

# The Downward Spiral

A Peculiar Journal of Free Press Editorial Employees

## We Have Met the Enemy...Us

Whom should we blame for the demeaning contract now before us?

We can blame our employer, but Knight-Ridder and Gannett are only following the corporate imperative by seeking to maximize profits for their shareholders.

We can blame the Teamsters or the pressmen, but they are only acting in their members' self-interest, trying to cut the best deal they can.

We can blame our bargainers, but they did their best. In fact they deserve congratulations for their long, hard frustrating work.

We can blame the economy, the newspaper industry, God or K-mart.

These are all convenient targets to deflect blame from ourselves.

For the past four years, self-interest has dominated the agenda of Free Press editorial employees. When the company threatened to close the paper unless we endorsed the JOA, we did not stand up to the blackmail threat by working with those Guild members and members of other newspaper unions whose jobs would be eliminated by a JOA. The company said our jobs would be safe, so to protect our own butts we sided with the company against our co-workers.

We joined in various company-sponsored competitions to out-write, out-do-good and out-ass-kiss our fellow employees, for praise, money and special privileges.

We negotiated our own deals with the company, if we could.

We came to union meetings and got involved in work place issues only when we were personally affected. As a result, the union was divided and weakened, with many coming to rely on the company to take care of them in the brave new world of the JOA.

To some, the events of the last few weeks have been a rude awakening. Knight-Ridder and Gannett decided to jump-start the JOA to reap profits from holiday advertising. They dared us to get in the way of their juggernaut, and we chickened out.

Having the power to silence the jingle of ad bucks, we backed off our own strike deadline and toned down our loud and legitimate demands to a deferential whisper. Then we used the K-mart deadline to talk ourselves down some more. We came out with a contract that stinks.

It is easy to blame the other unions for settling for less than we wanted. But they got the goodies they craved. If we had gotten 35 personal days, would we have given a thought to what the other unions wanted? Did we give a thought to the pressmen during our celebrations over the JOA?

Solidarity should mean that no union settles until every union gets what it wants. But when self-interest dominates, any mutt in the kennel of unions will bolt if the right bone is tossed. What do we know about the working conditions of people who deliver the Free Press, run the presses or paste up the pages, of the people who sell ads or keep the books? What are their gripes? What are their issues? Most of us only find out about these things at contract time.

We need a conference or a series of workshops at which all the employees of the News, Free Press and DNA can discuss their situations and try to arrive at ways to work more effectively together.

After all, 1989 won't be the last time the companies try to play us off against one another. In order to get stronger, we have to overcome mistrust, transcend self-interest, and be willing to sacrifice for a collective gain.

Take the issue of overtime. Many of us enjoy the freedom of a flexible schedule. Some of us, however, regularly work overtime but rarely claim the extra pay for fear of rocking the boat. Any discussion of "work to rule" quickly brings the reply: "But then I'll have to follow the contract myself."

Self-interest, self-protection is logical. But in the profit-driven corporate culture of the post-JOA world, such values will save only the privileged and the lucky.

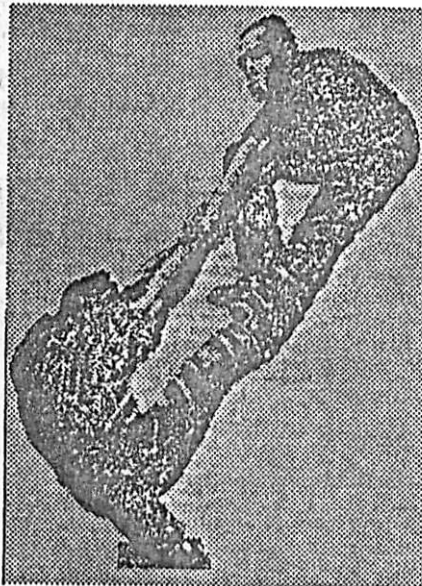
By what management techniques do you suppose Knight-Ridder and Gannett plan to make \$100 million a year in the Detroit market? By expanding payrolls, maximizing news-gathering budgets and spending freely to create the best working conditions for staffs?

On the contrary, our employers will find more ways to try to divide and conquer and make us dependent on them. More perks, more favors, more contests, more deals. And more personnel cuts.

We as Guild members must find creative and effective ways to fight such tactics. The first step may be to recognize we're all in this together. We can't sit back and expect union leadership to take care of us without our active support.

Too many Guild members refer to the union as "they." The union is us. Faced now with this bitter pill, we can't afford to swallow hard and return to business as usual. We have to put away past divisions. We have to grow up, sober up and get to work on building a much stronger union.

- BETZOLD



**Viva La First Amendment: Your writing & graphic contributions to The Downward Spiral are needed.**

# Diary



Dear Diary,

Alvah, his usual jovial self, stopped by for drinks this afternoon. Invited me to fly down to Miami on the Knight-Ridder corporate jet for an evening of ocean fishing. I figured he'd make me scale the fish like last time. I politely but firmly refused.

Sometimes I get the feeling these people don't really like me for myself. Gosh, I know that sounds paranoid, but I get to thinking they only hang around me because of what they think I can do for them.

I said to Alvah in my finely-honed lawyerly way, "Alvah, old pal, quit beating around the bush. There's something on your mind."

Alvah says: "I'll come to the point. I'm worried about this JOA situation in Detroit. What if it goes to the Supreme Court? I mean, Ed Meese we can manage, but the High Court? They're nine justices out of control, Clark!"

"Well, maybe ... And again, maybe not," I winked slyly. Of course, dear diary, I was too cagey to come right out with what I thought.

"Clark, by any chance are you, er, FRIENDS with any of those fellas on the High Court? Or — heh-heh — maybe with that gal, what's her name?"

"Oh bless me, Alvah, you do know how to flatter an old dog, don't you? To tell the truth, I like to think they're ALL my friends, except that maniac, Billie Rehnquist."

"Gosh, Clark, you wouldn't happen to be friends with, say, a simple MAJORITY OPINION of the Supreme Court?"

"Gosh, no, Alvah, just with Byron White. Whizzer and I used to play a little touch football \_"

"TOUCH football, Clark? You don't mean touch as in TOUCH? Oh, lordie, Clarkie, that's wonderful. Did you ever TOUCH Whizzer?"

"Oh, hell yes, Alvah, I tagged him many a time, back in the good ol' days."

"My word, Clarkie, will wonders never cease? Did you ever touch any of the other justices?"

"Afraid not, Alvah."

"Hmmm, I don't know, Clark. One justice out of nine is a long way from a majority."

"In touch football, Alvah, one justice out of the game is better than nine in."

"Hey, Clarkie, I just had a thought! How'd you like to be Knight-Ridder's lobbyist? If this JOA thing ever moves to the Supreme Court, we could use a good, heh-heh, quarterback."

See what I mean, dear diary? These people never like me just for myself. They're always thinking about what I can DO for them!

Well, guess I better go out and practice my passing.

CLARK



Tom Bray's Bray

People have asked us whether the JOA doesn't violate our general bias toward competition and the free market. The answer is no. In a truly free market, there wouldn't be rules against such mergers in the first place, because it's absurd to pretend that The News and Free Press constitute some sort of monopoly. The proliferation of local, state and national publications, as well as television, radio and direct mail marketing, long ago made a mockery of this notion. If it were otherwise

Sure, Tom.

Oh well. At least he didn't censor his cartoonist.

## ASK

### Ms. Monopoly

### JOA Q & A



**Q. THE EVENTS OF THE LAST WEEK HAVE LEFT ME CONFUSED. I PARK IN A DETROIT NEWS LOT. A FREE PRESS TRUCK DELIVERS THE NEWS TO OUR BUILDING. THE FREE PRESS SWITCHBOARD ANSWERS THE PHONE, "DETROIT NEWSPAPER AGENCY." THE NEWS HAS LOCAL COVERAGE ON PAGE THREE; WE HAVE IT ON A SECTION FRONT. AND WHAT ABOUT THE CROSS WORD PUZZLES? DO WE STILL WORK FOR KNIGHT-RIDDER?**

*A. No. There's a new feeling in the air. Can't you smell it? We work for K-Mart, and John Jaske is our boss.*

**Q. IF THERE HAD BEEN A STRIKE, WHICH FREE PRESS EMPLOYEES WOULD HAVE SCABBED?**

*A. Ms. Mono says it's never nice to point fingers.*