

One big union at the *Herald-Examiner*

Photo by Sherry Rayn Barnett

By Bob Gottlieb

Los Angeles. In December 1967, 13 different craft unions walked off their jobs or were locked out of the Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner*. The issue was wages. The newspaper Guild wanted parity with other union shops in the area, but the *Herald's* publisher, George Hearst Jr., refused to come even close to the union's offer. Hearst looked forward to a strike in order to try to rid himself of the unions and gain absolute dominance over his property. He secured the services of professional strikebreakers, installed a new security system, set up a new printing operation in the L.A. suburbs and warned his executives that a protracted battle was in the works.

It was a bitter and bruising strike. The Central Labor Council threw its support behind the strikers. The Hearst corporation supported and subsidized George Hearst's resistance (*Time* magazine estimated strike losses of \$150 million in the first year). Sympathy towards newspaper unions was at an all time low in the 1960s and Hearst capitalized on favorable sentiment in the Los Angeles business community. By 1969 Hearst had effectively broken the strike, though the picketing continued and the AFL-CIO placed the *Herald* on its unfair list. The newspaper unions in Los Angeles had been completely routed.

►Cutting costs.

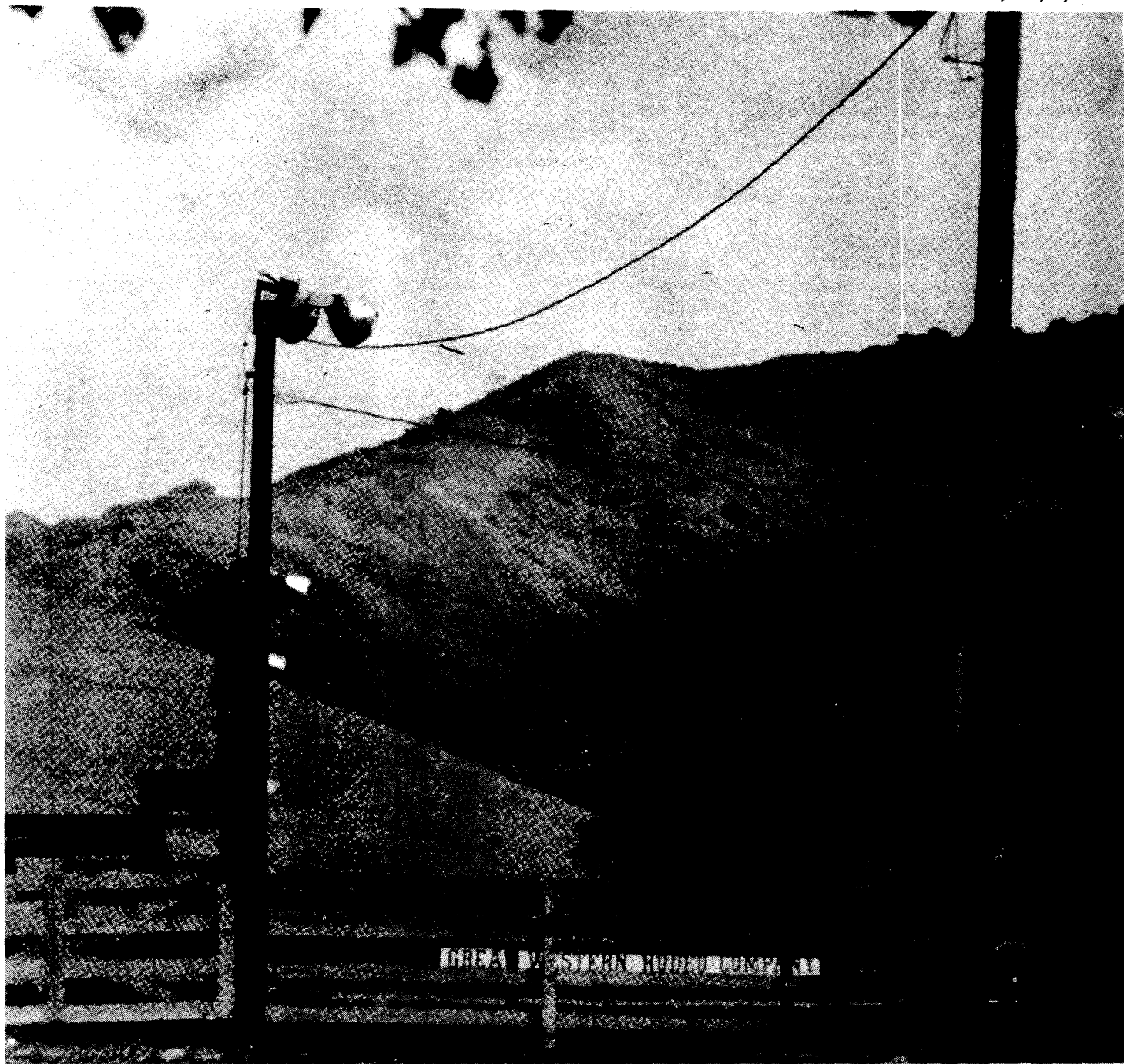
With the *Herald* completely in his control, Hearst proceeded to let the paper disintegrate. He and his general manager George Sjostrom ruthlessly cut costs. They pared the paper's staff from 2,000 to 700, kept wages frozen (starting salary for a reporter in January 1977 was \$128/week and the highest possible salary was \$234/week), trimmed every department in the process. Circulation dropped from 725,000 in 1967 to below 350,000 (and continues to fall), advertising lineage fell to one-third its 1967 levels and, most importantly, the editorial quality of the paper declined from a typically bad Hearst daily to one on every journalist's worst ten list.

The paper made no pretense of trying to adequately cover the news. Its ad jingle boasted that the *Herald* was for those "who didn't have all day to read a paper." Controversial subjects were taboo, and editors told their reporters to lay off anything that related back to George Hearst—unless it was one of the frequent puff pieces assigned by the city desk or the feature editors. The managing editor not only accepted expense-paid junkets from the South African, Taiwan, and South Korean governments, but then proceeded to write glowingly about how those dictatorships maintained order and "helped" their people.

By the early '70s, most of the "scabs"—those that had crossed the picket lines during the strike in 1967 and 1968—had either left the paper or been fired. The paper had a yearly turnover rate of 30 percent—over 300 percent since the strike had begun. The new staff was younger and included many women and minorities. They had come to the *Herald* with little awareness of the strike. Desperate for a job in the post-Watergate journalism crush, many younger writers were thankful for a job at any big city daily.

►A time clock for reporters.

They soon found out just how bad the *Herald* really was. Reporters punch in and out on a time clock and are docked if they're ten minutes late. Staff-initiated story ideas are scotched by the city desk, and any kind of initiative is frowned upon. "It feels like Hearst and Sjostrom are deliberately attempting to demoralize us," one of the staffers complained, and the sentiment is widely shared. "It seems they actually dislike journalists," another reporter said of her bosses. One reporter, assigned to do a story on Howard Hughes and his "Spruce Goose" airplane, attempted to locate clips on the "Spruce Goose" in the paper's morgue, but spent hours unable to find the appropriate cate-



George Hearst Jr. and two associates at the *Herald-Examiner* set up their own company and then contracted services with the paper. They used the profits from these inside dealings to buy this ranch.

gory in the library's oblique set up. She finally located the clips in a box marked "Animals."

While the paper declined, Hearst, Sjostrom, and Hearst's lawyer Philip Battaglia (a one-time Reagan aide) set up their own company (with the three men as sole stockholders) and conducted a series of profitable deals with the *Herald-Examiner*. IN THESE TIMES has learned that the Hearst trio's company contracted with the *Herald* to provide "services" including guard service, contracting and repair work, transportation, office supplies, uniform sales and accounting and research work. The trio's private company has used the profits from the *Herald* contracts to help purchase a multi-million dollar ranch in Ventura County, northeast of Los Angeles for Hearst, Sjostrom, and Battaglia. It appeared to be a case of "insider dealing": milking one company for the benefit of another.

►The new union.

Into this situation stepped a new union. In the fall of 1974, several truckdrivers, all of whom had been hired well after the '67 strike, decided to organize a union for the drivers. They contacted the Teamsters Union, which reluctantly offered token support. But the drivers soon learned from the NLRB that in order to organize themselves they first had to decertify the Newspaper Guild (which was still officially on strike) and then had to win an election that included not just the drivers, but editorial workers and classified ad people who had been part of the old Guild unit. At this point the Teamsters pulled out, and the *Herald* drivers created their own independent union, which they called "Employees for Better Working Conditions."

Word spread around the *Herald* like wildfire. Pressmen, stereotypers, the mailroom workers, photographers, the advertising department, and even reporters contacted the drivers and expressed interest. A new logic emerged from the situation: if the drivers have to organize a

unit that also includes editorial workers and classified ad people, then why not organize a unit that includes the stereotypers, the secretaries, the janitors, the printers; in fact, why not organize everybody. Why not one big union?

While the drivers explored their options, they were contacted by William Torrance, International Vice President of the International Printing and Graphics Communications Union (IPGCU) who was in charge of newspaper organizing. Though the IPGCU (formerly known as the Printing Pressmen, the group that had just recently struck the *Washington Post*) was a classical craft union, Torrance had come to the conclusion that only industrial organizing made sense in the newspaper business. No one had tried to organize a centralized plant-wide bargaining unit; one where the blue collar production workers could join together with the white collar advertising people and the "professional" editorial writers in the same organization.

►Workers still officially "scabs."

The obstacles were enormous: besides the traditional "class" hostilities between blue and white collar, *Herald* employees were also ostensible "scabs," and no newspaper union had ever regained its position at a shop that had been previously struck and where the strike had been lost. But few *Herald* employees really considered themselves strikebreakers any more than fellow workers at the *Los Angeles Times* considered themselves scabs (the *Times*, which is also on the AFL-CIO's "unfair" list, has "officially" been on strike since 1890). The conditions at the *Herald* also made a big difference: "professional" reporters lose some of their class bias when they punch clocks and work in the debilitating circumstances that prevailed at the paper.

Torrance linked up with the *Herald* drivers and helped obtain the Central Labor Council's blessing for the organizing drive. The Guild and 12 other craft unions officially withdrew from the

paper, thus ending the 1967 strike and preparing the way for the new union to bypass any decertification effort. The Employees for Better Working Conditions, now affiliated with the IPGCU due to Torrance's help and support, conducted an exciting campaign. It brought down Cesar Chavez to talk to the Chicano workers at the paper, and made a special attempt to appeal to each of its diverse constituencies. Elections at the plant began in early 1976 and in each vote the new union won by an overwhelming margin. The last vote was held in September '76 and the *Herald-Examiner* workers had elected for themselves a single plant-wide bargaining agent.

Negotiations for a contract began in the fall. The union greatly scaled down its initial proposals, including a 35 percent wage hike, to an 8 percent wage increase and other benefits. But Hearst and Sjostrom have held back from an agreement, confident that *Herald* employees, particularly the editorial workers, would be reluctant to strike. Fears of the 1967 failure and high unemployment ("If we strike," one editorial worker complained, "there'd be lines several blocks long of people wanting to take our jobs") and lingering "professional" elitism amongst some editorial writers (particularly sports and entertainment) have hampered the union's bargaining position.

However, pressures on Hearst have begun to mount. Australian magnate Rupert Murdoch has already made an offer to buy the *Herald* and remains interested.

The adverse publicity concerning the "insider dealing" of Hearst and his two associates also might, according to several sources, force Hearst to conclude negotiations. A new, possibly more devastating strike is another possibility. Whatever the outcome, the new union drive at the *Herald-Examiner* is a portent of things to come if unions are to survive in the newspaper industry.

Bob Gottlieb lives in Los Angeles and is the co-author (with Irene Wolf) of a forthcoming history of the Los Angeles Times (Putnam).

Red Squad files: like a soap opera

By David Moberg
Staff Writer

"Ann Green reported that at one time there were 43 people living in the commune. Her bedroom is the front room in the basement and access is by a ladder in the bottom of the closet in the commune office. Tom Brown tore out the kitchen on the 2nd floor and made it into a bedroom for himself. The building has the worst case of roaches I have ever seen. There were literally hundreds crawling on the wall of the bathroom and kitchen.

"Roaches are one of the reasons Ann wants to move out of the commune. She thinks she may be pregnant by Tom Brown but still wants to move out; they will get married some other time. She would like one of the collective's women to move out with her. Ann blamed the roaches on Rick of Men Fighting Sexism who lives in the commune. Ann reported that Fred and Liz would not attend tonight's meeting because they were away on a religious retreat.

"Sally told Ann that Tom wants her to know that the Iranian students have a strong group at the community college and would like to work together with a NUC chapter. This led to a discussion of the chauvinistic attitudes of Arabs and their sexual habits. The chapter then discussed their current project, a pamphlet to be called 'The Politics of Fucking.' The group decided that the book they are writing will be more or less restricted to fucking in the movement. They decided that they had to deal with the problem of 'at what point does liberation become something that a man holds over a woman—if you are truly liberated, you'll do it.' Rachel said that the book must point out that liberation is the freedom not to fuck also."

►A Red Squad file.

Part of a bad novel about sixties counter-culture life? Excerpt from a letter to friends or family by an observant leftist communist? No, the passage—with names changed—is part of the file compiled by the Chicago "Red Squad" on the New University Conference, a socialist group of university faculty and undergraduate students active from 1969 to 1972.

What, you may ask, was such personal material—followed in this case by a discussion of tensions in the organization resulting from affairs of the national leader and complaints that one regional organizer was recruiting women by sleeping with them—doing in a police file? That is also being asked by the Alliance to End Repression, the ACLU and other groups now suing the Chicago police department. (See IN THESE TIMES, Feb. 2) As a result of the Alliance suit, much of what's in the files can now be made public. IN THESE TIMES gained access to the NUC files.

►Beginning even before the organization.

The files start off even before the organization was founded. The very first documents give evidence of some standing Red Squad practices: there was (1) an exchange of information with the state police in Texas, (2) a description of the "participatory democracy" ideas of NUC—indicating the political, non-criminal intent of the investigation, (3) a credit check and criminal charge check on an early leader (possibly to find compromising material on him), (4) a report of his membership in a local draft counseling organization whose records had previously been lifted by police in a "narcotics raid," and (5) a check for information with a private right-wing political organization, indicating the ties such groups have with police spies.

At the first press conference, the file report notes, "most of the news media reporters present disagreed with SUBJECT views, and phrased their questions in that respect." In many instances, Red Squad agents posed as newspaper and TV reporters, hampering the work of the press and fomenting suspicious, tense relationships between journalists and the

NOTE: ALSO TO BE USED FOR INFORMATION

INTELLIGENCE DIVISION CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT

REPORT CASE

DATE OF REPORT 2 Feb. 1971

PERSON C.I. 436

SUBJECT MATTER OF INVESTIGATION
NEW UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE
Quantrell Hall
58th and Ellis

OTHER PERSONS PRESENT
None

DATE & TIME 28 January 1971 1500 Hrs.

INVESTIGATORS 579

PLACE OF On the Street

PURPOSE OF OR INFORMATION
TO obtain information on the SUBJECT that would be of interest to this Division.
Film showing took place on Wednesday, 21 January 1971 at 1900 Hrs.

STATEMENT OF OR INFORMATION

PERSONS IDENTIFIED

Dave Moberg I/W
I/W

Two showings of the film were scheduled: one for 7:15 P.M. and one for 9:00 P.M. Admission of \$1.00 per person was charged but not advertised on the flyers. Approximately 300 persons, mostly Orientals, attended the first film showing. Informant [redacted] of [redacted] student said that at on campus film showings, attendance at the second showing is usually larger and that the [redacted] could expect to take in at least \$700.00 this evening, if not more.

The audience was quiet and did not react to the film in a radical manner. They laughed once, at the antics of a small child, and applauded once, when the film showed the completion of the building of a causeway.

The evening began with a speech by Dave Moberg. He read the People's Peace Treaty and explained its purpose. He announced that there would be a meeting at 9:30 that night at the [redacted] to work on organizing this for the treaty and invited people to attend.

An u/f/u was selling materials from the [redacted] As of 9:00 P.M. she had sold nothing. Also on the table were the attached materials for the Peace Treaty Conference in Ann Arbor.

Bumbling, inefficient, goofy and crude as they were, the Red Squad did their best to make democracy "inoperative."

movement. Sympathetic reporters were also fed Red Squad information.

The political aims of the spying and filekeeping are often ludicrously obvious. The file records a university Peoples Peace Treaty meeting where "most appeared hippie style. This was an open meeting, meaning anyone could speak ... a discussion type meeting, ideas, suggestions and remarks were expressed by all. Everyone's opinion was subjected to the closest examination."

That is a description of the kind of activity supposedly safeguarded by the Bill of Rights from state interference. Yet it is in a file kept by an arm of the police force. That agency was charged, not through any law but only through its own internal memoranda, with investigating, prosecuting and "neutralizing"—"thru expose, cause to cease or change in direction"—groups and individuals "threatening the peace and security of the city and/or its citizens."

►Reports of specific views.

Although every reference to violence is duly noted, even when it's a scholarly discussion of the relationship between revolution and violence that is less provocative than the Declaration of Independence, the reports are also replete with reports of specific political views. "S--- states that America's leaders are racists, imperialists and war-like," one file reports. And another records that "at this time an unknown male praised Cuba in every way and condemned America in every manner."

True to their historical roots in the political squads of the late 19th century, contemporary Red Squad agents were alert for any foreign influence. There was a careful notation that most of the audience at one NUC film showing were "orientals." A leading black revolutionary group was described as "following the teachings of Kim Il Sung," although anyone vaguely familiar with the group knew most of the "teachings" sprang from ghetto street corners.

Likewise any contact with Commun-

ists was confirmation of the "germ theory of Communism," as attorney Richard Gutman describes it, justifying investigation of the contaminated. A prominent NUC member, a noted historian long critical of the Communist party, was identified as a "self-admitted Communist."

►AFT leader was an agent.

The most detailed accounts were possibly the work of Sheli Lilkin, a NUC member and until recently a prominent local and national leader in the American Federation of Teachers, whose name was recently added to the Alliance complaint. There is an immense amount of personal information on members—who was unemployed, jobs held or sought, membership in other organizations, plans for buying a house, marital tensions and budding affairs, friction between individuals and factions, use of drugs, family and commune finances, academic work (such as the subject of master's theses) and other examples of invasion of privacy. At times they verge on slander. One NUC member was described by "a colleague" according to the report, as working on his master's degree, very religious, completely non-violent and "nutty as a fruitcake and doesn't know what he wants, and everyone in the department keeps telling him that."

It's hard to tell who was told what by the Red Squad, but one file reveals that agents warned a major television network of an impending demonstration at their studio. There is also a report of detailed information on rental fees and insurance for a large meeting hall. Leftist groups, accustomed to sudden cancellations, had long suspected that police contacted building managers or bus companies about renting to radicals.

►Factionalism noted.

Financial affairs were given serious attention—problems in collecting dues, costs of operations, failures to pay salaries, fund-raising plans and basic office expenses. Also, files detail any ten-

dencies toward factions—such as reporting several names as constituting the "political reference group" of one NUC leader) or frictions (such as women's protests about sexism).

Spy reports always observed leftists' precautions about spies in the audience. "The three Xeroxed copies (of a proposal for an "action Faction") were passed around the room and then collected," one report reads. "The statement contained a disclaimer addressed to Police Agents, that all actions being planned were non-violent and not part of any conspiracy."

The one illegal action planned and reported in more than 200 pages of files, other than the publicly trumpeted May-day protests, was a plan to set off a stink bomb in a hotel where Nixon was visiting. From the files it appears that the two people most likely to have been agents were intimately involved in planning and executing that action—presumably not part of their assignment.

►A fearsome stereotype of radicals.

Frequently the files are quite funny. Agents had a fearsome stereotype of "radicals," not terribly appropriate for the well-meaning but fairly cautious members of NUC. Several times there are reports of meetings "ending without incidents," as if bombs and riots had been expected. "The audience" at a film showing, one file reports, "was quiet and did not react to the film in a radical manner," whatever that was. Perhaps they had been bored into lethargy, since the file also reveals that "the evening began with a speech by Dave Moberg."

As a very fragmentary and inaccurate remembrance of movements past, there are also some funny passages. For example, there is a "kid's liberation" leaflet with notations suggesting that the Red Squad tried to check out records on the children who signed it. In another file, there is a note: "Ann told Rebecca, Ted was here looking for you. He said he has some blue acid to sell that is pure. He said he will bring it on Wednesday." Then there are further hassles of commune living, discussions of whether monogamy is good for the political soul, and references to an underground press now buried under ground. It was only a few years ago, yet it reads like another era.

►Political documents.

Most of the files, however, are fattened with copies of NUC political documents, accounts of strategy sessions and discussion of political tactics that were fully legal and legitimate. When a new publication was readied, such as "Participatory Democracy in SDS," the Red Squad file incorporated it along with notes on how it would be distributed. There can be no question, after reading through the files kept, that the aim was political surveillance. The lawsuit in Chicago is challenging the longstanding refusal of the courts to reject such surveillance as an infringement of civil liberties.

It is also clear that the Red Squad missed a lot and was not as omnipresent as it often seemed. Yet its aims could be accomplished even when it was absent: distrust grew, cautious people stayed away, a presumption of wrongdoing hovered over left groups like NUC in a way that isolated them for potential supporters and many leftists overestimated the police state developing and were led, at times by agent provocateurs, into suicidal kinds of political organization and outlook that further isolated them.

The failures of the new left were not brought on by police spying, but the harassment was seriously destructive as part of an attack on political dissidence mounted from many points. Whatever its effects, it was also in principle a violation of First Amendment freedoms. Yet the Red Squad was there, as the NUC files and other volumes of documentation confirm. Bumbling, inefficient, goofy and crude as they were, the Chicago Red Squad did their best to make democracy "inoperative."