

## Opening Statement

Guild-AP Negotiations, Oct. 20, 2010

When the News Media Guild began national bargaining with The Associated Press in the late 1950's, news moved over teletype and motorcycle couriers. National bargaining was new for the AP in 1958, as was something called "Sputnik" that was orbiting overhead. The motorcycles have largely come and gone, and the AP is moving away from the satellite system. What the Guild hopes will remain constant, however, are contract discussions that are based on mutual respect and the understanding that however the journalism is distributed, fair treatment of the employees who provide the news is essential to quality journalism.

The last contract bargaining two years ago took place amid what appeared to be a financial precipice. There were many changes, and AP employees made many sacrifices. But there have been some disappointments.

The AP and the Guild agreed to more detailed job security provisions with the understanding that staff reductions would soon be in the offing.

In the talks, both sides agreed on a process that sought to soften the blow. But unfortunately, the AP did not fully avail itself of the agreed-upon mechanism to seek voluntary departures ahead of layoffs. AP chose to offer voluntary buyouts in only

three cases – resulting in much anxiety that could have easily been prevented, and AP fell short of staff expectations for less disruption.

This year, the Guild will be proposing changes to the job security article to fix gaps in the implementation of future staff reductions, including clarifying seniority rules for small correspondencies, and how recalls work. We have noted that the company is again hiring – but with new qualifications that seem to leave current employees who haven't received video or multimedia training out of the mix. The Guild will be advancing new training language.

We believe employee job security should withstand a decision to use contractors while employees' work continues. AP photographers need to hear that.

As we mentioned, the relationship between the employer and the staff should be based on respect, but it also has to be based on truth, a truth that both the Guild and the AP have long understood is essential in the news report. For that reason, our members are dismayed by AP's new approach toward staff evaluations issued over the last two years. In the business news department, staffers signed a petition urging AP to stop using the evaluation process – which is supposed to be a constructive – as a weapon. Instead, our members report that increasingly, the lack of honesty in evaluations is rendering them useless at best, and confrontational at worst. The management evaluation user's guide confirms their worst fears. The

Guild will be making proposals to address the evaluation process and employees' Weingarten rights.

In the area of economics, the Guild does not dispute that AP and its owners are facing continued challenges and pressures, and the union is glad the AP has aggressively moved into new platforms and content ownership tracking systems.

We are also pleased that AP technicians – whom the AP once referred to as its “ambassadors” – are taking on new roles in the operation of the Help Desk. We view that as constructive and a way to maintain technical excellence, support we ask be extended to video and other technical work.

Still, quality journalism is not free. The Guild will be making a wage proposal that reflects the increased productivity of the staff and their talents. The wage proposal, along with many long sought goals, such as improvements in pensions, health benefits, and union security reflect the hopes and aspirations of the staff.

We note that in the AP's Answer and Counterclaim in the Shepard Fairey (Obama poster) case, the company told a federal court that its employees work for “modest financial remuneration.”

We couldn't agree more.

We hope that as we start these talks, we will continue to find areas of agreement as we work for a speedy and fair successor contract.