

LIFE IN THE U.S.

MEDIA

Village Voice workers unionize

The most significant aspect of the contract is that freelance writers are included.

By Barbara Garson

NEW YORK—In the wake of a strike ultimatum, round the clock bargaining and plans for an alternate strike paper, newly organized employees of the *Village Voice* voted to accept their first union contract.

The 200 hundred member unit, organized as part of District 65, includes all categories of *Voice* workers from messengers to editors, from photographers to ad salesmen. Most significantly, for the first time in the U.S., free-lance writers are represented.

Though the National Labor Relations Board explicitly excluded free-lance writers from the bargaining unit, the rest of the employees firmly refused to sit down without the free-lancers.

It was this issue that brought the *Village Voice* Organizing Committee to District 65, a 28,000-member, left-leaning, catch-all union, outside of the AFL-CIO. The regular newspaper unions would not accept the free-lancers as members of the unit.

The *Village Voice* is the most profitable newspaper in New York City. (It is owned by the Australian newspaper magnate Rupert Murdoch, who also owns the *New York Post* and *New York Magazine*.) Its pay-scale, however, is a throw-back to its primal origins as an underground paper. The new contract doesn't go very far to change this.

It accepts minimums like \$87.50 a week for messengers, \$135 for clericals, \$180 for copy editors. However, there are some extraordinary clauses.

The contract not only sets minimums for free-lance articles but also guarantees, to even one-time contributors, kill fees, access to the medical plan, immediate payment of agreed expenses and payment on acceptance. (Former *Voice* policy—payment on publication—often meant payment in six months, a year, or never, if

the article was held till it became outdated.)

An unprecedented contract clause states that no changes will be made in copy without consultation, unless the contributor can't be reached. (It's yet to be seen what this means in practice.)

The contract assures many standard union benefits including well-defined job security, substantial severance pay, \$10 and \$20 raises, and small improvements in vacation and overtime pay.

In addition, there were peculiarly *Voice*-oriented benefits, like three paid mourning days for the death of a person with whom the employee had a "family-type" relationship or equality of meals. This stems from resentment by the clerical staff over the kind of food that's ordered in for them compared to what editors get when they all stay late to put out the paper.

The contract was presented with a minimum of fan-fare by the haggard negotiating committee. They said it was the best that could be gotten without a strike.

A straw vote showed only two members in favor of a strike. However there were many abstentions. A great deal of the floor discussion took the general

form of "Of course I don't want to strike but this really isn't so good for me."

After the straw vote the president of District 65, David Livingston, addressed the body. "We don't want any half-hearted lovers here," he said. "We don't want you to say about this union, 'She's weak, she's funny looking, she's a wreck, but she's mine!'"

He urged the members to accept the contract if they thought it was a good beginning, if they could feel proud of it. "But if you can't hold your head up when you walk down the street with her, then don't be afraid to strike."

By secret ballot, the contract was accepted overwhelmingly.

Note: Since many ITT readers are also free-lance writers, they may want to contact Kitty Krupat, District 65, 13 Astor Place, New York, NY, to familiarize themselves with the rights, benefits, and minimums of Village Voice contributors. Barbara Garson is the author of MacBird and All the Livelong Day: The Meaning and Demeaning of Routine Work. (Penguin). As a free-lance writer she is a member of District 65's Village Voice unit.

ALBUM



Photograph by Ed Kweskin.

SPORTS

'The Greatest' is getting old

By Manning Marable

Muhammad Ali may have won his last heavyweight championship fight.

Several weeks ago Ali faced Ernie Shavers, a tough, 33-year-old slugger from Warren, Ohio. Shavers had knocked out 52 opponents in his 54 professional victories, but the oddsmakers doubted that he had the stamina to stay in the ring with the champion for 15 gruelling rounds. Ali himself casually dismissed Shavers as "The Acorn," because of the black challenger's smoothly shaved head.

During the first 12 rounds, Ali took a commanding lead over Shavers. Several times Shavers had scored solidly with overhand rights to Ali's face, but the challenger was too slow to take real advantage of his overpowering strength. Suddenly, during rounds 13 and 14, Shavers came alive, punching Ali's chest, kidneys and ribs with solid shots. At the bell starting the last round Ali could barely stand. Waltzing sleepily into Shavers, the champion was smashed with a fearsome right hand that would have cleanly decked any other boxer. Angelo Dundee, Ali's experienced trainer, said aloud, "That's the ball game."

More out of pride than strength or skill, Ali asserted himself, as he has so many times in the past. Here was the Old Ali, returning to a swarm of powerful combinations, nearly knocking out Shavers at the bell. The crowd at ringside was on its feet; the fight was over; Ali was still the heavyweight champion of the world.

I have grown up with Muhammad Ali, as have millions of others. During John F. Kennedy's Cuban Missile Crisis and the last dark days of the Cold War, young Cassius Clay was just coming of age. The "Louisville Lip," he was called, the black youngster who "floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee."

We remember him standing with Malcolm X, proud and strong after his surprising victory over tough Sonny Liston, announcing to the world that he was now "Muhammad Ali," and a member of the Nation of Islam.

We recall white America's response. Newspapers and sports commentators on the major TV networks refused to utter the words "Muhammad Ali," referring to "Cassius Clay." Ali openly denounced America's illegal and immoral war in Vietnam and Cambodia, declaring that he would refuse to fight against the Viet Cong. Because of his deep political convictions, his heavyweight championship was stripped from him. He was barred from fighting in every major arena in the country. A phony boxing tournament was organized to crown a phony, Uncle Tom champion for the heavyweight division. White sports writers like the *New York Daily News'* Dick Young printed endless, petty attacks against Ali's character.

But Ali refused to abandon his principles. Like Jack Johnson, America's first black heavyweight champion, Ali laughed at white America's values, its social graces, its exalted heroes. His speed, his sure knowledge of the ring and his consistent ability to take physical punishment made him the best pure boxer of his generation, and perhaps the best heavyweight of all time.

Ali reminded black Americans that all sports, especially boxing, are profoundly political. When poor, deluded Floyd Patterson declared in 1965 that he would beat Ali and "return the heavyweight crown to America," people learned that a "Great White Hope" could be black as well as white. When big George Foreman, while winning the 1968 Olympic boxing championship, waved a miniature American flag before the ABC television cameras, we began to understand that he was being used to please the psychological and political conscience of whites and the Negro middle class. And when Ali, the peoples' champion, used his "rope-a-dope" to knock out and humiliate Foreman in their celebrated fight in Zaire three years ago, we cheered.

Ali has successfully fought against more different kinds of boxers and pugilistic styles than any fighter in sports history. His comeback victory over an overrated Jerry Quarry in 1970 sparked a popular celebration in the streets of Atlanta. Ali's three punishing fights with Joe Frazier, who stands next to Ali as the toughest heavyweight since 1965, were perhaps the greatest boxing contests of all time.

In the mid-'60s Ali's commanding speed and confident, cocky manner dominated every fight; now in the twilight of his career, his legs slowed with age, Ali must rely upon his psychological insights to control the tempo of each contest.

But Ali, only a human being, is not perfect. His contest prior to the Shavers fight, with Alfredo Evangelista, could scarcely be called a decent contest. Going through the motions, fat and tired, hopelessly out of shape, suffering from endless marital problems, Ali has become more like a Hollywood celebrity than a real athlete. Shaking hands with the likes of Ford and Carter, Ali has all but abandoned his original political allegiance with Malcolm.

And now, the end is in plain view. Madison Square Garden has told Ali that he will not be allowed to fight there again. Herbert Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, did not even attend the Shavers fight, and has urged the champion to retire. Ali at 35 is no longer the



graceful, innocent black champion; after earning over \$44 million, after becoming more and more a part of mainstream America, Ali finds it difficult, perhaps impossible, to accept the limitations that age places on every person.

If Ali does not retire within the next six to twelve months, he will undoubtedly lose to a younger, aggressive fighter possessing vastly inferior skills than he.

But despite the years, no one can ever diminish what Ali meant to me, and to all of us, during the turbulent age of the '60s.

There can never be another Ali. Thanks, Ali, for that.

Manning Marable is chairman of the Political Science department at Tuskegee Institute and an associate fellow of the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta.

Wit' a Brooklyn Accent

Who to watch for in the NBA

By Mark Naison

The new NBA season is off to a rousing start. After three weeks of play, teams like Atlanta and New Orleans, once the doormats of the NBA, are tearing up the league, while the once-proud Boston Celtics seem to have fallen apart. Kareem Jabbar, long a favorite target of NBA hatchet men, has developed a devastating right-hand punch; the feuding 76ers have chosen a schoolyard ballplayer (Billy Cunningham) as their coach; and the otherwise pathetic Nets have come up with a rookie named Bernard King who looks like the second coming of Dr. J.

The league is better balanced than ever but I think that a few teams will establish their supremacy by the end of the season. The teams to beat, in my opinion, are the 76ers, the Trailblazers and the Lakers, though there are a few clubs who might stay with them if the breaks go their way.

The Front Runners

The Philadelphia 76ers. This may be the year the 76ers take it all. The new coach, Billy Cunningham, is close friends with many of the players and may be the right person to get the superstars on the club to mesh their talents.

The key to the whole operation could be 20-year-old Darryl Dawkins. Dawkins is the starting center this year, and if he continues to develop at the rate he did at the end of last season, he will give the Sixers a dominant presence at the only position where they have been vulnerable.

If Dawkins can control the defensive backboards and throw the good outlet pass, the Sixers can run a fast-breaking, free-lance attack that uses their quickness and one-on-one skills to advantage. When that happens the rest of the league had better watch out.

The Portland Trailblazers. The Blazers are fundamentally the same team that

won the NBA championship last year and have started the season in torrid form. If Bill Walton and Maurice Lucas stay healthy, they could easily repeat; the teamwork, speed and depth that were their trademarks all seem to be there. But the Blazers are going to be marked men this season, the team against which all the other gauge their progress. In a long season, that kind of notoriety can take its toll.

The Los Angeles Lakers. For the first time in years, Kareem "Rocky" Jabbar has a supporting cast of fast young players. The addition of Jamaal Wilkes at forward and Norm Nixon at guard, and the return of injured power forward Kermit Washington, gives the Lakers a starting five that can run the fast break.

Veterans Lou Hudson and Don Chaney anchor a solid bench. The rookie backup center, James Edwards, has shown great offensive ability, and should enable Jabbar to get more rest when he returns to the lineup.

The key will be Jabbar: if he is healthy and shows the intensity that has sometimes been lacking in his play during the last few years, the Lakers can beat anyone.

Dark Horses

The Chicago Bulls. The Bulls were the hottest team in the league at the end of last season and gave the Trailblazers the hardest time in the playoffs. This year they have been erratic, but have wins over some of the league's best teams.

Their main problems are a weak bench and the inconsistent play of their center Artis Gilmore. At his best, Gilmore is a match for Walton and Jabbar, but he plays that way only every other game. If he puts it all together at key moments this season, the Bulls will be very tough to beat.

The Detroit Pistons. The Pistons have as much individual talent as any team in the NBA. Their front line of M.L. Carr, Marvin Barnes and Bob Lanier (backed up by Leon Douglas and Al Eberhard) is physically the strongest in the league, and they have four excellent guards.

But the Pistons seem to hate each other (and their coach) even more than the 76ers, and it seems to affect their play. If center and team leader Bob Lanier can stay healthy and help his teammates settle their differences on the court, Detroit could surprise a lot of people.

The New York Knicks. If new coach Willis Reed can persuade or intimidate the stars on his team to hit the open man rather than build up their scoring averages, the Knicks could be a contender.

They have great scorers in Earl Monroe and Bob McAddo, good rebounders in Lonnie Shelton and Spencer Halwook, and three fine rookies. But there are still a lot of rough edges in the Knick attack, and if they aren't worked out soon, New York fans will have to wait another year before their dreams of glory materialize.

The Houston Rockets, Denver Nuggets, Cleveland Cavaliers and Milwaukee Bucks. These are all "college boy" teams, which will amass good records during the regular season, but will have difficulty in the playoffs. All of these teams have talented and unselfish players who play with enthusiasm and work well together, but they all lack the dominating center that a championship team seems to require.

With the exception of the Golden State Warriors in 1975, each NBA champion in the last 15 years has had a "bad dude" in the middle (Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, Willis Reed, Dave Cowens, Kareem Jabbar, and Bill Walton, in case anyone forgot.) I see no reason why the results this season should diverge from the pattern.