Lockouts, Protests, and Scabs: A Critical Assessment of the "Los Angeles Herald Examiner" Strike [article]

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Lockouts, Protests, and Scabs: A Critical Assessment of the Los Angeles Herald Examiner Strike

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Abstract
This essay uses the case of the Los Angeles Herald Examiner strike, 1967–1977, to show how a critical labor perspective offers historically grounded, politically informed, and culturally situated analyses of media practices and uses. The decade-long strike analyzed here, which has been virtually ignored by media historians, highlights the devastating economic consequences for both the newspaper and the Guild. This essay focuses on the political and cultural implications of class conflict, read through the power struggle between Los Angeles Newspaper Guild members and the Hearst-owned Herald Examiner over issues of identity, work, and economics.
The *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* Strike, 1967–1977, offers important insights into the impact of institutional power on the development of labor and news work in American journalism. The decade-long strike had devastating economic consequences for both the newspaper and the unions. According to Robert J. Danzig, Hearst Corporation Vice President in the 1980s, although the unions and the newspaper finally reconciled, the strike “crippled labor relations and caused an exodus of advertisers and subscribers” (quoted in Mathews & Farhi, , p. E-3). As a result of the strike, the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* eventually ceased publication and the viability of the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild was severely undermined. Although the “facts” of the labor conflict are well known, this essay addresses issues of identity, work, and economics in the power struggle between Los Angeles Newspaper Guild members and Hearst management. Specifically, this critical cultural study assesses the Guild-based publicity efforts as well as the local and national press coverage of the strike in an effort to understand the political and social implications of this labor struggle. It also attempts to explain publisher George R. Hearst's potential motives for refusing to negotiate with the unions and prolonging a strike that eventually destroyed his newspaper.

Critical communication studies offer historically grounded and politically informed examinations of culturally situated media practices that may expose power relations in the communication process and provide alternative readings of the relationship between media and society (Hardt). Historically based critical cultural analyses go beyond considerations of catastrophe, crisis, domination, and oppression to also consider regenerative processes, oppositional strategies, and challenges to dominant ideological positions. As Raymond Williams () explains, “It's the infinite resilience, even deviousness, with which people have managed to persist in profoundly unfavorable conditions, and the striking diversity of the beliefs in which they've expressed their autonomy” (p. 322). Understanding the political ramifications of history, critical cultural assessments of labor relations consider the “often troubled” (Garnham, , p. 33) relationships between the cultural and economic realms within organizations and professions.

During the past decade critical scholars have urged a more interdisciplinary approach to media studies, linking cultural considerations directly to the political economic realm. The political economy of communication examines relationships between media ownership, advertising, and government policies, particularly as they influence media practices and content (McChesney). Showcasing theoretical connections between cultural studies and political economy, Nicholas Garnham () maintains that because in capitalist societies, “waged labor and commodity exchange constitute people's necessary and unavoidable conditions of existence” (p. 71), these elements must be included in any analysis of cultural practices. While cultural studies theorists remain concerned with the reductionist potential of political economy, Lawrence Grossberg () notes that economic practices may even help to shape the cultural agenda, albeit “always and only in part” (p. 79). Eileen Meehan () suggests that a dialogue between cultural studies and political economy is “essential” to critique the complex “relationships among corporations, audiences, makers, and regulators” (p. 162).

Pointing to Hanno Hardt’s study of news workers, technology, and journalism history as an example, Mosco () finds that recent studies of newsroom labor are one contemporary area of research that attempts to reconcile political economic concerns with critical cultural studies. This essay responds to Meehan's interdisciplinary call by integrating central concerns of political economy into a critical cultural analysis.

This historical study of the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* strike draws on government documents on antitrust and monopoly, as well as hearings regarding the Failing Newspaper Act, which considered joint operating agreements including “price fixing, profit pooling and market allocation” (Barwis, p. 27) for at risk newspapers. It uses strike-related materials from the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild collection at the Los Angeles Urban Archives Center; *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* labor conflict files from the Freedom of Information Center at the Missouri School of Journalism; and two telephone interviews with Charles Dale, an International Representative of the Newspaper Guild who served as co-director of the strike.
Constructing a Collective Identity

The strike began on December 15, 1967 when approximately 1,100 members of the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild, Local 69 walked out of the Los Angeles Herald Examiner. At the time of the labor conflict, the Guild negotiated for all Herald Examiner newsroom, circulation, and business employees (“Guild strike idles,” 1967). Guild members had asked for a $25.20 a week salary increase for reporters, photographers, and copy editors, achieved over a two-year period, to bring them in line with their colleagues on the Los Angeles Times and the Long Beach Independent Press-Telegram. At the time of the strike, full time professional Guild reporters, known as journeymen, with four to five years' experience earned a minimum of $174.50 a week at the Herald Examiner. Comparable wages on the city's non-union morning newspaper, the Los Angeles Times, were $208 a week (“Where do we stand,”). Negotiations had broken down after Herald Examiner management had offered Guild members a $13 weekly increase over a two-year period (Stone).

In support of the Guild, members of the International Association of Machinists, Local 94 also walked out of the Herald Examiner that morning. That afternoon members of the International Typographical Unions, Printers Local 174 and Mailers Local 9 were locked out by management after they refused to do editorial work such as gathering wire copy and running stories from the news office to the back-shop print facilities. Later that day Web Pressmen, Local 18, Stereotypers, Local 58, and Paper Handlers, Local 3 were forced out of the newspaper “under threat of arrest” (“Strike fact sheet,” p. 1). In sympathy, Building Services Employees, Local 399, Teamsters General Warehousemen, Local 598, Photoengravers, Local 262, and News Vendors, Local 75-A stopped working. In total approximately 2,000 union members were affected by the labor conflict.

A few months before the strike began, the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild Bulletin evaluated minimum weekly pay rates for newspaper reporters and photographers in urban newsgathering centers guaranteed in Guild contracts. It found that Guild reporters in Los Angeles received the lowest contract pay. For example, experienced Guild reporters in St. Louis and San Francisco earned at least $200 a week while Herald Examiner and Independent Press-Telegram reporters earned $174.50 each week (“Where do we stand,” ). That fall, the Long Beach Independent Press-Telegram Guild unit successfully negotiated a new contract that would bring reporters' salaries up to $200 a week within two years.

In negotiating sessions held before the strike, Herald Examiner management maintained that it was “economically impossible” to match the salaries and benefits of those recently negotiated at the other Guild newspaper, the Long Beach Independent Press-Telegram. In response, Robert J. Rupert (), Chief Negotiator of the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild, urged Hearst to provide the Guild with evidence that the Herald Examiner was losing money. Hearst management did not respond. In the early weeks of the strike, Hearst negotiators changed their position regarding the salary dispute and said that while the newspaper could afford the new wage proposals, they “did not see fit to do so” (“No heart in Hearst position,” , p. 1).

Throughout the decade-long labor conflict, the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild organized a variety of public relations activities and utilized several publication venues to keep strikers informed and to publicize and promote their views on the progress of the strike. More than 1,400 daily editions of the newsletter On the Line reported on labor activities during the first four years of the Herald Examiner strike. The Los Angeles Newspaper Guild Bulletin regularly covered strike-related issues and events as did the official publication of the Los Angeles County AFL-CIO unions, the Los Angeles Citizen. In addition, significant labor related news and opinion were announced in press releases sent to local, regional, and national media outlets throughout the ten years.

Strike-related promotional activities and news coverage focused on three major intertwined issues: the economic aspects of the strike, the use of professional strikebreakers to crush the unions, and Hearst's refusal to negotiate with labor. Consistent with Douglas Kellner's () suggestion that in modernity group or individual
identity is self-reflexive and changeable, Guild strike strategies may be seen to have also aided in the development of a collective identity as workers.

One economics-based strategy of the Guild was to try to persuade local companies to stop advertising in the Herald Examiner during the labor conflict. Letters were sent to major advertisers and members talked with businesses about canceling their advertising. Rupert () maintained that advertisers held the key to the strike: “They are the lifeline of the newspaper. Without them, Hearst could not further pursue his union-busting campaign.” Urging major advertisers to support the labor boycott, Rupert rejected the use of violence or other illegal actions by union members, yet he warned that the Guild would take every legal action possible to disrupt businesses that failed to support the strike.

More than three years into the strike the Guild continued to encourage businesses not to buy advertising during the strike and consumers not to purchase products from companies that continued to advertise in the Herald Examiner. For example, the January 27, 1970 issue of the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild Bulletin urged workers not to buy Coors, Seagrams, or California grapes because the companies still advertised in the Herald Examiner. In an effort to sway major advertisers' continued support of the newspaper, Guild members picketed Herald Examiner advertisers and held large demonstrations at major local retailers. While many businesses continued to advertise in the Herald Examiner, demonstrations and related activities continued to increase public awareness of the strike and helped to bring Guild members together and re-energize them for the extended strike.

In addition to daily picket lines at the Herald Examiner, Guild crews went door to door, discussing the strike with residents and asking them to cancel their subscriptions to the Herald Examiner during the dispute. This strategy not only hurt the newspaper's circulation but it also further increased community awareness of the issues involved in the strike. Increases in circulation and advertising lineage reductions were regularly reported in pro-Guild publications as evidence of labor's progress in the strike. Hearst's discontinuation of the newspaper bowling tournament and the closing of the Herald Examiner library were showcased as further evidence of the strike's economic damage to the newspaper.

Such strategies had devastating consequences for the Herald Examiner's circulation and revenue figures. Audit Bureau figures for September 30, 1967 ranked the as the largest circulation daily afternoon newspaper in the United States, with a Monday through Friday average of 731,473 (“Guild strike idles,” 1967). Six weeks into the strike, Herald Examiner daily circulation dropped 28 percent to about 450,000. Circulation continued to decrease throughout the strike (“No apparent end seen,”). Advertising revenue declined sharply and Time magazine estimated that after one year the strike had cost the Herald Examiner $15 million in advertising sales revenues alone (“Defeat of the strikers,”).

Charles Dale, an International Representative of the Newspaper Guild, was sent by labor leaders to Los Angeles to work with the other unions on the strike. As co-director of the Herald Examiner strike, Dale focused on making strike related activities as effective as possible. He oversaw the economic aspects of the conflict, made sure that strike benefits were paid and all money was spent wisely, and worked to bring the strike to a positive conclusion. According to Dale, to keep strikers motivated during the lengthy conflict, the Guild held many meetings and organized numerous events for the striking workers, including an annual Thanksgiving food drive. As the strike dragged on Guild members became discouraged. Nonetheless, Dale said, the low pay and old, outdated equipment at the newspaper motivated union members. Most remained determined to negotiate a fair contract (Dale, personal communication, February 21 and 26, 2002).

Appeals for donations to help fund the strike frequently appeared in pro-labor publications. In March 1969, fifteen labor organizations in Southern California pledged $250,000 for a radio, newspaper, and television
advertising campaign to encourage the public to boycott companies who continued to advertise in the *Herald Examiner* (Joint Council of Teamsters). Although unions throughout the country and in Canada helped out financially, by August 1971 the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild had borrowed $100,000 from the AFL-CIO because costs associated with the *Herald Examiner* strike had reached five million dollars.

**Showcasing Scab Labor**

The most strident rhetoric found in Guild strike materials focused on the *Herald Examiner*’s use of professional strikebreakers, also known as scabs. Author Jack London coined the term “scab” in 1903 to describe a professional strikebreaker who readily works in the place of a striking employee and refuses to join or support the actions of labor. London () insisted that “the modern strikebreaker sells his birthright, his country, his wife, children and his fellowmen, for an unfilled promise from his employer, trust or corporation” (p.1). From a labor perspective, the use of professional strikebreakers undermines the collective bargaining process, since when scab labor is used, employers are trying to “bust” the unions, reject contract negotiations, and operate an open shop without union influence. During the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* strike, Hearst used at least 200 professional strikebreakers “imported” from other cities and states. The Guild judged this a betrayal of all working people and condemned it as unethical and amoral. *The Guild Bulletin* and *On the Line* frequently referred to professional strikebreakers as “parasites,” “criminals,” and “mercenaries” with no redeeming value. Specific information on professional strikebreakers working for the *Herald Examiner* was repeatedly included in pro-Guild publications. For example, the January 1968 edition of *Strike Lockout Extra* prominently displayed photographs of strikebreakers and identified them not only by skill areas but also by name, background, criminal record, and past strikebreaking activities.

Twelve days into the strike, AFL-CIO Leader Thomas L. Pitts charged that Hearst’s use of professional strikebreakers was part of a concerted effort to destroy collective bargaining at the *Herald Examiner* and ultimately “crush the unions” (Peevey). An undated editorial cartoon in *The Guild Bulletin* by “Strobel” titled “A Killer on the Loose!” illustrated labor’s concern about “George R. Hearst’s Anti-Union Drive,” with huge feet smashing free collective bargaining in America, and destroying employees’ rights, union shops, decent wages, working conditions, and the gains of labor during the last 30 years.

Strike leaders also maintained that professional strikebreakers were used to destabilize the working class community of Los Angeles (“Dynamics of aggression.”). With nearly 2,000 employees out of work, the economic and social well being of the community was challenged by “transient mercenaries” who collected excessive wages and then moved on without contributing anything to the community. Labor leaders maintained that professional strikebreakers’ lack of respect for union work generally escalated into a total lack of respect for the community as a whole (“Community is loser,” p. 4).

Executive Secretary of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor Sigmund Arywitz (1968a) maintained that Hearst management had been preparing for a strike for at least one month before it began. Newsprint, cots, and food were stockpiled at the plant, a chain link wire fence was installed around part of the building, and arrangements were made with the Western Newspaper Industrial Relations Bureau, a company that specialized in providing newspapers with non-union labor, to hire professional strikebreakers. Three weeks into the strike, Hearst negotiators announced that professional strikebreakers hired at the beginning of the strike would become permanent employees and would have “super-seniority” over striking workers regardless of any final agreement reached. Finding Hearst’s actions “wholly unacceptable, immoral and a deterrent to peace” (“Labor calls Hearst boycott,” p. A-3), Arywitz () insisted that such decisions made negotiations impossible. He said that until the *Herald Examiner* dismissed all professional strikebreakers and began negotiating with the unions, they must be considered the enemy of labor. In response to Hearst’s actions, 2,000 union members participated in an anti-strikebreaker march from the *Herald Examiner* to Los Angeles City Hall (“Labor socks Hearst,”). The Los
Angeles County Federation of Labor called for a nationwide boycott of all Hearst enterprises. People were urged not to purchase any Hearst newspapers, magazines, or Avon Pocket Books and to cancel subscriptions to Hearst publications.

Hearst's unwillingness to negotiate continued throughout the strike. Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty, members of the Los Angeles City Council, and ten prominent Jewish and Protestant clergy urged Hearst to negotiate with the unions; however, he refused (“Strike fact sheet,”). Eight months into the strike-lockout, Guild negotiators said they were willing to work with any arbitrator chosen by the Herald Examiner. Hearst management replied:

We will not turn the management of this paper over to an outsider. We are not going to give any outsider the authority to make decisions regarding the operation of this paper. We will not agree to arbitrate any of the outstanding issues we have in dispute with the Guild. (Rupert & Dale, August 28, p. 1)

Nearly four years into the strike, the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild and the other unions involved in the Herald Examiner strike-lockout volunteered to comply with President Richard Nixon's call for a three-month end to all labor conflicts. In exchange for ending the strike, union members asked Hearst to end his lockout and immediately rehire all union members who were still available to work. Hearst refused to agree with their terms (Abraham). Although Hearst's unwillingness to deal with the unions frustrated negotiators, it reinforced the union's zeal for gaining an equitable contract and helped to keep strikers motivated as to the righteousness of their cause, again reinforcing a collective identity among Guild members as part of the labor movement.

Press Coverage of the Strike

Over the ten years, an extensive amount of pro-Guild strike information and publicity was produced. However, Dale explained that the anti-labor sentiment in Los Angeles made getting other newspapers interested in covering the Herald Examiner strike difficult (Dale, personal communication, February 21 and 26, 2002). Dale's comments regarding an anti-labor environment are supported by research into the American labor movement during the twentieth century. Robert McChesney () finds that in mainstream media labor coverage is limited to stories about the negative or violent aspects of strikes. “If one read only the commercial media, it would be difficult to determine what on earth good was served by having labor unions at all” (p. 298). As early as the 1940s and 1950s “unionists charged that it was impossible to find unbiased coverage of labor issues in the daily press” (Fones-Wolf & Fones-Wolf, p. 48). An assessment of more than 50 articles on the Los Angeles Herald Examiner strike published in local and national newspapers, collected in the Los Angeles Urban Archives and the Freedom of Information Center, also supports Dale's charges. From the 1950s through the 1990s the Missouri Freedom of Information Center clipped all newspaper articles available on freedom of expression, including the Los Angeles Herald Examiner strike. A pro-labor perspective is virtually absent from the reportage of the Herald Examiner strike. Consistent with McChesney, the strike coverage in local and national newspapers, Time newsmagazine, and the trade publication Editor and Publisher, focused on the violence of the strike and the damage the unions were inflicting on the newspaper.

In most cases a pro-management perspective was framed through word choice and an emphasis on negative consequences of the strike for Hearst management. Headlines such as “Mob invades Walnut Creek, attacks Times” (), “Strike violence at L.A. paper” (1968), and “Herald strike throng pays city hall visit” (Bernstein) illustrate how the strikers’ actions were cast in a negative light. The coverage frequently compared the strikers to an unruly mob. For example, supporters of the strike were referred to as a “massive throng” of demonstrators who “demanded” an audience with the Mayor (Bernstein, p. 1). When labor picketed other Hearst properties the Los Angeles Times reported that picketers were participating in an “illegal secondary boycott” (Bernstein, , p. 1). In contrast, Hearst was portrayed as a courageous individual battling with the evil unions. Time magazine maintained that the grandson of William Randolph displayed “determination rarely
displayed these days by a publisher confronted with a strike” (“Frustrating the unions,” p. 72). The Wall Street Journal showcased Hearst's ability to keep publishing the newspaper during the strike and several newspaper articles lauded Hearst for working in the newsroom and pressroom, answering the phone and even composing type. “Powerful” support from the non-union Los Angeles Times and Mayor Yorty was showcased to illustrate the righteousness of Hearst's stance. Yorty was quoted as saying, “I think the unions should get wise to themselves. They're putting the newspapers out of business” (“Defeat of the strikers,” p. 48). Financial costs associated with the strike were used to reinforce the need to fight the unions; no articles mentioned the circulation and advertising losses to illustrate public support of strikers.

The consequences of professional strikebreakers were downplayed in most of the coverage. The term “professional strikebreaker” was rarely used; instead scabs were referred to as “non-union personnel.” To de-emphasize the use of professional strikebreakers, reporters explained how Hearst managers worked in the newsroom to augment the use of wire-service copy and syndicated columns from other Hearst writers. Time magazine reported that during the strike jurisdictional disputes ceased, because non-union labor and management worked together wherever they were needed. The article noted approvingly that “even reporters are called on to run copy and dirty their hands in the backshop” (“Frustrating the unions,” p. 72).

Violence was a significant aspect of the strike coverage in the press. During the strike Hearst management was quick to define any issues or problems as violent pro-labor actions. The Herald Examiner distributed flyers and ran display advertisements offering a reward for evidence resulting in the arrest and conviction “of any person, or persons, damaging the property of any Herald-Examiner advertiser through strike-related criminal activity” (“Hearst reward,”).

Newspapers showcased Hearst's accusations in strike-related coverage, even when the charges were unfounded. Ten days after the strike began the Los Angeles Times reported that the Herald Examiner was offering a $5,000 reward for information on shots fired at a newspaper delivery truck. The Times quoted Herald management as saying that since the strike began there had been repeated incidents and threats of violence against newspaper dealers and carrier boys and sabotage at the newspaper's offices. While the front-page article focused on strike-related violence, it mentioned that the Los Angeles County Sheriff's office had found no bullet holes or other evidence to indicate a shooting (Reich). Also within days of the strike's onset, Editor and Publisher reported that union members had sabotaged the Herald Examiner. Hearst management had charged that glue was poured onto the newsprint conveyor belts, ink tanks were emptied onto the pressroom floor, and composing room type and materials were destroyed (“Guild strike idles,” 1967). Similarly, Time magazine described the “cold blooded murder” of a non-union printer as the worst of some 150 strike-related violent actions. While the newsmagazine admitted that police had not tied the crime to the unions, the article showcased Herald Examiner opinion that blamed the shooting on the strikers (“Frustrating the unions,” p. 72). Ultimately, no charges were ever filed against any union members connected with the Herald Examiner strike.

Lack of evidence was also apparent in the Des Moines Register report that a January 1968 pro-labor demonstration “erupted into violence” when windows were broken with rocks and sticks. The newspaper article added that a television cameraman was “attacked” but sustained no injury. Missing from the news story was any estimation of the numbers of protestors, the extent of the violence, or the cost of the damage. Nor did the article include any sources to support the accusations (“Strike violence at L.A. paper,” p. 1). No follow-up coverage of the demonstration was found in the archived articles.

Reporters connected other arguably unconnected newspaper industry violence to the Los Angeles Herald Examiner strike. For example, when a large group of men damaged machinery at the Walnut Creek printing plant used to publish the Contra Costa Times and the Concord Transcript, news reports blamed union
sympathizers for the damage. Although no evidence was included to support such an accusation, articles quoted owner/publisher Dean Lesher as saying that he did not know why union sympathizers harmed his plant because his newspapers had “no connection” with strike. Lesher noted that the Herald Examiner had hired some of his employees, but he maintained that the workers left “without consent” (“Printing shop wrecked,” p. 8).

While much of the coverage included some mention of the union perspective, if only to counter Hearst’s charges, some Editor and Publisher articles were openly and blatantly anti-labor. For example, an E & P article published one month after the strike began emphasized the efforts of labor to try to close down Hearst’s newspapers. Calling picket lines at the Los Angeles Herald Examiner and at Hearst-owned newspaper the San Francisco Examiner “strong-arm” techniques that “turn collective bargaining into a farce” (Brown, , p. 64), E & P urged Guild members to be reasonable and equitable. No mention whatsoever of the Guild's position appeared in the E & P article. Hearst's use of professional strikebreakers and his unwillingness to participate in collective bargaining were omitted from the coverage as were wage inequities.

Overall, the U.S. press showcased a pro-management perspective on the strike, dismissing union charges and accusations as insignificant. None of the news articles presented both sides of the labor conflict fairly, much less showcased a pro-labor position. Even labor's charge that Hearst would not negotiate was downplayed and challenged as merely a “claim” by union members (“Frustrating the unions, , p. 72). None of the articles archived at Missouri questioned Hearst's determination that union members were responsible for all strike-related violence. No articles considered the possibility that police and/or professional strikebreakers might be involved in some of the violence. In fact, Dale said that he met often with the Los Angeles Police Department to complain about brutality on the picket lines, but he found police were clearly pro-management (Dale, personal communication, February 21 and 26, 2002). In at least one case, a police officer framed a strike leader for destroying newspaper delivery boxes and threw him in jail for ten days. Dale noted that the professional strikebreakers often assaulted the strikers. The strikebreakers walked through the picket lines with long neck soda bottles and hit the picketers with them. They also injured strikers with filed down printing tools.

Hearst's Unwillingness to Negotiate

Why did George Hearst refuse to negotiate with the unions and allow the strike eventually to destroy his newspaper? A definitive answer is impossible, given that Hearst himself has remained mute on this topic. He never commented publicly on the strike and repeated requests for an interview have been denied. No Herald Examiner archive exists. As California Business reporter Dan Goodgame () suggested, as a private corporation, “the Hearsts don’t have to tell anybody anything about their business, and generally they don't” (p. 46). The Hearst corporate web site offers a brief history of the corporation and a timeline that begins on March 4, 1887 when William Randolph Hearst became proprietor of the San Francisco Examiner. Although the vast majority of acquisitions are included here, the site never mentions the Los Angeles Herald Examiner (or any other Hearst-owned Los Angeles papers), although at one time it was the largest circulation afternoon newspaper in the United States.

While the Hearst corporation may have erased the Herald Examiner from its history, some strong evidence remains that provides clues as to Hearst’s motivation for his actions during the strike. Early in his career William Randolph Hearst was not actively opposed to the labor movement. Ironically, the Los Angeles Examiner began publication in 1903 after labor activists encouraged Hearst to start a union newspaper in Los Angeles to compete with the non-union Los Angeles Times (North). Hearst agreed and in November 1903 the Los Angeles Herald Examiner began publication.

Initially, Hearst seemed to respect the role of labor and he negotiated equitable contracts with craft and trade unions. However, Hearst was actively opposed to the American Newspaper Guild from its inception in 1933.
Envisioning reporters as romantic figures, Hearst felt that the Guild would undermine editorial policies and could ultimately compromise the integrity of journalism (Lee). He ordered his editors and publishers actively to oppose the Guild. Newsroom employees were warned not to join the Guild; those who disobeyed were reprimanded and even fired (Carlisle). In 1934, the firing of the respected San Francisco Examiner editorial writer Louis Burgess for union activities exemplified Hearst's anti-Guild policy. During the development of the American Newspaper Guild, Hearst refused to negotiate with any of the local Guilds; when the Milwaukee News went on strike, Hearst vowed to spend as much money as necessary to defeat the Guild. After a tentative agreement had been reached between editorial workers and the newspaper, H. L. Bitner, General Manager of Hearst newspapers, informed Milwaukee Guild members, “The Hearst management will not enter into any agreement written or verbal that recognizes the Guild” (quoted in Leab, p. 250). For Heywood Broun (), the American Newspaper Guild's first president, Hearst's strident non-recognition of the Guild became a unifying force among editorial workers. Initially the Guild was organized as a semi-professional organization that worked with publishers to represent the economic and professional needs of editorial workers. As publisher resistance and non-recognition escalated, the Guild became a union committed to collective bargaining.2

George Hearst's actions during the Herald Examiner strike solidified an anti-Guild bias first established by his grandfather William Randolph Hearst. During the twentieth century the Los Angeles Newspaper Guild and Hearst management had maintained a contentious relationship. Strikes occurred in the late 1930s and again in 1946. The Guild held a one-day strike in November 1965 after a contract deadline passed without resolution. Apparently shocked by the strike, George Hearst settled with the Guild within hours but “vowed that he would oust the unions” (“History of the Herald Examiner strike,” n.d.). The November 1965 strike is generally considered the precursor of the 1967–1977 Herald Examiner strike. Dale suspects that Hearst wanted to destroy the unions as a way to keep the Herald Examiner economically competitive with the non-union Los Angeles Times (Dale, personal communication, February 21 and 26, 2002). While this is an interesting explanation, it does not fully explain Hearst's actions because at that time employees at the Times were paid considerably higher wages than workers on the Herald Examiner. Although the problems between the Hearst organization and the Guild were at least in part historically situated, Hearst's actions probably were also a conscious effort to weaken the Guild specifically because it represented the most vocal opposition to the development of monopolistic practices in the newspaper business. Over the years, the American Newspaper Guild repeatedly questioned the growth of newspaper chain ownership, single newspaper communities, and local media monopolies. Concerned with the influence of newspaper concentration on the overall economic well-being of communities, the Guild asserted that newspaper trends toward monopolization eliminated the diversity of information, opinion, and news sources that were essential to a democratic society (The Failing Newspaper Act).

Media Conglomeration and Monopolization

By the 1960s, single ownership or combination newspaper monopolies existed in most U.S. cities (Arywitz). In 1955 chains controlled about 28 percent of the daily newspapers in the U.S.; ten years later they controlled 43 percent of daily newspapers (Failing Newspaper Act, ). In 1962 only 55 U.S. cities still had competing daily newspapers, whereas 552 cities had competing daily newspapers in 1920. According to William Randolph Hearst, Jr., “when monopoly is substituted for two formerly competitive papers, the profit is two and a half times the total profit under independent operation of the two papers” (“Growth of monopoly and concentrated ownership,” , p. 1291).

Interestingly, the creation of the Herald Examiner was the result of a combination newspaper monopoly in Los Angeles. Until January 1962, four newspapers operated in Los Angeles. The Hearst-owned Herald and the Chandler-owned Times were morning papers. Hearst's Herald-Express and Chandler's Mirror were afternoon newspapers. Cross-ownership agreements arranged in 1962 between Hearst and Chandler consolidated
the Examiner and the Herald-Express and discontinued the Mirror. These actions resulted in one morning newspaper, the Los Angeles Times, and one afternoon paper, the Los Angeles Herald Examiner.

During House of Representatives hearings on news media concentration of ownership, Hearst General Manager G.O. Markuson said that the Hearst and Chandler actions in Los Angeles were undertaken because the Los Angeles area “could not profitably support four metropolitan papers” (Failing Newspaper Act, p. 212). Markuson maintained that some of the newspapers were consolidated because they were losing money. Yet in hearings before the judiciary subcommittee of antitrust and monopoly, Executive Secretary of the New York Newspaper Guild Thomas Murphy attributed the Los Angeles situation to corporations creating a monopoly rather than encouraging the “free flow of news as a competitive press” (Failing Newspaper Act, , p. 2677). Murphy noted that the Los Angeles newspapers had been profitable before the consolidations. Doubting the claim that newspapers were losing money, he said that for many years the Los Angeles papers had been profitable but that profits had been drained off to subsidize other corporate ventures. Further doubt about Hearst’s consolidations came from Samuel Shulman of the General Accounting Office. In 1963, Shulman testified to a House antitrust subcommittee on newspaper business practices and ownership trends that “more realistic bookkeeping” would have changed Hearst’s claimed $2,037,000 five-year loss on the Los Angeles Examiner into a $6,124,000 profit (Failing Newspaper Act, , p. 209).

In a concerted effort to halt the newspaper industry’s trend toward monopolization, in 1959 the Guild asked the Justice Department to investigate possible antitrust violations in a rumored newspaper merger between Scripps-Howard and Hearst in New York City. In the previous eighteen months Hearst and Scripps-Howard newspapers in San Francisco had merged and Scripps-Howard’s United Press had acquired Hearst’s International News Service. The Guild noted that before each of these business transactions, the newspapers had publicly denied plans for any merger. This time the Guild wanted the Justice Department to consider potential antitrust violations before a merger was completed. In response, Hearst sued the American Newspaper Guild for spreading unfounded rumors regarding a new Hearst and Scripps-Howard merger. William J. Farson, Executive Vice President of the Guild, said that the purpose of Hearst’s lawsuit was to divert public attention from the Justice Department’s recent scrutiny of business transactions between Hearst and Scripps-Howard (“Comment on Hearst suit”, ). The suit was eventually dropped but not before the Guild spent thousands of dollars in legal costs. However, the Guild’s call for an antitrust inquiry was successful in the short run in that it forestalled new mergers between Hearst and Scripps-Howard.

The American Newspaper Guild was also a vocal opponent of the Failing Newspaper Act because it would accelerate the trend toward monopolization and chain ownership of newspapers. The Failing Newspaper Act was originally designed to maintain the diversity of editorial voices in a community when at least one newspaper was in serious financial straits and no prospective buyer could be found. Under the Act, newspapers established joint operating arrangements that allowed them to “reduce costs by combining the economic and business aspects of their papers' production, while at the same time maintaining separate editorial and reportorial staff” (Barwis, , p. 28). Under the Act, jointly operating newspapers may fix joint advertising rates and pool their profits—actions that the Sherman and Clayton Antitrust Acts otherwise expressly prohibited.

At its board meetings and national conventions the Guild repeatedly raised opposition to the Failing Newspaper Act. State and national officers also testified during Senate and House of Representatives hearings. During Congressional hearings Thomas Murphy, Executive Secretary of the New York Newspaper Guild, maintained that the proposed bill violated current antitrust laws and infringed on freedom of the press. Murphy said that, if passed, the Failing Newspaper Act:

would encourage greater monopoly, not only by giving existing publishers greater freedom to make agreements for producing newspapers more cheaply through common production and distribution facilities, but most
importantly by giving the blessings of law to unregulated price and rate fixing and profit-pooling arrangements that make it financially impossible for a potential new competitor to even consider attempting to enter a market. (Failing Newspaper Act, , p. 2674)

While other individuals and organizations also testified against the Failing Newspaper Act, most of the commentary against the bill came from Guild members. In contrast, newspaper owners and publishers lobbied Congressional members for the Act and testified that the Act would maintain a diversity of voices and actually prevent newspaper monopolies. After extended hearings, and a series of legislative compromises, including a more optimistic sounding name, the Newspaper Preservation Act became law on July 24, 1970. Just as the Guild had warned, a retrospective assessment of the Newspaper Preservation Act (Barwis, ) found that joint operating agreements had saved no newspapers from failure; instead it had increased the profits of successful newspapers and encouraged monopolistic business practices that inhibited freedom of the press.

The Guild's vocal opposition to chain ownership and monopolization and the Justice Department's repeated investigations into antitrust violations directly targeted Hearst. Each time Guild members testified before Congress, they offered examples from the Hearst Corporation to support their concerns regarding monopolization and chain ownership. With the lure of huge financial gains tempting Hearst, he may have decided that his economic plans for the corporation depended on destroying union viability. Certainly, the issue of monopolization at least partially influenced Hearst's decisions in the Herald Examiner strike.

A Story of Failure

A critical assessment of the Los Angeles Herald Examiner strike showcases strategies of opposition, challenge, and resistance to the dominant ideological power structure. It illustrates the formation of a collective identity as well as the power struggles between the unions and Hearst. However, the Herald Examiner strike is also a story of failure. Throughout the decade-long strike, Herald Examiner advertising revenue and circulation dwindled. In the decade after the strike, the newspaper was unable to rebuild its circulation and advertising base. In 1989 when the Hearst Corporation attempted to find a buyer for the newspaper, its circulation had fallen to 242,000. Unable to sell the newspaper, the Herald Examiner ceased publication on November 2, 1989. Meanwhile, the viability of the Newspaper Guild and the other unions involved in the labor conflict was severely undermined, because they were unable to negotiate a settlement. In 1976 a series of elections decertified all of the original unions involved in the strike and created a new union, the International Printing and Graphic Communications Union, which immediately began negotiations with Hearst. Interestingly, the new union included striking workers who had not found other jobs and non-union employees who currently worked for the newspaper. Eight months later, in March 1977, the International Printing and Graphic Communications Union successfully negotiated a new three-year contract for Los Angeles Herald Examiner employees (“Union pact,”).

Although the Guild ultimately failed to bring the strike to a positive outcome it does not diminish the years of effort and the resilience of its campaign to raise wages for reporters on the Herald Examiner in line with other Southern California newspapers. During the decade-long strike Guild members used a variety of promotional strategies to showcase their struggle. Their sustained efforts informed the public about the labor conflict and helped to influence adversely the Herald Examiner's circulation numbers and advertising revenue. Although the vast majority of the local and national newspaper coverage was pro-management this stance had more to do with the newspapers' anti-labor ideological position rather than any failing of the Guild to make its views heard. Certainly Editor & Publisher's coverage of the strike reinforced an anti-Guild position among editors and publishers that began in the 1930s when the American Newspaper Guild first turned to collective bargaining (Brennen,).
Hearst refused to negotiate with labor despite sustained pressure from community leaders and the public to settle the strike. The continued losses of revenue and circulation were offset by his intention to destroy union involvement at the Los Angeles Herald Examiner. The same strategy used by Hearst and other corporations to hide profits from individual newspapers, by funneling income from one company within the corporation to another, was used to sustain the Herald Examiner during the decade-long strike. The assets of Hearst's multi-million dollar media empire allowed the newspaper's continued losses to be diffused throughout the corporation, Hearst was thereby able to hold out for ten years until the existing unions had been decertified and rendered powerless. Hearst's refusal to negotiate with labor was repeated by other media conglomerates. Today union influence is at an all time low in the newspaper industry.

As Hardt () suggests, the “anti-labor attitudes of media owners may offer explanations for the contemporary status and working habits of news workers, the production of content matter, and the understanding of audiences as consumers” (p. 90). At the time of the Herald Examiner strike, while many newspapers were anti-labor, they also covered labor issues as a regular beat. Some newspapers, such as the Los Angeles Times, employed a labor editor. Today, even on daily urban newspapers, labor is no longer a regular area of coverage. McChesney describes labor reporting as “nearly extinct” (p. 88). Linking the lack of labor coverage directly to the decline of the labor movement, McChesney notes, “People still work, poverty among workers is growing, workplace conflicts are as important as ever, but labor issues are no longer considered newsworthy because organized labor is no longer powerful” (p. 76). Current labor coverage is routinely ahistorical, fragmented, and superficial because it lacks background or understanding of the role of labor.

The relationship between the strike and the Guild's active and sustained opposition to monopolization also provides insights for future research into conglomeration and consolidation, central concerns of political economy. In the twenty-first century, the structure and control of media conglomerates are central concerns of a global market economy. Ben Bagdikian notes that as of 2003, five media corporations—Time Warner, Walt Disney Company, Murdoch's News Corporation, Viacom, and Bertelsmann—dominate mass communication in the United States. Linking media conglomeration to an increasingly limited flow of diverse information as well as to changes in public policy and political power, Bagdikian (2004) suggests that political leaders now “treat the country's most powerful media corporations with something approaching reverence” (p. 29). Yet, for many policy makers, media monopolization is a new issue, because they do not understand that media consolidation has been a concern throughout the twentieth century (Sterling, ). At a time when the FCC is working to relax media ownership rules even further, understanding the efforts of the Newspaper Guild to alert Congress about the problems of monopolization might aid critics and researchers trying to counter questionable FCC processes.

Notes
[1] This author made numerous attempts by letter, email, and telephone to contact George Hearst or any Hearst managers willing to comment on the Herald Examiner strike. To date, no one connected with the Hearst organization has been willing to comment.

[2] For further discussion of the development of a union perspective in the American Newspaper Guild, see Brennen ()

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