Sad, bitter, outrageous

There is but one word to use for the San Francisco press blackout: outrageous. It is outrageous that San Francisco must go, as long as it has and as long as it probably will, without a major daily newspaper.

Perhaps it was inevitable, as our front-page labor analysis argues forcefully; the 1965 merger (approved by President Johnson’s Justice Department under suspicious circumstances never fully explained) . . . the publishers’ plans to maximize profits without much of a trickle-down prospectus for unions . . . the difficulty of bargaining with a management whose profits are safely hidden in private corporations . . . Hearst’s union-smashing policy in Los Angeles . . . the intransigence of the unions in dealing with automation and their failure to put together progressive automation programs as did Harry Bridges for the longshoremen.

The public has a stake in the daily publication of monopoly papers, just as it does in the publication of strong, competitive, daily papers, let it now can’t do much about the former it can.

If the strike continues much longer, and both sides remain bitterly dug in, World War I trenches, there seems to be only one thing to insist upon: that management and the unions be forced to submit to compulsory and binding arbitration in their interest and in the public interest.

The strikers who are torn by doubts

Soldiers forever? It’s not that solid.

Factions split the 3,000 members of 11 unions who own La’s closed down operations of The Chronicle and The Examiner, and of their mechanical component, the San Francisco Newspaper Printing Company.

There are those who strike grudgingly. There is a silent minority.

If the strike drags on for a long strike appears possibly those factions will, inevitably, unite in the surface, like a sour yeast in the batter.

STUBBORN MANAGEMENT
Failure of the very short-sighted and short-sighted officers of the Print-
Nobody cared about better papers

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All would be published by the new company. Editorial work would be separate, but all other functions -- mechanical, operations, advertising, circulation and the like -- would be merged and run by the jointly-owned Printing Company.

San Francisco's long-suffering newspaper readers hardly benefited. The Examiner remained dull, reactionary and Hearstian as it had been in the mornings -- picking up, moreover, the sloppy, slap-dash habits of the default News Call-Bulletin.

The Chronicle retained its position as one of the country's more liberal, sprightly and well-written papers, but still far too short on solid information and investigative reporting.

The Examiner papers had the talent and resources to do much, much better. But they hadn't merged in the interest of better newspapers.

The goal was maximum profits and, with competition wiped out, the unions realized that there was anywhere else to go, as they changed.

The newspaper union didn't show much concern for the readers either -- not even the Newspaper Guild, whose members include the reporters. Theoretically, at least, they worry about things beyond mere bread and butter.

The unions took some perfectly-fortunate and belated steps to stop the merger on anti-trust grounds. But even a prompt announcement of their members would lose jobs after the merger. They were right, and they have been fighting ever since to see that no more jobs are lost, and to get the greatest possible share of the new profits.

The unions were aware that the merger would not be completed until the Printing Company also completed its partial headquarters move to a joint printing facility and remodeling the Chronicle Building at Fifth and Mission Sts. and adding a new annex in the rear.

The San Francisco Chronicle and the Examiner evening edition was printed at the former Chronicle Building until the move. The move was expected to be completed by the end of the year, or almost a year after its old contract expired.

But that first came the Mailers Union, an ITU affiliate whose 150 members handle and otherwise prepare papers for distribution until the pick up press, its contract expired in March, 1967.

If it got what it wanted in a new contract, others would expect the same treatment in 1968.

"If we're a pushover for the Mailers Union," a printing company director explained to negotiators, "the three big ones will think it's pretty easy."

Obviously, it hasn't been easy for the mailers. They negotiated with the new company for almost a year, long after their old contract expired.

But company knew the mailers would not accept, across the picket lines, "they can push all of us around."

The other unions feared, in short, what the Printing Company's plans might hold for them. They didn't know, and still don't know, but they got a good idea from the concept of "management." The concept of "management".

For one thing, they called for reducing the number of mailers almost 25 per cent. Yet they would increase the output of papers to 70,000 an hour on the new press in the headquarters building, from the current output of 40,000 an hour on old Examiner presses and 60,000 an hour on Chronicle presses.

The union, quite naturally, raises the issue of "pushovers" too. "If the newspaper publishers can push some of us around," they argue, "we're handing our profits distributed on the picket lines, "they can push all of us around."

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After the merger

The most basic of the other issues in dispute:

WAGES -- The mailers, now paid $144 for a five-day, 35-hour work week plus $1 for any night shift, are fighting a cut to a four-week, 32-hour week with no pay increase, and to remove the contract provision that a man work at least three hours before he is sent to lunch. It also wants to cut the number of hours of rest required between shifts to a flat eight hours. Mailers now get at least 12 hours on weekdays, nine on Fridays and eight on Saturdays, and are paid at overtime rates if they get less.

PRINCIPAL BENEFITS -- The Union, whose members now get four weeks of paid vacation after seven years, wants to see this cut to two weeks after a year's experience, including a demand by the company that the mailers be allowed to honor only the picket lines of the Typographical Union. Obviously, this would keep the mailers from giving strikes, for the mailers now are getting, and the unions see it as part of a move to destroy their unity.

Whatever the specific issues, the fight clearly boils down to this: A struggle by publishers to reap the greatest return from the merger that ended real newspaper competition in San Francisco and paved the way for new and bigger profits. From their viewpoint, the merger will be a success only if their plans are realized; the merger was meant to institute certain cost-cutting, union-weakening operations.

The unions are fighting, of course. They will not stand by while the publishers take unilateral actions that will weaken them and minimize the share of their hard-earned blessings in the new money.

The stakes are large, how large is known only to those who have seen the publishers' well-guaranteed financial records. Clearly, they are large enough for the publishers to take a strike; and large enough for 5,000 men and women to leave their jobs and, except for a favored few reporters and columnists who can turn to radio and television, attempt to live on strike benefits of no more than $100 a week, for those who get them at all.

Their strike had to come, and it has a chance at Hearst's Los Angeles Herald-Examiner that finally kicked it off. Mailers there would not and, when Newspaper Guild picketers appeared at Angeleno claim at the Chronicle building that day, the decision was made.

The Chronicle and other local newspaper unions decided to honor the Los Angeles Guild's picket lines legally. By that token, "informational" -- to advertise that Hearst had replaced the Los Angeles Guilds and other newspaper unions with non-union strikebreakers and was publishing a paper even though all regular employees had walked off the job in response to a Guild strike. Even though "informational" picket lines cannot legally be honored by collective bargaining, when they are honored by union members, as an act of individual conscience, San Francisco newspaper union members did just this, clearly in line with the informal wishes of their officers, and certainly in line with the wishes of "informational" picketers who stood at entrances all day, roughly threatening anyone who tried to enter the newspaper buildings.

That evening, the inevitable happened. Local newspaper unions knew the out-of-town-pickets would be gone soon, and, rather than send everyone back to work and then call them out later, they moved immediately. They replaced the Los Angeles pickets with pickets from the San Francisco Mailers Union -- pickets who would keep all union members on the building legally.

The other unions joined the picket lines and began a hectic rush to set up joint operations on the ground floor of the Newspaper Guild building behind The Chronicle at 433 Natoma St. A commissary was set up, a publicity operation launched, 5 pickets from 12 unions moved in and out, around-the-clock.

The unions, if they are to win, must have two things: tight unity and support from a public that never had such much reason to love the publishers of its daily papers.

DESPITE CONCODE

Thus, the publishers are attempting to split the unions, and to appeal to a public that, whether it loves them or not, is interested primarily in getting its papers back, whatever the alleged harm to those who put out the papers.

Outwardly, the unions seem to be accomplishing their purposes. Even union officers privately concede surprise at the cooperation among so many particularly among members of often hostile blue-collar craft unions and white-collar Guild members.

Too, food and money is flowing into strike headquarters regularly from outside sources -- hot dogs from the Digger Diner, desserts from the Blue Fox, coffee from arch capitalist Lou Larie who thought worth while to bring his first donation personally and pose for new photographers.

But the publishers are being forced on the defensive. As the strike goes on, the strikers' enthusiasm will lessen; it always does. For now, anyway, the publishers are trying to wear down their employees and push the public's patience to the breaking point.

They have refused to negotiate with the mailers for almost a week now. Meanwhile, they chip away at the unity, suggesting repeatedly to interviewers that none of the unions but the mailers has any grievances with them, and playing up the "alarms" they have raised among their employees.

TRUCKING ON

I[continued on page 3]
After the merger, the Mailers Union is in no hurry to compromise. Neither has changed its basic position, and it isn't even certain when they will sit down and talk together again. Many strikers are convinced the publishers have adopted this position because they have strike insurance that will at least greatly minimize their losses for as long as three months. But no one has been able to prove it. Others feel the strike will not be settled until there is a settlement of what is now an even tidier deadlock at the Horald-Examiner.

Still others bank on Mayor Joseph Alioto to move in and settle it. Like any other would-be mediator, however, Alioto does not want to enter until both sides invite him. He has asked them, but both turned him down, although his presence could use his considerable influence to get them to invite him, but this appears unlikely at the moment.

A very real fear at strike headquarters is that Alioto may be forced to move in, nevertheless, because of strikersbreakers. Alioto would have behind him an untested ordinance that prohibits the hiring of "professionaid stribreakers" — defined as those who have worked two or more times in the past five years for any strike firm anywhere.

The ordinance probably wouldn't be circumvened, but what could not be circumvented would be the violence that stribreakers invariably cause. It erupted in San Francisco just four years ago, prior to the adoption of the ordinance, when the city's print shops brought in non-union replacements for striking PTV members, and union leaders warn it would erupt again.

They have threatened, in fact, to call a general strike if the Printing Company does bring in stribreakers. There's more bark than bite in these threats so far, but the press is not as idle as they might appear — not when the leader making the loudest noise is the chief western representative of the Teamsters' National office, Jack Goldberger, of the Newspaper Drivers.

The strike, too, may drag on long enough to involve the Oakland Tribune and San Jose Mercury-News. The contract that covers the mailers in San Francisco also covers millers at those papers. The union has avoided stricking them, because they usually follow the pattern of any settlement agreed to in San Francisco and because of the obvious problems of extending the strike. But how much longer can the public wait for the daily newspapers which, how-er important, it needs badly?

"As long as it takes to answer this question, and for all," says an official deeply involved in the dispute.

"How tough are the publishers, how tough are the unions?"

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