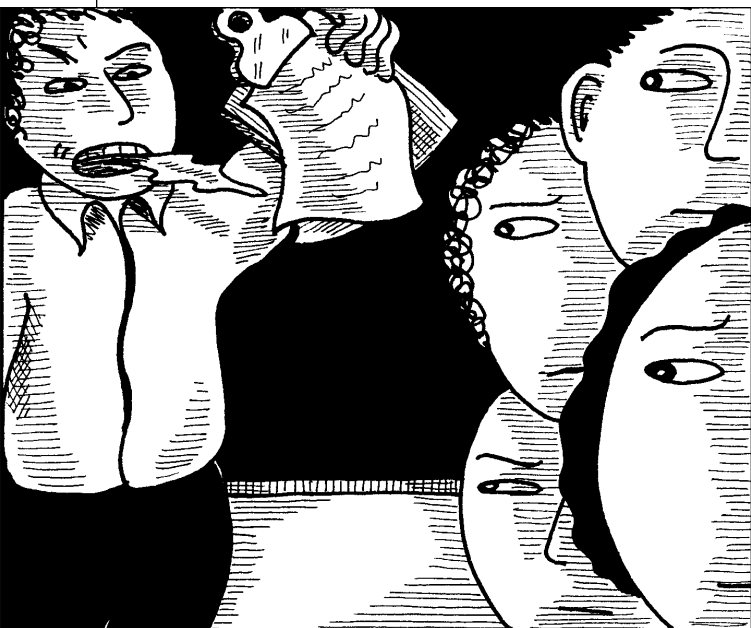


ACTIVIST

NALC

A NEWSLETTER FOR BRANCH LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LETTER CARRIERS
VOL. 13, NO. 2

SPRING 1998



Grieving supervisors' abusive behavior

The Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace, signed in February 1992 by NALC, USPS and eight other unions and organizations, provides a contractual basis for filing grievances against managers who intimidate, harass or threaten letter carriers. As stated by National Arbitrator Carlton Snow in his award on the Joint Statement (C-15697), the Joint Statement is not merely a "pledge" or "promise" to eliminate abuse and intimidation in the workplace. Rather, it is a contractually enforceable agreement. (Complete text of the Joint Statement appears on page 7.)

As has been demonstrated since the Snow award was re-
continued on page 2

Rounding up volunteers: Taking a fresh approach

Recruiting reliable volunteers is a constant challenge for NALC branch leaders. Some basic principles can help: always ask, never wait for people to come forward; provide clear expectations for the work, including an estimate on how much time it will take; try to make the work enjoyable; and always, always recognize and reward volunteers.

Paying attention to these basics can go a long way toward filling a branch's need for volunteers. Sometimes, however, branch leaders may want to step back and look at the issue of volunteer recruitment from a different perspective. This article suggests a multiple-

step process that can help branch leaders structure volunteer opportunities so that members will be more willing to participate and the branch will accomplish more of its goals.

So take a break from rushing from event to event, grabbing available bodies as you go. Instead, ask other officers to join in planning sessions that will **assess branch goals and the resulting needs for volunteers.** Then **create volunteer job descriptions.** Finally, **analyze what should be changed about the branch's current approach to volunteers.** In the long run a formalized, thoughtful plan for volunteer recruitment will pay off with more

informed and committed people willing to take on more work for the branch.

"You need to structure volunteer opportunities," says Hackensack,
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Violence

continued from page 1

dered in August 1996, the standards set forth in the Joint Statement apply not only to craft employees but also to managers and supervisors. A number of regional arbitrators have upheld NALC grievances against supervisors who have been charged with violating the Joint Statement.

Careful study of the growing number of arbitration decisions concerning unacceptable supervisor behavior against letter carriers reveals some basic principles and key issues that NALC representatives should consider when confronted with these situations. This article will address such issues, with reference when appropriate to specific national and regional

Workplace abuse is not limited to physical violence.

arbitration awards. (Note that such awards are identified throughout this story by C-numbers. These C-number cases are available from your National Business Agent).

As will be shown, the first challenge facing NALC representatives is **determining that a supervisor has violated the Joint Statement** as well as other provisions concerning workplace behavior. Some guidelines concerning the definition of abusive

behavior appear in several arbitration decisions. although in many cases the question of whether an act meets such definitions will be evident on its face.

Second, NALC stewards and local leaders must possess a clear **understanding of all contractual bases for grievances about workplace behavior**, including language in the *National Agreement, Management of Delivery Services (M-39)* and the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual*. As will be explained below, branch leaders should be able to cite not only the Joint Statement but also all relevant provisions found in other documents as listed above.

The third component in building an effective grievance about a supervisor's workplace behavior involves **understanding and pursuing all appropriate forms of grievance investigation**. As will be shown, such grievances can carry a certain emotional weight that may interfere with standard investigatory procedures. Advice on handling such circumstances appears below.

Branch leaders should also be able to **recognize elements that strengthen or weaken a grievance** concerning workplace behavior. These elements include the existence of a **pattern of abusive behavior** on the part of the supervisor involved as well as the **severity or intensity** of the behavior being grieved.

Finally, the question of **appropriate remedies** must be considered. Some confusion about the nature of the remedy may exist. As will be explained below, NALC representatives are empowered by the Snow award to ask that supervisors be removed from duties that require them to supervise letter carriers. The circumstances in which this remedy should be requested will also be discussed.

What is abusive behavior?

Although the question of what exactly constitutes abusive behavior in the workplace can seem obvious, there exist some areas in which, as with any situation leading to a grievance, the steward must apply his or her own judgement. Clearly, if physical violence occurs—slapping, shoving, punching and the like—a grievance (and perhaps also the filing of criminal charges of assault) is appropriate.

Perhaps not surprisingly, NALC representatives have seen few cases involving physical abuse of carriers by supervisors in the years following the signing of the Joint Statement on Violence. Physical violence is clearly intolerable to all parties and supervisors seem to stop short of actual physical attacks.

Workplace abuse, however, is not limited to physical violence. Supervisor behavior that violates the Joint Statement can include repeated harassment, displays of anger, shout-

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Published quarterly by:

National Association of
Letter Carriers
100 Indiana Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20001-2144

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ing at employees, threats of discharge, shaking fingers in faces and other "in your face" physical and psychological intimidation. For example, in a regional arbitration decision rendered in May 1997 (C-17586) the arbitrator sustained a grievance in which a letter carrier claimed that a supervisor made an obscene gesture at the carrier. Language that has been found to violate the Joint Statement and other contract provisions includes not only obscenities and epithets, but also threats such as "you'll suffer the consequences later" (C-15316), and "Don't [mess] with me or I'll get you fired." (C-16459).

At the same time, however, stewards and other local NALC leaders must exercise common sense in evaluating carrier complaints about supervisor behavior. Abusive attacks can be distinguished from situations involving horseplay or joking around by the intensity of the emotions and the feelings of the people on the receiving end. As will be explained later, thorough investigation of the circumstances surrounding the behavior will also help the steward evaluate whether the incident was indeed abusive.

Relevant language

Before beginning any investigation of charges of abusive behavior, NALC local leaders must familiarize themselves with all relevant provisions of the contract and other documents that address the issue of workplace violence. NALC representatives are probably already familiar with the language of the Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace. However, other negotiated language also applies to situations involving workplace violence. The NALC Contract Administration Unit recommends that stewards and local leaders cite all of the provisions appearing in the box on page 5 when grieving supervisor behavior, as all such provisions can usually be demonstrated to apply in all instances.

It is particularly important to include language from Article 14, Safety and Health. Because grievances about abusive behavior charge supervisors with creating an unsafe working environment, they can be filed immediately at Step 2 and be more quickly resolved, which is especially desirable in situations involving abusive behavior.

Why would an instance of, say, name-calling by a supervisor be a situation involving safety and health? The NALC's view is that any kind of abusive behavior threatens the safety and health of the carriers involved. Carriers who are threatened in any way can become impaired and unable to perform their duties safely. Thus, situations involving abuse and intimidation place such carriers at risk.

USPS BY THE NUMBERS

USPS Operations—AP6 1998	Number	Chg from SPLY*
Total mail volume year-to-date (YTD) (billions of pieces)	91.2	2.8%
Mail volume by class (YTD in billions)		
<i>First-class</i>	47.5	0.8%
<i>Priority Mail</i>	0.6	14.0%
<i>Express Mail</i>	0.1	8.6%
<i>Periodicals</i>	4.8	-0.7%
<i>Standard A (bulk)</i>	38.2	5.8%
<i>Standard B (parcels)</i>	0.5	2.9%
<i>International</i>	0.5	-0.3%
Daily DPS letter mail volume (pieces)	127 million	53.4%
<i>Percent of total letter mail</i>	29%	—
City routes with DPS mail	144,000	22.0%
<i>Percent of total</i>	86.2%	—
Daily delivery points (millions)	129.7	1.4%
<i>Percent city</i>	75.5%	—
<i>Percent rural</i>	24.5%	—
City carrier routes	167,023	-1.9%
Rural carrier routes	60,018	3.2%
Net Income (\$millions, YTD)	\$ 1,288	46.4%
<i>Total Revenue</i>	\$28,270	3.3
<i>Total Expense</i>	\$26,982	1.9
Employment/Wages—AP3/PFY 1998 (First Quarter)		
City Carrier employment	238,292	-0.5%
<i>Percent union members</i>	91.0%	—
<i>Percent career employees</i>	98.5%	—
City carrier casual/TE employment		
<i>Casuals</i>	5,477	-0.3%
<i>Percent of bargaining unit</i>	2.2%	—
<i>Transitionals</i>	3,495	-10.8%
<i>Percent bargaining unit</i>	1.5%	—
City carriers per delivery supervisor	19.5	-4.1%
Career USPS employment	772,809	1.9%
City carrier avg. straight-time wage	\$17.16/hr.	2.6%
City carrier overtime ratio (overtime/total work hours)	12.7%	—
<i>Ratio SPLY</i>	11.9%	—

*SPLY = Same Period Last Year

This information compiled by the NALC Research Department from USPS Reports.

Building the case

Thorough knowledge of effective grievance investigation techniques is essential when confronting situations involving workplace abuse. Just as with every situation that may lead to a grievance, the steward must be sure to **get all the facts**. As has been noted in earlier *NALC Activist* articles, skills and techniques that stewards must master include **knowing the right questions and asking them; conducting all interviews as soon as possible and documenting every fact and argument**. (For more details on these techniques, see "Investigating a grievance," in the Spring 1997 *NALC Activist*.)

There are, however, some special concerns of which stewards should be aware when the situation being investigated involves abusive behavior in the workplace. Most obviously, the entire situation will be emotionally charged. It is therefore important that the steward remain calm and matter-of-fact. Although the rule is to get statements as soon as possible after the incident, the steward in these situations might consider giving the parties directly involved some time to calm down, using that interval to find and question witnesses who may be capable of greater objectivity.

Stewards may be concerned that in cases involving charges of abusive behavior, especially verbal confrontations, there may be no witnesses or supporting evidence and the only evidence available is along the lines of, "he said, she said." However, the fact that there is no evidence other than the victim's word does not mean that the case is weak or cannot be won. It is not inconceivable that a grievance charging a supervisor with abusive behavior could be sustained on the grievant's testimony alone, provided that testimony is *sufficiently detailed and internally consistent* to be believable.

For example, in a regional arbitration decision handed down in October 1997 (C-17420), the arbitrator determined that although no witnesses could be found to support the grievant's statement that her supervisor called her a "stupid bitch" and told her "you are already in hell and so is your bitch whore mother," Arbitrator Nancy Hutt believed the grievant.

One key element supporting the grievant's story was the fact that *she had written down her account of the incident on the day it happened* and had also immediately told her union steward what had happened. The arbitrator was also impressed by testimony of the NALC steward that he had seen the supervisor lose her temper on previous occasions. The arbitrator wrote, "Although

Consistency can be a deciding factor.

Grievant admittedly has a history of performance-related problems and discussed personal issues at work, this is not persuasive evidence that Grievant would fabricate the words spoken by the Supervisor or retaliate against the supervisor. The Supervisor's outright denial simply was not valid."

Similarly, in a regional arbitration decision issued in January 1997 (C-16459), Arbitrator Kenneth McCaffree commented positively on the fact that the grievant had commit-

ted to writing the exchange between the grievant and his supervisor *on the day it occurred*. In contrast, the supervisor's statement was made nearly two weeks later on the day before the Step 1 hearing.

Contemporaneous accounts, as they are termed, can be especially important in cases when witnesses may disagree about what happened. Such conflicts are somehow more likely to occur when witnesses include one or more managers as well as carriers. In such cases, arbitrators have cited *the consistency of testimony* as a deciding factor.

For example, in one of the first regional arbitration awards to sustain a grievance charging a supervisor with abusive behavior (C-15316), Arbitrator McCaffree noted that the supervisor denied that he had raised his voice or shaken his finger in the grievant's face, leading her to believe he was about to strike her. However, an NALC steward and an alternate steward both witnessed the action. Another supervisor who was present testified that he could not see exactly what happened. The arbitrator chose to believe the grievant and the two union witnesses, stating that the supervisor's behavior was "overly threatening in manner [and] bespoke of an attitude of disregard for the dignity of the employee."

In some cases, witnesses agree on what they have seen or heard but disagree about whether the behavior was abusive. Arbitrators have ruled that the threat of violence or perception of abuse need not be shared by all witnesses to the behavior. In a regional arbitration award rendered in December 1997 (C-17594), Arbitrator Charlotte Gold wrote, "Even if just one or two individuals believe that there is a real threat, and it can be assumed that other similarly situated people could reasonably be expected to have the same response, that may be sufficient to sustain a charge."

Know your contract: Language concerning abusive behavior

At a minimum, the following language from the Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior and other relevant documents should be cited when filing grievances charging a supervisor with abusive behavior:

From the Joint Statement:

"It is a time for reaffirming the basic right of all employees to a safe and humane working environment...there is no excuse for and will be no tolerance of harassment, intimidation, threats or bullying by anyone...Our intention is to make the workroom floor a safer, more harmonious, as well as a more productive workplace."

From the *National Agreement*:

Article 14, Safety and Health:

"Section 1. Responsibilities: It is the responsibility of management to

provide safe working conditions in all present and future installations and to develop a safe working force...

"Section 2. Cooperation: The Employer and the Union insist on the observance of safe rules and safe procedures by employees and insist on correction of unsafe conditions...and the workplace must be maintained in a safe and sanitary condition."

Additional language from the *M-39* and the *ELM* also apply in each instance of grieving a supervisor's abusive behavior. These provisions require that management provide a working atmosphere of respect and dignity, which is clearly violated when carriers are abused.

The *M-39*, Section 115.4 states: "...it is the front line manager who controls management's attempt to

maintain an atmosphere between employer and employee which assures mutual respect for each other's rights and responsibilities."

The *ELM*, Section 666.2, Behavior and Personal Habits, states: "Employees are expected to conduct themselves during and outside of work hours in a manner which reflects favorably upon the Postal Service.

"Although it is not the policy of the Postal Service to interfere with the private lives of employees, it does require that postal personnel be honest, reliably, trustworthy, courteous, and of good character and reputation. Employees are expected to maintain satisfactory personal habits so as not to be obnoxious or offensive to other persons or to create unpleasant working conditions." ■

For stewards investigating such highly charged situations, the optimum procedure would be to record all statements without getting directly involved in attempting to judge what exactly is "the truth." In most cases, an accurate picture of what happened will emerge through consistent and reasonable testimony of the people who were either directly involved or witnessed the behavior at issue.

Proving a pattern

In several cases, arbitrators have found significant not only evidence concerning the situation that provoked the immediate grievance, but also documentation obtained by the union showing that the supervisor in question had a prior record of abusive

behavior. For example, in a case heard in San Antonio, Texas in June 1997 (C-16961), Arbitrator Leonard Bajork considered testimony from a number of witnesses as well as documented accounts of union-management pairs (UMPS) resolutions revealing that within a two-year period, the supervisor in question had been abusive on a number of occasions and also had provoked violent responses from carriers under his supervision. In this case, the arbitrator ruled that the supervisor should be restricted from performing the duties of any position that involved dealing with carrier employees. Arbitrator Bajork wrote, "The purpose of this restriction is to avoid a recurrence of hostility between [the supervisor] and employees of the letter carrier craft."

At the same time, arbitrators have been less likely to impose such remedies in situations that the arbitrators feel are one-time events. For example, in a case heard in New Brunswick, New Jersey by Arbitrator Rose Jacobs, the arbitrator sustained a grievance charging that a supervisor had "verbally assaulted" the grievant. However, Arbitrator Jacobs also stated, "There is sufficient proof that the supervisor's improper behavior has not been repeated since the incident and it appears that he has learned a good lesson from the incident."

The arbitrator therefore did not grant as a remedy that the supervisor be removed from his administrative role, but rather ordered that the supervisor "cease and desist" from any such behavior, the supervisor be re-

evaluated concerning his ability to perform supervisory duties, the supervisor write a formal apology to the carrier, the supervisor be retrained in management duties, management place a note in the supervisor's file containing the arbitrator's recommendation that he be dealt with more harshly if similar conduct is repeated, and that the award and a copy of the letter of apology be posted on the bulletin board for 30 days.

If a steward believes that a supervisor's abusive behavior is part of a pattern of behavior, the steward should request the discipline records of those supervisors as part of their grievance investigation. The Postal Service has argued that such records should not be provided to NALC representatives; however, in a national-level arbitration decision (C-10986,) National Arbitrator Carlton Snow has ruled that the "modern law of discovery" mandates release of such information "unless it plainly appears irrelevant."

In cases concerning a supervisor's abusive behavior toward carriers, the existence of a record of similar prior acts would be considered highly relevant, as the San Antonio arbitration award cited above (C-16961) plainly shows.

The question of remedy

As the above discussion reveals, the remedies available to arbitrators who find supervisors acting in violation of the Joint Statement and other relevant contract provisions include the removal of that supervisor from any duties involving supervision of letter carriers. The authority to issue this remedy is derived from Arbitrator Snow's original award concerning the arbitrability of the Joint Statement. In that decision, Arbitrator Snow wrote, "Arbitrators have available to them the flexibility found in arbitral jurisprudence when it

comes to formulating remedies, including removing a supervisor from his or her administrative duties."

Although relatively few of the arbitration awards issued to date have required such a remedy, NALC representatives should not hesitate to ask for this remedy in cases in which a supervisor clearly and flagrantly defies the Joint Statement, either by repeated acts of abuse or by a particularly egregious act. Again, as in all other grievance-handling situations, stewards and other NALC officers

**Remedies
can include
removal of the
supervisor from
administrative
duties.**

should apply a rule of common sense. Other remedies that have been awarded include requiring the supervisor to post an apology on workplace bulletin boards, ordering that the supervisor "cease and desist" from such behavior, ordering the supervisor to be retrained in management duties, and retaining a note in the supervisor's file that should such behavior occur again, the supervisor be dealt with more harshly. (See, for example, the remedies awarded in C-15551.)

Grievances concerning supervisors' abusive behavior can be among the most difficult that union representatives may handle. As can be seen from the cases cited above, situations can be extremely volatile and emo-

tions may run high. As is often the case in grievance investigations, stewards must weigh the accounts of all persons involved. Thorough, not to say exhaustive investigation is essential in determining the facts.

Maintaining standards

The NALC steward who investigates such situations must remain unemotional and matter-of-fact. Maintaining a clear head and sound investigative techniques in the midst of the controversies often aroused by such cases can be difficult. In such situations, it is important to keep in mind the basics of good grievance handling.

First and foremost, prove the case using written testimony, corroborating witnesses and whatever other supporting evidence is available. Remember that the lack of witnesses does not automatically doom a case. Rather, look for consistency and reliability in the grievant's account.

Remember also that the NALC steward can request information about the supervisor, including prior discipline records. Cases in which a pattern of abuse can be shown are most likely to lead to the optimum remedy, which is to have the supervisor removed from administrative duties.

The world is too often a violent and unpredictable place. With the signing of the Joint Statement on Violence and the interpretation of that statement by Arbitrator Snow, NALC representatives have a tool readily at hand to protect and serve the letter carriers they represent. The NALC representative's goal is to achieve a safe and harmonious workplace for everyone. As the Joint Statement affirms, "Every employee at every level of the Postal Service should be treated at all times with dignity, respect and fairness." ■



JOINT STATEMENT ON VIOLENCE AND BEHAVIOR IN THE WORKPLACE

We all grieve for the Royal Oak victims, and we sympathize with their families, as we have grieved and sympathized all too often before in similar horrifying circumstances. But grief and sympathy are not enough. Neither are ritualistic expressions of grave concern or the initiation of investigations, studies, or research projects.

The United States Postal Service as an institution and all of us who serve that institution must firmly and unequivocally commit to do everything within our power to prevent further incidents of work-related violence.

This is a time for a candid appraisal of our flaws and not a time for scapegoating, fingerpointing, or procrastination. It is a time for reaffirming the basic right of all employees to a safe and humane working environment. *It is also the time to take action to show that we mean what we say.*

We openly acknowledge that in some places or units there is an unacceptable level of stress in the workplace; that there is no excuse for and will be no tolerance of violence or any threats of violence by anyone at any level of the Postal Service; and that there is no excuse for and will be no tolerance of harassment, intimidation, threats, or bullying by anyone.

We also affirm that every employee at every level of the Postal Service should be treated at all times with dignity, respect, and fairness. The need for the USPS to serve the public efficiently and productively, and the need for all employees to be committed to giving a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, does not justify actions that are abusive or intolerant. *"Making the numbers" is not an excuse for the abuse of anyone.* Those who do not treat others with dignity and respect will not be rewarded or promoted. Those whose unacceptable behavior continues will be removed from their positions.


We obviously cannot ensure that however seriously intentioned our words may be, they will not be treated with winks and nods, or skepticism, by some of our over 700,000 employees. But let there be no mistake that we mean what we say and we will enforce our commitment to a workplace where dignity, respect, and fairness are basic human rights, and where those who do not respect those rights are not tolerated.

Our intention is to make the workroom floor a safer, more harmonious, as well as a more productive workplace. We pledge our efforts to these objectives.


D.C. Nurses Association

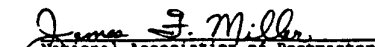

Federation of Postal Police
Officers


National Association of Letter
Carriers


National Postal Mail Handlers
Union


United States Postal Service


National Association of Postal
Supervisors


National Association of Postmasters
of the United States


National League of Postmasters of
the United States


National Rural Letter Carriers'
Association

Dated: February 14, 1992

PLEASE POST ON BULLETIN BOARDS IN ALL INSTALLATIONS

Volunteers

continued from page 1

New Jersey Branch 425 president Frank Camporeale. “Rather than waiting till the last minute to grab people you may need, think about how the branch uses volunteers and how you can build a pool of dedicated and trained members.”

First step

A brainstorming session about volunteers can provide useful ideas about how to structure a volunteer program. Begin the session by asking questions. It’s not enough to say, “We need more volunteers and we need them now.” Instead, ask, “What needs to be done around here?” Identify *all* the unmet needs of the local union, including large and small projects. Good questions to get people thinking can include:

- What are we doing now that we would like to do *more* of?
- What *unmet needs* do our members have that we presently can do nothing about?
- What might we do *differently* if we had more skills or time available to us?

In Galesburg, Illinois Branch 88, president Larry Daughtery and other branch leaders realized that the branch needed to reach out somehow to members who were part-time flexibles. “The issues and concerns that PTFs have can get overlooked,” Daughtery says. “So we decided to look for volunteers among the PTFs themselves, so those people would have a voice.” Branch leaders approached individual PTFs to ask if they would be part of a PTF committee that meets monthly with branch leaders.

Daughtery also made sure that PTFs were asked to help with branch activities, such as event planning,

contributing to the newsletter, and letter-writing sessions to Congress. By making a goal of including PTFs, the branch not only changed its approach to volunteers, but also was able to tap a new resource for accomplishing tasks that benefit all members.

As you consider branch goals, you should also reflect on how well those goals are conveyed to members. Sometimes branches run into problems recruiting volunteers because the members may have misconceptions about what the branch is all about.

To begin with, many people who join NALC don’t even realize that it is an organization that depends on



Create specific jobs and opportunities for volunteers.

volunteer effort. These members may see NALC as a kind of insurance policy, there to help them when they get in trouble but not really relevant to their day-to-day life.

Potential volunteers may present other objections that are also related to the image they may have of the NALC branch. “When we began looking for volunteers, we ran into people who had a real negative perception of what the union was,” says Eugene, Oregon Branch 916 president Steve Howell. “They see the NALC as always fighting management, always being in conflict, and some members just don’t want to be a part of that kind of activity.”

To overcome such preconceptions, Howell and other branch leaders informed members about *positive* programs that the branch put on. “We stress the ways we can help each other,” Howell says. “And we emphasize how the union can help in the community. It’s not just an us-and-them kind of fight. The local union is much more about solidarity and mutual support.”

Pin it down

Once you have clear goals and a way to communicate those goals to members, you will need to determine exactly what kind of volunteer work will best help you meet those goals. This means creating **specific jobs and opportunities for volunteers**. In this step, leaders should think not only about what would best suit the branch, but also what would offer the most to potential volunteers.

“There can be conflict between what volunteers want to do and how organizations create volunteer projects,” writes Susan Ellis in *The Volunteer Recruitment Book*. “Volunteer assignments are too often created quickly and without much respect for the skills and interests of those who will fill them.... For the volunteer, the time carved out of a busy schedule for volunteer work is quite precious. Volunteers hope that their contributed time will have real meaning, have an impact or make a difference.”

Ellis suggests that leaders who wish to recruit volunteers first develop **volunteer job descriptions**. Although this step may seem a bit formal for such jobs as bringing hot dogs to the picnic, a volunteer job description can be invaluable in recruiting people to more complex tasks such as planning events or becoming a branch officer.

The volunteer job description should include a **title** for all jobs. Remember that the word “volunteer” simply means “someone who is not getting paid.” It’s not a title that actually describes the work. Although it may seem trivial, people feel more responsible and empowered when they can call themselves the “picnic coordinator” or the “retirement specialist,” rather than “just a volunteer.”

Next, outline the **responsibilities** of the assignment. Describe sample tasks, making clear the potential as well as the limits of the job. You may want to state specific **outcomes** or **goals** so the volunteer will be able to tell that the job was done successfully.

If you are going to provide **training** or **supervision**, state that fact in the description. Also, be sure to **specify the time commitment**. Can you say that this job will take two hours a month, or 10 minutes a week, or whatever the realistic assessment may be? Don’t fudge about the time involved by giving underestimates. It’s far better to have volunteers know in advance what’s required than to hope to persuade them later on to do more. If a volunteer cannot commit to all the time needed, perhaps you can make other arrangements or split the job with other people.

Finally, make sure you state **qualifications** for each volunteer assignment. “Warm and walking” as the only qualification probably won’t draw much interest from potential volunteers. If you can, describe specific skills or talents that you know people have in the branch. In the recruitment phase, you will be pitching directly to those people and can stress how their specific talents can be put to optimum use.

“If we can, we ask people to use their expertise,” says Worcester, Massachusetts Branch 12 president

James Servideo. “It makes a big difference if you can say, ‘I know you’re really good at...computer stuff, maybe...and we need someone to design a program, or help buy equipment, or whatever.’”

Along with the obvious benefit of getting qualified people to do the work, branch leaders who make such personalized appeals can also reinforce members’ feelings that they are known and appreciated.

Change when necessary

The first steps of assessing needs and writing job descriptions can give branch leaders something solid to have in hand as they turn to the final

and most important step, actually approaching people and recruiting them as volunteers.

Simply moving through these preliminary steps can change the way you think about the recruiting process. Instead of asking, “Who’s available?” you are now focused on “What talents do we need?” Your approach will therefore be thoughtful rather than desperate, and the jobs themselves may well have more appeal to the people you wish to recruit.

As Ellis writes in *The Volunteer Recruitment Handbook*, “Saying ‘we need help’ may grab some attention...but the truth is, *everyone* needs help. Your job as a volunteer recruiter

Pointers on recruitment

- Be motivated yourself. Sincerity wins out over technique every time.
- Be clear on what you want people to do. Use written job descriptions whenever possible.
- Use titles. The word “volunteer” simply means “I’m not being paid.” Be more specific in describing the job.
- Be honest. Tell prospective volunteers what the work entails, even if you think it may sound like a lot. Avoid minimizing the work.
- Share deadlines up front. When does the work have to be finished?
- Remember that it is better to live with a vacancy a little while longer than to convince the wrong person to become a volunteer.
- Define the training and supervision or support the volunteer will have. This isn’t sink or swim.
- Identify and express the benefits to the volunteer from accomplishing the task. People can feel good about work that helps other people; they

also may be able to develop new skills.

- Explain why you asked this particular person to help—what skills or personality traits make him or her a good candidate for the position.
- It may be just as important to discover what a prospective volunteer wants to *learn* or *try* as a volunteer as it is to know his or her official credentials.
- Keep in mind that you can never insult people by asking them to volunteer. In fact, you are usually flattering them by implying they have the talent to do the job.
- Paint an upbeat picture of the work. Volunteering should be fun.
- The best way to recruit volunteers is to *ask* people to help.

From Susan J. Ellis, *The Volunteer Recruitment Book*, available for \$19.95 from Energize, Inc., 5450 Wissahickon Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19144, (215) 438-8342. ■

Why do members volunteer?

As you begin your efforts to recruit members to assume volunteer positions within the branch, take a moment to think about the reasons you first got involved in the local union. Always think about a person's motivation for getting involved before you attempt to recruit them.

For example, people volunteer because they:

- want to see real change
- believe in the labor movement
- are asked by someone
- want to try something new
- want social interaction
- seek recognition

- feel strongly about an issue and see the union as the best way to accomplish change
- seek leadership roles
- look for challenges and creative outlets.

When seeking members' participation, always think of their motivation and try to insure that their needs are met in the process.

Also, you should recognize that many people don't volunteer because they are afraid of failing, don't know what is expected of them or see an endless commitment in front of them.

People need reassurance, training and realistic expectations if they are to succeed as volunteers. ■

is to invite potential volunteers to *select* the opportunities that are the best match for them. Put another way, your message is:

"We are worth your time and effort. We offer you the opportunity to become involved with us so that we can utilize your talents and you can feel like you're making a contribution."

As branch leaders seek out suitable volunteers, they should consider presenting the following information, suggested by author Susan Ellis:

- Explain what the local union does, who it serves and what its successes have been.
- Explain how volunteers contribute to the local union. What have volunteers achieved in the past? What kinds of people volunteer?
- Explain what work needs to be done and why a volunteer may be well suited to do it—go over the major elements of the volunteer job description.

Ellis also advises that volunteer

recruiters avoid such common mistakes as:

- *Speaking with forked tongue.* This means telling people what you think they want to hear, rather than what you really want them to do. Don't gloss over the less glamorous parts of the job. If you find that it's difficult to tell the truth about a particular volunteer assignment, look more closely at the job itself. Perhaps you need to redesign it or spread its responsibilities among more people.
- *Playing on guilt.* Don't tell people, "The union does so much for you, it's time to repay the debt." People should not have to be shamed into volunteering. Members should feel as if they have something to contribute, rather than guilt to get rid of.
- *Asking for a favor.* Don't put people on the spot by forcing them to volunteer based on their personal feelings for you. People should volunteer because the work itself is

worthwhile, not to help you out of a jam. (Spouses and children excepted!) This is also strongly connected to playing on guilt.

Other points to remember in asking people to volunteer appear in the box on page 9.

Summing it up

When you take a step back to think about volunteer recruitment, the benefits far outweigh the time involved. As this story has detailed, you can build an accurate picture of what the branch needs as well as what kind of people can best achieve those needs. At the same time, you are taking a fresh look at the image of the branch and how members see you. By examining volunteer recruitment, you can also gain insight into changes the branch may need to make to clarify the local union's ultimate goals and reasons for existing.

Remember that an effective volunteer recruitment program is not going to happen overnight. Nor will all the people that you approach quickly buy into the opportunities you offer. Rather, as you work toward refining and focusing your approach to volunteers, you will make slow but sure progress toward creating a solid base of support among branch members who thoroughly understand and appreciate NALC's accomplishments.

"When we reach out more effectively to members, asking for their input, we can change the way people think about the branch," says Worcester Branch 25 president James Servideo. "We move away from the notion that the local union is only there for people who mess up. Instead, we build up awareness of the branch as an organization where everyone participates, where solidarity is a reality." ■

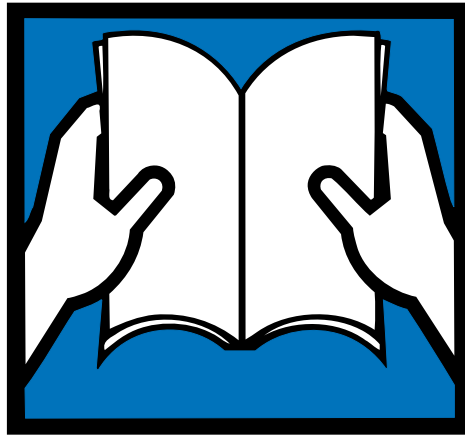
Can management impose 'blanket' discipline?

Savvy consumers shopping for clothes have learned to be more than a tad suspicious of the reassuring words, "One size fits all." People come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, and a garment to fit everyone would probably look like—well, like a blanket, a shapeless hunk of cloth that really fits nobody.

Although most of us recognize the fallacy of "one size fits all," Postal Service managers seem to be slow learners. Almost every NALC steward has encountered the idea of **blanket discipline** or **table of penalties**—management directives that mandate the same kind of discipline for every infraction of a certain rule, no matter what the circumstances may be. Blanket discipline is not merely a bad idea—it violates the *National Agreement*. Article 16, Discipline Procedure, requires that USPS management administer discipline only for just cause. When managers blindly apply blanket discipline or table of penalties, they have failed that requirement.

A recent regional arbitration decision (C-16436) offers insight into the ways that management attempts to use blanket discipline or table of penalties and the arguments that will prevail against such attempts. In this case, the arbitrator sustained the NALC's grievance of a seven-day suspension imposed on a letter carrier who was involved in an at-fault vehicle accident.

As an examination of the case reveals, the union had a number of points that would have prevailed. The arbitrator, however, considered only one argument—that the discipline had been ordered by higher management, rather than by the grievant's immediate supervisor. The arbitrator cited the



existence of a district-wide memo *requiring* that certain types of discipline be given for safety violations as evidence that higher management had usurped the discipline decision in violation of Article 16 of the contract.

The facts

Neither side disputed the fact that the grievant had caused a vehicle accident by hitting an approaching vehicle while backing out of a patron's driveway. Also, the parties agreed that up to this point, the grievant had no discipline or any previous accidents on his record for the 24 years he had been a carrier.

According to the grievant, he had been following a practice of nine years in pulling into the driveway, delivering the mail and then backing out into the street. At the moment of collision, his speed had been under five miles per hour. In examining the car he had hit, the grievant himself had to point out the damage to the other driver because the damage was so minor.

Eleven days after this incident, the carrier received a letter from his supervisor informing him that he would be suspended for seven days as

a result of the incident. The union grieved the suspension and the grievance proceeded through the grievance-arbitration procedure.

Union arguments

The NALC representative did not deny that the grievant had been in an at-fault vehicle accident. However, the union argued that the seven-day suspension was a violation of the contract in many ways.

First, Article 16 requires that discipline be corrective, not punitive. For this reason discipline must be progressive in nature. To jump directly to a seven-day suspension for such a

Blanket discipline violates the National Agreement.

minor accident for a carrier with an otherwise spotless record is clearly a violation of these requirements and constitutes the imposition of punitive discipline.

Also, the NALC presented evidence indicating that the grievant's immediate supervisor did not have full responsibility for the discipline decision. The NALC steward testified

that the supervisor had stated that discipline would be issued only after a consultation with the postmaster and with people at the district level. At the hearing, the supervisor testified that normally the accident would have resulted in discipline no greater than a letter of warning, but because a directive had been issued from the district, the supervisor was required to take a tougher stance on accidents.

The union presented the text of this district directive, which was issued a month before the grievant's accident. In the directive, the district manager stated, "The increase in accidents, injuries and associated costs are far above our goals and is a trend which must be reversed. Therefore, effective immediately, any violation of a safety rule or procedure will result in discipline."

The memo went on to state that violations of safety rules that "display extreme carelessness" will "normally" result in a suspension, "regardless of the employee's past record of accidents/injuries."

The union advocate argued that the existence of this memo effectively removed discretion from the carrier's immediate supervisor either to make the decision whether to issue discipline or to resolve the grievance at Step 1.

USPS arguments

The Postal Service advocate responded by stating that the grievant had clearly been involved in an at-fault vehicle accident, a clear violation of safety rules. The union failed to prove that the discipline violated any due-process requirement. Although the USPS advocate confirmed the existence of the district memo, the advocate denied that the memo mandated disciplinary action. Therefore, the discipline was entirely appropriate.

The arbitrator rules

In making his decision, the arbitrator chose to focus on the question of whether the existence of the district directive constituted a mandate of discipline by higher management. The arbitrator cited language in Article 16.1 which states, "No employee may be disciplined except for just cause such as...failure to observe safety rules and regulations." He then stated exactly why the district memo was in violation of this language.

The memo removed discretion from the immediate supervisor.

"In the view of the Arbitrator, this language permits—but does not require—disciplinary language to be imposed for safety violations," the arbitrator wrote. "By comparison, the district directive states, in relevant part, that '...any violation of a safety rule or procedure **will result** in disciplinary action.' This language clearly requires supervisors in the district to impose discipline, whether or not the supervisor believes that discipline is warranted under the facts of a particular situation.

"Thus...the district directive is a mandate, since it creates within the district a policy under which all safety violations result in disciplinary

action, thereby effectively removing supervisory discretion."

Because the district memo was so clearly a violation of the contract, the arbitrator stated that its existence alone was sufficient to sustain the grievance. Therefore the arbitrator did not go on to consider other union arguments such as the imposition of punitive discipline.

In his award, the arbitrator ordered management to rescind the suspension and make the grievant whole.

Note to stewards

This case illustrates that NALC stewards should be on the lookout for any instances of management policy that amounts to blanket discipline or table of penalties. Such statements from managers remove the immediate supervisor from the discipline decision. With blanket discipline or table of penalties, the immediate supervisor no longer has the authority to investigate and decide whether to issue discipline in the first place, nor can the immediate supervisor determine the level of discipline that is appropriate.

Blanket discipline policies violate a fundamental requirement of just cause: that management investigate each case carefully and weigh each case on its own merits before making disciplinary decisions. The contract requires that the individual circumstances of each case be considered, with the immediate supervisor taking into account not only the previous record of the person accused of the infraction, but also the severity of the infraction and the existence of any mitigating factors.

Just like smart shoppers, NALC stewards should never accept the reasoning that "one size fits all." Always grieve any case involving the imposition of blanket discipline and insist that each case be measured on its own merits. ■

Broadcasting labor's message

Getting publicity for NALC branch events at first glance looks straightforward. You follow the rules, put together press releases, call reporters, set up news conferences. Many articles and books cover these points, including the *NALC Activist* stories, "Use public relations to tell the union story," in the Spring 1991 issue, and "Using the media to boost the branch," in the Spring 1994 issue.

But suppose you follow all those rules, you make all the right moves in setting up a legitimate news event—and nobody comes. Or some of the reporters that do show up have questions that seem critical, even hostile.

Many NALC branch leaders have had such experiences. San Diego, California Branch 70 president Steve Shank, for example, knows that San Diego's staunchly Republican newspaper, the *Tribune*, never covers NALC news. And in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, NALC Branch 115 president Mike Wills was amazed that a reporter's questions about the national food drive seemed to imply that the food might be misappropriated.

"The reporter was asking me how I knew that the food really went to deserving people," remembers Wills. "She wanted to get into all kinds of political aspects, and I finally had to tell her that the food drive is purely and simply a community benefit, no politics attached."

It would be comforting to believe that such examples are isolated instances involving uninformed reporters working for media companies that represent only a tiny minority of existing news distributors. However, in just the past few years some disturbing trends seem to be driving American mass media and its reporters further

away from the ability to seek out and reflect the issues and events that are important to union members in particular and working people generally.

A number of media analysts have commented on some of these trends—how news is becoming trivialized and viewed as entertainment, how serious issues are pushed off front pages and news broadcasts in favor of spicy scandals or non-events involving celebrities, and how mergers and the formation of media conglomerates create a not-so-subtle bias within the media to focus on an audience of relatively wealthy viewers who have a great deal of discretionary income.

Conglomerates control most of the media and influence its content.

"American media is turning into a national entertainment state controlled by a dwindling handful of media moguls and global corporations," writes Don Hazen, director of the Institute for Alternative Journalism, in a new book, *We the Media: Fighting for Media Democracy*. Hazen and other critics point out that stories about the economy, for example, generally discuss stock prices—news that affects a more upper-class audience. And reports on plant closings and downsiz-

ings usually look at how such events affect Wall Street rather than workers.

Charges of media bias have been around for years. And generally such charges come from both ends of the political spectrum. While unions and workers' groups claim that the media shortchanges their issues, extremely vocal critics on the right claim that the national media is a hotbed of liberals and leftists. Media reporters and owners claim, therefore, that because they're attacked by both sides, they must in truth be neutral and objective.

So who's right? And in any case, why should NALC activists care about what's actually happening to the mass media? In this story, local union leaders talk about how their enhanced awareness of the existence of subtle and not-so-subtle bias has shaped the way they approach the media. The bad news is that the mega-conglomerates that control most of the media are indeed influencing the content of the media. But there's good news as well: Branch leaders have found ways to make the system work for them, primarily through building strong personal relationships with individual reporters.

Facts about the media

Back in 1983, Ben Bagdikian, a former journalism school dean and *Washington Post* editor, sounded the alarm about the negative impact of a shrinking number of corporations owning a growing percentage of U.S. media in his book, *The Media Monopoly*. At that time, about 50 corporations dominated the media.

Today, four companies—GE, Westinghouse, Disney and Time Warner—control the major TV news divisions. These same four, plus three

others, own almost every TV channel you can get on cable. Fourteen companies control over half the newspaper circulation.

How does this concentration of ownership affect the content of the media? Some examples:

Progressive talk-show host Jim Hightower, who brought his own unique brand of wit and wisdom to NALC's 1996 national convention, had two million listeners on the ABC Radio Network before the network was bought by Disney. When Hightower criticized Disney on the air for replac-

ing full-time workers with contract labor, ABC canceled his show.

After acquiring ABC, Disney had its news division apologize to Philip Morris—a major TV advertiser, through Kraft Foods—for having told the truth on a broadcast of *Day One* about the company's manipulation of nicotine levels in its cigarettes.

Rupert Murdoch, whose News Corporation owns Fox Television, 20th Century Fox, *TV Guide*, HarperCollins and the *New York Post*, among others, summarily took the BBC off his satellite programming to Asia because it

sometimes ran stories critical of the Chinese government—which controls a lucrative market for Murdoch.

Commenting on the growing concentration of media ownership, veteran anchor Walter Cronkite has said, "When they [corporations] control all the sources of media within a community, this is a very dangerous situation. They can declare their own blackout of news they don't want the public to share. Or they can twist the news anyway they please. And there's no monitor. There's nobody to say, 'Don't.' Nobody to say, 'Hey, wait a minute, folks, you're not getting the truth.'"

Basics of media relations

As NALC branch leaders in the accompanying story point out, media coverage of NALC events and activities can and does happen. Branch leaders need to know a few basic pointers:

- **Maintain good contact with the media.** Don't wait until a week before the event to find out who might cover it. Call local media for names of reporters and try to meet them. Send these reporters the branch newsletter and other announcements from the branch.

Invite reporters and editors to NALC events. They may not attend, but they will become aware that NALC is an active part of the community.

- **Write clear, simple media advisories and press releases.** When you have an event you'd like to see covered, alert reporters with a one-page, fact-filled media advisory. The advisory should give reporters just enough information to entice them to cover the event—but not so much that they can write their story off your advisory. Then be sure to prepare a press release for distribution on the

day of the event itself. Write the release as if it were a news story—lead with who, what, where, when and why.

And speaking of press releases—media analysts note that up to 40 percent of the "news" is virtually unedited press releases from corporate public relations offices.

- **Think about setting up media events and photo opportunities.** TV people want sound bites and catchy pictures. If you can stage an event to meet their needs, you have a better chance of success. But make sure the event is newsworthy. For example, to publicize the national food drive, many branches inform TV stations about the best places to be to get dramatic shots of towers of donated food.

- **Keep trying.** Many times a branch's first few efforts to get media coverage will fail and not necessarily because the media is biased. Although publishers generally have strong anti-union views, most reporters are every day workers who sympathize with your concerns. However, they don't often get news from local union leaders. It may take time to cultivate and inform these reporters, so don't give up. ■

What to do

In many cities as well as smaller communities, mega-corporations now dominate all forms of media. Does this mean that NALC branches will never get reporters to cover its events and issues?

"It depends on what information you offer," says Los Angeles, California Branch 24 president Larry Brown. Brown recognizes that the news media especially thrive on stories of conflict, and he's been contacted fairly frequently by reporters wanting to talk about violent incidents at postal facilities. And Brown takes every opportunity—even these negative ones—to build relationships with local reporters.

Brown understands that a good relationship with the media is a two-way street—unless you talk to reporters when they need your cooperation, they won't be willing to listen to you when you're trying to "sell" them on a story.

"You make connections, and they pay off," he says. Sometimes when he gets a call to comment on a negative situation, he'll ask for coverage of a positive event in return. This tactic has also worked for Steve Shank at San Diego Branch 70.

"Seems like the only time the news people call us is for something bad,"

Shank says. “But you’ve got to use those occasions to get to know reporters, inform them about the bigger issues affecting carriers and union members.” Shank stresses the need to stay available and to keep “bugging” reporters for coverage.

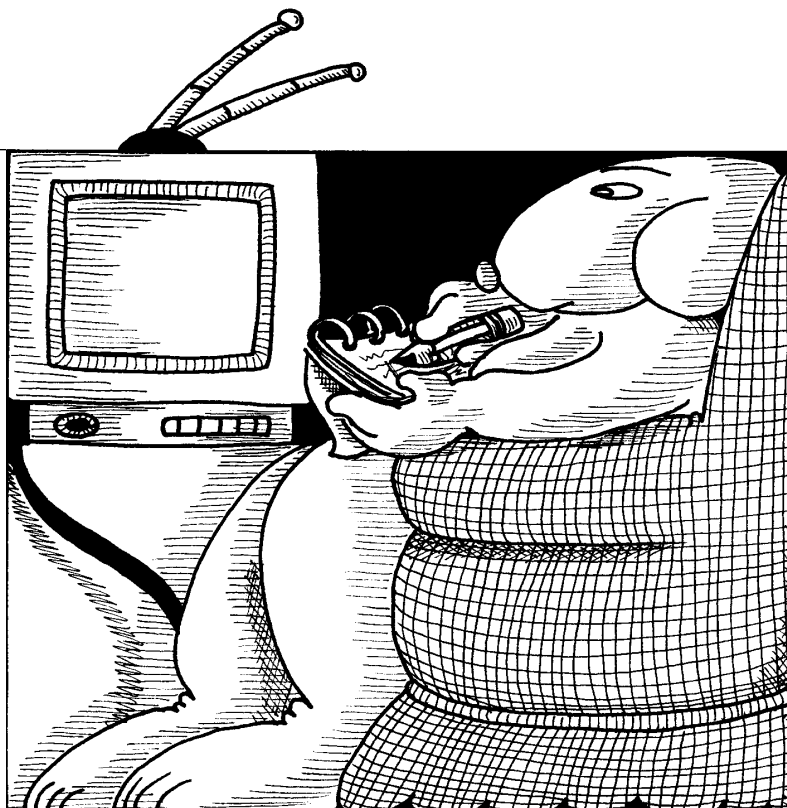
As Buffalo Branch 3 president Bob McClennan notes, “You’ve got to make it easy for reporters to get the news you have to offer.” For example, every year during the NALC food drive, McClennan calls local TV stations to pass along locations of food collection points where TV crews can get good footage. “I tell them to go to places right next to where the TV stations are, and give them the best time to get shots of lots of food,” he says.

Longterm change

Such common-sense tactics can help NALC branches become more of a presence on local media. At the same time, many media analysts urge that people who are unhappy with how their news gets reported begin taking positive action. For example, journalist Danny Schechter urges people to monitor media performance in their own communities.

“If teachers and their students, labor unions and their members began tracking what’s on TV and radio, they will be able to better detect and challenge bias,” he writes in *The More You Watch, The Less You Know*. “So armed, citizen groups will be in a better position to demand accountability by media corporations.”

Resources abound for people interested in learning more about the current state of American media. The media watchdog group, FAIR (Fairness in Accuracy in Reporting), has developed manuals and lists of criteria to use in monitoring



media. For the past two years, the Media and Democracy Congress, which is sponsored in part by unions, has attracted more than 1,000 people who debate how to ensure freedom of the press. (For more information on these resources, see the box on this page.)

It’s true that local leaders need to keep focused on the basic rules of public relations. (For a quick review, see the box on page 14.) But union activists may also want to think about the growing evidence that mass media is grossly distorting the challenges facing our society, and therefore also heavily influencing the solutions to these challenges. ■

Where to get more information on media

Several new books and a number of organizations—both new and long-standing—offer insight into the workings of American mass media. Here are some suggestions for further investigation:

We the Media: A Citizen’s Guide to Fighting for Media Democracy, edited by Don Hazen and Julie Winokur, is a compilation of articles and resources focusing on such issues as media concentration, commercialization, content and access. (At larger bookstores or send \$18, which includes shipping, to Institute for Alternative Journalism, 77

Federal St., 2nd Floor, San Francisco, CA 94107.)

The More You Watch, The Less You Know by Danny Schechter is a first-hand description of life on the inside at both commercial and alternative media. (At bookstores or order for \$26.95 plus shipping from 800-597-7437.)

Through the Media Looking Glass: Decoding Bias and Blather in the News by Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon, looks at media concentration, talk radio, labor reporting and other issues. (\$13.95 in bookstores)

FAIR, Fairness and Accuracy in

Reporting, is the leader of the nation’s media watchdog groups. They publish a monthly magazine, *Counter Spin*, and offer guides and manuals for monitoring the media. Contact FAIR at 130 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001, 212-663-6700.

On the Internet, you can access the contents of both meetings of the Media and Democracy Congress. Its address: <http://www.mediademocracy.org>. The page is maintained by Media Democracy, 77 Federal Street, San Francisco, CA 94107 (415) 284-1420. ■

Regional Training Seminars

Listed below are regional training and educational seminars scheduled to begin before August 1, 1998.

For more information, contact your national business agent.

Atlanta Region (Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina)

May 1-2, South Carolina State Convention, Holiday Inn Downtown, Myrtle Beach, SC.

May 29-31, Florida State Training Seminar, Holiday Inn, Gainesville, FL.

June 19-20, North Carolina State Training Seminar, Radisson Governor's Inn, Durham, NC.

June 20-21, Georgia State Convention, Columbus Hilton, Columbus, GA.

National Business Agent Matthew Rose, (954) 964-2116.

District of Columbia Region (Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia)

April 28-29, Virginia State Shop

Steward Training, Fort Magruder Inn, Williamsburg, VA.

National Business Agent Tony Martinez, (410) 813-2130.

KIM Region (Indiana, Kentucky and Michigan)

May 1-2, Indiana State Convention, Holiday Inn, Michigan City, IN.

May 14-16, Michigan Off-Year Seminar, Holiday Inn Fairlane Conference Center, Detroit, MI.

National Business Agent Ron Brown, (248) 589-1779.

Memphis Region (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee)

April 24-25, Mississippi State Steward Training Seminar, Ramada Inn, Natchez, MS.

National Business Agent Ben Johnson, (615) 366-1951.

Minneapolis Region (Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin)

April 20-24, Regional Training Seminar, Minneapolis, MN.

April 25-26, North Dakota Spring Training Session, Fargo, ND.

National Business Agent Barry Weiner, (612) 378-3035.

St. Louis Region (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska)

April 17-19, Nebraska State Convention and Training Seminar, Ramada Inn, Norfolk, NE.

May 1-2, Kansas State Convention and Training Seminar, Holiday Inn, Olatha, KS.

May 3-5, Iowa State Convention and Training Seminar, Holiday Inn, Waterloo, IA.

June 12-14, Missouri State Convention and Training Seminar, Marina Bay Resort, Osage Beach, MO.

National Business Agent Joe Miller, (314) 872-0227.

San Francisco Region (California, Guam, Hawaii, Nevada)

May 28, MBA Training, Burlingame Hyatt, Burlingame, CA.

National Business Agent Dale Hart, (714) 554-0775.

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