generally less-educated printers and pressmen at the Tribune, not to mention the national Guild average, which had risen above $226 per week at the top of the scale by the spring of 1972.

The raises looked worse at the bottom of the Guild's pay scale, where the contract provided a $19 weekly raise spread over two years. For example, stenographers, receptionists, cashiers, clerks and telephone operators with four years of experience could expect their weekly salaries to rise from $108 a week in the fall of 1972 to $127 a week by the contract's end in December 1973.

On the surface, raises averaging slightly more than 7 percent a year might seem generous — management certainly considered them generous —
but not to Guild leaders, who believed their union had lost ground in terms of wages during the 1960s. Bidwell, in a 1991 interview, recalled that the Guild "gave up a lot of money benefits" in 1972 in return for such things as the pension plan.\footnote{14}

Weighed against its original salary demands presented to management in February of 1972, the final results were disheartening. The Guild had wanted $256 a week for the most experienced reporters, photographers and copy editors in the last year of the new contract; it settled for $212 a week. The Guild had demanded $256 a week for district circulation managers at the top of their scale; it received $192. The Guild began the 1972 talks asking that its most experienced clerks, bookkeepers, receptionists and stenographers receive no less than $170 weekly; it settled for $127.\footnote{15}

The Guild's aim to "catch up" with the Tribune's craft unions and the national Guild average would have to wait until the next negotiations, which were scheduled to begin after Dec. 1, 1973.

Though neither management nor the Guild anticipated it then, the 1972 contract would be the last both parties would sign for more than four years.

\footnote{14}{Ralph Bidwell, interviewed by author, 20 June 1991, Great Falls, Montana.}

\footnote{15}{Guild money package proposal, 29 February 1972, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.}
CHAPTER THREE
COLLISION COURSE: THE STRIKE'S CAUSES

If sacrificing big wage gains for improved benefits had seemed like a wise compromise in the autumn of 1972, Guild leaders were having second thoughts by the time the contract expired in December of 1973. Fueled in part by a huge increase in the price of imported oil, inflation began to eat away at American workers' salaries and American industry's profits.

No longer held in check by the Nixon administration's wage and price controls of 1971 and 1972, inflation more than doubled in 1973. The Great Falls Newspaper Guild's 7 percent pay increases, which had seemed at least palatable during the 3.4 percent inflation of 1972, were eclipsed in 1973 as inflation climbed to 8.7 percent. And the worst was yet to come. The cost of goods and services increased by 12.3 percent in 1974.1

In reaction to the double-digit inflation, Guild locals across the nation were demanding and, in many cases, getting large wage increases. By February of 1974, the national average for Guild members in the top wage

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1 Inflation figures provide by the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, based on numbers supplied by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
bracket stood at $268 and was expected to climb even higher by fall, when
many new Guild contracts were expected to be signed. In September of 1974,
five small California Bay-area dailies represented by the San Francisco-
Oakland Guild won the highest top minimums negotiated by any Guild
newspaper of 50,000 circulation or less. By the end of 1975, experienced
reporters and copy editors would be earning more than $367 a week at the San
Mateo Times and News Leader, the Santa Rosa Press-Democrat, the Vallejo
Times-Herald, the Richmond Independent and the Berkeley Gazette.2

Other small Guild dailies were doing almost as well. At the Macomb
Daily, a small newspaper in the suburbs of Detroit, the Detroit Guild won a
contract that guaranteed starting reporters a weekly salary of $238 a week, the
seventh highest starting salary of any Guild paper in the nation. Closer to
home, the Yakima (Wash.) Herald-Republic, was paying its Guild reporters
with four years of experience $230 weekly.3 By comparison, fourth-year
reporters at the Great Falls Tribune were making $189 a week as of August
1974. Beginning Tribune reporters were making $131 a week.4

But if Guild leaders were watching the progress made at other small
locals, they were paying particular attention to negotiations at the Cowles-

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Guild Reporter is the official newspaper of The Newspaper Guild, with headquarters in
Washington, D.C.

3 Ibid., 23 August 1974, p. 7.

4 1972 Great Falls contract, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
owned Minneapolis Star and Tribune. In a two-year deal reached in early September 1974, the same company that owned the Great Falls Tribune had granted its most experienced Minneapolis reporters a $55 weekly raise to be spread over two years. By the end of that contract, top Star and Tribune reporters would be making $362 a week. Of special interest to Great Falls Guild leaders was the fact that the Minneapolis agreement had been reached just short of a strike deadline.5

Few Great Falls Guild leaders truly expected to make the kind of salaries their Guild colleagues were earning in Minneapolis, where the cost of living was higher. Nevertheless, many did expect the kind of raises won by the Twin Cities Guild, and they wanted those raises granted across the board. If Cowles could pay its top Minneapolis employees raises of $55 spread over two years, it could do the same in Great Falls, or so the thinking went.

Although it was little more than an opening gambit, the Great Falls Guild began negotiations by demanding a 44 percent increase in salaries for its top-scale reporters, photographers, copy editors and ad salesmen. The top minimum salary would increase from $212 a week to $306 by the end of the two-year contract in December of 1975. It was a symbolic demand, one that would bring Great Falls' top Guild salaries up to the projected national Guild

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5 "Minneapolis reporter top raised $55 over 2 years," The Guild Reporter, 2 September 1974.
average, an average Local 81 hadn't matched since 1950. As expected, management quickly rejected the demand.

By the fall of the 1974, the Guild had lowered its salary demands in what Guild President Carla Beck called "an attempt to compromise." Nonetheless, it kept the $55 per week Minneapolis raises in sight. In early October, the Guild was asking for a two-year contract that would raise salaries for top scale reporters, photographers, copy editors and ad salesmen from $212 per week to $275 per week, an increase of $63 weekly or nearly 30 percent.

Mindful of its obligations to "downstairs" employees at the low end of the wage scale — experienced stenographers, cashiers, telephone operators and circulation clerks — the Guild was seeking to raise their salaries from $127 per week to $175, a 37 percent raise of $48 per week spread over two years. In the middle categories, the Guild sought 41 percent raises, or $54 a week, for bookkeepers and those classified advertising employees whose salaries would jump from $132 per week to $186 per week by the time the new contract expired.

Not only would the raises help lower-paid Guild members cope with inflation, it would help correct what Beck and other Guild members saw as a

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6 The Missoulian, Oct. 27, 1974, p. 7. Missoulian reporter Don Schwennesen interviewed Great Falls Guild President Carla Beck about the Guild's salary demands a week after the strike began.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.
growing disparity in the salaries paid the Tribune's male and female employees. Although equal pay for equal work within job classifications had been an early achievement of the Great Falls Guild under Joseph Kinsey Howard, Beck was disturbed by fact that the paper's lowest paying jobs were held almost exclusively by women, while men dominated the best paying jobs in the editorial and advertising departments.

Conceding that the market for top editorial and advertising talent was national or at least regional — meaning that the Tribune would have to pay well to attract that talent — Beck nonetheless thought the Guild was obliged to ensure that its sizable and mostly female contingent of bookkeepers, circulation clerks, stenographers, receptionists, phone operators and classified ad clerks was not ignored at the bargaining table. The Guild's strength in numbers depended on keeping those workers in the union, and to do so, the union was convinced it had to repay that loyalty by securing wages that were above the prevailing local market.

On a more philosophical level, Beck, as the Great Falls Guild's first and so far only woman president, was more sympathetic to the needs and desires of the local's women, who, she thought, were underpaid and deserved better. In a 1991 letter to the author, Beck said the Guild's women employees were particularly determined to improve their pay:

The Tribune, on the other hand, was under pressure from the local business community to "hold the line" on wages and benefits, especially those of women employees.

This was 1974 and we in the Great Falls Newspaper Guild
were a harbinger of things to come. We represented all "non-craft" employees of the Tribune. Of these employees, approximately half were women, who were filling jobs in all departments: news, advertising, business office and circulation. However, women held all the jobs in the lowest-paying classifications and among these particular employees were single women heads of households who were the sole support of themselves and their families. Up to this particular negotiation, we were never able to negotiate a pay scale which even came close to the cost of living, so we had concentrated on benefits, particularly health insurance, which is the same for all workers and has the advantage of being untaxed. However, the women were frustrated and resentful over their pay scale and demanded that negotiators concentrate on their needs. (This was the era of the "golferoo," when certain employees were allowed to make arrangements on the day of this event so they could report to the country club for golf, followed by a steak dinner afterwards [sic]. The "certain employees" were males. After several years the Guild was able to win a compensating event for the woman — as might be expected the women were not allowed the same time away from the job — but the resentment remained.) Of course, concentrating on demands of those at the lower end of the pay scale in the long run helps all immeasurably because those with skills will always be able to command more in the long run. Better pay at the bottom raises the floor for all. Management understood this. I don't think all the Guild members did.9

Management saw the salary dispute differently. Because the Tribune's revenues depended largely on local advertising and its expenses depended on the cost of local services, wages and benefits had to reflect local conditions. Although it was part of a larger enterprise — the Cowles organization — the Tribune received no financial support from its parent company, Cordingley said in a 1991 interview with the author. 10 The Guild's insistence on raises

10 Cordingley interview.
similar to those won at the Minneapolis Star and Tribune ignored the financial reality in Great Falls, he said. "Here we [the Tribune] are at 40,000 circulation they're [Star and Tribune] sitting at 400,000 thousand on Sunday," he said. "It was kind of silly. We couldn't pay those kinds of salaries."

Despite Cordingley's refusal to accept Guild salary proposals based on national averages or Minneapolis rates, he was nonetheless willing to increase wages. By July, the paper's negotiators were offering the Guild's top-scale employees a two-year contract featuring 9 percent annual raises. Salaries for fully experienced reporters, photographers and display ad salesmen would increase over two years by $38 per week, from $212 to $250 weekly. Under management's initial proposal, salaries for experienced bookkeepers and classified ad clerks would rise over two years from $132 per week to $156 per week, an increase of 9 percent annually. Receptionists, stenographers and other clerical workers at the bottom of the scale would receive raises averaging 11.4 percent annually for two years, taking them from $127 per week to $156 per week over two years, and putting them on a par with slightly better paid bookkeepers and classified clerks so they could be treated as a

11 Ibid.

12 Company proposal, 14 June 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

13 Ibid.
single category in future negotiations.14

In proposing raises averaging 9 percent a year, management thought itself more than generous. "I think we felt the offer we made was too much," Cordingley said in a 1991 interview with the author. "We weren't exactly a cash cow. We had too many employees. People at the low end of the scale — the clerical workers — they were overpaid and there were a lot of them."15

Consequently, the company was reluctant to increase its offer, even as the Guild lowered its demands. Pressed to make some movement on salaries, management did increase its offer on Oct. 4, but only by a dollar or two per week in each job category.16

After 10 months of negotiating, the two sides remained far apart in terms of salaries. The Guild and management were $23 apart at the top of the scale, a difference that represented roughly $1,200 annually per employee at an estimated cost to the company of more than $30,000 in the top wage bracket alone.17 And that was in addition to the company's cost of providing increasingly expensive fringe benefits, another point of friction during the negotiations of 1974.

14 Ibid.

15 Cordingley interview.

16 Company proposal, 4 October 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

17 This figure is the author's own conservative estimate, based on the assumption that at least half of the Guild's 40 editorial and advertising members were at the top of the scale. Management cost figures were not made available.
The Guild was asking for a 50-cent per shift increase in the $1.50 night differential, the extra money paid to each employee required to work past 6 p.m. In addition, the Guild wanted a new "Sunday differential" of $2.50 per shift for those employees required to work on Sundays. Management rejected both demands. Another sticking point was the paper's mileage allowance. Faced with higher gasoline prices due to the Arab oil embargo, the Guild wanted 14 cents per mile for employees who used their own cars on company business in the city and 12 cents per mile for business conducted out of town. Management was offering 13 cents per mile in town and 11 cents per mile on the highway. In other issues, the Guild sought improvements in the pension plan begun in 1972, an increase in the amount of coverage offered in the Tribune's dental insurance plan, a new optical plan and reimbursement for office visits to physicians.

With contract talks all but stalled, the Guild began preparing for a strike. Having conducted dress rehearsals for strikes in 1970 and 1972, the Guild had some experience in strike planning. Following a Sept. 12 vote, in which the membership authorized the union's executive board to call a strike if negotiations failed, the Guild established committees to plan for picketing.

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18 *Bread and Butter*: Guild Strike Paper No. 8, 27 October 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.


the publication of a strike newspaper, the doling out of strike benefits, food services for picketers, the establishment of a strike headquarters and publicity. Strike benefit applications were distributed as early as Sept. 19. With the exception of sports reporter Bruce Bartley, who opposed the idea of unions and strikes, all 65 Guild members filled out and returned the forms, which would qualify prospective strikers for weekly cash allowances ranging from $35 to $65, based on the number of each striker's dependents.21

Although the rank and file reaffirmed its strike vote on Oct. 2, the Guild's leaders still held out some hope for a late-hour settlement with the arrival of Dick Pattison, the International's West Coast representative. Management, too, was hopeful that a strike could be avoided with a last-minute compromise, just as it had in years past.

Though he was not a member of management's negotiating team, Tribune Editor William "Scotty" James found himself involved as an intermediary in a series of what were to become last-ditch meetings between management and the International's Pattison. James, in a 1991 interview with the author, said Pattison approached him about a private meeting, saying he had a plan that would break the deadlock and achieve a settlement without costing the Tribune "a dime more" than the paper had proposed.22 James, a former Guildsman sympathetic to the Guild, said he couldn't meet

21 Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

22 James interview.
without first talking to Cordingley, but thought the publisher would be interested in any idea for a quick and inexpensive settlement.

James met with Pattison and the exchange did lead to a meeting on Oct. 16 between Pattison and Joel Koppang, the Tribune's general manager. Koppang reported later that day that the meeting with Pattison was friendly, and the two made some progress in the area of fringe benefits, but added that Pattison then "threw a stinger at me." The International, Pattison reportedly told Koppang, would not approve any settlement that did not include the same raises as those obtained by the Twin Cities Guild. In other words, the Guild would settle for $55 a week, spread over two years, at the top of the scale.23

According to James, Cordingley thought the wage demand was "a tactic," and asked Koppang if he wanted another meeting with Pattison. Koppang suggested that management "sweeten the pot" by agreeing to the Guild's demands on mileage and other fringe benefits and reach a settlement by the end of the day. Cordingley agreed. With James and Cordingley in the room, Koppang called Pattison to arrange another meeting. James recalled the following conversation:

Dick [Pattison] said "What about the national Guild's contention that they [the Great Falls local] had to have the same raise as the Star-Tribune's?" I was there, I heard Joel say that's not

23 Ibid.
reasonable to do that and Dick said, "Well, goodbye."24

With that conversation, the talking stopped. The Guild called a
general meeting that day at its headquarters in the Odd Fellows Building, just
across the street from the Tribune. On a voice vote, management's offer was
again rejected, again by an overwhelming margin, although several
advertising salesmen who had supported the original strike motion changed
their votes.

With its members' blessing, the Guild's executive board wired the
International for permission to strike. The reply from International President
Charles A. Perlik Jr. arrived by telegram at 4:30 p.m. Oct. 18, and was read at an
executive board meeting later that night. Perlik's answer was short and to the
point:

Authorization is hereby granted to the Great Falls Newspaper
Guild to call a strike of its members at the Great Falls Tribune.
Reports reaching me make it clear Company is not offering the
wages and fringes your members deserve.25

A strike was scheduled to begin on Saturday, Oct. 19, following a 3 p.m.
meeting of all Guild members. Before attending the meeting, Guild
members, including those working on Saturday's paper, were to clean out
their desks. Robert C. Gibson, a young reporter serving an internship at the
table, was working Saturday when Guild President Carla Beck stopped by his

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24 Ibid.

25 Telegram from Charles A. Perlik Jr. to the Great Falls Newspaper Guild, 18 October 1974,
Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
desk and put her hand in Gibson's typewriter and told him it was time to leave:

Before leaving for the meeting, each Guild member removed personal belongings from his desk. Cameras, coffee cups, carbon copies for years of stories, notes, negatives, pens and pencils all went into sacks and boxes and were carried out at 3 p.m. Only management personnel, the print shop day shift and Bruce Bartley, a sports writer opposed to unions and strikes, stayed in the building.26

Don Bartsch, a Tribune copy editor and former Guild president, had just returned to work that Saturday after a three-week vacation. "I worked about an hour and they called us over to a strike vote meeting," Bartsch recalled. "I grabbed a notebook with all the headline counts and sizes and left."27

The meeting, as several Guild members were to later recall, was grim, but Pattison, a forceful and persuasive speaker, assured Local 81 that International would see its brethren through the ordeal ahead. As Bartsch recalled:

I think [Pattison's] presence there influenced a lot of us because most of us didn't relish the idea of going out on a strike. I wasn't that hot to go out strike, but I didn't speak out against it. I sort of went along. I had a good job, I was well-paid, and I liked it. I really didn't favor going out on strike, but if we were, I was a member of the Guild and I was going help as much as I could.28


27 Bartsch interview.

28 Ibid.
If more conservative Guild members like Bartsch didn't like their union's growing militancy, they nevertheless believed in unionism and were grateful for what their Guild had accomplished in the years since its founding. Though it was not an easy choice for some, loyalty to the Guild came before loyalty to the Tribune. As Bartsch described it, the Tribune:

was a good place to work and it was a better place to work after they got the Guild. We had the best pay in Montana. We had good working conditions — better working conditions than anywhere in the state — and there was no censorship from the company.29

After another voice vote to reject management's offer, Pattison told Guild members they were on strike. In a 1991 interview, Pattison recalled the moment as one of extreme frustration. Faced with a growing impatience on the part of the local's leadership and management's refusal to make any new movements at the bargaining table, a strike seemed unavoidable.30

Although management later accused him of wanting a strike, Pattison said he considered a strike an admission of failure, not something to celebrate. Pattison said there were significant areas of disagreement between the Guild and the Tribune's management, but nothing that could not have been worked out. More than anything, Pattison said, the Great Falls local "wanted to be taken seriously," and management's decision to raise its offer

29 Bartsch interview.
by a dollar or two was considered a slap in the face that could not be ignored.\textsuperscript{31}

Yet despite the union's hostile talk, Pattison said he believed the strike could have been avoided if management's negotiating team had been more skillful in the diplomacy of negotiations. In previous years, the \textit{Tribune}'s negotiating team, led by Scotty Haines, a labor relations attorney for the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Association, had managed to avoid such last-minute showdowns. Haines, Pattison said, knew the "game" well enough to know that you "always leave some room for movement." Over the years, Pattison and Haines had faced one another during negotiations at numerous Guild papers throughout the Northwest, and the two had developed a special relationship. Each knew how far the other would go, Pattison said.

But Haines had died since the last \textit{Tribune} contract was signed, and the company had yet to bring in a PNNA negotiator for the 1974 talks. Though Koppang, as the paper's lead negotiator, had participated in several contract talks, he wasn't Scotty Haines, Pattison said. Whereas Haines had left room for further discussion, Koppang was blunt in his refusals and gave Pattison the impression that management was more interested in reacting to Guild proposals than providing any of its own.

Had management shown even a little willingness to raise its Oct. 4 pay and pension proposals, the strike could have been avoided, Pattison said. Although the Guild was asking for a $55 raise at the top of the scale, Pattison

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}
said he was prepared to accept less:

Sure, everybody wanted Minneapolis salaries but I don’t recall anybody being that unrealistic that they could achieve that in one round of negotiations. What we were doing, primarily, was trying to make a substantial advance toward that. By substantial, I would say if the company had offered $25, and Minneapolis had got $55, we would have thought that $40 or $45 would have been pretty substantial. Perhaps, when we got down to the crunch, even less than that would have been acceptable.32

The other major issue — the Guild’s demands for improvements in the company pension plan — was more complicated, but nevertheless solvable, in Pattison’s view. As promised, the company had established a pension program, but it was a plant-wide plan instituted by the Cowles organization, meaning that it was the same for Guild members as it was for Tribune craft unions. The company was the sole trustee of the pension program, and the Guild wanted to share that role. “They wanted a say in their pension program,” Pattison said. Had the Tribune indicated a willingness to discuss the Guild’s participation, or even explained why Cowles insisted on a single plan for all its papers, Pattison said he would have advised the Great Falls local to give up the issue for the time being.

But as of 3:55 p.m. on Oct. 19, it was too late. As he was explaining the Guild’s strike strategy to members assembled at the Odd Fellows Building, Pattison was interrupted by a phone call from a federal mediator he had been trying to reach all day. Could the Guild postpone its strike for a couple of days

32 Ibid.
while the mediator tried one last shot at bringing the two sides together? the mediator asked. Pattison replied that it was unlikely because Guild members were awaiting his return to receive picket signs and march downstairs and across the street to the Tribune.

As he talked on the phone, Pattison was interrupted by Guild leaders who told him the crowd was getting impatient. Could they go ahead and hand out the picket signs?

I said something like "Do I have any choice?" Then the mediator asked me again if I thought we could postpone the strike until Monday or Tuesday so he could bring someone in. I looked out the doorway and said, "I'm afraid not. They just walked down the stairs without me."33

33 Ibid.
CHAPTER FOUR
"VIVA LE STRIKE"

After years of threats, the Great Falls Newspaper Guild had finally gone on strike. It began on a sunny and unseasonably warm Saturday in October, and Guild pickets took the weather as an omen. God must be a Guildsman, they joked.

Smoking cigarettes and wearing white sandwich-board signs with bold red lettering, the pickets formed themselves into small groups and sealed off all entrances to the Tribune building at the juncture of Second Avenue North and Fourth Street. The mood was both serious and jocular as picket captain Ron Rice, a Tribune reporter, moved his troops into position. Unaware of what was going on, passing motorists slowed to decipher the strikers' signs, which read:

ON STRIKE
AGAINST
GREAT FALLS
TRIBUNE CO.

GREAT FALLS
NEWSPAPER GUILD
LOCAL NO. 81
AFL-CIO, CLC
It was an historic moment. For the first time in the history of Montana journalism, the Guild had struck a Montana paper. But the objective was more than providing a show for passersby. The Guild's strategy was to shut down the Tribune and force it to stop publication. The strike had been timed to begin just before the night shift of typesetters and pressmen was to arrive to produce Sunday morning's paper, a time when the fewest number of people would be inside the building.

The strike clearly caught management off guard. Only two typesetters were in the building, along with a handful of management editors and sportswriter Bruce Bartley, who opposed the idea of unions and strikes. William Cordingley, the Tribune's publisher, was at his country club. Editor William "Scotty" James was at home. As word of the strike spread through town, Cordingley, James, Koppang and other management personnel brushed through the lines to take control.

Meanwhile, Managing Editor Terry Dwyer and Ralph Bidwell, a former Guild officer who had been named city editor in June, were busy dividing up copy and pages in an attempt to produce some kind of Sunday paper by scraping together local news articles prepared before the strike and news ripped from the Tribune's clattering wire service machines. It would not be a great Sunday paper, but simply producing one without the services of reporters, copy editors and photographers would be enough.

Finding enough copy to fill a paper was the easy part, but setting the
stories in hot lead type and running the presses required special skills no one but the paper's unionized typesetters, photoengravers and pressmen possessed. And even if the Tribune's craft unions defied the Guild's picket line, there was the sticky problem of delivering the finished paper to 40,000 subscribers scattered throughout the state. The district circulation managers, who supervised the paper carriers and motor route drivers, were walking a picket line. Still, if the craft unions crossed the line and a paper was published, management could seriously cripple the strike by showing the Guild that its services were not necessarily required. Would the craft unions come to work?

Outside, the Guild was busy bolstering its line in anticipation of attempts to cross. It was one thing to let a few management personnel through, but the craft unions had to be kept out. By 5 p.m., Rice, the Guild's picket captain, estimated that his line comprised 40 members of the Guild and other Great Falls unions sympathetic to the strike. Representatives from the Communications Workers of America, the Hotel and Restaurant Workers, the Machinists Union, the United Steelworkers and the Retail Clerks Union helped man the line. After 5, the Guild strikers were reinforced by 18 paper carriers, some of their parents, and individual members of the Great Falls Education Association.¹

¹ Bread and Butter, Strike Paper No. 1, 19 October 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers. During the first two and a half weeks of the strike, the Guild published a daily newsletter to keep its members informed about the strike.
The support of other Great Falls unions was considered critical to the strike's success, especially in the early going when Guild leaders were worried that Tribune craft unions might cross the picket line. But the Guild's careful cultivation of other unions over the years seemed to be paying off. During the first 48 hours of the strike, the Guild picket line was joined or supported by representatives of the unions already named, and also by members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the Pipefitters Union, Operating Engineers, Teamsters, the Montana Education Association and the Montana Federation of Teachers.

In the meantime, Dick Pattison, the Guild's international representative, was busy persuading the Tribune's craft unions to honor the strike. Despite the fact that their internationals would not sanction their joining the Guild's strike, the pressmens union, the bookbinders union and the International Mailers Union agreed not to cross the Guild's picket line, even though it meant a loss of wages without immediate hope of strike or lockout benefits. Pattison promised that the Guild would provide the craft unions some financial assistance during the strike.2

But the International Typographical Union, which represented the Tribune's 36 typesetters and composers, was in a more difficult situation. Its international, which had long considered the Guild a rival to its power in the newspaper industry, ordered its Great Falls local to return to work. Terry

2 Pattison interview.
Schuh, a spokesman for the ITU's Local 256, told the Associated Press that, unlike the Guild, the ITU had a contract with the Tribune and was bound to honor it. The ITU at least would have to make an attempt to enter the building.

The attempt came at 8 p.m. when at least three ITU typesetters decided to cross the line, which by then had swollen to about 100 pickets. The crowd also included a number of television and radio reporters hoping to get a story for their late-night newscasts. With an escort of three Great Falls policemen, and under the glare of television floodlights, the typesetters shouldered into the line. The pickets pushed back. After a few seconds of shoving, the police and the typesetters gave up and left. The line had held. The ITU considered itself locked out and agreed to observe the Guild's picket line.

After seeing what had happened to the typesetters, management knew it could not publish. Even if pressmen somehow managed to show up for their regular 9 p.m. shift, there would be nothing to print without ITU members to set the type. For the first time in the Tribune's history as a daily, it would not publish a regularly scheduled edition.

Guild leaders were ecstatic. They had known from the beginning that a strike stood little chance of success if the paper continued publishing. Now,

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4 Accounts of the ITU's efforts to cross the Guild's picket line were found in The Guild Reporter, 25 October 1974; Bread and Butter, Strike Paper No. 2, 20 October 1974; and Robert C. Gibson's "The Great Falls Strike," Montana Journalism Review, No. 18, 1975.
after only five hours on the picket line, the Guild had forced Montana's second-largest daily newspaper to cease publication. If the craft unions continued to honor the line, the Guild could hold out for as long as its support lasted. As fresh pickets took their place on the line early Sunday morning, they were handed a mimeographed copy of the Guild's strike newsletter, *Bread and Butter*, which explained the day's strategy to union members as well as the general public. What it lacked in accuracy and knowledge of French, it made up in enthusiasm:

The aim of all picket line walkers and supportive help today should be to make Monday, October 20 [sic], the second day in Montana journalism history that a newspaper has not been published because of picket lines.

UNITED WE STAND! VIVA LE STRIKE! [sic]5

Nor was that enthusiasm limited to Great Falls Guild members. Rex Adkins, vice chairman of the Guild's *San Francisco Chronicle* unit, was on his way to visit his 80-year-old father in Harlem, Mont., when he heard about Local 81's strike. Stuck in Great Falls awaiting a bus, Adkins walked to the *Tribune* and joined the Guild's picket line on the strike's first night. In a feature article appearing in the Nov. 8 issue of *The Guild Reporter*, the International's semi-monthly newspaper, Adkins applauded the strikers' organization and spirit. As for the local's cause, Adkins quoted picket captain Ron Rice as saying the strike was aimed at boosting pay for Guild members at the bottom of the the wage scale:

5 Ibid.
If we on the top scale have to take the company offer of $40 over two years, we won't like it but we'll make do, somehow, despite the raging inflation. But, you know, the company wants to widen the differential between us and the lower-paid people, generally women. Ten dollars a week more is what they want to give them in 1974.

Well, you know how that works when we go to the store. I go in there and tell them I'm a reporter, I got a B.A. in sociology, an M.A. in English and that I've written papers on the science of journalism — and the store charges me 90 cents for a half-gallon of milk.

Well, Mary Member goes in and she tells them she got through high school, all right, and she's a clerk in circulation, making half what I do. You know what the store charges her? 90 cents.6

Time, or so it seemed on that first day of the strike, was on the Guild's side. Montana was two weeks away from an off-year general election, and the Tribune, like most of the state's newspapers, reaped a good deal of revenue from the sale of political advertising, particularly in the last two weeks of the campaign. Even worse, a prolonged strike would cut into the traditional Christmas advertising season, the most profitable time of the year for most newspapers.

Nor could the Tribune count on receiving any money from its non-newspaper business, Tribune Printing Co., a commercial printing shop located about a mile from the paper. Because it housed a circulation office, Guild pickets had shut down the print shop, a move that prevented, among other things, the printing of election ballots for Cascade and two other north

central Montana counties. 7

The strike was meant to hit the Tribune where it hurt most, in the pocketbook, but the Guild hoped to benefit as well from the anger they expected readers to show when the paper failed to arrive. They did not have long to wait. Though news of the strike had been reported Saturday by Great Falls' four radio stations and two television stations, many readers were still surprised when the newspaper and comics failed to land on their doorsteps Sunday morning. 8 Robert Gibson, a young University of Montana journalism student serving an internship at the Tribune, recalled subscribers' confused reactions in a 1975 article on the strike published in the Montana Journalism Review:

A neighbor of one Tribune reporter asked to borrow the reporter's newspaper since he did not get one because of the strike.

Disbelieving residents and curious onlookers drove slowly around the Tribune Building in cars packed with kids leaning out the windows for a better look at the pickets. Some shouted obscenities at "ya bums" to get back to work. Others shouted encouragement....

Yet the Tribune switchboard was swamped Sunday morning with calls from people complaining that their newspaper had not been delivered. Later in the day, callers wanted to know sports scores, how long the strike would last, what would happen to pre-paid subscriptions and what had happened to Rick O'Shay [a cartoon character]....

One man called and said he had heard a friend had died — he wanted to know if it was true. A shoe store that gives away free samples to new mothers called to say it got their


names and addresses from the Tribune's vital statistics column.

Attendance at public meetings and lectures declined sharply. News of fires and crimes was exaggerated as it passed from person to person.9

So far the strike was going according to plan. Besides the 65 full-time Guild members on strike, more than 160 Tribune employees were off the job, including 12 pressmen, 36 compositors, 22 people from the mailroom and 26 employees at the commercial printing plant.10 The craft unions were honoring the picket lines and Cordingley, the Tribune's publisher, had said in a local television interview that the paper had no plans to bring in strikebreakers.11 Although both management and the Guild indicated that negotiations had not been broken off, no new talks were scheduled during the strike's first week.

With its flanks protected, the Guild concentrated on supporting its striking members and soliciting support from the public as well as other unions.

The Guild's Welfare Committee met with local lending institutions, insurance companies and county welfare officials to ensure that strikers were protected from foreclosure proceedings, unexpected health-care costs and starvation. In most cases, lenders agreed to grant extensions on installment


loans to certified Guild members, while Blue Cross, the Tribune's health insurance carrier, agreed to continue employee coverage for the duration of the strike. Welfare officials promised to meet with struggling strikers to gauge their eligibility for food stamps, and strikers with children were advised to take advantage of free or reduced-price programs in the public schools.12

More importantly, the Welfare Committee arranged for the payment of weekly strike benefits to Guild members who took an active role in the strike. Checks ranging from $35 to $65, depending on the number of each member's dependents, were handed out less than a week after the strike began. According to International policy, benefit levels would increase $5 a week after the fifth and 13th weeks of the strike, should it last that long. To make things easier, moonlighting Guild members were allowed to earn up to $50 a week without losing their strike benefits.13

Support also began to pour in from other Great Falls unions and Guild locals from across the nation. In addition to supplying pickets early in the strike, local unions also donated food to the Guild commissary established at strike headquarters and operated mainly by older Guild members unable to serve on the picket line. If nothing else, there was plenty of food, Gibson recalled. During the strike, Guild members and guests:

12 Bread and Butter, Guild Strike Paper No. 3, undated; and Bread and Butter, Guild Strike Paper No. 11, 31 October 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

13 Ibid.
consumed hundreds of gallons of coffee, thousands of cookies, dozens of rolls and doughnuts, gallons of chile [sic], soup and casseroles, a bushel of fresh fruit and thousands of sandwiches — ham, turkey, egg salad, corn[ed] beef, salami, bologna and cheese.14

In response to Local 81's strike announcement, several Guild locals sent telegrams and letters of support, along with checks ranging from $500 from the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Guild to $50 from Wire Service Guild's Associated Press branch in Helena.15 Valued as much as the money were the messages of fraternal support, which appeared regularly on Local 81's bulletin boards and in its strike newsletters. A telegram from the Cleveland Newspaper Guild, which was itself involved in bitter strikes at the Cleveland Plain-Dealer and Cleveland Daily Press, was typical:

    Cleveland Guild members hasten to send the enclosed $100 to aid your first battle with a recalcitrant publisher who probably should have been struck years ago, if for no other reason than to capture his attention. Be assured of our continuing moral and financial support.16

    Smaller locals, too, were paying attention to the Great Falls strike. Peggi Keller, secretary of the Bakersfield, Calif., Guild, cut short a Colorado vacation to visit Great Falls and walk the picket line. Before leaving, she left the strikers this message:

14 Gibson, "The Great Falls Strike," p. 49.


The Great Falls local is providing a worthy example for its fellow Guild members throughout the world. It is a small, isolated local, but it is not alone. News of the Great Falls battle has spread fast and far.

Guild brothers and sisters are pledging moral and financial support to win that battle. In return, Great Falls Guild members are demonstrating guts and determination that may well inspire courage in others who deserve more than they are getting.

The year 1974 has begun a new era for the newspaper industry — one of liberation for newspaper employe[e]s and of reality for publishers. Some publishers have been surprised at employe[e]s scoffing paternalistic traditions and organizing new units of the Newspaper Guild. We are with you. Be strong. Have faith. Win!*7

Nor was the Great Falls Guild shy about soliciting support. It asked subscribers to cancel their Tribune subscriptions for the duration of the strike, and several did. Leo Greybill, a Great Falls attorney and chairman of the state's 1972 constitutional convention, cancelled his subscription and so did Jim Murry, executive secretary of the Montana AFL-CIO.18 The gestures, of course, were purely symbolic, as Sam Reynolds, editorial page editor at the Missoulian, was tickled to point out to his readers:

Sounds great? Parse it out. A paper that doesn't print, doesn't appear at all. To cancel something for the duration of the time it doesn't exist, is to cancel nothing. It's like shaking one's fist at the television set just after the nightly sign-off and vowing to boycott that blasted station until it comes on again the following morning.

Some gesture. But there's no question it has an antic

17 Ibid.
18 Letter from Mr. and Mrs. Leo Greybill to the Great Falls Newspaper Guild, undated, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers; press release from Jim Murry to the Montana media, 23 October 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
Nevertheless, the Guild continued to seek what support it could from well-known Montanans, an effort that reached its zenith on Oct. 29, when Montana Gov. Tom Judge visited the Guild's strike headquarters and wished the strikers well.20

During the strike's first 10 days, the Guild had considerable success publicizing its side of the dispute. After all, many of its members were veteran news men and women who knew how the game was played. A publications committee churned out dozens of press releases to local and statewide media, and even read them over the air to radio and television broadcasters. Guild President Carla Beck made herself available for almost daily interviews with reporters, and Guild press releases continually emphasized the disparity between Great Falls salaries and national averages.

The Tribune,

in the face of spiraling inflation and inadequate salaries, has seen fit to ignore the needs and requests of its employe[e]s.

In recent years, the wage scale at the monopoly Tribune has fallen more than $50 behind the national average of $268 a week, and is $155 behind current top minimum salaries at the Minneapolis Star and Tribune, the owners of the Great Falls Tribune.21

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19 Missoulian, 27 October 1974, p. 4.

20 Bread and Butter, Strike Paper No. 11, 31 October 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

21 Strike Paper No. 4, undated, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
Another oft-repeated charge was that the Tribune's pay scale was so low, some Guild members were eligible for welfare:

Reporter scales in Great Falls currently are only $212, with the people in other departments receiving as much as $100 less than that. In fact, some employees may well qualify for supplemental welfare payments because their pay is so low.

Despite the fact that pay scales are unquestionably low, the Guild has not asked for an unreasonable settlement out of line with scales of comparable papers throughout the country.22

Yet despite the union's exuberance and expertise, none of the evidence suggests the Guild monopolized coverage of the strike. Throughout its early phase, the strike was big news, especially in Great Falls, where the dispute received major play from local broadcasters who were quick to contact management spokesmen for reaction to the Guild's claims.23

Outside Great Falls, the state's major dailies provided readers with early coverage of the strike, mainly through short Associated Press stories played on inside pages. And though most Montana AP writers belonged to the Guild's wire service branch, they also included comments from management outlining the paper's decision not to publish and reiterating its last proposal to grant top Guild members a raise of $40 a week over two years.24

22 Bread and Butter, Guild Strike Paper No. 2, undated, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.


Even so, Montanans outside Great Falls did not get an in-depth account of the issues involved in the strike until a week after it began, when *Missoulian* reporter Don Schwennesen wrote a lengthy article based on interviews with Cordingley, Beck and Pattison.25

Schwennesen reported that federal mediator Sherman Hodges of Great Falls had been asked to referee a meeting between management and the Guild on Oct. 29. The meeting was to be the first between the parties since the Guild launched its strike Oct. 19. Other than that news, the article outlined the Guild's salary proposal and Beck's contention that the paper's female employees, who held most of the lowest paying jobs at the paper, were being treated unfairly.

But the article was more notable because it represented management's first detailed response to the strike. Cordingley, Schwennesen reported, said he did not understand what had precipitated the strike, but he linked the Guild's action to the arrival of Pattison, the Guild's international representative, in Great Falls. The inference, which Cordingley would continue to make in the years following the strike, was clear: the International, for whatever reason, wanted a strike in Great Falls.

What other reason could there be? Cordingley asked. He defended the company's pay offer and declared the Guild's demands unreasonable. "They're demanding we pay them the Minneapolis scale," Cordingley was

quoted as saying, adding that there was:

"no way we can pay what they pay in the Twin Cities.
"We offered $40 a week — nine percent in the first year
and 9.1 the second year. That's not counting fringes.
"Some of them get as high as a 28 percent increase," under
the management proposal ... and "the lowest paid person at the
Tribune will get $139 a week."26

Cordingley denied that wage discrimination against women was an
issue, saying that "of the six lowest paid people (at the Tribune), one of them
is a man." And he defended the paper's benefit offerings, including the
company's health and dental plans and even the mileage proposal, which
was designed to increase as the price of gasoline increased.

Beck argued that the Tribune's pension plan discriminated against
older employees, saying that "benefits stop accumulating when a person
reaches 65 and if a person is 55 when employed, he or she gets no pension."

Cordingley admitted that the pension program "was a hell of a complex
deal," but said some of the Guild's complaints had been rendered moot in
new federal pension legislation due out soon. Even so, he added that only
one older Tribune employee would be affected by the pension's age
qualifications, and the company had already offered to "take care of him."

The Tribune publisher also complained to Schwennesen that the Guild
was trying to blame management for the pushing and shoving incident at the
paper's main entrance during the strike's first hours. Cordingley said police

26 Ibid.
listed the incident as "partly staged." "It was on television," he said.27

While the two sides carried on the labor dispute in the media, the Guild began working on plans to publish its own newspaper to serve Great Falls' readers and advertisers during the strike — and to ensure that the union had a voice independent of local and statewide news outlets. Wayne Arnst, a Tribune reporter and photographer, headed the Guild's Publications Committee, but the task of producing the paper fell to Robert C. Gibson, the young Tribune intern. While the committee produced news releases and filled holes in the picket lines, Gibson began searching for a printer to publish such a paper.

The plan was to have an interim paper on the streets shortly after the strike began. It was important to show Great Falls citizens that the Guild's professional commitment to the community had not taken a back seat to the union's demands for better pay and benefits and one way to demonstrate the Guild's commitment was to publish its own newspaper well in advance of the Nov. 5 election. On a more practical level, by publishing before the election, the Guild might cash in on the anticipated rush by candidates to buy advertising space now that the Tribune was shut down. If the strike lasted past the election, the Guild's newspaper also could expect to reap revenue from the Tribune's larger advertisers with no place to turn with their holiday ads.

27 Ibid.
With an experienced pool of editorial, advertising and circulation workers to draw from, Guild leaders were confident they could produce an interim newspaper to fill the void left in the wake of the Tribune's closure. The problem was finding someone to print it, and from the start the project was hampered by the very same forces that forced the Tribune to shut down — union politics.

Many of the Guild's display advertising members declined to sell ads for the strike newspaper, fearing such an action would be considered competition with their erstwhile employer, the Tribune. Even more troublesome was the reaction of the ITU local, which was less than pleased with the Guild's strike.

Though many of its members sympathized with the Guild's complaints against the Tribune, ITU leaders were angry about the Guild's decision to strike, and they were particularly upset with the Guild's decision to picket the Tribune Printing Co. The commercial printing shop, which was closed down on the strike's first day, had nothing to do with the newspaper, they argued. ITU typesetters, along with the shop's pressmen and bookbinders, had been forced out of work in an unfair secondary strike and they resented it. Although the ITU eventually received lock-out benefits from its international, the money was slow in coming and print shop employees clearly felt the pinch. As a consequence, ITU leaders were reluctant to help the Guild do anything that might prolong a strike, including
the publication of an interim newspaper.

Bernie Kempa, president of the ITU local, refused to allow ITU members to work on the strike paper. Moreover, he threatened to have his local ram the Guild's picket lines if the strike paper was printed at anything other than a union shop, and not just any union shop. The paper had to carry an Allied logo or bug, meaning it had to be printed at a shop that employed members of both the ITU and the pressmen's union. That demand considerably reduced the Guild's options.

Outside of the Tribune printing shop, there was only one Allied shop in Great Falls, Electric City Printing, owned by Bob Bennetts. At first Bennetts refused to have anything to do with the project, but later agreed to print the paper at a price roughly three times higher than estimates gathered from other Allied shops in the state. The price was more than the Guild could pay and the union kept shopping for a printer, though it meant the paper would have to be printed out of town. But the search failed as one print shop after another declined, saying they could not meet the Guild's requirements on such short notice.

Finally, after more persuasion, Bennetts relented and cut his price for printing a single issue of the paper from $5,000 to $2,000. The Guild quickly accepted, and the rush was on to produce a paper that would hit the streets by Saturday, Nov. 2. Striking reporters made the rounds of sources on their old beats, photographers threw together a few file photographs of scenery and
wildlife and the Guild's classified advertising contingent worked the phones and walked the sidewalks collecting ads.

By Wednesday, Oct. 30, the paper, named Pennant after the Great Falls bar patronized by many Tribune employees, was ready to go to press. The stories had been written, the photos had been printed, the pages had been dummied and the advertising money had been collected. The event was even publicized statewide by the Associated Press.28 Shortly before presstime on Thursday, Gibson rushed down to Electric City Printing with a set of page folios he had failed to provide Bennetts the evening before. He was in for a surprise. "Bennetts put the folios on the top of the box of copy he had been given the previous evening and handed the whole thing to me," Gibson later wrote. "He said he had decided not to print the Pennant. He gave no reason and refused to talk about it."29

The situation had become critical. Unless Bennetts could be persuaded once more to reconsider, there was little hope that the Guild could find another printer willing to publish the Pennant before the election. The work done so far would be useless. Even worse, the Pennant's advertising staff would face the depressing task of returning all the money it had collected for the issue.

With nowhere else to turn, Gibson quickly called Pattison, who agreed


to come over and try to change Bennetts' mind. But Pattison had no sooner entered Bennetts' shop when he was called to the phone. The message he received made the Pennant's problems seem trivial. The strike, which had been a carefully orchestrated success in its first 10 days, was beginning to come apart.

Back at the Tribune, a police escort had formed around a contingent of display advertising salesmen prepared to crash their own union's picket line.

30 Ibid.
If anyone in the Great Falls Newspaper Guild had thought the strike would last only a few days, they were badly mistaken. And if anyone in the Guild thought management would quickly see the folly of its negotiating position and capitulate, they did not know Bill Cordingley and Joel Koppang very well. Nor would the fact that the Tribune's editors had once been Guild leaders be of any help. With the exception of former Guild secretary Ralph Bidwell, who had been named city editor that summer, the Tribune's management team, to a man, considered the strike an unwarranted attack.

If management had failed to see the Guild's growing discontent, the union had failed to consider the depth of management's indignation after the strike began. Though Cordingley publicly declared that negotiations had not been broken off after the Guild forced his paper to shut down, he was in no mood to rush back to the bargaining table. If anything, he viewed the strike as a betrayal of the company's generosity and something of a sneak attack, launched precisely at a time in the negotiations when management had been most willing to make concessions.
"Our position wasn't to crush the union, it was to get a contract we could live with," Cordingley said in a 1991 interview with the author. "We weren't trying to crush anybody; they attacked us. I don't know what we could've done to avoid the strike. I think they thought we were going to be a pushover."¹

Editor Scotty James, although not directly involved with the negotiations, thought the strike had been premeditated. Recalling his part in arranging the last round of talks between Pattison and Koppang, James said he felt as though the Guild had lured management into a private negotiating session with the promise of a quick and easy settlement based on major concessions by the Guild. Instead, he said, Pattison made demands knowing management would reject them. As far as James was concerned, the meeting had been a set up designed to allow the Guild to proceed with a strike. "I think they thought it was going to be a pushover," said James. "They didn't know Bill Cordingley. They didn't know Koppang ... they weren't going to be pushed around."²

As a result, the Tribune's management dug in for the long haul. The task, Cordingley told his executives, was to figure out a way to resume publication. In the meantime, Tribune executive editors were to become reporters, following and gathering the news so that readers could receive


² William "Scotty" James, interviewed by author, 27 April, 1991, Great Falls, Montana.
instant updates once the paper began publishing. To that end, other management people would begin learning how to run the presses. Strikebreakers from outside the Tribune would not be brought in, but Tribune executives were encouraged to assist disgruntled strikers, particularly ad salesmen, to return to work if they so wished.

While it searched for a way to resume publication, the Tribune asked the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Association to send a professional negotiator, and within a few days of the strike, PNNA attorney Woody Young arrived at Great Falls. Technically, negotiations had not been called off, only adjourned following Pattison's last meeting with Koppang, but neither the Guild nor the Tribune was in any hurry to resume the talks. The Guild was busy reinforcing its picket lines, ensuring that members in need were getting benefits and trying to find a printer for the Pennant. Management was in no rush to resume talking because it had little it wanted to say.

Nevertheless, both management and the Guild accepted federal mediator Sherman Hodges' invitation to informal meetings on Oct. 29 and 30. The meetings accomplished little more than to allow both sides to restate their existing proposals. As it happened, no formal negotiating would take place until Nov. 8, almost three weeks into the strike.

As far as management was concerned, the time could be better used searching for ways to resume publication. Moreover, the Guild's solidarity was beginning to crack.
On Oct. 23, just five days after the strike began, Jerry Coonse and B. R. "Butch" Kummer, both Tribune advertising salesmen and Guild members, put on picket signs and joined the line. As the two neared an unlocked door, they ducked inside.3 One by one and over the next several days, five more Tribune advertising salesmen and an office clerk crossed the line, along with Frank Adams and Thomas Kotynski, two reporters from the Tribune's Capitol Bureau in Helena. Editorial writer John Chapman and sports writer Bruce Bartley crossed as well.

Although the defections did not give management the power to publish — someone would have to learn the complicated job of running the presses for that to happen — they gave management some hope that it was not alone in its fight against the Guild.

Until then, the mood inside the building had been one of isolation mixed with a grim determination to hold out. Despite persistent rumors on the picket lines that the state's Lee newspapers had offered the Tribune the use of its presses and even pressmen, Cordingley said other Montana newspaper publishers offered their moral support, but that was all. According to Cordingley, one of the callers was Lloyd Schermer, a former Missoulian publisher who had become president and chief executive officer of Lee Enterprises. "Schermer called me one day and said, 'Bill, if we can help you

in any way, don't hesitate to call," Cordingley said. "It don't go beyond that."4

The only evidence of any public support from other daily newspapers in Montana was an Oct. 23 editorial in the Billings Gazette, Lee's largest Montana daily, which accused the Guild of being unfair to the public and business community:

A newspaper is a quasi-public institution. When it ceases to publish because of labor strife, the principal losers are not newspaper [sic] itself and the immediate employe[e]s.

The public is hurt. One group, in this case the American Newspaper Guild [sic], is denying the public its primary source of news and advertising.

Especially deplorable in the current dispute between the Guild and the Great Falls Tribune is the early evidence of violence when nonstrikers [sic] workers attempted to fulfill their contractual obligations.

When the Great Falls Tribune does not publish it results in harm to the businessmen of that city and to the readers in the city and its trade territory. They are without needed means of communication beneficial to both.

A strike which shuts down a newspaper is totally different than one which shuts down a store because of the interdependent relationship between reader-customers and the entire business community.5

Whether Lee publishers offered more than moral support is impossible to determine, but it was reasonable for the Guild to fear Lee's intervention, given its anti-union history. Though it never had to deal with an organized newsroom, Lee had effectively broken the mechanical unions at all of its

4 Cordingley interview. Schermer declined to answer the author's questions about Lee's attitude toward or possible involvement toward the Great Falls strike, saying he could not recall the company's reaction.

5 Billings Gazette, 23 October 1974, p. 4.
newspapers by the mid-1970s. George Remington, a Lee executive and later publisher of the Billings Gazette, was particularly wary of The Newspaper Guild, and said so in a 1976 interview with a University of Montana journalism student, in which he blamed the union for emphasizing seniority over quality:

The Guild is no longer a professional union. It equates reporters with dark room technicians, classified ad salesmen and clerks in the business office. And they dominate the Guild because there are more of them. The Guild started out as a professional union but it has turned into an industrial union.

If Lee didn't actually help the Tribune break the Guild strike, it certainly was not going to do anything to harm the Great Falls paper's chances of winning the strike. Although Lee publishers could have scored a temporary circulation coup by flooding the news-starved Great Falls market with their papers, they refrained from doing so. Instead, they continued to send only the normal number of papers required to fill their Great Falls vending machines. As competitive as the newspaper business was in terms of circulation and advertising, some things — namely the united fight against the industry's troublesome labor unions — were more important.

Moreover, there was precedent to follow. When the Great Falls Guild threatened to strike in 1960, Don Anderson, publisher of Lee's Wisconsin

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State Journal and the executive responsible for negotiating Lee's purchase of Montana's Anaconda-owned papers, wrote Richard E. Morrison, general manager of Lee's Montana division, advising him not to exploit the Tribune and its publisher, Alex Warden:

In one of your letters you said Alex Warden might be facing trouble with the Guild. If that should develop, I hope you'll issue order[s] all over our own circuit that no Lee paper is to take even the slightest advantage of such a situation. None of our papers should send a single extra copy into any territory served by the Tribune, and no circulation effort of any kind should be made. In fact, if the Gazette or the Missoulian have any road men in the Tribune areas, they should be pulled out until the trouble is over.

I know that coincides with your own feeling on the subject, because of the high regard you have for Warden, but I thought you might like to know that's the way we play ball. If that will help Alex's position in bargaining to know that, I have no objection to your passing on the word of what our policy will be.8

Morrison, in a quick reply to Anderson's letter, agreed and offered to take the policy a step further:

As far as the Great Falls situation is concerned, under no circumstances would we attempt to take advantage of any misfortune that might befall them. We would expect, and receive, the same treatment from them, I know.

The thing that occurred to me was that if trouble should develop with the Guild over there, some of those people would be around our papers looking for jobs. I intend to see that none of them are hired. There doesn't seem to be much of a chance of a strike right now. It may develop, however.9

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8 Letter from Don Anderson to Richard E. Morrison, 12 March 1960, Don Anderson Papers, University of Montana Archives, Missoula, Montana.

Even if the Montana's Lee publishers gave the Tribune the same quiet support in 1974, the fact remains that the paper's management was pretty much on its own in terms of dealing with the Guild. The Cowles organization itself offered little more than advice, according to Cordingley. "I don't think there were two people here from Cowles Media at any time," he said in a 1991 interview with the author. "They were having their own problems with the Guild. We didn't use them at all."11

Left to its own devices and forced to consider its own vulnerability to a strike by its mechanical unions, the Tribune's management decided to take advantage of the shutdown to improve its printing methods. Actually, such a move had been under consideration before the strike and was tentatively scheduled to take place in 1976, but the absence of the paper's printers and pressmen would make the move much easier.

By the 1970s, the so-called "cold type revolution" was sweeping the newspaper industry. The new technology made it cheaper to print a newspaper because it required fewer highly skilled workers than the existing "hot metal" process. Under the old procedure, a reporter's type-written copy had to be set in hot lead type by highly skilled workers using complex and cumbersome linotype machines. From there, the metal type had to be

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10 John Talbot, publisher of the Missoulian during the time of the Great Falls strike, told the author in 1991 that he didn't recall specific instructions not to take advantage of the Tribune shutdown, but added that it was unlikely any Montana publisher would have taken advantage of another facing labor trouble. "It might be you the next time," Talbot explained.

11 Cordingley interview.
arranged in page forms by skilled compositors and then molded onto metal plates, which were attached to the presses. A newspaper was produced by pressing the ink-covered plates against absorbent newsprint.

The new method, called "offset" or "cold type," eliminated several steps and — more importantly for the craft unions — jobs. Simply put, the offset method is essentially a photographic process, in which news copy and ads are typed directly onto photographic film, which is developed and then pasted into pages. The pages are rephotographed and transferred chemically to smooth, flexible metal plates, which are then attached to the presses. When passed through a film of water and oil-based ink, the ink clings to the type on the plate, which is pressed against newsprint to print a page.

The upshot was that "cold type" required only a handful of workers to produce a printed page, whereas the hot metal procedure called for a gang of highly trained and skilled typesetters, stereotypers, photoengravers, proofreaders and compositors. Further advances, namely the introduction of computerized typesetting, eliminated even more jobs. Instead of having trained typesetters set the type on photographic film, computers and special "scanners" were able to "capture" a reporter's keystrokes and convert them directly to photographic film for paste-up. The equipment was expensive, to be sure, but unlike union typesetters and compositors, it could be depreciated on the tax rolls. More to the point, computers might break down, but they never went on strike.
As might be expected, the industry's mechanical unions, particularly the ITU, fought protracted and heated battles to save members' jobs threatened by the new technology. But it was a battle the ITU was destined to lose. The best it could hope for at most papers was to get management to agree to retrain and retain some of it members to operate the new equipment.

Converting to cold type was considered an essential step toward retaining the industry's level of profitability, but it was nevertheless a tense and unsettling experience for most newspapers that went through it. The Tribune was well aware of that, and was planning to introduce the new equipment gradually, giving it time to "buy out" veteran "hot metal" employees with offers of early retirement and retrain others to operate the new equipment.

But according to Cordingley, the Guild strike changed everything. Faced with mounting losses in terms of lost advertising and subscription dollars, the paper had to resume publishing as quickly as possible. Although it had already converted some of its production to offset, bringing in the new computerized typesetting equipment and training management personnel and nonstriking workers to run it might allow the Tribune to get a paper out within a matter of weeks.

At the very least, word of the paper's planned equipment changes might exert enough pressure to force the Tribune's threatened craft unions to ram through the Guild picket lines and return to work. "To break the strike,
we had to go to cold type in a hurry," Cordingley said. "If we had had cold
type earlier, we could've beaten this thing right off the bat." 12

But planning for a technological change and actually installing the
equipment were two different things. With newspapers across the nation
rushing to make the switch, production of offset equipment was lagging
behind demand. Some newspapers had to wait months to acquire the
machinery, but here again, anti-union solidarity among publishers saved the
day. "Other papers let us in ahead of them to get it," Cordingley said. 13

While it waited for the offset equipment to arrive, management tried
to keep busy preparing for the day when the presses would roll. Editors began
attending government meetings looking for stories and making the rounds of
Great Falls' funeral homes to update their obituary files. Those advertising
men who had crossed the Guild's picket line began a training course and
revamped the paper's billing system. Erstwhile state capitol reporters Frank
Adams and Tom Kotynski, who had endured taunts of "scab" from pickets,
began visiting local governments, the courts and schools in search of news.

For the strikebreakers, the decision to cross the line had been an
individual one. Frank Adams, an experienced newsman and chief of the
Tribune's Capitol Bureau, was opposed to unions and had only joined the
Great Falls Guild because it was a condition of employment. His decision to

12 Cordingley interview.

13 Ibid.
cross the line was an easy one, and he could not resist an occasional jab back at strikers who taunted him as he entered the Tribune building.

Late in the strike, when strikebreakers formally resigned from the Guild and mailed in their union cards, Adams claimed to have lost his card, and instead enclosed a phony business card that read:

The Kleptograph Institute  
Walla Walla, Wn.  
Specializing in  
Birdseed Research  
Prof. F. G. Adams, Director

For Tom Kotynski, the choice was more difficult, even agonizing. A former union steel worker in the mills near Gary, Indiana, Kotynski came from a blue-collar family with strong union sympathies. In fact, his decision to move from a Chicago-area paper to the Tribune had been based in part on the Guild's presence in Great Falls because he knew the paper's salary and benefits would be competitive.

Nevertheless, he disagreed with the strike and thought it "suicidal." Management's offer seemed fair, and he was frightened at the prospect of losing his job if the strike should fail. Yet his more immediate concern was how to support his pregnant wife, 3-year-old daughter and a relative's daughter who was living with the family. "Certainly, there was an economic

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factor to it," he recalled.  ...  

Torn between his union loyalties and economic worries, Kotynski traveled from Helena to Great Falls, where he served a short stint on the picket line and had a talk with Guild President Carla Beck early in the strike.

She and I sat and talked about my philosophy, background and where I came from. I even remember telling her how I'd worked for Bobby Kennedy in '68.... She was very understanding — my dealings with Carla were always pleasant — and she told me "you gotta do what you gotta do."  

Two weeks later, Kotynski informed Beck by letter that he planned to cross the picket line:

I can't support this strike ... in any way. Therefore I plan to cross the Guild's picket lines and go to work.

Enclosed is the strike benefit check from last week. In good conscience I don't think I can accept it.

As I told you and other Guildsmen on that Saturday of picket duty I picketed more out of confusion than conviction.

My real conviction is that I am not on the strike's side. I think the Guild is being greedy in its demands and totally unrealistic. On the other hand I believe management's offer seems fair and something I and other employe[e]s should be able to live on comfortably.

The two weeks has also fueled my resentment toward the Guild. You have deprived me of a decent living during the strike. I will tolerate it no longer. You have also unnecessarily jeopardized relationships between fellow workers and management employe[e]s.

I believe the strike's long term harm will far outweigh the short term monetary gain for which the Guild is striving.

Yes, I've made my decision and will no longer be intimidated by the Guild on a matter for which I have no

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16 Ibid.
sympathy.\textsuperscript{17}

Other strikebreakers, such as sports writer Bruce Bartley and B.R. "Butch" Kummer, an advertising salesman, considered the strike and shutdown of the \textit{Tribune} a breach of journalistic ethics. Journalists were supposed to keep the public informed, not force newspapers to cease publication, they argued. Bartley made his intentions known to the Guild almost a month before the strike began:

I am not applying for strike benefits because I am not going to be a participant in a strike. It is a personal matter and I do not feel that it is ethical for a journalist to strike a newspaper. That is not to say that you, or anyone else who might strike is unethical. It simply means that I feel it would be unethical for me to strike. In my rampant idealism, I would quit my job at the paper before I would strike.

That again is a purely individualist approach and of course would not be a practical solution for the great majority of Tribune employe[e]s who have homes and families here. I have no such limiting obligations which makes it easier for me to hold such views on striking.

For these reasons I am also returning the strike committee form. I hope my action in this matter is not construed as approval of the management side of the operation. As I have said to many people before there are things that need to be changed.

However ours is a profession, a calling which demands initiative and imagination. Were I an employe[e] with a mechanical job, such as working on an assembly line, I would be in the forefront of union ranks.

There is also the responsibility bestowed upon us by the Constitution. We cannot piously browbeat the world with the "public has a right to know" line and then turn around and ignore that public by going out on strike and leaving them without a newspaper. We can't have our cake and eat it, too. We can't enjoy the prestige the job affords, the doors it opens

\textsuperscript{17} Letter from Thomas Kotynski to Guild President Carla Beck, 1 November 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
which would be closed to the ordinary citizen and then ignore all our responsibilities for our own pecuniary demands.

As I said before this all falls in the category of rampant idealism but different people are motivated by different things. The idealism behind the concept of freedom of the press is what motivates me.18

More difficult to fathom, however, were Kummer's reasons for crossing the line. A long-time Guild member, Kummer had even run for the Guild's presidency in 1972. Yet in a letter of resignation from the Guild, written after he had crossed the picket line, Kummer accused the union's officers of hatching a "strong and treacherous plot ... not only to put your own employer out of business, but in doing so, also denying me my rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness...."19 Furthermore, Kummer, whose own daughter was a Great Falls Guild member walking the picket lines, claimed that the strike was sacrilegious:

... as you all know, by the Grace of God I was reared and still remain an active Christian. Regardless of where one looks in the entire Bible, the message is clear that those who are placed in authority over us are in that position also by God's Will, and that our first allegiance and obligation is to those who are our employers except when they ask or demand anything contrary to the Law of God.

Clearly, you have not only infringed on my personal civil rights, but even more dastardly, have asked me to compromise my moral convictions. I did not spend three years overseas in World War II to allow anyone to thus interfere with these liberties on which this nation was founded.

As for the offer itself: for the most part, you are the people

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18 Letter from Bruce Bartley to Carla Beck, 23 September 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

19 Letter to the Great Falls Newspaper Guild from B.R. "Butch" Kummer, undated, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
who write the news. I cannot fathom anyone in so enviable a position not being aware of the impending depression which is about to sweep this nation and the world. In a matter of a few short months, the percentage of unemployed will be greater than ever believed possible ... even in the 30's. Anyone with any kind of job ... at any wage will be considered fortunate. This offer (and maybe I'm too easily satisfied) was and is in my opinion, more than fair ... it was most generous....

Kummer went on to charge Guild picketers with being profane and abusive to those who had crossed the line:

Though many of you have been obnoxiously vociferous, your language often times not only abusive but downright filthy, I have used no such language in regards to you as a group or individually, nor shall I. Though it is difficult to forget some of the incidents which have occurred, I bear animosity to none ... many I still consider highly regarded ... nay, much loved friends. Can you, any of you, muster enough personal dignity to afford me the same courtesy....

Your way, it seems to me, has been one of mob psychology, mob tactics and mob actions, so shockingly unbecoming professional journalists. Is there no one left out there with any personal convictions at all? Or is it just that you don't have backbone enough to back up your convictions with positive action? Will you continue to be played like pawns on a chessboard to satisfy the avarice of a few? May God forbid!

No less emotional was Jerry Coonse's reaction to the strike. A 39-year-old advertising salesman and Guild member, Coonse had made the original strike motion on Sept. 12, but had completely changed his mind by the time the strike became a reality. In his letter of resignation from the Guild, Coonse charged that the union's executive board had violated its own constitution in

\[20\] Ibid.

\[21\] Ibid.
taking the union out on strike:

On Oct. 23, 1974 [the day Coonse and Kummer crossed the picket line] I decided that I could never have any part of any organization that would not govern themselves as they were charged.

On further research, I discovered that I never swore, affirmed, or took an oath of allegiance to the constitution of the Newspaper Guild or any of its provisions. I have also discovered that my only obligation to the Local 81 of the Newspaper Guild was to pay dues in order to be employed at the Tribune.22

Whatever Coonse's reasons for turning against the strike, his defection drew the pickets' particular wrath. Coonse, along with the other strikebreakers who had been crossing the picket line since Oct. 23, were subjected to pickets' taunts and shouts of "scab" as they entered the Tribune by an unlocked door just off the paper's parking lot. By Thursday, Oct. 31, the strikers' patience had worn out. The lines were bolstered in an attempt to keep the strikebreakers out.

What happened next is not entirely clear, but an AP story reported that city policemen were called to the Tribune at 8:30 a.m. to escort strikebreakers through the lines.23 Photographs of the incident, taken by Guild members, clearly show Guild members blocking the entrance while police tried to

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22 Letter from Jerry Jay Coonse to John Barber, secretary of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild, undated, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

23 Missoulian, 1 November 1974, p. 2.
thread the gaps. At some point, Coonse broke through the line and either shoved or punched Guild member Jack Remmel, a Tribune photoengraver, who fell to the ground. In the ensuing melee, police arrested Remmel along with Carla Beck, former Guild president Ralph Pomnichowski and Frank Gerlach Jr., a district circulation manager, and charged the four with disorderly conduct.

The incident was hardly more than a scuffle. Remmel was taken to a hospital, where he was treated for minor injuries and released. The four union members arrested pleaded innocent before a police court judge and were released on their own recognizance without spending any time in jail. In a 1991 interview with the author, Pomnichowski, a former Tribune police reporter, recalled his arrest as "no big deal," and said he was treated well by the arresting officers, most of whom he knew as friends or professional acquaintances. "[The arrests] didn't amount to much," he said. "The cops were just trying to cool things down."

Nevertheless, because the tussle outside the door represented the only real incidence of violence during the strike, both the Guild and management made what hay they could of the affair. In addition to appearing on the inside pages of most Montana dailies, the Guild's version of the scuffle was featured

24 The photographs are included in Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

25 Missoulian, 1 November 1974, p. 2.

on the front page of The Newspaper Guild's international organ, The Guild Reporter, along with a large photograph of a limp Carla Beck being hauled away by burly policemen.\(^{27}\)

The Guild Reporter story, based on accounts supplied by the Great Falls local, reported the arrests were made after one picket had been "attacked by police and a strikebreaker." According to the report:

The picket-line scuffle was precipitated when the [Tribune] company called on police to escort seven advertising salespersons and a clerk across the picket line. The eight, who had drifted back to work one or two at a time after the Guild struck Oct. 19, had entered without incident the day before.

Several pickets moved in front of the door to start talking to them, but one of the strikebreakers, Jerry Coonse, struck Remmel, who was then hurled to the ground. His head struck the pavement, and he required hospital treatment.

Beck was arrested when she fell in the doorway while trying to pick up her eyeglasses, which had been knocked off....

The conduct of police was protested by Vince Bosh, president of the Cascade County Trades and Labor Council and the State Federation of Labor. Denunciations also came from a city councilman and TNG International Representative Dick Pattison, who protested personally to Police Chief Jack Anderson and issued a statement deploring the company's action in bringing police to the plant.

The next day, five of the strikebreakers went home without entering the plant after Pattison spent three hours in front of the entrance talking to two others. Police did not interfere.\(^{28}\)

Along with the story, The Guild Reporter printed a photograph, under the tagline "A blow for management," purporting to show Coonse landing a

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\(^{27}\) The Guild Reporter, 8 November 1974, p. 1.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
punch on Remmel's chin and telling readers that Remmel had filed an assault charge against his attacker.29 Pomnichowski, an eyewitness, insisted that Remmel had indeed been punched in the face, though he didn't understand why. From his vantage point, Pomnichowski said Remmel appeared to have his hands in his pockets and made no comment or effort to either provoke Coonse or ward off the blow.30 Nevertheless, based on a print of the photo sent to the Guild reporter, it is difficult to tell whether Coonse actually struck Remmel or simply grabbed him by the collar.31

At any rate, the clash seemed to temporarily bolster the Guild's picket lines, which had begun to sag following the strikebreakers' successful attempts to break through. But the renewed spirit on the lines did not last long. If the Guild had been angry at what it considered police interference in support of the "scabs," management was equally critical of the police for failing to keep pickets off Tribune property. Cordingley had long complained, without effect, that Guild pickets were trespassing by massing in front of the building's entrances, and he was particularly upset with police's failure to move a Guild member's camper that had been parked in front of the

29 Ibid., p. 6.

30 Pomnichowski interview.

31 A black and white photograph of the alleged punch is in the Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
Tribune's main entrance since the strike began.32

Finally, in the wake of the scuffling at the Tribune's back door, Cordingley sought and received a district court injunction ordering strikers off Tribune property. The restraining order was a blow to the Guild's picket line. Instead of confronting individual strikebreakers at the doors, pickets now faced the daunting, if not impossible, task of preventing strikebreakers' cars from entering the paper's parking lot. Once inside the lot, strikebreakers simply walked to the building's rear entrance and entered undisturbed.

By the second week in November, the Guild's hopes for a quick and painless settlement had all but vanished. As many as 12 strikebreakers, along with management personnel, were now crossing the Guild's weakened picket lines each day; and over at the Tribune's printing plant, impatient typesetters, bookbinders and pressmen harassed Guild pickets and threatened to rush through the lines.

Moreover, management showed no sign of improving its pre-strike offer. The three meetings with federal mediator Sherman Hodges were fruitless and no further negotiations had been scheduled. In its Nov. 9 strike bulletin, the Guild tried to put the best face on events. The Tribune, after all, remained shut down, and, after three weeks of frustration, the first issue of the Pennant had hit the streets, although its continued publication meant a weekly 400-mile round trip to a willing print shop in Billings. Still, the

32 Cordingley interview.
union was forced to admit there had been no progress in contract talks despite the fact that the Guild had modified its offer.

According to Guild notes taken during the Nov. 8 meeting with Hodges, Woody Young, the PNNA lawyer and now the Tribune's chief negotiator, flatly rejected the Guild's offer to reduce its salary demands for those at the top of the scale in return for boosting salaries for Guild members in the lower job categories. Management would stand firm. Young said that unless the Guild could "bring in some data that proves to us our stand is unfair to people here, unjust, unrealistic, erroneous or that our argument could not be substantiated on the basis of Great Falls conditions, then we can see no reason why we have to improve that offer."³³

The bulletin went on to report Young's contention that the Tribune's salaries, across the board, "appear to be better than what the vast majority of people in Great Falls get at comparable work." Pattison countered that Great Falls salaries were irrelevant. The crux of the issue, he said, was that the "company should be adequately sharing its profits with the [people] who make it all possible."

But Young, in a reply that would appear time and time again in the Guild's correspondence, newspaper and strike bulletins, argued that the Tribune's salaries had nothing to do with its profits:

I want to emphasize that we have never based increases on our

ability to pay ... and no one is saying we can't afford twice as much. Our proposal is based on a number of factors such as comparable wages in the community. But our proposal has nothing to do with the ability to pay. We reach a point where we have to say "no." You've got it.34

Hodges told Guild leaders that management's arguments had not changed since the summer, and that it was pointless to schedule another bargaining session until either the Tribune or the Guild came up with something new:

For me to call you [the Guild] in and have the company say "no" again and again is ridiculous. If they tell me we'll increase the offer $1 a week, at least I'd have something to work with. The laws governing negotiations mean they'd show up. If you request a meeting, the theory would be that you'd have something to say other than [what] you've said before.... Sometimes people feel that if you force people to a meeting to talk, maybe something will happen, but I've done this three times now and nothing has happened.35

If developments were discouraging, the Guild made every attempt to boost striker's spirits. Its Bread and Butter newsletter for Nov. 12 reported that the Guild had voted unanimously at a special Nov. 11 meeting to continue the strike until a favorable settlement was reached. In another vote, the membership approved the appointment of a "trial board" to determine whether the strikebreakers should be allowed to keep their jobs under the Guild's closed-shop provision. More revealing, perhaps, was its discussion of morale. Though its newsletter reported that "rumors that the Guild spirit is

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
low and members dissatisfied were quickly squashed," the fact that the discussion took place at all seems to indicate that the tide was turning.36

As November crawled along and the weather grew colder, the union made a symbolic concession to management, agreeing to drop an unfair labor-practice charge it had filed against the company following the Oct. 31 scuffle at the paper's rear door. The Guild had accused the newspaper of failing to bargain in good faith, of harassing pickets and threatening strikers with the loss of their jobs. But if management was grateful for the union's "concession," it did not show it. The company's offer stood unchanged.

Meanwhile, the tension at the Tribune Printing Co. was about to burst, and on Wednesday, Nov. 13, nearly the shop's entire complement of typesetters, pressmen and bookbinders linked arms in what Pattison described as "a flying wedge," and rammed through the Guild's reinforced picket line. Faced with a fait accompli, Pattison agreed to withdraw Guild pickets at the print shop in return for a pledge of continued support for the Guild's strike against the newspaper itself.37

Just how long the Tribune craft unions could honor that pledge remained to be seen. In the days that followed, trucks delivering strange-looking equipment were seen pulling up to the paper's loading dock.


CHAPTER SIX
A HOLE IN HISTORY: REACTIONS TO THE STRIKE

As it entered its second month, the Great Falls newspaper strike had become more than a economic struggle between management and labor. Not only did the stakes include dollars and cents, but friendships and personal loyalties were on the line, as well. Within the Tribune's circle of employees, the prolonged strike divided old friends and even families, introducing a cool distance that was to linger for years after it was over. Even those who managed to maintain friendly relations with their counterparts on either side of the line remembered the strike as one of the most stressful periods of their working lives.

Tribune Editor Scotty James, charged with helping break a strike of the union he once led, called the period "the most traumatic experience of my career."\(^1\) Though he was convinced the strike had been a mistake, many of the pickets he passed on his way to work each day were long-time friends. Others were trusted colleagues whose work he respected, and many were at the Tribune because he had hired them. In a very real sense, it was his news

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\(^1\) James interview.
team that had shut down his newspaper. After years of defending the union by telling publishers that the most conscientious Guild members also were the Tribune's most conscientious journalists, James felt torn between his sympathy for the union and his loyalty to the paper.

Strikebreakers Tom Kotynski and Butch Kummer were torn as well, but in addition to the difficult decision to abandon the Guild, they faced personal losses. Before the strike, Kotynski and his family had been close friends with the family of Tribune photographer Stuart White, a steady influence on the picket line who would soon succeed Carla Beck as the Guild's president. The relationship would never be as close after the strike. In Kummer's case, the strike divided his own family; while he crossed the picket line, his daughter marched in it.

Others felt the strain on personal relationships, too. A Tribune switchboard operator who crossed the picket line said she had done so under pressure from her husband, who demanded she return to work or find another job. And for Dick Pattison, who had spent 10 years as a Tribune reporter before going on to become an international representative for the Guild's vast western U.S. region, the strike drove a subtle wedge between the friendship he and his wife had shared with Tribune Managing Editor Terry

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2 Kotynski interview.

3 Pomnichowski interview.

Dwyer and his wife.\textsuperscript{5}

Others felt a growing disgust with militants on both sides of the dispute. Striker Don Bartsch, who marched in the picket lines and helped produce the \textit{Pennant}, more out of past loyalty to the Guild than its present cause, hated the confrontations he witnessed on the picket lines. "It was very strange to be walking the line at the back of the building and see Scotty [James] coming out," Bartsch recalled. "He would stop and chat for a second, but when Koppang came through, I'd say "Hi, Joel," and he wouldn't even look my way."\textsuperscript{6}

But that was friendly compared with the outright "hatred" expressed by both sides during other confrontations on the line, Bartsch said. Coonse could not resist screaming back at some of the pickets who had set up a chorus of "Scab!" as he crossed the line. Among the strikers, Bartsch said circulation men Ed Myers and Frank Gerlach Jr. provoked some of the verbal jousting with their taunts. And on at least one occasion, Bartsch said the provocation led to more than shouting:

One day I was in the back lot and Tom Hillstrand ... one of those in the ad department who went back to work ... came back out of the building. Frank Gerlach and some others got into an argument with him and took his car keys away from him and

\textsuperscript{5} Pattison interview.

\textsuperscript{6} Bartsch interview.
threw them on the roof.\(^7\)

No one could truthfully call the strike violent, but minor incidents, such as the one Bartsch witnessed, had a way of making the strike seem personal. Years later, Ralph Pomnichowski would remember that a fellow striker had been "sideswiped" when a strikebreaker sped his car through pickets marching along the entrance to the paper's parking lot.\(^8\) Nor could Terry Dwyer forget the night he left the building and found a bag of roofing nails behind one of the tires on his car. "I've still got those," Dwyer said in 1991.\(^9\)

If the strike shredded the relatively peaceful and even friendly relations between Tribune employees, it had an equally disruptive effect on the lifestyles and business affairs of the paper's readers and advertising customers throughout the Tribune's circulation territory, which covered not only Great Falls, but stretched from Shelby to Havre along Montana's Hi-Line. Subscribers, who relied on the Tribune for everything from the daily comic strips to government news and obituaries, had nowhere to turn but to local radio and television stations. Newspaper advertisers, who had depended on the Tribune, were forced to find other means to hawk their wares.

The impacts of the strike were as varied as the daily offerings the

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\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Pomnichowski interview.

\(^9\) Dwyer interview.
Tribune had served up for years. Gary Langley, a reporter for the Lee State Bureau in Helena, which provided state coverage for the Missoulian, Billings Gazette, Montana Standard and Helena Independent Record, traveled to the Electric City in late November and found that the Tribune strike dominated conversation. The bottom line, he reported, was that Great Falls missed its newspaper.

Readers' reactions "ranged from the philosophical to the frivolous," Langley wrote. One man said the strike disrupted his morning routine because he always read the paper as he ate breakfast. Several others missed the comics. Another said what he missed most was the gossip and the paper's death notices. The local news and vital statistics columns — which announced birth, deaths, weddings, divorces and incidence of crime — topped most readers' lists of what they missed most in the Tribune's absence. "When you live in a town our size for very long, you know a lot of people and you're interested in what they're doing," said V. L. Howry, manager of the local J.C. Penney store.

Still others were arranging their daily schedules around television and radio newscasts, but most of those Langley interviewed said they found TV and radio news lacking. Bob Wells, executive vice president of the Great Falls Chamber of Commerce said it was difficult to catch the TV news on a regular basis: "Now if you miss it on TV you bloody well miss it. You get the top of

\[\text{10 Missoulian, 29 November 1974, p. 19.}\]
the news off TV, but you don't get the in-depth coverage."

But the paper's absence was more than a simple inconvenience for government officials. Great Falls City Manager Dick Thomas said he feared otherwise knowledgeable citizens were left ignorant of important city government actions. As Mayor C.A. Ammondson put it: "We want (the people) to know what's happening so the news coverage is what we're missing. The electronic media has been doing a good job, but they're limited. They can't cover anything in depth really."

Moreover, state law required local governments to publish legal notices of such things as new ordinances and zoning changes in a newspaper of general circulation. Without a newspaper, Thomas worried that such actions would go unnoticed by the public and the city itself might become a target for citizen lawsuits.

Langley also reported that one of Great Falls' four radio stations, KEIN, was trying to meet the increased demand for news. The station expanded its newscast from five minutes each hour to 10 minutes and was distributing a written daily summary of top news events. As a direct result of the strike, the station also shuffled its broadcast schedule to include more meeting notices and vital statistics. And the move appeared to be paying off. Brad Baker, KEIN's station manager, said his advertising revenue had increased by 15 percent since the strike began.

But while Baker was increasing his news offerings, Great Falls' two
television stations — KRTV and KFBB — were stuck with their half-hour afternoon and late-night newscasts. KRTV initially expanded its late news to an hour because of the strike, but network officials at NBC refused to allow the affiliate to join Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show" in progress. "We were told by NBC we couldn't do that, so we only did it for about a week," the station's sales manager told Langley.

KFBB faced similar network constraints. "We've got a certain amount of reading time and that's it," newsmen Bill Belcher said. Dick Pompa, another KFBB newsmen, said that television could not compete with newspaper coverage even with extra time. "We try to get the meat of the story, but as far as expanded coverage, we just let the newspapers do that," Pompa said. "We just can't do what newspapers can." Nor were the TV stations earning any extra advertising dollars as a result of the strike. "We're normally close to sold out this time of year anyway," KRTV's sales manager said.

But at least one other Great Falls media outlet was cashing in on the Tribune strike, Langley reported. Pay Dirt, a weekly advertising "shopper" that contained no news, more than doubled its business with the infusion of large grocery and department store advertising usually found in the Tribune. As the strike lingered on, the weekly shopper, normally a 20-page tabloid, grew in size to 24 standard pages, which are about the twice the size of a tabloid page, plus a 24-page tabloid insert.
Meanwhile, businesses who depended on newspaper advertising, reported that although day-to-day business had not slacked, special sales and promotions suffered. One store, K-mart, found itself stuck with $100,000 in Halloween candy it had been unable to sell because of the strike. But so far, the strike did not seem to be having a great impact on retail sales. Most stores, Langley wrote, were reporting sales increases ranging from 2 to 15 percent, although some said they felt they could be doing better with the stimulant of newspaper ads. "I think it's a shame the people who have gone on strike would pick a time like this," said Michael Tilton, manager of Great Falls' Skaggs store.

But retailers' biggest fear, Langley reported, was that the strike would continue past Christmas, a time when stores traditionally offered big sales to clear away leftover inventory. Those fears apparently led some larger advertisers to print their own supplements and hire organizations such as the Boy Scouts to deliver them door-to-door.

And in a statement certain to send chills down a newspaper publisher's spine, one local retailer, Donald L. Triplett, manager of the Paris of Montana department store, said the strike had made him reconsider his advertising strategy. Before the strike, 90 to 95 percent of the store's advertising was placed in the Tribune, he said. "We will probably split our budget up a little

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more when this thing is over," Triplett added. "None of us have ever been big spenders with radio and TV and we're finding that we can do some business with them, too."

If the Tribune's management was worried about the loss of advertising revenues, it also had to be concerned with the appearance of another upstart competitor on the Great Falls media scene. On Saturday, Nov. 9, 17,500 copies of the Guild's long-awaited interim newspaper, The Pennant, finally hit the streets of Great Falls. Though its maiden issue was only 16 pages in a tabloid format, all but 2,000 copies were snapped up by citizens eager to pay 15 cents per copy for local news, any news.13

The paper carried little advertising, mostly thank-you ads from local politicians successful in the Nov. 5 elections, but it was crammed with several dozen news stories, as well as TV listings, sports, meeting notices and roundups of obituaries, births, weddings and divorces since the strike began.14 Even though it had failed to begin publication before the election, the Pennant's first issue carried a complete rundown of local and state election results, including a story announcing the election Montana's first black

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14 Great Falls Pennant, 9 November 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers. All seven issues of the Guild's interim strike paper are on file at University of Montana Archives, Missoula, Montana, and at the Montana State Historical Society, Helena, Montana.
legislator, Geraldine Travis of Great Falls.15

Although most of its news coverage was fairly straight-forward, the Pennant was not shy about promoting the Guild's side of the strike. The newspaper's premiere issue carried editorials apologizing for "any inconvenience caused by the strike to lift many of its members from inadequate wage levels," and for the fact that its interim newspaper contained no comics, feature materials or "Dear Abby" columns. But it also took the opportunity to blame the strike on management's intransigence, and said strikers were suffering along with Tribune readers and advertisers:

   Employees lose during a strike while trying to improve for the future. And especially in a newspaper strike, employees must live with the thought that they are not serving the public, they are not performing the tasks at which they are best, and much of the public does not understand the reasons for the strike.

   No one wants a strike. Members of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild have every desire to return to work at the Great Falls Tribune with fellow trade and craft union employees. But until the economic package offered by management is altered so that all employees, and not just the top scales, can afford to work at the Tribune, Guild members have resolved to stand firm.16

The paper also printed a short account of strikebreaker Jerry Coonse's appearance before a police magistrate to answer an assault charge filed by Guild member Jack Remmel as a result of the Oct. 31 scuffle outside the Tribune's rear entrance. The paper said Coonse pleaded innocent and was

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15 Ibid., p. 2.

16 Ibid., p. 4.
released on his own recognizance, but made no mention of the four Guild members who had been charged with disorderly conduct during the confrontation.17

More interesting in terms of public reaction to the strike, the first Pennant also included a front-page sampling of comments from an eclectic assortment of local government, business, church and labor leaders.18

Milo Dean, chairman of the Cascade County Commission, appealed to both the Guild and the Tribune's management to reach "an artful compromise" soon because the county's citizens "miss a newspaper tremendously." But John Hamrell, secretary of the North Central Montana Building and Construction Trades Council, called for citizen solidarity with the Guild, saying, "The Newspaper Guild's strike is everybody's strike. It is long overdue and has left its mark on our community."

Mike Morgan, a Tribune district circulation manager and member of the Guild's executive committee, also was quoted in the article, but identified only as chairman of the Cascade County Democratic Committee. "The Democratic Party has consistently supported collective bargaining as a means of settling labor disputes," he said. "We hope the dispute between the guild and Tribune management will be settled at the bargaining table. This strike

17 Ibid., p. 4.

18 Ibid., p. 1.
has made a big hole in people's lives."\textsuperscript{19}

Morgan's Republican counterpart, E. Bob Brown, was quoted as saying the strike had especially hurt local real estate agents, who depended on \textbf{Tribune} advertising. Moreover, Brown claimed the lack of statewide and county political coverage could only damage GOP congressional candidate Jack McDonald's hopes of defeating incumbent Democrat John Melcher.\textsuperscript{20}

Both Great Falls' mayor and city manager said the strike had cut the city's best line of communication with citizens, while Jack Dykstra, president of Forward Great Falls, a local booster organization, complained that the strike had made it difficult to publicize his group's activities.

But, as the \textbf{Pennant}'s article pointed out, not everyone missed the \textbf{Tribune}. Forrest Hedger, president of Great Falls' Northwestern Bank, said citizens "can get enough national and international news via electronic media to keep informed." And Vince Bosh, president of the Montana AFL-CIO and vice president of Great Falls' Operating Engineers local, took the opportunity to air some long-standing complaints against the \textbf{Tribune}:\textsuperscript{21}

I've been disappointed with the Tribune for years — its decreasing space for the news, dropping the Leader [the \textbf{Tribune}'s former afternoon edition] and a glorification of the

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 2.

\textsuperscript{20} McDonald may or may not have lost votes as a result of the \textbf{Tribune} shutdown, but the fact that Melcher won 63 percent of the vote in the 1972 eastern district congressional election would seem to indicate that the strike was hardly the decisive factor.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 1.
ads. We used to have half the population with twice the coverage we have now. Even if the Guild settles with management, I hope you bring out (The Pennant). We often called the Tribune at night for coverage and there would be only two reporters in the newsroom. It seemed the Tribune cared more about getting ads than covering the news. More hometown news should be carried.

And for at least one Great Falls civic leader, the Rev. Charles Gorman of Holy Family Catholic Church, the Tribune’s absence was quite literally a blessing:

It's a blessing to the community not to begin the day by filling their minds with the bad things of society. Newspapers belabor people's faults. First offenders, for example, are blasted in the news the same as calloused criminals. Walter Cronkite once said there are 99 cats who stay home, but the 100th cat who climbs the tree and has the fire department out for the rescue is the one that is reported in the news. We have young people making weekend religious retreats and a Wednesday night prayer group, and they aren't making the news. What is the newspaper doing to get people to look for the positive rather than the negative in life?

Not all Great Falls clerics felt the same way. Jake Beck, an Episcopalian minister and Guild President Carla Beck's husband, provided essential support for the strikers. Every evening, he mimeographed the Guild's Bread and Butter newsletter and even managed to convince the local ministerial association to write a resolution in support of the Guild's fight for better wages and benefits.22 Other religious leaders, such as Sister Providencia of the College of Great Falls and Sister Kathryn Rutan of the Sisters of Charity,

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22 Letter from the Great Falls Ministerial Association to the Tribune, undated, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
visited the Guild's strike headquarters to offer their support.23

Yet if God was taking sides in the strike, it was not clear to those marching in the picket lines, who were frequently targets of abuse from passing motorists, mostly youths out cruising the town. "I don't remember exactly, but I suppose they yelled things like 'Hey, asshole! Get back to work!'" Pomnichowski recalled.24 For Bartsch, the taunts from passersby were the worst thing about walking the line. "What I hated was to be walking the picket line and have people drive by in cars and throw things at you and yell, 'Go back to work, you so-and-so,'" Bartsch said. "They were mostly young people but it still made you angry."25

Aware that a great many Great Falls residents either did not support or understand its strike, the Guild took pains to explain its position through the pages of the Pennant and pleaded for patience in special "Sidewalk Spirit" handbills it gave pickets to distribute to other pedestrians. Though neither management nor the Guild seemed likely to change its stance as a result of public opinion, both sought to cultivate it when they could.

In that respect, the Guild clearly had an upper hand. After all, it was printing a newspaper and pounding management with every editorial blast.


24 Pomnichowski interview.

25 Bartsch interview.
The *Pennant's* second issue featured one such salvo, written by the paper's news editor Wayne Arnst and titled "Management arrogance." Arnst accused the Tribune company of adopting a "public be damned" attitude in its reluctance to settle with the union and resume publication.

He also chided management for denying it had tried to intimidate Guild members during the strike by threatening them with the loss of their jobs, pointing out that Richard Hill, a young editorial writer and Guild member who was serving a six-month probationary period at the Tribune, had been fired Nov. 8. Management claimed Hill was "incompetent," but Arnst did not buy it, noting that Hill was not informed of his dismissal until the strike was three weeks old.

Arnst also rejected management's argument that Tribune salaries compared favorably with those given other Great Falls workers, and reminded readers of company negotiator Woody Young's assertion that the dispute over wages and benefits had nothing to do with the Tribune's financial ability to meet the Guild's demands. "Management," Arnst wrote, has stated that salaries at the Tribune "appear to be better than what the vast majority of people in Great Falls get at comparable work." But where does one find jobs in Great Falls to compare with the work done by Tribune newspaper employees? The Tribune is the only daily paper in the area, as the public has become painfully aware.

If Tribune management has no problem with the ability to pay the Guild's requested wage and fringe benefits, as Young suggested, it would seem it must have another motive for

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refusing to negotiate, keeping its employees out of work and denying the public the right to know.

Rumor has it that strike insurance is a factor in keeping the Tribune's doors closed but no one expects the company's management to admit they would use that penurious tactic to deprive the reading public of its morning paper....

It is long past the time when Tribune management should have sat down at the bargaining table and faithfully negotiated a contract.

It is time that merchants, their customers and the reading public demand that a recalcitrant Tribune management stop playing the role of strikebreaker, get to the bargaining table immediately and get the Great Falls Tribune back to its readers.

It is hard to tell whether the Guild's public pronouncements succeeded in winning public support for the strike, but there is little doubt they struck a nerve with management. With no paper of his own to use as a vehicle, Cordingley issued his first and only formal statement on the strike in a two-page open letter written Nov. 15 and mailed to hundreds of the community leaders and advertisers. Five days later, Cordingley's "Fellow Montanan" letter was reproduced as a large advertisement in the local Pay Dirt shopper, and in daily newspapers in Havre, Helena and Bozeman and weeklies in Shelby, Cut Bank and Conrad.

In his opening paragraph, Cordingley wrote that he felt obliged to explain his paper's position because Montanans "have received a barrage of misinformation and distorted versions of the Great Falls Tribune's offer to the members of the Newspaper Guild..." 27 Cordingley went on to outline management's offer, saying that the Tribune's fully experienced reporters,

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27 Open letter to Montanans from Tribune Publisher William A. Cordingley, 15 November 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
copy editors, photographers and outside display and classified advertising sales people were being offered generous two-year raises. "This means these persons will receive $1,092 per month or $13,104 per year," he wrote. "This is an increase of 18.9 percent!"

Similarly, Tribune clerks, telephone operators and receptionists would receive raises ranging from the same 18.9 percent to 23.9 percent, depending on experience, he said. Between the top and bottom of the scale, Tribune librarians, news information clerks, circulation district managers and photo technicians were scheduled to receive minimum increases of nearly 19 percent under the paper's last proposal.

In addition to the raises, Cordingley wrote that employees were offered a generous package of fringe benefits that included a mileage allowance of 13 cents per mile for city travel and 11 cents a mile outside the city, plus an escalation clause that guaranteed mileage increases as gas prices rose. Moreover, employees were scheduled to receive $3,000 of free life insurance, health and welfare benefits with major medical, plus a 70 percent paid dental program. As far as its pension program was concerned, Cordingley said the management agreed to go back 35 years to assume obligations "even though there was no obligation to do so before 1965." The company's contribution to the pension plan alone totaled some $330,000, he said.

All in all, the company's proposal was fair and even generous, Cordingley said:
Summarizing the above, the lowest paid Newspaper Guild member working or on strike now at the Tribune, with one exception, would receive $139 per week, $603 per month, or $7,228 per year. The exception is a proof delivery boy, an individual in our ad service department who was offered an increase of 23.9%, to $120 per week.

From the calls we have received, apparently our pay scales are higher than many, if not most, in Great Falls and possibly in the state.

We think Montanans would be interested in knowing that twelve members of the Newspaper Guild, or more than 20% of the full time Guild membership on strike, including members of the news and editorial department, advertising department and the business office recognize that and have crossed their own union's picket line and are now working full time.

We are very disturbed that an individual from out of state came to Great Falls and took our employees out on strike.

The strike is creating animosities among old friends. When it is over, this Guild representative will return to California and the Tribune and its employees will be left with the task of putting the broken pieces back together again. This individual also closed our commercial printing operation for more than three weeks, throwing twenty-six people out of work, even though the Guild has no representation at the printing company and none of those twenty-six persons had anything to do with the strike.

The management of the Tribune thinks that our offer is more than fair and that this strike is unwarranted.

The Guild fired back, arguing in its own "open letter" that the company's seemingly generous pay proposal paled against the 12 percent inflation rate. The union restated its demand for a increased night differential and blasted the company's mileage proposal, quoting the American Automobile Association's estimate that the average cost to operate an automobile was pegged at 15 cents per mile. Furthermore, the union

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28 Letter from Great Falls Newspaper Guild to the public, undated but circulated soon after management's letter of 15 November 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
wanted a pension program better than the company's "bare bones" plan, which it claimed was tailored to meet only minimum federal guidelines. The company's health plan was not keeping up with the costs, the union added.

The letter also took special aim at Cordingley's claim that Pattison was an outside agitator who had taken a reluctant local out on strike:

The management of the Tribune has accused an "outsider" of disrupting the Tribune and instigating the strike. The Guild's international representative was born in Montana and lived in Montana for 36 years -- ten of those years he worked at the Tribune. He is here at our request. He was instrumental in settling contract disputes without a strike in 1970 and 1972. We hoped he might be able to help us avoid a strike again in 1974.29

Cordingley's letter also prompted an editorial blast from the Pennant, in which Wayne Arnst vehemently denied that the Guild was greedy or that it had gone on strike simply to punish the Tribune. He took particular exception to Cordingley's contention that the Guild, even in its now modified wage demands, was asking for wages far above those paid to other Great Falls workers. A check with other local industries, Arnst said, showed that:

At the top of the local labor market are iron workers making $340.40 per week. The Tribune has offered its top minimum as $252. The Guild is asking $257. A county bookkeeper makes $161.31 weekly with the Tribune offering employees in similar categories $157. The Guild has requested $165. PBX operators (switchboard) at Malmstrom AFB start at $130. Tribune offer is $121, the Guild asks $126.

Teamster drivers receive locally $259.20. For similar work the Tribune offers $228 and the Guild is asking $247. Laborers receive $248.80 weekly on a projected hourly basis. Top minimum editorial personnel under the Tribune proposal

29 Ibid.
would be $252.

Associated Press reporters in Helena receive $317, which is $60 more than the Guild request. The Great Falls Tribune, as a member of the AP wire service, helps to pay the AP reporters' wages.

The average reporter wage scale in the United States is $272.33, still $15.33 more per week than what is asked by the Guild from the Great Falls Tribune.

The Tribune's claim that its employe[e]s will be making more than the average wage scale is an obvious mistake....

As the strike dragged into December, the Guild and the Great Falls Tribune were nowhere near a settlement. Although the union had offered to reduce its salary demands, management had become more entrenched. If anything, those inside the Tribune building had become even more determined to resist the strike now that 15 strikebreakers had returned to the fold and plans to revamp the newspaper's production process were underway. Though the Guild did not know it, management was convinced that it could resume publication before Christmas. In the meantime, with negotiations adjourned, the battle of words continued to be played out through letters and media.

But for many of the Tribune's 40,000 subscribers, the strike was growing old. All they knew, or cared to know, was that the Tribune had failed to show up on their doorsteps for more than seven weeks now. Life went on, and if they missed their newspaper, there was little they could do about it.

As one philosophical subscriber told Lee reporter Gary Langley, "I

30 Pennant, 29 November, 1974, p. 4.
suppose when you get right down to it, there will be a hole in history."\textsuperscript{31}
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STRIKE COLLAPSES

By the first week of December, the Guild's strike against the Great Falls Tribune began to lose steam. As many as 15 strikebreakers were now entering the Tribune building relatively undisturbed each day and rumors were circulating that strikebreakers were being trained to run the Tribune's presses in order to publish a paper by Christmas. The paper's commercial printing subsidiary was back in business, but back at the bargaining table, management had not budged from its pre-strike position.

The strike, now in its eighth week, had entered a critical phase and no one understood that better than the Guild's leaders who desperately needed some kind of breakthrough to keep union members and their craft-union allies from losing interest. Outside Great Falls, the strike no longer captured even small headlines in the state's major daily newspapers because there was little new to report. And though individual Guild locals continued to send encouraging messages and checks, The Guild Reporter, The Newspaper Guild's official organ, which had given the Great Falls strike prominent play early in the battle, carried nothing about the strike in its December edition.
Back at home, the Guild's Bread and Butter newsletter, which had appeared daily in the strike's first week, began to appear less frequently as the strike wore on. In fact, the newsletter disappeared for nearly three weeks between Nov. 22 and Dec. 13.

Another sign of the strike's inertia was the Guild's dwindling picket line. For many strikers, picket duty was growing old and those who remained on the line were frustrated by the fact that they could do little to stop strikebreakers' vehicles from entering the Tribune's parking lot. By now, the line was little more than a symbolic barrier against the return of the paper's craft unions, which had pledged to support the strike so long as the Tribune failed to publish.

In fairness, the Guild's most active members were spending less time carrying picket signs and writing press releases and doing more of what they did best — produce a newspaper. The Pennant had become a weekly feature since it was first published Nov. 9, and Guild reporters, photographers, copy editors and classified ad salesmen — who had been the backbone of the picket lines — were now devoting most of their time to its production.

Although it never garnered the kind of major advertising it had hoped for, the Pennant proved that it was more than just a platform for the Guild's cause. Despite all kinds of constraints, the Pennant staff was nevertheless serious about covering the news. The paper's Dec. 5 issue featured an account of a protest by local Indians angry over what they considered police brutality...
and prejudice connected with the shooting death of 37-year-old Indian man by police and the hanging death of a 19-year-old Indian man in the Great Falls city jail.\(^1\) The Pennant's reporters also waded into a controversy over student violence and drug use at Paris Gibson school and the statewide debate over increased strip mining in eastern Montana.\(^2\)

By most standards, the Pennant was an aggressive weekly. It had even managed to get itself declared the city's official newspaper — a move that allowed it to carry legal advertising — but it could not hope to supplant or even compete with the Tribune should management find a way to resume publication. At best it served to show the public that the Guild was committed to its profession despite the strike, but as a weekly with less than half the Tribune's regular circulation, it was only a partial substitute for the daily news coverage Great Falls citizens had come to expect. It carried little or no state, national or international news, and large advertisers, such as grocery and department stores, remained aloof as rumors circulated that the Tribune was close to resuming publication. Though the Pennant had plans to publish two papers a week, it could do no more than fill in some of the gaps caused by the Tribune shutdown and perhaps generate public support for the strikers' cause.

But as the strike dragged on, it became increasingly apparent that no

\(^1\) Pennant, 5 December 1974, p. 1.

\(^2\) Pennant, 12 December 1976, pp. 1 and 16.
amount of public support for the Guild would persuade management to come to terms. Except for contacts with large advertisers, management made little effort to respond to the increasingly vehement attacks published on the Pennant's editorial page. As far as Cordingley and management were concerned, this was not a political fight, but a battle for economic survival. If the Tribune, with all its resources, could resume publication without the Guild, it could dictate its own terms and easily drive the Pennant out of business.

By mid-December, it was clear that no matter how hard the Guild tried to influence public opinion, its ability to prolong the strike and force management to compromise rested almost entirely on the support of Tribune craft unions that considered themselves locked out.

If the craft unions went back to work, the strike would surely collapse, and the craft unions, especially leaders of the Tribune's ITU local, were getting restless. Though ITU printers received lock-out benefits, the money represented only a part of their normal salaries, and many were feeling the financial pinch. Already angry over the Guild's three-week closure of commercial printing, leaders of the ITU local insisted that management and the Guild settle their differences as soon as possible.3

Despite the great union principle of brotherhood, many ITU members

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3 An ITU resolution urging the Guild and management to resume negotiations and settle their dispute "as soon as possible" was quoted in the Guild's Bread and Butter, Strike Paper No. 16, 22 November 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
were convinced that this was not their fight. For them, the ITU's self-described "lockout" was farcical; its members had proved at the Tribune printing shop that Guild pickets could not keep them from returning to work if they wanted to. Although the Guild could and did argue that all Tribune unions benefitted from victories won by any of them, the ITU, alone among the paper's unions, had a signed contract with management that guaranteed printers higher salaries than the average Guild members. Moreover, the Guild and ITU had a longstanding national rivalry over which union had the right to represent non-editorial newspaper workers, and at a handful of American newspapers, the ITU even represented editorial employees. Though it dated to the Guild's birth in 1933, the rivalry between the ITU and the Guild over representation intensified during the 1960s and 1970s as the ITU struggled to replace members who lost their jobs to the industry's technological advances.4

In addition to those pressures, many ITU members believed they had little in common with their labor brothers and sisters in the Guild. Whereas most Guild locals were led by college-educated journalists who considered themselves white-collar professionals, the ITU comprised mostly skilled craftsmen who had learned their trade on the job as apprentices, not in collegiate journalism programs. Some ITU members believed, and not without some justification, that many journalists considered themselves

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4 For an account of the early Guild-ITU rivalry, see Leab, *A Union of Individuals*, op. cit.
superior to skilled printers and pressmen, although craftsmen's salaries generally kept pace and even surpassed those made by newspaper reporters, copy editors and photographers. As proof, they could point to the fact that many of nation's newspaper publishers came from the ranks of the newsroom, but relatively few printers and pressmen could aspire to management jobs above the rank of production foreman.

Whatever its causes, the fact remained that the Great Falls ITU local was deeply divided over the Great Falls Guild strike, and Guild leaders clearly worried that without the ITU's continued promise to honor the picket line, the strike could quickly unravel. After a three-week absence, the Guild's Bread and Butter newsletter reappeared Dec. 13, featuring a desperate plea for solidarity and its most vitriolic attack on management to date:

The Great Falls Newspaper Guild and brother Tribune craft unions are at this moment in a win it or lose it position. If members remain strong, if other craft unions maintain their support and if the Tribune is prevented from publishing a daily paper -- an acceptable contract will be signed to the benefit of all unions.

If solidarity is lost, or if unions falter in their support, the success of this strike is in jeopardy!

The Tribune is using scare tactics, strike breakers and verminous scabs in craft jobs as a threat to break union solidarity and bargaining power.

For eight weeks the Newspaper Guild has listened to management garbage about how they have room for movement. But when a meeting is called, management sits back, refuses to move or even consider any new proposal by the Guild.

Although it will bargain and negotiate immediately, the Guild has come down far enough. To retreat further is to only
prolong the strike.\textsuperscript{5}

As nervous as the Guild seemed to be over its reluctant allies' growing impatience, it was even more disturbed by rumors it was hearing from sources inside the \textit{Tribune} building.\textsuperscript{6} Two ad salesmen were being trained to run the \textit{Tribune}'s presses by the paper's non-union pressroom supervisor. Strikebreakers in the paper's advertising department were selling ads for impending yet unannounced issues of the \textit{Tribune}. Management editors and strikebreaking reporters were seen attending local government meetings and visiting the city's funeral homes. Moreover, trucks passing through the picket line had delivered special electric typewriters and computerized "scanners" capable of converting encoded wire service and local reporters' stories into camera-ready copy, bypassing typesetters altogether.

If the rumors were true — and they were — the \textit{Tribune} was almost ready to publish a paper. In an editorial written for the \textit{Pennant}'s Dec. 19 issue, Guild leaders braced for the inevitable and launched what was to be their last public attack on management:

\begin{quote}
While stating on Oct. 23, Nov. 22 and Dec. 6 that a newspaper would not be published unless printers and pressmen cross the picket lines and return to work, and on Oct. 24 that strikebreakers would not be hired, Tribune management has hired strikebreakers and is reportedly using unskilled,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{5} Bread and Butter, Guild Strike Paper No. 17, 13 December 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

\textsuperscript{6} Ralph Bidwell, the Guild's executive secretary who had been promoted to city editor in the summer of 1974, told the author in 1991 that he secretly kept union leaders informed about goings on inside the \textit{Tribune} during the strike.
untrained, unqualified "scab" labor in an attempt to run the large web press and composing room equipment in the Tribune Building. Running such machinery with unskilled labor is not only contrary to good labor practices but also places the untrained employe[e]s in dangerous situations.

Management, while saying it will take care of its employe[e]s, has shown a callous disregard for the needs of a just wage for its employe[e]s.

While expressing concern about the effects of the strike on the community, management has made absolutely no attempt to faithfully negotiate with or consider numerous propositions made by the legal bargaining unit of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild....

Let us get to the bargaining table, stay there until the issues are settled and then once again bring truth and freedom of the press to the public on a daily basis.7

But management had no intention of increasing its Oct. 4 offer to the Guild. By mid-December, management's only goal was to publish its paper. The first issue was scheduled for Dec. 19, exactly 61 days after the strike began.

"We were determined to get the thing out," Cordingley said.8

Despite Cordingley's conviction, publishing a paper without skilled pressmen and other production people was no easy task. Management newsmen could easily write and edit their own news stories, but printing the paper required technical skills few inside the building possessed. Under normal conditions, the Tribune's seven-day press crew totalled 12 pressmen. Despite the fact that two advertising salesmen were being trained as pressmen, it was a very complicated job and Cordingley had only two people

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7 Pennant, 19 December 1974, p. 4.

8 Cordingley interview.
on hand who could actually run the huge presses — the pressroom foreman and the manager of the Tribune's printing company. The only way such a small crew could print the paper was to do it in sections and over several days. Even if management did somehow manage to print a paper, there was little guarantee that it could be done on a daily basis without additional help from the craft unions.

But management needed to print and deliver only one issue to break the strike. If the Tribune could publish without the aid of its unions, it would send a strong signal to the craft unions that they, as well as the Guild, could be replaced. Management made no secret of the fact that it intended to publish a paper, and on Dec. 17, Guild pickets outside the Tribune building heard the tell-tale clang of the pressroom safety bell, warning all hands that the presses were about to roll. The strikers learned later that day that the paper's comics section had been printed. It was only a matter of hours now, a day or two at the most, before a paper would be ready for circulation.

The news spread quickly through the Tribune's unions. The response from Guild leaders was to ask for an immediate round of contract talks. Management agreed, but during meetings on Dec. 17 and 18, it steadfastly refused to consider any Guild proposition other than complete acceptance of its pre-strike offer. Moreover, management negotiators announced that in


10 Gibson, "The Great Falls Strike," p. 54.
addition to pay and benefits, the company had a few new contract wrinkles it wanted to discuss, such as the post-strike treatment of strikebreakers.\textsuperscript{11}

Meanwhile, Bernie Kempa, president of the Great Falls ITU local, called an impromptu membership meeting on the night of Tuesday, Dec. 17, and asked for a vote to return to work. No longer was there any doubt that strikebreakers were being trained to do the printers' work on new computer equipment. Despite its pledge to support the Guild's fight, ITU jobs were in jeopardy. Frustrated with the Guild's strike and fearful that management was taking advantage of the dispute to eliminate printers' jobs, Kempa and others argued for an immediate return to work.\textsuperscript{12}

Yet even at that point, the ITU membership was divided over the prospect of abandoning the Guild. It was bad business to cross another union's picket line, particularly if the ITU hoped for Guild support in its future contract talks with management. It was also true that past Guild victories at the bargaining table, such as paid health insurance and a pension plan, had been extended to printers.

Nevertheless, the midnight motion to return to work passed 20-17, although Guild leaders and some ITU members sympathetic to the Guild would later charge that the motion had been railroaded to passage by ITU leaders determined to end the strike. Guildsman Robert Gibson, writing for

\textsuperscript{11} The Guild Reporter, 10 January 1974, pp. 1 and 6.

\textsuperscript{12} Gibson, "The Great Falls Strike," p. 54.
the Montana Journalism Review in 1975, said three ITU printers supportive of the Guild missed the vote because they were in Billings setting type for the Pennant. All three, according to Gibson, said they would have voted against crossing the Guild's picket line if ITU President Bernie Kempa had allowed them to vote by telephone.\(^{13}\) And Dick Pattison, the Guild's international representative, told the author in 1991 that ITU leaders further stacked the deck by encouraging retired ITU printers to attend the meeting. According to Pattison, ITU by-laws allowed retired printers to vote in local matters, and in this case, retirees were eager to cast ballots for the back-to-work motion because they had been told a prolonged strike could somehow reduce their pensions. Pattison said the pensioners' fears were groundless but the tactic worked nonetheless.\(^{14}\)

Alerted to the ITU's decision late Tuesday night, Guild leaders the next morning reinforced the picket line outside the Tribune with members of Great Falls' Steelworkers, Retail Clerks, Operating Engineers and Laborers locals. But there was little pickets could do when police arrived to escort the printers' 10-man morning shift through the lines.\(^{15}\)

Guild leaders understood at once that the strike had collapsed. Though pressmen and mailers promised not to cross the Guild's line unless the

\(^{13}\) Ibid., pp. 54-55.

\(^{14}\) Pattison interview.

\(^{15}\) The Guild Reporter, 10 January 1974, p. 6.
Tribune succeeded in publishing, everyone now knew it was inevitable that they too would return to work.

Inside the paper, management personnel, strikebreakers and printers spent all of Wednesday and most of Thursday morning completing the first issue of the Tribune to appear in more than two months. As newspapers go, it was not much to look at. Limited to only 16 pages and filled with wire service copy, the long-awaited paper contained only a handful of local stories and lacked many of the regular features Tribune readers had come to expect. Nevertheless, it was a newspaper, and the Tribune had managed to publish it without the help of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild.

But before management could celebrate the fact, it first had to deliver the paper to subscribers, and that would not be easy because the paper's district circulation managers, who served as the vital link between the paper and its legions of carriers and motor-route drivers, were Guild members out on strike. To get around that obstacle, Cordingley decided to hire a fleet of trucks and drivers to deliver the papers. For now, the Tribune would circulate only in the city; the paper's circulation staff would have to be rebuilt before the paper could resume delivery to the Hi-Line and other outer reaches of its former territory.16

For Cordingley, the most anxious moment of the strike was the actual delivery of the papers. If the Guild could somehow prevent the trucks from

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16 Cordingley interview.
leaving the plant, the strike would continue. Worried about that possibility, and the potential for picket-line violence, management hired private security guards — "rent-a-cops," pickets called them — to ride in each truck.

Cordingley also arranged for the trucks to be escorted out of the Tribune's loading area by the Cascade County Sheriff's Department because he had little faith in city police, who he thought were more interested in avoiding confrontations than helping the Tribune resume publication.17

Finally, on the afternoon of Thursday, Dec. 19, the printed papers were loaded into trucks and the caravan, led by the Cascade County sheriff himself, rolled through the Guild's picket line, which was helpless to stop it. The Tribune was back on the streets. Within hours, Tribune readers throughout the city were once again browsing through the hometown paper, which carried a special front-page "Notice to Tribune readers" apologizing for the inconvenience of the strike:18

This is the first issue of the Tribune since Oct. 19 when we were forced to discontinue publishing because of a strike by the Great Falls Newspaper Guild.

Of the 58 full-time Guild members, 15 of them have returned to work through their own picket lines.

On Wednesday, members of the International Typographical Union, representing the printers, returned to work and the Tribune scheduled resumption of publication beginning today. At this writing, it is hoped that members of the pressmen's and mailers unions will also return.

This first edition is limited to 16 pages and for distribution

17 Ibid.

in the city only during the late afternoon, the reason being that we have to rebuild our circulation organization. It is our intention to resume morning publication as soon as possible.

Regular Tribune news coverage, editorials, markets and features are being added as rapidly as we are able to do so.

We regret the inconvenience, concern and problems the strike has caused readers, advertisers and the public. As we have stated, we consider this to be a most unwarranted strike.

It is our intention to review news events, obituaries and other happenings of the past nine weeks in subsequent editions.

For Cordingley, the day had been a triumph over the Guild. "They didn't think we could do it, but we did," he said. "At that point, we didn't care if they came back or not. We were getting the thing out."19

The Guild's leaders were stunned. For more than two months, their historic strike had shut down Montana's second-largest newspaper. Strikers had devoted hundreds of hours to walking the picket lines, writing press releases and newsletters, securing strike benefits, serving in the strike commissary, attending impromptu meetings, corresponding with other unions and producing a weekly newspaper entirely from scratch. In a logistical sense, until that day the strike had been a great success. Yet now, in the span of a single day, the strike was on the verge of complete collapse through what many Guild members believed was no fault of their own.

"When the printers went back, we knew it was over," Guild picket Ralph Pominchowski said years later. "We knew damn well that they could put the

19 Cordingley interview.
As hard it was to accept defeat, Pattison and Guild President Carla Beck realized that if the Guild and its remaining craft union allies hoped to survive the strike, they had to get back to work as quickly as possible. On the day the Tribune reappeared in print, Pattison met with representatives of the pressmen's and mailers' locals and advised them to send their members back to work the following day to keep from losing their jobs. Under federal labor rules, management could legally hire permanent replacements for non-striking employees who remained outside the plant once a lockout had been broken. Now that the ITU was back on the job, the pressmen and mailers, regardless of their pro-Guild sympathies, could hardly argue that they were being locked out.21

The Guild itself faced a similar lack of choices, Beck recalled in a 1991 letter to the author. "When the other unions announced they were returning, the Guild had to go back to save its members' jobs," she wrote.22 On Friday morning, Pattison called the federal mediator and told him he was sending the Guild back to work Saturday. An emergency meeting of the Guild membership was called that afternoon, and at 4 p.m., Pattison told those attending that their strike was over. "I felt very bad about it," he

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20 Pomnichowski interview.

21 Pattison interview.

recalled. "It wasn't a very easy thing to do."  

With no other recourse, grim and disappointed Guild members voted 35-9 to accept management's pre-strike offer and went home.

23 Pattison interview.
CHAPTER EIGHT
AFTERMATH: COSTS AND REPERCUSSIONS

In strategic terms, the strike had been a complete failure. The Guild gained nothing in terms of pay and benefits that it could not have won without a strike. By holding out and proving that it could publish without the Guild, the Tribune's management had essentially instituted its own wage and benefit package and forced the union to accept it. There was little the union could do but take what the Tribune had offered all along and try to put the strike behind it.

Outside Great Falls, news of the Guild's capitulation first appeared Saturday, Dec. 21, in an Associated Press story in which Beck said a contract would be signed between the union and Guild management on Thursday, Dec. 26. Guild members with weekend duty would report to work Saturday and Sunday and the bulk of the union's membership would return on Monday, she said.1

It was time to go back to work and on Saturday, a contingent of Guild members finally entered the Tribune building. It was an awkward moment.

No one knew what to expect as strikers and strikebreakers confronted each other inside the plant. Don Bartsch, the reluctant striker who had heard of the strike's collapse while in Billings working on the Pennant's last issue, recalled the tension in a 1991 interview:  

It was terrible going back in there. I was the first one to go back in. Terry [Dwyer, the managing editor] was there in the doorway and there were some printers there, too. The atmosphere was just terrible. The ad people who were already in there wouldn't speak to us and some of us wouldn't speak to them. It went on that way for months....

I was so turned off by the attitude on both sides that I pretty much went my own way. It was pretty vindictive on both sides for a year. Finally, I got fed up with talking about it.

If anyone in the Guild had thought things at the Tribune would be the same as before the strike, they were badly mistaken. Although management editors such as James, Lathrop and Dwyer tried to soothe tensions in the newsroom, Cordingley and Koppang soon made it clear they wanted more than just the Guild's acceptance of the company's Oct. 4 pay and benefit proposal. Now that the Guild's strike had collapsed, there would be some changes made in the way management did business with its largest union.

For starters, management announced in a front-page story Dec. 22 that it was not ready to sign a new contract with the Guild. "Additional negotiations on issues arising since the Oct. 4 offer will be required prior to

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2 Bartsch interview.
any contract agreement," readers were told. Moreover, since management had instituted its own pay scale during the strike, it announced that all merit pay, the money some Guild members received in addition to their salaries, would be eliminated. Furthermore, it hinted that it might not continue health-insurance coverage until a new contract was signed. Management also notified Guild officers that the services of three Guild circulation district managers — Mike Morgan, Ed Myers and Frank Gerlach Jr. — would no longer be required. They had been permanently replaced the afternoon the Tribune resumed publication.

And that was not all. Management wanted assurances that the 15 Guild members who had crossed their own union's picket line would not be punished. Under the Guild's 1972 contract, the union clearly had the right to discipline members who violated terms of the local's charter, and crossing a Guild picket line was considered the worst possible offense. If found guilty by a Guild trial board, the strikebreakers could be tossed out of the union, which, under the Guild's closed shop, also meant they would lose their jobs. What management was really demanding was an end to the closed shop.

Following the first post-strike negotiating session on Dec. 26, Beck and other Guild leaders understood all too clearly what it meant to lose a strike.


4 The Guild Reporter, 10 January 1974, p. 6.

5 Ibid.
As far as management was concerned, its real battle with the Guild had just begun. "They wanted to come back not on our terms, but theirs," Cordingley said 17 years later. "We weren't trying to crush anybody, but they attacked us and they lost. All we wanted to do was get a contract we could live with."6

For Beck and other Guild leaders there was no question the Tribune had won the fight over wages and benefits, but they were determined to protect the union's viability. In demanding that the Guild give up the closed shop, management struck at the very heart of the union's power — its ability to compel Guild membership, and thereby ensure its right to bargain on behalf of every non-mechanical Tribune employee. The Guild was not about to relinquish that power, but how could it fight back now that its most potent weapon — the strike — was shattered?

For Tribune readers, the strike's end meant a return to normal routines. For most, the strike had been an inconvenience, a disruption in the flow of information, some of it vital, much of it merely entertaining. They had missed the comics, TV schedule and sports scores. But more importantly, they had missed the paper's daily coverage of community news — the births, deaths, club meetings, marriages and divorces — those events that form the core of conversation in any small city. Presumably, they also missed Tribune coverage of other local matters, such as crime, taxes, local politics, new city ordinances, zoning requests, the opening of new businesses and the failure of

6 Cordingley interview.
old ones.

Still, the Tribune strike did not result in anything like a complete news blackout during its two-month duration. Dedicated newspaper readers turned to television and radio for coverage of international, national and statewide news, while those who wanted more lined up to buy copies of out-of-town newspapers, such as the Montana Standard, which were quickly sold out at street-corner vending machines. Consumers relied on radio, television and the Pay Dirt shopper for advertising. To an extent, the Pennant provided a weekly capsule of local news and advertising, although its news was generally dated and its advertising minimal. Those who wanted news could certainly find it, but it meant going to a variety of sources, whereas the Tribune had provided a neat, comprehensive and daily package delivered directly to their doorsteps.

Without a more detailed analysis of readers' reactions, it is hard to know exactly what the Guild's strike cost Tribune readers, but it is safe to assume that the newspaper's absence caused some degree of confusion in community life, and especially in terms of the public's dealings with local governments. City, county and school officials claimed public attendance at hearings decreased during the strike and officials worried that citizens uninformed, or even misinformed, about impending government actions might sue.

More intriguing but no less difficult to measure was the strike's effect
on the 1974 off-year elections in Cascade County. Without the Tribune's typically detailed campaign coverage, editorial endorsements and advertising, political newcomers feared incumbents would hold a distinct advantage simply because they were better-known. Cascade County Republicans were particularly worried that the Tribune's shutdown would hurt J. K. McDonald's hopes of defeating Democratic incumbent John Melcher in the race for the state's eastern congressional seat.

An analysis of Cascade County voting sheds some light on the question. McDonald lost the election by more than 30,000 votes and carried only one of the huge district's 33 counties. In Cascade County, where most of the Tribune's 40,000 subscribers lived, McDonald carried only 37 percent of the vote. Had the Tribune been able to cover the campaign's last two weeks, it is conceivable McDonald might have done better in Cascade County, but Melcher would have won re-election even if McDonald had captured all 20,000 Cascade County votes cast in the contest.7

Nor is it clear what role, if any, the Tribune's absence played in determining the outcome of local legislative campaigns. If anything, the voting in those races disproved the notion that a shortage of political coverage necessarily favors better-known incumbents. An assortment of Republican and Democratic challengers won six of the nine local legislative

races featuring incumbents.8

More difficult to dismiss, however, is two University of Montana professors' contention that the Tribune's absence contributed to the repeal of annual legislative sessions in Montana. After considerable debate, Montana's 1972 constitutional convention mandated annual rather than the state's traditional biennial sessions, but the issue resurfaced in 1974 when supporters of biennial sessions successfully petitioned to put the matter before Montana's electorate. The outcome was close. Of the more than 215,000 votes cast, the amendment to repeal annual sessions passed by a mere 6,006. In analyzing the returns, University of Montana professors Ellis Waldron, a political scientist, and Paul B. Wilson, a geographer and statistician, determined that the vote was split along distinct urban vs. rural lines, with urban voters generally supporting annual sessions:

Both groups [organizations campaigning on each side of the issue] used media advertisements and pamphlets; proponents of return to biennial sessions emphasized the greater costs of annual sessions and defenders of annual sessions stressed improved citizen access and greater responsiveness of government to citizen interests promised by annual meetings. If voters were moved by these arguments the rural-urban cleavage apparent in the vote on the amendment may have been no accident. The editors of several major newspapers defended retention of annual sessions but the Great Falls Tribune was silenced by a strike during the weeks before the election. Voters in Cascade County failed to join the opposition to the amendment that was expressed in several other major urban areas and defenders of the annual session in Great Falls believed that the loss of an important medium of communication may

8 Ibid., p. 275.
have accounted for the narrow statewide margin of decision for return to a biennial legislature.9

Waldron and Wilson were not alone in speculating that the strike played a significant role in at least this statewide political issue. In a 1991 interview with the author, Tribune City Editor Tom Kotynski, who covered state politics during the 1970s as a reporter for the paper's capitol bureau, said the Tribune had been a strong advocate for retaining annual sessions before the strike shut it down. The paper's silence in the crucial last two weeks of the campaign may well have influenced the vote, he said.10

But while it is conceivable that annual sessions might have gained more support had the Guild's strike not closed the paper, it is quite another thing to blame the repeal of annual legislative sessions solely on the strike. The Cascade County vote for biennial sessions was 9,155 to 7,988.11 Even if the Tribune had been able to promote its views on annual sessions in the critical last two weeks of the campaign, it seems unlikely that it could have persuaded 6,006 of 9,155 voters to change their minds on the matter. Had it been able to do so, the Cascade County vote to retain annual sessions would have topped an incredible 81 percent. No other Montana county, not even Missoula County, where a state-high 62 percent of the electorate favored

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9 Ibid., p. 271.

10 Kotynski interview.

11 Ibid., p. 276.
annual sessions, produced such support for the cause.\textsuperscript{12}

As difficult as it may be to gauge the strike's impact on local and statewide politics, the strike did have an effect on Great Falls businesses, particularly those that depended on \textit{Tribune} advertising. Aside from the inconvenience and expense involved in finding other advertising outlets, some Great Falls retailers reported that special sales and promotions suffered during the strike. For example, Great Falls' K-mart store blamed the strike for its inability to sell $100,000 worth of Halloween candy. Still, retailers generally reported sales increases during the strike, and their chief fear that important post-holiday sales would suffer without \textit{Tribune} advertising dissipated when the paper resumed publication a week before Christmas. All in all, most Great Falls businesses survived the two-month loss of \textit{Tribune} advertising. Some, such as the \textit{Pay Dirt} shopper and local radio and television stations, even profited during the strike.

The business hit hardest, of course, was the \textit{Tribune}. "We lost advertising, we lost subscription money, we lost everything," Cordingley recalled.\textsuperscript{13} Though he declined to supply documentary evidence of the strike's costs, Cordingley estimated the \textit{Tribune} lost $300,000 to $350,000 in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Cordingley interview.
\end{itemize}
revenues. In a 1975 interview with a University of Montana journalism student, Katherine Hardin, Cordingley estimated the paper's financial losses during the strike represented 30 percent of the year's operating profit.

In addition to lost revenues, the Tribune also incurred special expenses, such as the cost of hiring delivery trucks and private security guards, including one who guarded Cordingley's home during the strike's final week. But the biggest expense by far was the cost of new electronic typewriters and computerized typesetting equipment, estimated at $250,000. The equipment costs had been included in the paper's capital improvements budget for 1977, but the strike forced management to make the purchase two years ahead of schedule. Ironically, the move may have even saved the Tribune money in the long run, because it allowed the paper to lay off 14 printers, some of whom it had once planned to buy out with early retirements. "This was a tragedy for the printers and stereotypers," Cordingley said. "It wouldn't have been so terrible if we had been able to

14 In his 1975 Montana Journalism Review article, former Great Falls Guild member Robert C. Gibson quoted Tribune Editor William James as saying the strike cost the Tribune $1 million (p. 55). However, James, in his interview for this thesis, told the author the figure was just a guess and that he wasn't privy to Tribune financial information.


16 Ibid.

17 Cordingley interview with author.
bring in the new equipment gradually."

The strike may have cost the Tribune some of its readers, too. According to Cordingley's own figures, the paper's circulation as of Oct. 5, 1974, just two weeks before the strike, stood at 40,818 daily and 46,285 on Sunday. By the end of February 1975, two months after the strike's collapse, circulation dropped by more than 2,600 for the daily paper and by more than 1,800 for the Sunday edition. By year's end, Tribune circulation still lagged behind its pre-strike levels. As of Dec. 27, 1975, the paper's daily circulation was 39,498 and Sunday circulation was 46,047.

Here again, it is difficult to determine the strike's effects exactly. It is possible that some readers decided during the paper's absence that they could live without the Tribune, but Cordingley chose to blame the decrease on a subscription rate increase that took effect on August 11 of 1974. Even so, it is difficult to understand why the effects of the rate increase were not felt for more than four months, a period in which subscribers had gone without a newspaper for more than nine weeks.

Obviously, the strike cost the Guild too, and not only in terms of lost

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18 Ibid.

19 Hardin, "History of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild," p. 34. According to Cordingley, the Tribune's circulation at the end of February 1975 was 38,158 daily and 44,450 on Sunday.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.
opportunities at the bargaining table. Strikers had survived more than two months without Tribune paychecks, living on strike benefits that, in most cases, represented less than a third of their regular wages. Gibson estimated that Guild members lost a total of $21,000 in salary during the strike.\textsuperscript{22} The union itself was $10,000 in debt, and the figure could have been higher had the union not received financial assistance from its international and Guild locals scattered across the nation.

A strike audit, prepared by the New Jersey accounting firm of Shulman, Kurtz, Turer and Topaz in June of 1976, demonstrated just how heavily the Great Falls Guild depended on the kindness of its Guild brothers and sisters. The international's defense fund contributed more than $41,000 to the strike, $30,277 in direct benefits to strikers and a $10,000 loan to the union. Local 81 also received $4,651 in donations ranging from $25 to $600 from 40 individual Guild chapters. Individuals and other unions contributed another $2,014.\textsuperscript{23}

All told, the Great Falls Guild spent slightly more than $12,000 of its own money to prosecute the strike. Although the international paid strikers' benefits, the local was responsible for all other strike-related costs, including $4,340 in Blue Cross health insurance for strikers, $2,626 in legal fees and

\textsuperscript{22} Gibson, "The Great Falls Strike," p. 55.

\textsuperscript{23} Strike audit prepared for TNG's International Executive Board by the Shulman, Kurtz, Turer and Topaz, certified public accountants based in Gibbsboro, N.J., 18 June 1974, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
another $2,600 in expenses connected with operating a strike kitchen and strike headquarters for two months. In addition, the Great Falls Guild spent $25,255 to publish nine issues of the Pennant, which returned only $19,472 from the sale of single copies and advertising.24

But money was the least of the Guild's worries in the months following its unsuccessful strike. Although it had returned to work and its members were being paid according to the Tribune's pre-strike salary offer, the Guild was still without a contract. Management refused to sign unless the union agreed to give up its closed shop and make other concessions, which the Guild refused to consider. The deadlock would continue for nearly two years.

From its standpoint, management did not care whether the Guild ever signed. By law, management was obliged to continue bargaining in good faith and it continued to meet with Guild negotiators throughout the period. But "good faith" bargaining did not mean management had to compromise its demands, and in the absence of a signed contract, the company could and did impose its own wage scales, benefits and work policies. Under those circumstances, who besides the Guild needed a contract? More importantly, what could the Guild do about it? Call another strike?

Specifically, management demanded two important changes in its contractual relationship with the Guild: an end to the Guild's closed shop

\[24\text{ Ibid.}\]
and language abolishing what management negotiators called the "evergreen clause," a Guild provision that required management to abide by the terms of an expired contract until a new one was signed. Joel Koppang, the Tribune's general manager, spelled out management's demands in a letter to Carla Beck written 11 months after the strike's collapse and nearly two years after the Guild's 1972 contract had expired:

Your letter of September 30 indicates there are still major differences between the Company and the Guild on contract language pertaining to union membership and the effective periods of future agreements. These basic differences have kept us from reaching agreement on a new contract to replace the one which expired November 30, 1973.

On union membership. The company is seeking a "maintenance of membership" clause which would require only those employees who are members a week or so after the contract is signed to maintain their membership in the Guild as a condition of employment for the life of the next contract. The Guild is seeking a clause which would require all employees to remain or become members of the Guild as a condition of their continuing in the employment of the Tribune.

On future negotiations. The Guild seeks to maintain a clause which has provided that the terms and conditions of an expiring agreement will remain in effect during negotiations for a new agreement. The Company said it will not agree to such a clause in its next contract; but, this does not mean the Company will not observe its obligation under the law to bargain with the Guild before implementing new benefits or effecting any changes in an expiring contract.

We have been deadlocked on these points since December 26, 1974, and your new proposals which include the union shop and "terms and conditions" clauses neither remove the present impasse nor indicate a way to reach a full and complete agreement which both parties will sign.25

Frustrated with management's intransigence, Guild spokesmen

25 Letter from Joel Koppang to Carla Beck, 5 November 1975, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
complained bitterly that Tribune negotiators were being vindictive in their demands. According to Guild minutes of an October 1975 bargaining session, Guild attorney Ben Hilley accused Tribune negotiators of trying to bully the union into accepting their demands:

We're interested in recouping a decent contract for our people and over the next year or two mopping up the blood. There's nothing to be served by you saying "We won!" and shoving it in their [the Guild's] face. If you want to stop us mopping up by taking away union security, grievances ... then the Guild will just have it pushed in their [sic] face....

Despite such outbursts, management still refused to budge. Faced with disagreeable options, Guild negotiators stalled and played their few remaining cards. They proceeded with internal efforts to oust 15 strikebreakers from the union, a move that could ultimately cost strikebreakers their jobs at the paper. Throughout the strike, Guild pickets kept meticulous notes detailing who crossed the picket line and how long they remained in the Tribune building. By the strike's end, petitions for dismissal had been circulated and signed against four editorial department employees and 11 members of the paper's advertising and business office staffs, even though many strikebreakers had submitted letters of resignation from the Guild.

Named on the Guild's list of strikebreakers were Frank Adams, Bruce Bartley, Bette Buus, Clark Calkins, John Chapman, Jerry Coonse, Gordon

26 Hilley's remarks are contained in an undated Guild transcript of the meeting and were later excerpted for the Guild's Bread and Butter newsletter, October 1975, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

27 Great Falls Newspaper Guild papers.
Cunnif, Tom Hillstrand, Sue Jewett, Thomas Kotynski, Burnell Kummer, Margaret Madden, Ardella McCarty, Daniel Peterson and Durwood Sanderson. The Guild also sought the dismissal of Twila Van Leer, a reporter hired during the strike who had never joined the Guild. Certified letters informing strikebreakers of the charges against them were mailed on June 2, 1975, but most were returned unopened. The issue, Guild leaders wrote strikebreakers, was now in the hands of the international, which had the final say in union dismissals.

And there was still the matter of Ed Myers, Mike Morgan and Frank Gerlach Jr., the three Guild district circulation managers who had been replaced in the strike's final hours. Guild leaders argued that the three had not been dismissed for poor job performance, as management claimed, but because they had been among the union's most militant strikers and had been involved in some of the scuffling outside the Tribune building during the strike's early phase. The dismissals were nothing less than punishment, the union charged in a complaint filed with the National Labor Relations Board. In May of 1975, the board's regional director refused to order the men's reinstatement. Though it had failed to win back the men's jobs, the Guild insisted that the company at least owed the men severance pay, and in

28 The unopened letters are part of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

29 Letter from Charles Henderson, regional director of the National Labor Relations Board, to Emilie Loring, the Guild's attorney, 31 March 1975, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
February of 1977, the union filed suit in federal district court, claiming the Tribune owed Gerlach, Morgan and Myers a total of $6,500. The company finally agreed to settle out of court, but Gerlach, Morgan and Myers would never again work for the Tribune.

As the Guild's last resort, the National Labor Relations Board proved to be no resort at all. In addition to its petition on behalf of the three circulation men, the Guild asked the NLRB to order the Tribune to sign its own pre-strike proposal, claiming that management added new demands after the union agreed to sign it. Moreover, the Guild accused management of making unfair and unilateral changes in its treatment of the union employees after the strike. The company, the union charged, had eliminated merit pay, withheld bylines and changed its method of computing commissions for advertising representatives.

The complaint, filed after the first negotiating session following the strike, received immediate attention from NLRB, which sent field examiner Henrik M. Sortun to Great Falls in early January 1975. After taking depositions from both sides, Sortun issued a preliminary report on Jan. 21, rejecting the Guild's arguments. Sortun wrote that management had indeed informed the union that it intended to change its pre-strike proposal before

30 Great Falls Newspaper Guild vs The Great Falls Tribune, filed 17 February 1977 in U.S. District Court in Great Falls.

31 Letter from the National Labor Relations Board to Guild attorney Emilie Loring, 22 May 1975, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
the Guild voted to sign it, and, therefore, the NLRB could not order the company to sign an agreement that was never reached.\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, Sortun said the Guild failed to prove that management had no right to make changes in merit pay, by-lines and commissions.

The Guild filed an appeal of Sortun's findings to the NLRB's regional director, who promptly denied it. A last-ditch appeal to the national board was denied as well. The union's only success with NLRB occurred when the board denied the state bureau's half-serious request to create the "International Brotherhood of Capitol Bureaus," a move that would eliminate the Guild's jurisdiction over state bureau reporters Frank Adams and Tom Kotynski.\textsuperscript{33}

By the fall of 1976, two years after the strike, the Tribune and the Guild had yet to come to terms and neither party showed signs of giving in. In a report to The Newspaper Guild's Western District Council, the Guild wrote that management's attitude toward the union had changed "from the malign neglect of the past two years to blossoming hostility." Moreover, the Guild claimed management was angling for a vote to decertify the union:

\begin{quote}
At our last negotiating session (Oct. 19, the two-year anniversary of the start of the strike), the first session since January 27, the company informed the Guild that it would henceforth no longer pay the salary of Guild negotiators for
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} Letter from Henrik M. Sortun, field examiner for the National Labor Relations Board, to Emilie Loring, the Guild's attorney, 21 January 1975, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.

\textsuperscript{33} Petition to the National Labor Relations Bureau from Frank Adams, 3 February 1975, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
meetings attended during work time -- breaking a 30-year precedent. The Guild's reply: "That's a benefit and must be negotiated on." It will probably end up as an unfair labor practice charge.

The company has also begun dropping none-too-subtle references to decertification. Recently notices appeared on most of the company bulletin boards (with the exception of the newsroom, which has been characterized as a "jungle of unionism" by the general manager) tersely reporting the result of the Salem vote and the vote at Coos Bay [Oregon newspapers where employees had voted to decertify the Guild]. Also, in negotiations, the company spokesman indicated that there was some doubt as to whether the Guild represented a majority of the bargaining unit, or whether the traditional bargaining unit was appropriate.

In short, Local 81 is gearing up for a battle.34

In truth, the Guild was growing weary of its seemingly endless fight. The strike's failure, combined with the ongoing tension between strikers and strikebreakers and protracted wrangling over a new contract, was beginning to take a toll on the Guild's membership. While some union members, such as Bartsch, withdrew from the controversy, others simply left the newspaper. In the summer of 1975, the Guild listed 62 dues-paying members. By the following June, the number had fallen to 49, and many of those were growing tired of the impasse. They wanted an end to the uncertainty of working without a contract. They wanted to know where they stood in terms of wages and benefits.

Finally, on May 10, 1978, the Guild accepted management's contract offer, which promised raises across the scale in return for the union's

34 Great Falls Newspaper Guild report to the Guild's Western District Council, fall 1976, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers.
agreement to give up its closed shop and its "evergreen" clause.

Furthermore, the Guild agreed to drop its efforts to discipline the strikebreakers. For many in the Guild, it was an acceptable trade. The union shop, after all, had not prevented the strike's collapse, nor would its loss prevent the Guild from negotiating on behalf of the Tribune's non-craft employees. Writing 17 years after the strike, former Guild President Carla Beck was philosophical about her union's final capitulation:

> It is difficult to continue working without a signed contract. The committed member is willing to stick it out but others do not have the patience. So the contract was signed, with the loss of the guild shop.
>
> Without the guild shop, there is an inevitable falling away of members. It's like any other organization: the committed see the value and are willing to work for it and pay for it.\(^{35}\)

> The strike, and the bitter contract dispute it precipitated, was finally over.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS

Among the obvious questions left in the wake of the Great Falls Guild strike is whether the battle was worth the cost.

In terms of the union's financial aims, the strike was a considerable failure. The Guild continued to lose ground in its ongoing effort to attain the international Guild's elusive average top wage, which had climbed to $262 as of April 1974 and would top $300 by 1976.¹ With its acceptance of management's pre-strike pay offer, Local 81's top minimum salary during 1975 was set at $252 a week for its most experienced reporters and $156 a week for beginning reporters. And because merit pay had been eliminated, the Guild's top "minimums" had in fact become "maximums" for all but a handful of Guild members.

To make matters worse, the Guild could no longer boast that its salaries were the best in Montana. The state's other major dailies in Missoula, Billings, Helena and Butte had made significant strides in improving wages.

¹ Figures supplied by The Newspaper Guild's department of research and information.
since they were acquired by Lee Enterprises. By January of 1975, beginning reporters at Lee's smallest Montana daily, the 11,000-circulation Helena Independent Record, were paid $160 weekly while the paper's top reporters made $250 a week. At the Billings Gazette, Montana's largest newspaper with a circulation of 58,000, beginning reporters earned $185 a week and top reporters could earn as much as $310 weekly. The story was the same at Lee's Missoula and Butte dailies, which reported circulations of 29,000 and 22,000 respectively. Beginning Missoulian reporters were paid $185 a week and the paper's best reporters earned as much as $275 per week. The Montana Standard paid beginners $175 a week and top reporters earned $270 weekly.

In each case, the Lee papers clearly paid better wages than the Tribune for beginning reporters, but it is more difficult to compare the papers' top newsroom salaries because raises at Lee papers were based on merit, not longevity. The evidence suggests that only a handful of Lee reporters, the "stars," earned the maximum salary. Yet an informal sample, taken by University of Montana journalism student Katherine Hardin in March of 1976, showed that Lee's salaries were slightly higher or at least comparable to the Tribune's in the two years following the strike. A reporter with seven months of experience at the Montana Standard said she made $195 a week,

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3 1975 salary and circulation figures for the Lee papers were provided by the publishers of the Missoulian, Montana Standard and Billings Gazette, as cited in Hardin, "The History of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild, 1936-1975," p. 34.
while a reporter employed three years at the Missoulian made $245. A veteran Gazette reporter with eight years' experience reported that she made $265 a week in January of 1976.4

If anything, the protracted contract talks following the strike actually slowed management's generosity in terms of wage increases. On Dec. 1, 1975, Cordingley offered to pay new reporters $169 a week and fully experienced reporters $273. The offer, contingent upon the Guild's abandonment of the closed shop among other things, also proposed to raise those salaries to $183 a week and $295 a week on Dec. 1, 1976.5 The contract wasn't signed until 1978.

Since the strike, salaries at the Great Falls Tribune and the Lee's Montana newspapers have remained roughly equal. As of Dec. 1, 1990, the Tribune, with a circulation of roughly 33,000, paid beginning reporters $338 a week and the most experienced reporters $546 weekly. During the same period, salaries at the Missoulian, with a circulation of about 28,000, ranged from $335 a week to a maximum of $563 a week. Though some Missoulian editorial employees earn more than the Great Falls Guild's top scale, the average Missoulian reporter makes just less than $400 a week.6 According to

4 Ibid., p. 35.

5 Ibid., p. 34.

6 Missoulian wage scales were outlined by Robertha Engelstad, the paper's personnel director, in a deposition taken in connection with a divorce suit filed in Montana's Fourth District Court, Case No. 72214, 27 March 1991, pp. 14-17, hereafter referred to as "Engelstad deposition." Engelstad was asked to testify about newspaper salaries to help the court determine alimony
a 1989 survey conducted by the American Newspaper Publishers Association, the national average for wages paid beginning reporters at papers within the Missoulian and Tribune's circulation category ranged from $314 to $363 a week.7

Despite the strike's failure to boost pay to even greater heights, Guild salaries remain among the highest in Montana and evidence suggests that they form part of a standard against which at least some Lee salaries are measured. In a 1991 deposition for a divorce case, Robertha Engelstad, the Missoulian's personnel director, testified that salaries at her paper are required to be within 5 percent of the average at newspapers of like circulation in the area.8 Based on that, it is reasonable to speculate that had the Guild's 1974 strike succeeded, pay at the Tribune, as well as other Montana newspapers, might be higher than it is today.

An even stronger case can be made that the strike ultimately hurt Tribune employees in the lower wage classifications, those workers Guild leaders had fought so hard to help. Although the weakened Guild won raises for all its members in the three contracts negotiated after the strike, the local's own official history concedes that it was forced to accept lower pay for such workers — many of whom were women — in 1984:

for one of the suit's participants, who had been trained as a journalist.


8 Engelstad deposition, p. 20.
As a concession in the contract signed on June 22, 1984, a two-tier pay schedule was put into the contract. New persons hired as display and advertising clerks, telephone operators, stenographers, cashiers, data entry clerks, receptionists, bookkeepers, hired after June 22, 1984, were to be paid at lower rates than their counterparts already working for the company.9

Another indication of the Guild's weakened condition after the strike was its inability to protect its members' jobs. The three district circulation managers "replaced" during the strike were never rehired, although management had technically agreed to rehire them if new positions opened. Moreover, the strike played an indirect role in the loss of other jobs at the Tribune, namely those of the 14 printers who were dismissed when the paper rushed in new technology during the strike to help it resume publication. No doubt the Tribune would have eliminated those jobs eventually, but the strike forced the issue and may have kept some printers from being retrained for other jobs or released with early retirements.

Of all the strike's effects, the loss of the Guild's closed shop was perhaps the most significant. Although the Guild remained the legal bargaining agent for the paper's non-mechanical employees, it could no longer enforce its demands by threatening malcontents or strikebreakers with dismissal. Nor could it demand that all of the paper's non-craft workers pay dues to support the local's battles with management. The result was an immediate drop in Guild membership, which weakened the union's power at the bargaining

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9 Official Guild history, p. 18.
table by making it extremely difficult to threaten a strike.

In the years following the strike, former Guild president Carla Beck argued that the closed shop had actually hampered the union. In the strike's lessons, she said, was that a closed shop did not mean union solidarity:

We learned that any organization, and especially a union, who wants to accomplish its goals must organize and educate its members.

There is a school of thought which holds that the strongest, most effective union is that which functions without the union shop. It is strong because it organizes and educates its members about cooperating and working together to accomplish its goals. Its members know that its chief reason for existence is not to win higher pay for its members but to provide them with due process in the workplace. Read any poll today. Workers complain about poor working relationships and poor working conditions more than they complain about pay.

GFNG members were not organized and educated because GFNG achieved a guild (or union) shop early in its history. The guild never felt the need to organize and educate. Some did it on their own, but they were in the minority. The resulting lack of education meant a lack of understanding and therefore commitment and that no doubt had something to do with those who crossed the picket lines.

While it may be true that a voluntary union better represents the goals of all its members, that does not explain the Great Falls Guild's bitter fight to keep its closed shop and management's determination to abolish it.

Whatever else it may have been, the closed shop was more than just a symbol of the Guild's strength. It represented real power over the union's

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11 Ibid.
membership as well as a barrier to management's ability to dictate pay, benefits and work policies. Without that power, the Guild's grip over its members and management was effectively crippled.

The strike not only cost the Guild in terms of pay and power, it also led to a further deterioration in its relationship with management, which is hardly surprising given the bitter confrontations on the picket lines, the harsh rhetoric of the union's publicity efforts and management's tough demands following the strike. Throughout most of the Guild's history, relations between management and labor were by nature restrained, yet both sides retained a remarkable degree of respect for each other. But in the years just preceding and following the strike, the relationship was colored by mistrust and personal animosities. By the strike's end, both sides viewed the bargaining relationship as a battle for survival.

One of the Guild's major complaints before the strike had been that management did not take the union seriously. The strike certainly fixed that. From then on, management, to the Guild's dismay, would take bargaining with its largest union very seriously. The union's closed shop, which management had never seriously tried to eliminate since its introduction in 1938, became a major point of contention afterward. Time would heal some of the wounds but others ran deep, so deep in fact that some Tribune employees quit the paper rather than live with the lasting tension that followed the strike.
Finally, the strike also closed the door on the Guild's hopes to organize other Guild locals in Montana. In truth, the effort had all but collapsed in the late 1960s when the union focused nearly all of its attention on improving conditions in Great Falls. Though Great Falls Guild officers and the Guild's international representatives received infrequent inquiries about the union from employees at the state's non-union papers, such as the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, the Guild made little or no effort to organize those papers, partly because the Guild had little money or time for organizing, but mostly because leaders, such as Carla Beck, figured their chances of success were slim:

From time to time GFNG was approached by employees of other dailies for organizing assistance. The international was also approached. The local and international were both interested but the employees at the other dailies were almost always out of the newsroom and while they believed they could organize the news people, they were doubtful about other "front end" employees. The position of the local and the international was that you couldn't have an effective bargaining unit without the entire front end.

If employees at Montana's non-union dailies wanted the Guild, they would have to do the initial organizing on their own.

In terms of Guild pay, benefits, job security, power, relations with management and organizational goals, the strike seems hardly worth the costs. A more difficult question to answer is whether the strike could have

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12 A Guild Bread and Butter newsletter in October of 1975 reported that a Bozeman Daily Chronicle reporter asked Guild President Carla Beck to help organize the Chronicle, where college graduates were reportedly earning only $125 a week.

13 Beck letter to author, op. cit.
been avoided. Perhaps, but not likely.

For one thing, the Guild's antipathy toward management was too deeply rooted by 1974. Since 1960, the union had threatened to strike during every negotiation. By 1974, Guild leaders were convinced they had to put up or shut up. The steady slide in local wages compared to national Guild averages had gone on for more than a decade and threatened to split the union. The election of militant leaders such as Bidwell, Pomnichowski and Beck set the union on a collision course that was bound to end in a strike, and the double-digit percent inflation of 1973 and 1974 provided the necessary motivation.

But along with the economic factors, there were psychological and political ones as well, not the least of which was the Tribune's purchase by a large, out-of-state corporation. Nationally, the late 1960s and early 1970s were times of protest against paternalism and "the establishment," an attitude fueled by the Vietnam War and Watergate. In Montana, the protest erupted as a backlash to what many saw as the Anaconda Company's paternalistic domination of the state's political and economic life. The result was growing mistrust of large, out-of-state companies, which many Montanans saw as no better than absentee landlords or colonial capitalists.14 For the Guild's mostly liberal Democratic leadership, the Minneapolis and New York-based Cowles chain fit the profile, and the union made a special point of emphasizing the

Tribune's "monopolistic" position in the Great Falls economy in its public pronouncements both before and during the strike.15

Of course, this attitude was hardly new in Montana, or among Great Falls Guild leaders, for that matter. Joseph Kinsey Howard, Local 81's founder, emerged in the 1940s as one of the Anaconda Company's most prominent critics with the publication of his history Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, which saw the state's past as one of incessant exploitation, financed and executed by robber barons and huge out-of-state conglomerates.16 Howard's thesis, bolstered in the 1960s and 1970s by the writings of University of Montana historian K. Ross Toole, gained considerable acceptance in the protests and reformist ferment of the early 1970s.17 As Howard's "heirs," Great Falls Guild leaders echoed his anti-corporate theme in their efforts to revive their union's early militancy and gain concessions from its new, out-of-state owners. But there were new social and political issues on the Guild's agenda, too. Under the leadership of Carla

15 Many of the Guild's leaders were actively involved in the local Democratic Party. Mike Morgan, one of the Guild circulation men replaced after the strike, was its local chairman. Dick Pattison, the Guild's international representative, had worked as an aide to Democratic Gov. Tom Judge; Ralph Pomnichowski and Carla Beck worked for Montana Democratic Sen. John Melcher after leaving the Tribune. Others, such as Ralph Bidwell, campaigned for local Democratic candidates.


Beck, the union's first female president, women's struggle for equal rights and opportunities became a driving force behind the union's aims.

These factors — union members' real and perceived financial losses, combined with the reformist, anti-corporate mood of the era — made a showdown all but inevitable by the fall of 1974. After years of urging restraint, the Guild's international leadership, which had the power to grant or refuse strike sanctions, seemed to realize that its Great Falls local wanted a strike and it wanted it now. Dick Pattison, the former Tribune reporter turned Guild international representative, managed to avoid strikes in 1970 and 1972, but not without stinging criticism from disappointed local officers who had even threatened to take the Great Falls local out of the Guild.

Pattison's organizational skills and strong presence no doubt boosted the Guild's hopes for a successful strike, yet there is little evidence to support subsequent claims by Tribune management people that the international wanted the Great Falls strike as a means to satisfy larger, ulterior motives. In interviews for this thesis, former Tribune editors William James and Terry Dwyer speculated that the international saw the strike as an opportunity to win a major victory in Montana, thereby giving the Guild leverage to organize the state's Lee papers. Cordingley himself, in an 1976 interview with University of Montana student Katherine Hardin, claimed the Great Falls strike was orchestrated not by local officers, but by the international. The

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18 Dwyer interview; James interview.
Tribune, he said, "was a test case. We were the first strike following the ITU convention where delegates were talking about a merger with the Guild. In our opinion we were selected and this strike was called out of Washington."^{19}

If so, the Great Falls Tribune proved to be a poor test of any burgeoning Guild-ITU alliance. After all, it was the ITU's decision to cross Guild picket lines that caused the strike's collapse. Moreover, although the national ITU and Guild officials were talking about a merger, an idea that frightened publishers nationwide, the two unions never resolved their serious differences and the idea was all but dead by the early 1980s.^{20}

As for management's claim that the international wanted a victory in Great Falls to help it organize Montana's Lee papers, it is difficult to believe that a Guild victory at the Tribune could have done much to encourage Lee employees to join the union. Lee employees were already receiving comparable salaries and benefits without having to negotiate, pay union dues or face the prospect of walking picket lines. Furthermore, if organizing other papers had been the international's goal, it could have saved itself a lot of trouble by spending the $40,000 it loaned or paid directly to Tribune strikers on its meager, if not non-existent, organizing efforts in Montana.

At any rate, it seems more likely that the international supported the

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Great Falls strike because it felt obliged to pursue an angry local's wishes. Pattison, in his interview for this thesis, said the international had no other reason for supporting the strike, and, in fact, had hoped it might have been avoided. By 1974, the international, which was prosecuting major strikes of national significance in Cleveland, had bigger fish to fry. The Great Falls strike, according to Pattison and Local 81 officers, was a local affair designed to improve local conditions. Beck, in a 1991 letter to the author, said she knew of no other reason for the international's support and dismissed management's contention that out-of-state labor officials "took our employees out on strike." 

I find it amazing that management continues to believe this group of "independent recalcitrants" could be "led" anywhere. But what I really find amazing is that they apparently never did understand the level of discontent resulting from management policies and how this affected working conditions....

Like out-of-state corporations, out-of-state labor officials made convenient scapegoats for local troubles. If the Guild chose to deny the realities of the Montana economy in its demands for higher wages, management was no less guilty of ignoring the very real anger of many of its employees in the months before the strike. Given the Guild's mood and its demands, perhaps nothing short of complete surrender on management's

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22 Beck letter to author, op. cit.
part could have prevented the strike. Nevertheless, the fact that the strike came as a great surprise to management would seem to indicate that management failed to heed the warning signs and take steps to diffuse the situation.

As a consequence, management reacted to the strike as though it were the local labor equivalent of Pearl Harbor. With all the outrage of an innocent victim hit by an unforeseen sucker punch, management was determined to fight back, break the strike and cripple the union so that future strikes would be almost impossible. Once the strike began, there was no thought of compromise, even though the Guild made significant modifications in its demands.

Ultimately, the costly and bitter strike was just as much a result of management intransigence as the Guild's militant determination to force management to take it seriously. Union and company officials badly misjudged each other. Had the two sides been more understanding of the other's plight, perhaps the strike could have been avoided. But given the history, pressures and personalities involved, it seems highly unlikely.

Despite the strike's costs and the lingering animosity it generated, the Guild survived to fight another day. "The Guild lost the battle," Beck said, "but it did not lose the war, if the 'war' means the ability to organize and to continue to represent its members in terms of a grievance/arbitration
procedure, wages and working conditions." But at least in terms of pay and benefits, some of the issues that led to the Tribune strike of 1974 remain issues today.

Although the Great Falls Guild union has kept Tribune wages competitive in Montana, it continues to lag far behind national Guild averages. As of April 1, 1990, The Newspaper Guild's average top reporter minimum was $645.96 per week and the average starting pay for beginning reporters was $415.42. By comparison, the Tribune's top Guild salary as of the same date was $533.40 a week while beginning reporters earned $330.75. The Guild has also suffered setbacks in terms of benefits. When rising health insurance costs forced the Tribune to consider switching to a new carrier, the Guild agreed to have its members pay 10 percent of the monthly premiums in order to retain the old carrier.

Moreover, the loss of the closed shop made it more difficult for the Guild to call a strike because those who disagreed with the union's goals faced no threat of unemployment if they crossed the picket lines. As a result, the union without a closed shop was likely to be less militant in its contract demands.

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23 Beck letter, op. cit.

24 Salary figures supplied by the The Newspaper Guild's research and information department.

25 Official Guild history.
But if the loss of the closed shop weakened the Guild's ability to organize effective walkouts in the future, the 1974 strike also demonstrated the role new technology would play in relationships between newspaper management and labor. Computerized typesetting and composition, along with the increasing supply of electronically transmitted news and feature services, have made it more difficult for the Guild to shut down newspapers. A handful of trained management personnel can now prepare a newspaper for press in less time than it once took dozens of unionized employees.

Although the technology of 1974 was not so advanced as that, it did represent enough of a threat to pressure Tribune craft unions to return to work. As a direct result of the strike, the paper's management quickened its efforts to introduce new technology that would not only cut the costs of production but make the paper less vulnerable to future Guild walkouts. Without the ability to shut down production, and therefore cut the paper's income, the Guild's ultimate weapon was rendered almost useless.

If the creation of the Great Falls Newspaper Guild in 1936 launched a bright era of improved pay, benefits and job security for those Tribune employees the union represented, the failed strike of 1974 ushered in a long period of decline in Local 81's fortunes, a decline that continues today.

According to Bert Lindler, a Tribune reporter and local Guild president during the 1980s, "the Guild has never recovered from the strike." 26

26 Bert Lindler, interviewed by author over the telephone, 20 August 1991.
Although current figures are confidential, membership in the Great Falls Guild has not returned to its pre-strike levels, and the years since the strike have seen a continued reduction in benefits. Guild salaries at the top of the scale have fallen further behind national Guild averages, while those at the bottom has been particularly hard hit. Because of the two-tier pay schedule, Tribune clerical workers hired after 1984 earn a top wage of $290.25 a week, compared with the $340.78 paid to those hired before 1984.27

Although the Guild's pension plan has been significantly improved since the strike, the union has suffered serious setbacks in most other areas. Mileage, which stands at 19 cents per mile in town and 20 cents in the city, has not increased since 1981. Union members now pay 20 percent of their company health insurance premiums. As a result of bitter negotiations in 1987, the union's sick leave, which had once guaranteed members unlimited "reasonable time off" for illness, now accrues at a rate of five days per year to a maximum of 30 days allowed.28

Moreover, severance pay has been cut almost in half. Before 1987, Guild members were guaranteed a week's severance pay for every eight months of employment, up to a maximum of 40 weeks. Today, they are allowed one week's severance pay for every year of employment, up to a


28 Lindler interview.
maximum of 26 weeks. In other areas, the union's $1.50 per hour night differential has not changed for more than 20 years. Likewise, Guild members who had once received an extra day off if they were required to work on their regularly scheduled days off, now get only four hours of additional free time. Management has also succeeded in winning concessions making it more profitable to hire part-time workers, who are paid 80 percent of Guild hourly wages and are entitled to no benefits other than participation in the paper's pension plan.  

The Guild's ability to battle such changes has been severely limited by the loss of the union shop and the fact that a shutdown of the paper is nearly impossible given the technological advances employed by the Tribune since the 1974 strike. When the Cowles organization decided to streamline its operations in the 1980s, the Great Falls Guild was powerless to prevent layoffs that reached into the paper's newsroom. The best the union could do was to ensure that the layoffs were based on seniority. And during the bitter contract talks of 1987, the union's reaction was limited to a couple of rallies held outside the paper's new building overlooking the Missouri River and threats to incite a subscriber boycott.  

The 1987 negotiations were particularly embarrassing for the once-powerful Guild. To conduct its side of the talks, management, led by Steve

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29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.
Studt, Cordingley's successor as publisher, hired a Chicago law firm that specialized in winning concessions from labor unions. In place of the one- or two-year contracts that allowed the Guild frequent opportunities to improve its lot, management demanded and won a four-year pact that reduced key benefits and increased Guild wages, but at a rate that ensured a widening gap between local salaries and national Guild salaries.

The Guild was not alone in facing new threats from management. In a successful attempt to force pressmen to sign a new contract, the company threatened to lock them out. To back up its threat, some management personnel were sent to Oklahoma, where they received special training in how to run the presses. When they returned, management employees participated in a special weekend session in which they produced "practice" issues of the paper. Although the paper's pressmen had supported the Guild's 1974 strike by honoring the picket lines, the Guild was in no position to return the favor. Instead, the Guild proposed to help pressmen with lockout benefits in return for the craft union's promise that it would not picket the paper. "It was a very difficult period for all the unions," recalled Lindler, the Guild's president during that time.31

The pressure on Tribune unions continues today. If anything, the paper's recent purchase by the powerful Gannett chain, publishers of more than 100 daily newspapers, including USA TODAY, makes the Guild's future

31 Ibid.
seem all the more unclear. Although Gannett could have effectively broken the Great Falls Guild by buying only the paper's physical assets, firing all its employees and rehiring only non-union employees, it chose to honor the existing contracts of all Tribune unions, including the Guild's. Still, the real test of Gannett's attitude toward the paper's unions will come in late 1991 and 1992, when the corporation enters negotiations for new contracts. One indication of things to come is management's opening demand that the Tribune's mailer's and pressmen's unions give up their closed-shop status, a move that could further weaken the Guild's ability to forge effective alliances with craft unions to resist management demands. Although Guild officers promise to continue to fight for its members' rights in negotiations, they concede that their union's survival is uncertain. "The unions don't just feel threatened, they are threatened," Lindler said.

Given the union's recent decline, it would be tempting to blame the Guild's losses solely on its unsuccessful strike in 1974. But in truth, the local's troubles parallel those experienced by the international. Membership, which reached its peak at more than 34,000 in 1987, had fallen to 32,599 by 1990, and further losses are predicted as The Newspaper Guild loses more and more.

32 According to Lindler, the relationships between the Tribune's unions have somewhat improved since the strike of 1974. For example, members of the paper's unions will sit on each other's negotiating committees during upcoming contract talks.

33 Lindler interview.
more decertification elections across the nation.34

Industry executives, such as John B. Jaske, Gannett's vice president for labor relations, say the major reason for the decline in newspaper unions is the rapid advance in new technologies, which have reduced the number of dues-paying union members and made it easier for publishers to produce their papers in the event of strikes. But the decline in newspaper unions is also attributed to management's becoming more responsive to employees' needs. "The average reporter doesn't want to run a newspaper, but he wants to be listened to," Jaske said in a 1989 interview with Presstime, the official magazine of the American Newspaper Publishers Association.35 Still another factor, publishers argue, is that employees see less need for unions because the federal government — through legislation concerning work hours, pensions, overtime pay, health insurance, safety in the workplace — has taken over functions traditionally bargained for by unions.36

International Guild leaders agree that technology has decimated the ranks of the industry's craft unions, but they reject the notion that their union is crumbling under the increased generosity and sensitivity of today's publishers. In a 1987 interview with Editor and Publisher magazine, TNG's retiring president, Charles Perlik, blamed his union's woes on the increase in

34 Figures supplied by The Newspaper Guild's department of research and information.


36 Ibid.
newspaper closures and mergers, the emergence of high-powered "union-busting" law firms and the conservative, anti-union policies of the Reagan administration and its conservative appointees to the National Labor Relations Board.

While publishers and Guild leaders disagreed over causes of the union's troubles, the Guild also faced considerable criticism from journalists, some of whom accused the Guild of straying from its original goal of providing better pay and working conditions for its journalist members. Haynes Johnson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the Washington Post, argued in a 1972 Columbia Journalism Review article that the Guild had damaged its credibility and betrayed its professional and ethical principles by dabbling in politics.37 From 1961 to 1967, Johnson wrote, the Guild accepted nearly $1 million in Central Intelligence Agency subsidies to create ties with foreign journalists, raising suspicions that CIA spies were using the Guild to infiltrate foreign news organizations. The Guild had further compromised its credibility among journalists by publicly endorsing Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern in 1972.38 Not the least of Johnson's criticisms was that the Guild, which by now counted journalists as a minority of its members, no longer represented the professional goals of those who created


38 Ibid. The Guild also endorsed Democrat Walter Mondale's 1984 presidential campaign.
In addition to those criticisms, many journalists argued that the Guild's emphasis on job security, longevity, the closed shop and strict work rules actually discouraged innovation and enterprise among more dedicated reporters and editors. It was an old argument, but one that had been leveled at the Great Falls Newspaper Guild as well as its international parent. In his interview for this thesis, former Tribune editor and Great Falls Guild president Terry Dwyer complained that the union made it difficult to fire incompetent employees. And Charles E. Hood Jr., a former Tribune reporter and later dean of the University of Montana's School of Journalism, wrote in 1969 that despite the Guild's "commendable role" in improving journalists' pay and working conditions,

it has become a distinct barrier to newspaper improvement. Like some other labor unions, the guild perpetuates a system whereby deadwood and unsatisfactory performance are protected. Moreover, the guild's very existence continues to be a tacit admission that newspapering is not a profession but merely a craft, where mechanical skills are given the remuneration they deserve.39

Whatever the reason for the international's problems, the criticisms and counter-arguments show that the union faces considerable pressures in addition to its ongoing struggle to satisfy the economic needs and wishes of its members. No doubt the Great Falls Newspaper Guild has faced similar pressures in its fight to survive and attract new members. But in assessing

Local 81's weakened status today, it would be a mistake to ignore the significance of the 1974 strike.

When push came to shove, the Guild lost, perhaps forever, its most threatening weapon. Management knew it, the paper's craft unions knew it and, more importantly, Guild members knew it. The internal and external recriminations that followed the strike left the union crippled, divided and vulnerable to an assortment of attacks from which it may never recover. If the Guild someday ceases to exist, its members will no doubt trace its demise to the day when its union allies, along with 15 of its own members, crossed the picket line.
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