

IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICE
IN LABOUR NEWS REPORTING

by

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Abstract

This study of ideology in the news media attempts to describe the ways in which a practical activity such as labour reporting is implicated in a larger process of constructing a view of the world from the perspective and in terms of the enterprises of those who "rule". Ideological practice in this study involves those organizational practices for creating "objective" news accounts which introduce a fundamental source of bias from a management perspective. In Chapter I the social context in which labour news accounts are made in advanced capitalist societies is discussed. The traditional approach to communications theory is criticized as a means to describe how an institutionalized or "biased" point of view is produced. This approach is rejected in favour of working within the framework of the "social organization of knowledge". This is concerned with the understanding of how "factual", documented accounts are constructed in bureaucratically organized settings. In Chapter II and III we examine the practical work activities involved in labour reporting at the "Star", a major Canadian daily newspaper in Western Canada. The practices involved in generating news accounts and establishing their factual status in an organizationally warrantable manner at the "Star" are examined. In Chapter

II, three aspects involved in the generation of news accounts are viewed, i.e., those routine practices for locating, defining and writing news accounts. The manner in which "events" and "facts" are constructed in these processes reveals that the presuppositions regarding "labour" attain practical significance in the procedures for perceiving what could be defined as newsworthy. Chapter III contains a discussion of the methods for documenting these accounts which express a management perspective in the construction of "labour". In this section, the following practices are examined for establishing the factual status of an account in terms of this relation to labour: a) the use of "reliable" sources to authorize an interpretation; b) reference to "objective" standards of interpretation to guard against "bias"; c) how the reporter's opinion on "the story" are separated from "the facts", and d) the production of "facts" through consensus. We conclude that the ordinary, routine procedures for reporting labour news construct a "managerial" conception of "labour" in the media. The ideological practices for "objective" reporting structure the relation of peoples' everyday experiences to their modes of thought about the world. This symbolic mode of action is one aspect of the unequal distribution of knowledge in advanced capitalist societies and is a product of the ruling institutions which reproduce the extant relations of domination under capitalism.

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CHAPTER 1

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE NEWS MEDIA

The topic of this paper is the social organization of labour news reporting as it is done at the "Star" daily paper in a Western Canadian province. In this study we will attempt to demonstrate how the news organization mediates and hence structures the relation between what happens in the world and what is represented publicly in the news as having happened.*

The process in which institutionally mediated knowledge is produced is of central importance to advanced capitalist society.¹ This centrality has to do with the changing forms of domination that are exercised by ruling groups in the specific historical conditions of advanced

*The original work for this paper was done for a seminar on the Social Organization of Knowledge at the University of British Columbia. The conceptual framework was developed by Professor Dorothy E. Smith and many helpful insights were contributed by Kevin Busswood, Nancy Jackson, Thierry Lebrun and Sylvia Webster.

capitalism. As greater portions of our lives come under the control of centralized forms of administration and management, decision making processes become less and less available to individual scrutiny. Social awareness is increasingly dependent on highly rationalized forms of administration and the social processes which underlie their creation, reproduction and transformation. The ideological mystification which results helps maintain a system in which knowledge necessary for social action is differentially distributed between ruling and non-ruling groups.²

Boyte and Ackerman contrast the effectiveness of ideological mystification in two very different contexts - advanced capitalism and autocratic third world countries. In pre-revolutionary China, Russia, Cuba and in many third world countries today, the ruling classes were dramatically polarized from the masses. Under these circumstances, the legitimacy of the ruling class and the state was significantly undermined. In such cases, they maintain, state repression is necessarily the primary instrument of ruling class domination against indigenous revolutionary movements. This is not the case, however, under advanced capitalism, in which material conditions are not as oppressive nor are politics as transparent. Under these conditions, state

repression is not the primary means of class domination; rule is achieved

first through 'consent' and acquiescence, through the contradictory and confused ideas ... that legitimate the capitalist status quo and redirect the hostility and frustrations that capitalism causes away from the system, towards other oppressed groups.

Popular 'consent' and acquiescence may be understood as a relationship between the masses and the ruling class in the complex articulated societies of advanced capitalism. Gramsci used the notion of 'hegemony' to explain this relationship and its role in class domination. Hegemony consists of

an equilibrium between 'civil' society and 'political' society, between 'leadership' or direction based on consent and 'domination' based on coercion in the broadest sense. Through civil society, the hegemony of one social group over the whole nation (is) exercised through so-called private organizations⁴ as the church, trade unions or schools.

In the ruling class we include

those positions which are part of that total complex of activities by which contemporary capitalist society is ruled, managed and administered. These activities are differentiated into many spheres. Thus the ruling class, as the term is used here, subsumes that whole section which in the business world is called 'management' and in government 'bureaucracy'. It includes also the professions and the work of those who train, indoctrinate and select those who will be its governors,

namely the educators. It includes those who provide and elaborate its procedures and develop methods of accounting for how it is done and happens, namely the schools of business administration, the 'sciences' of economics and sociology. It includes also those who conceive, play with, and spin out the artistic forms in which it is expressed, formulated, justified and made natural-seeming.⁵

This includes those "dominant groups" who comprise the minority of individuals who control the decision making processes.⁶ The various segments of this group, while diverging in their specific interests, have a unifying interest in preserving the structures of domination under capitalism and an unchanged economic system.⁷

According to Gramsci, the forms of cultural domination are as crucial to class rule as that of state power. 'Civil' society, or the entire complex of social, cultural and political organizations and institutions in a particular society, must be analyzed in order to understand the means to obtain consensus and support for the formal political leadership of the state. The guiding ideas and intellectual currents of civil society are integrally related to the organization of social relations and the hegemonic position of ruling groups in advanced capitalism.

The process of governing modern society then involves a symbolic mode of action which structures our

relation to social reality from within what Gramsci referred to as 'civil' society. This symbolic mode is constructed from within bureaucratically organized settings, e.g. universities, military organizations, central intelligence agencies and newspaper offices, and is provided in the form of documented accounts, e.g. newspapers, television, books. These result in what Smith has called a "socially constructed documentary reality": this view of the world is

constituted in those socially organized practices of reporting and accounting which mediate our relation to 'what actually happens' in the world.

In these processes, in which it is decided what will be said about the world, two levels of phenomena are at play: 1) the symbolic or conceptual level, which is constituted by organizationally correct and administratively recognizable interpretive procedures; these take place within historically situated institutional structures and implicitly depend on and take in the conceptual framework of a given profession; and 2) the "real world" or practical organization of life into ordinary day-to-day interactions and situations.

The process of governing society involves using the symbolic mode, which is an articulation of ruling interests, as the representation of the "real world"

interests of non-ruling groups.⁹ This mode of knowledge is normally presented as "objective" portrayals of the world. These are documented as such in the settings in which they are produced. The result of this process is a "documentary" form of knowledge, a form in which the world is known to those who rule it.¹⁰ This institutionally mediated knowledge is a mode of knowing which is

fundamental to the governing super-structures (whether of business, government, the professions or other). The organized processes of act and decision which are the acts and decisions by which governing, managing administration, etc., get done are built up out of and depend upon knowledge put together in this way.¹¹

The use of the term ideology in this context refers to a world view which represents reality as it is for those who occupy ruling positions in society. As such, ideology is a symbolic or conceptual mode generated from a ruling relation to the objects of the world. It may be properly conceived of as a conceptual framework which operates not independently from the contexts in which it is generated but which is dependent upon the social organization of these contexts for its meaning and production.

The analysis of ideology is concerned with this relation between concept and reality in the social sciences.

It is therefore useful to explain how that which passes as an "observable" of social activity is used by social scientists, and to determine whether these coincide with the real world character of people's activities.¹² This problem is especially relevant to the discussion of the power of the press. When conceptual representations no longer make the real world available to consciousness, then it becomes possible to operate selectively upon the world, to control it, and to preserve ideal representations of those who rule.¹³ The fundamental features of society remain a mystery, and ideological representations prevent us from viewing this mystery - and the process from which it has resulted - as problematic.

Professional news reporters conceptualize the news produced in various newspapers in terms of its proximity to some criterion of "objective" reporting. In their own work, reporters at the Star are programatically committed to reporting what in that setting can be recognized as "objective" news accounts. News as such is viewed as being factual, i.e., it is claimed to report actual events in the world and to make them available for public knowledge. Nevertheless, union officials, rank and file workers and reporters for union and underground papers view labour news in the Star as consistently biased

in the favour of business. Similarly, the Star reporters view the coverage of union and underground papers as consistently "biased" in favour of labour and lacking the objectivity embodied in their own news.

The problem of our study is to understand how this contradiction in views is produced by examining how "bias" and "objectivity" are established at the "Star" as routine organizational affairs. To do so, we will view how the actual organization of newswork introduces an ideological structure into the reporting of labour news. This structure represents "labour" from a management perspective and therefore from that of the ruling institutions of society.

Labour news as it is constituted in the "Star" is an instance of such knowledge which is presented in "factual" representations of the world. In order to analyze this process, we will first contrast two theoretical perspectives on media "bias" and consider their usefulness in conceptualizing knowledge and the news:

- 1) "gatekeeping" theory, which is the predominant view espoused in traditional communications literature:¹⁴ and
- 2) the social organization of knowledge, a framework which will be followed in the discussion of labour news production at the "Star".¹⁵

2. Gatekeeping Theory

Without questioning the process in which social "observables" are originally constituted, media theorists have dealt with what they see as the problem of "bias" in the presentation of those observables. Previous studies on bias in the press suggest that its existence is commonplace.¹⁶ Bagdikian's study of 87 news organizations established a very high correlation between editorial policy and news bias, with bias almost always following policy set down by the editorial staff. On the basis of a survey of over 600 American dailies, Bowers found that the orientation of news is most actively managed by publishers, and especially on local matters.

Exactly how organizational bias is instituted remains problematic. Breed's study of over 120 newsmen found that publishers do set news policy which is typically observed by reporters. Such policy, however, is never established formally.¹⁷ Rather, policy is covert due to journalistic norms which prevent executives from openly dictating the slant of a news story. Learning of policy is achieved, according to Breed, through a process of socialization in which the recruit "discovers and internalizes the rights and obligations of his status and its norms and values ... so as to win rewards and avoid

punishments."¹⁸ Sigelman finds similar organizational practices functioning as structural forms of control, e.g., recruitment, socialization and in working arrangements. He sees these functioning so as to guarantee bias while at the same time promoting shared satisfactions between newsmen and minimizing conflict with management.¹⁹

Both of these approaches fall within the rubric of "gatekeeping" theory of news production which has been the dominant sociological perspective on the subject. Because of the inadequacies of this conceptualization, gatekeeping theory is unable to explain important aspects of the news production process. Fishman's critique of the theory of "channels and gatekeepers" in its application to news organizations points out some of the deficiencies in this approach.²⁰ Based on a comparison to the patterned movement of goods through "social channels" gatekeeping theory views news in its patterned movement through "news channels", the channels of communication. In this schema, the essential structural elements of communication are the message and the news channel, which is comprised of a sender and a receiver, the communicator and the audience. Along the channel are a series of gatekeepers (reporters and editors) who have the right to open or close their gates to messages that are transmitted.²¹ Bias in this

context is seen to be instituted by the opening or closing of the newsmen's gate. Their activities are controlled by "directed forces" which, when applied in formal organizational terms, consist of the following: the organizational setting in which the newsmen work (including sanctions, deadlines and other constraints), and the newsmen's organizational roles (formal and informal, including norms, goals and value orientations) motivating their actions.²²

Fishman's critique centres on two problems in gatekeeping theory: 1) the exclusive focus on the selection of "facts" and "events" in the outside world; and 2) the vagueness of the point of origin of a news message in the "news channel". The basic problem in focusing exclusively on the selection function of newsmen is that it has as its starting assumption the existence of a world of raw data which is immediately translatable into news upon discovery by the first communicator.

Gatekeeping theory is similar in this respect to newsmen's perception of their own activity because it is essentially a sociological elaboration of how newsmen view their own work. Both stress the function of selection or rejection of facts which exist "out there" by the reporter. Newsworthy events are treated as phenomena which are already worked up, only to be discovered by the reporter

and communicated to the public. This implies that facts and events are constituted prior to the newsmen's activity of writing a story and recognizing an "event" or a "fact" as such. This "raw material" consists, however, of some domain of events - people's talk, activities and documents produced in relation to these - which do not comprise already formulated news stories. To say that a convergence or divergence of value orientations will result in the ignoring or recording of talk and events implies that reporters play a very passive role in writing a story; however, this bears little resemblance to their actual work.²³ What is "passed on" is considerably altered from its original form in the talk of source people and is simply not explained by the notion of a gate.

The second problem with gatekeeping theory is not unrelated to the first, i.e. what is the point of origin of a news message? In gatekeeping theory, it is assumed to be obvious who the first gatekeeper is, where the "raw news" is fed into the news channel, and where the news source originates. However, the point of origin of a news source (the sender) as opposed to a gatekeeper is not so easily distinguishable: what is considered a fact or an event depends greatly on a determination which must be made from within the news organization. What may

become newsworthy, for example, may be a statement that is issued or the act of issuing it; which is newsworthy is decided by the newsman. This leads to the question of what his role really is, the first communicator of an event or the first gatekeeper? A simple illustration will make the equivocality of the two roles more explicit.

A statement was made by a union official that was printed in the Star previous to the ratification of a highly controversial contract by 32,000 woodworkers. The story was headlined as follows: IWA Leaders Considering "Terrific" 12% Offer. Merely by the addition of quotation marks, what becomes newsworthy is not the statement itself, but that there is reason to question how "terrific" the contract really was, and perhaps even the motives of the leader for characterizing it as such.* What is to be treated as a fact or event is not self evident and requires organizational work in determining precisely how and which object of knowledge will be newsworthy or fact. The opening of one's gate is not conceptually adequate to assess this process.

* The union official involved complained to the editor that the paper was becoming a party to the issue of contract ratification by changing the intended meaning of his statement. One reporter commented that putting quotes around "terrific" suggested that the union leadership was trying to cram a not-so-terrific contract down the workers' throats.

Hence, we have maintained that traditional communications theory simply adds theoretical sophistication to the newsmens' views of their work, and that this perspective is inadequate for conceptualizing the social construction of news accounts. To elucidate this process, it is necessary to consider the socially organized context in which a documented account is produced. The routine institutional practices and procedures for 'knowing' must be examined as a social mediation in the generation of such accounts.

Especially important are those practices which establish the objectivity of an account and therefore warrant its status as "fact". In this study, we have gathered such information from 30 hours of observations, from interviews and labour stories which appeared in the "Star" and union newspapers over a four month period. The observations were made in the newsroom of the major British Columbia daily newspaper and analysis is done on the basis of fieldnotes. Interview material was gathered from two groups: 1) the two labour reporters, the city editor and other newsmen at the "Star"; 2) several labour leaders, workers and editors and reporters for worker oriented (union and underground) papers. The second group will be referred to as the "union" reporters to distinguish them from the "labour" reporters at the "Star".

3. Brief Description of the "Star"

The "Star" is a leading newspaper in Western Canada. There is one other major daily paper in the city which is owned by the same corporation as the "Star". The two newspapers are housed in the same building and use many of the same operating facilities, such as printing production equipment and a library of past news stories. The Board of Directors of the corporation which owns the "Star" appoints the publisher. The publisher is responsible for the operation of the paper and has the following people directly under his direction: Assistant to the publisher, advertisement director, circulation director, promotions manager, editorial director and managing director. The paper receives revenues largely from the selling of advertisement space to companies and individuals, as well as from customer subscription, which exceeded 250,000 in May of 1975.

Formal Decision Making and the Labour Story

News stories are written in the newsroom, where the managing editor and his assistant also have their offices. The managing editor supervises the production of news, and has the following editors under his direction: Finance, Sports, Photography, Features, Living Today, City News, and News Editing. The Editorial Director works

with the Managing Editor and his assistant, however, he is responsible for the editorial material which appears in the paper. All of these editors have one or more assistants, a copy editor and reporters under their direction.

Labour news reporting is supervised by the City Editor and his assistants, as is general news on the local scene, e.g. coverage of political happenings, medical news, etc. The typical career of a story written by the two labour reporters follows the same course of any other news story handled by the city editors. A story will be turned in to the city editor (or at night, to the night assistant city editor) for an initial appraisal. If it requires no rewriting, it will be passed on to the news editor who reads the stories, stamps the page and edition of the paper it will appear, e.g. morning, afternoon, evening, and sets a tentative size allowance for the headline and the story. The story is then passed to the Copy Editor who gives it a headline, final editing and possible cutting of part of the story. The News Editor or his assistant give the final approval of a story before it is sent to the composing room to be set in type. The City Editor may overrule decisions made by the News Editor at this point in the process. The Managing Editor has the final word on whether a story goes to press or not.

In addition to these channels of decision making, a morning conference is held every day in which it is determined what stories will be placed on the front page of the first and second parts of the paper and any other special items are discussed. The following individuals attend these meetings: the Assistant Managing Editor, the News Editor, the Assistant News Editor, the Assistant City Editor, the Photography Editor, the Wire Editor, and the first and second part front page editors.

Although most stories are treated in the formal processes outlined above, there are variations on this model, depending on the circumstances. Two special circumstances were suggested by the reporter. One would involve labour stories phoned in at the last minute. Such a story could be supervised or written by the city desk (the city editor and his assistants), placed immediately by the News Editor, for example, on page one, and appear in the next edition to be printed. Another example offered would be important business stories, e.g., business reaction to the federal budget, which appears on page one. In such case, the finance editors would write the story as soon as the information was made available, and it would go immediately to the News Editor for final editing.

On the labour beat, stories will follow the standard editing and placement process, unless they are commonly produced by both reporters. In such cases, the night reporter's stories may be completed, edited or rewritten by the day reporter. The day reporter has worked on the labour beat for seven years and informally directs the night reporter, who is fairly new to the job (he has worked less than a year at this paper). However, normally, both reporters submit their stories to the city desk directly upon completion.

In Chapter I we have argued that the social contexts in which "factual" accounts are produced structures our knowledge of the world in definite ways. In Chapters II and III, we discuss the social organization of newswork at the "Star" which is directly related to the production of labour stories from the original events. Chapter II is an examination of those practices responsible for generating "events" and "issues" into news. In Chapter III we explore how objectivity is warranted in the processes for establishing the factual status of a news account. Chapter IV contains concluding remarks and summary. A sample of the fieldnotes is located in the appendix.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 For a discussion of the fundamental role of ideology in modern capitalist society, see Dorothy E. Smith's "The Social Construction of Documentary Reality" in Sociological Inquiry, Vol. 44, no. 4, 1974, p. 257-268.
- 2 Smith, p. 258.
- 3 Boyte, Harry and Ackerman, Frank, "Revolution and Democracy", in Socialist Revolution, p. 60, 1974.
- 4 Gramsci, Antonio, Letters from Prison, Lynne Lawner, translator, Harper and Row, Publishers, New York, 1973, p. 42.
- 5 Smith, Dorothy E., "Women, The Family and Corporate Capitalism" published in M. Stephenson, editor, Women in Canada, Newpress, Toronto, 1973, p. 50.
- 6 Mueller, Claus, The Politics of Communication, Oxford, University Press, New York, 1973, p. 88, footnote.
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- 8 Smith, p. 257
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- 12 Smith, Dorothy E., "The Ideological Practice of Sociology" in Catalyst, Winter 1974, no. 8, p. 42.
- 13 Smith, p. 41.
- 14 Fishman, Mark, "The Production of Media News: How Newsmen Create Social Facts" chapter 1, unpublished dissertation Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, p. 2.
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- 16 Bowers, David R., "A Report on Activity by Publishers in Directing Newsroom Decisions". Journalism Quarterly, 44: 43-52, and Bagdikian, Ben H., "The Politics of American Newspapers". Columbian Journalism Review 10: 3-13.

- 17 Breed, Warren, "Social Control in the Newsroom" Mass Communications, Wilber Schramm, editor, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 178-197.
- 18 Breed, p. 182.
- 19 Sigelman, "Reporting the News: An Organizational Analysis" American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 79, July 1973, 132-57.
- 20 Fishman, p. 3
- 21 Schramm, Gordon, "The Gatekeeper: a memorandum on Gatekeepers and the Transmission of Information" in Schramm, op. cit., p. 175.
- 22 Fishman, p. 4.
- 23 Fishman, p. 5.

CHAPTER II

NEWS PRODUCTION AT THE "STAR" (A):

GENERATING NEWS ACCOUNTS

The "Star" reporters and editors view their own work as that of "reporting", of gathering the news of the world and communicating it in as accurate and unbiased manner as possible. Their professional commitment to reporting the facts objectively assumes that there exists an objectively present world, which we all experience in more or less the same ways.¹ Their procedures for reporting aim at a communication which distorts as little as possible what exists prior to their work of locating and writing up "the news". In doing so, newsmen adopt the "attitude of everyday life". The objects of the everyday world are taken to exist independently of the mode of inquiry addressed to them.²

The approach to news production in this paper begins by suspending this assumption.* News is viewed

* Note: For the purpose of this study, we do assume the existence of an objectively present world, however, we are suspending the belief that the objects of knowledge exist as they are constructed in the newsroom.

instead as a social production, which depends on and is a product of the organizational context in which it originates. This study attempts to show how the organizationally warranted mode of inquiry at the "Star" serves to mediate and hence structure the relation between "what happens" in the world and what is represented publicly (for anyone to read) as having happened in the form of "news". Therefore, in this chapter we focus on those organizational practices directly concerned with the production of labour news stories from the original events. Particularly, we are concerned with those practices which establish the "objectivity" of the news account and therefore warrant its status as "fact".

In studying the methods used to construct accounts in the newsroom we are not attempting to provide an authoritative version of "what really happened". Rather, this is an examination of the routine organizational practices which create one version of reality and not others. Newsworthiness is not viewed as an event's objective features. Rather, news is viewed as a social construction. It is therefore dependent on the proper organizational methods for interpreting the world in that setting. That is, the organization provides a social context in which events can be perceived and defined as

having happened. This context is provided for in the organizational practices for creating "objective" accounts. These reconstruct the world into "public events" which are defined as meaningful and assigned significance in that context.³

This definition of news, however, is determined in definite ways by the goals for which the news organization was originally established.⁴ This is true because the methods used to construct news accounts are a part of the organization's efforts to attain its own institutionalized priorities. Thus, "public events", in the news, exist due to the practical purposes they serve for the organization itself.⁵ The methods used to construct events are part of this enterprise and so is the final version of the facts.

In the business press, the organization of facts into news is part of a larger operation, the goal of which is to present the public with the news for the purpose of making a profit. The frame of reference in which "labour" as a category is constructed at the "Star" is one which preserves this latter purpose, i.e., the ongoing functioning of capitalist enterprises. "Objectively" reporting the news expresses this structure of relevance in the context of labour reporting.

The practice of "objectively" reporting labour news confronts two problems which must be addressed in the course of reporting and which are consequential for the manner in which news is defined. On the one hand, the processes which are reported are not material events leaving material "traces", like oil spills or traffic accidents. They are mostly organizational processes involving talk, talk about talk, and activities resulting from these, e.g. strikes. Hence, reporters' "material" is largely talk about talk, or action which has taken place in talk. The result of this is that they find themselves confronted with different versions of reality which must be worked up into an authoritative version of "what must be actually happening".

Furthermore, it is conflict which is their main subject matter. Union and management are represented as opposing sides in contention. Since reporters are committed to "objective" reporting, they are presented with the problem of not "taking sides". They must avoid bias and becoming parties to the conflict.* To do so, you need a version of what is at issue and what the "facts" are on

* The organizational ethos concerning the labour reporters' relation to the editors as well as to their own work involves two main tenets: 1) the reporter enjoys a status of autonomy vis-à-vis the editors in terms of editorial control, censorship, etc., 2) the reporter is committed to neutrality, or "objectivity" in his reporting, i.e., keeping one's opinions out of the story providing both sides of a conflict, with documented facts, impartially.

which both sides will be in agreement (more or less). The overall problem becomes one of arriving at a consensual version of "what actually happened" in an impartial and warrantable manner.

The reporters are able to produce such a consensual version of events by using the correct organizational practices for creating "objective" accounts. In this chapter, we will examine these practices in the context of the work of reporting. The following sections will deal with this process: (a) The scope of labour news; (b) Defining the news; (c) Locating news; (d) Writing a story. By examining the scope of labour news, we will see that the practices for creating "objectivity" systematically produce bias at another level, i.e., the definition of what is labour news is made from the perspective of management. The practices for defining and writing news are structured by this frame of reference. Further, since reporters do not have a normal "beat" to do investigative work, news must be located from within the newsroom and is therefore confined to written or spoken information made available by those groups managing and administering labour. This treatment of labour constructs a boundary on which can be known about "it" by generating labour related "events" that are meaningful from a management perspective. The practices which

provide for this structuring in the definition of "news" are examined in this chapter.

1. The Scope of Labour News

Both in its presentation and the way it is defined, labour is treated as it becomes significant to those groups managing and administering it in this context, i.e. business owners and management groups, the courts, government agencies, officials, etc. The scope of the news is primarily confined to the following categories of events as these present practical problems to management: actual production stoppages or threats to that effect, the costs of such occurrences to business and the consumer, negotiations which settle these problems and legal disputes between management and labour involving government agencies and figures. Thus, we see labour as management must confront it, in official contexts and official actions dealing with immediate conflicts demanding practical solutions for an individual or group of business enterprises. Labour news, then, is primarily concerned with conflict, and conflict as it can be seen from a management perspective, with labour as the agent of conflict. Labour is defined as disruptive in the otherwise normal flow of "business as usual".⁶

This structuring of the news results in the

exclusion of certain categories of events and coverage of a large segment of the work force not included in the definition of labour as unionized labour, i.e., non-union native and immigrant workers, penitentiary workers, etc. One union leader suggested some of the categories of events excluded from discussion, e.g., the majority of settlements which never go to strike, day-to-day political activities of organized labour such as working for the establishment of social legislation, union involvement on public boards, committees and municipal office.

Business does receive such coverage in its own section of the paper from the point of view of its own representatives, i.e., they are allowed to speak as experts on business concerns without the comment of labour. For example,

Duncan-based Doman Industries Ltd. stock is recommended as "an excellent vehicle for capital appreciation over the longer term" in a review of the company by Pemberton Securities Ltd.

For \$9,600, Madison Avenue offers a two-day course for eight in how to deal with the news media, and plans to begin offering a similar program on how to act before a congressional committee.

Space becomes a consideration when the story is written up because of the probability that lengthy, in depth stories will be shortened. In part this is due to

the fact that labour has no section of its own in the paper as do other areas of interest, e.g., sports, suburbs, gardens, business. For this reason, labour stories must be fitted in with general news as it appears throughout the paper. Because advertisements are laid out first, stories on labour are often cut in the layout room in order to fit where there is room on a page. Indirectly, this influences a reporter to keep it brief, as in depth portrayals can result in unused work. This spatial limitation is especially significant when one considers the necessity of recording the significant facts, the inclusion of which limits the space left over for "background" information, e.g., cost of living increases, company profits, or the events which lead up to a happening that is treated as news.

, Examples of the coverage labour would receive if it were treated in a similar manner to business can be found in union papers. This might include discussions of working and living conditions, the effects of inflation, profits, unemployment, etc. Such topics of discussion do receive regular coverage in union papers as the following examples illustrate:

The Canadian Labour Congress convention is over and the labour politicians have had their day ... What this will do in terms of building a stronger, more militant and effective labour movement is very doubtful to say the least.

It's simple: will the people of B.C. and the province get a share of the huge windfall profits from inflated metal prices and the mining industry out of their irreplaceable natural resources?

Such coverage is a routine matter in union papers where events are discussed in the context of the ongoing struggles and problems of working people, e.g., to organize, to fight for a decent standard of living, health and safety on the job, a job producing economy, an end to harassment by management, speed ups, etc. As well, the cost of living and worker productivity are considerations which receive attention in their explanations of the underlying rationales for labour's actions. Conflicts with management are not viewed as "disruptive" but are treated in the context of the ongoing struggles of the labour movement for better life conditions rather than by emphasizing their effects on the ongoing profitability of business or consumers.

When questioned on how newsworthy events are identified, the two reporters do not claim to represent labour from the perspective of its participants. They provide two categories, respectively, of events which can be identified as newsworthy: 1) those which affect industry and the public, e.g., strikes in the major industries, public services; 2) the unusual, the extra-

ordinary, e.g., settlements and strikes in government industries, and inconsistencies in policy and idealized people, e.g., officials in the public eye. Labour news at the "Star" predominantly focuses on the first category of events, i.e., coverage of labour's actions vis-à-vis industry and the consumer. These stories are treated as unusual, extraordinary, unitary events. They are not seen as episodes in a continuing movement as they are in union and "underground" papers. The way in which these events become topical depends on the organization of work and its consequences for the character of what is reported.

2. Defining the News

The definition of what is "news" itself is not a matter of having things happen "out there" with the reporters then describing them. Reporters and editors work with an understanding of what a news story is like and scan the world to locate what is happening that can be worked up into "news". Since reporters working for the "Star" must have had previous experience working for other business newspapers, this stock of knowledge, as well as their familiarity with what constitutes a newsworthy story at the "Star", provides them with the typicality of those stories to be covered, i.e., disputes involving major industries, an inconvenience to the average citizen due to

a strike, for example. Some examples of actual story leads include the following:

More than 9,000 B.C. Telephone Company employees refused to report for work today, forcing supervisors to man the switchboards and severely curtailing repairs and installations.

MacMillan Bloedel's Pacific sawmill is still shut down.

Bill King again appeared as the friend and supporter of the trade unions Tuesday, but he warned them against staging too many strikes.

One way then in which news is defined is as given types of stories that appear in the "Star". How to recognize what is news is by reading appropriate news stories in order to get the idea of what would be appropriate in the future. As one reporter commented, it is not newsworthy that workers in a particular company are underpaid, work under unsafe working conditions, suffer from inflation, etc., as such: there is nothing "new" and thus newsworthy about such a state of affairs. It must fit the organizational notion of a "story" with a proper context that can be seen to be meaningful to those defining "News", e.g. action taken and made available through the proper channels as recognized by the news team.

Not being able or willing to cover all the news in this fashion raises questions about the competence of a

reporter and his own commitment to reporting "objectively" on the labour scene. This was the case, according to one of the reporters, of a previous newsman who wrote on labour. He did not cover all of the typical stories expected of him and his work was considered inadequate by the editors. Not only was he considered to be "biased" (which will be treated below) by reporters and editors alike, but he was not "getting the job done" because he wrote about what he considered to be important struggles of the labour movement rather than covering those stories deemed of immediate relevance by the editors.

How this is determined depends on organizational procedures for locating news, getting the "significant" facts, and documenting these facts so as to warrant the objectivity of a news account. These practices are subject to given limitations which the editors participate in establishing. In this connection, editors may be viewed as "gatekeepers", but only in the narrow sense. For the typical ways of doing things at the "Star" accord with what reporters recognizes as professional journalistic standards, e.g., "getting it first", "objectively" reporting, and are addressed by reporters and editors alike in their attempts to portray the news given the circumstances of reporting at the "Star".

3. Locating News

How news is defined is determined in part by the procedures for locating it and the organizational limitations on how these may be carried out. Although reporters "scan the world" to locate what can be worked up into news, most of this scanning takes place in the newsroom. This is because of the many limitations placed on the job of labour reporting at the Star, i.e., exigencies of time, space, required stories and story content, which mean that the vast majority of their work is not done on the "beat", i.e. reporters don't go out and look for news. For this reason, they are extremely dependent on written materials and what they can learn from talk, both within the newsroom and on the telephone. These restraints are consequential for the ways in which news is located and for what gets defined as news.

In the broadest terms, the news organization constrains the reporters by the fact that there are limited resources, i.e., two labour reporters, for covering all the news deemed important. This may be compared, for example to the reporters who write for the business section where there are five. Covering "all the news" places such a demand on the two reporters that they are rarely able to leave the newsroom to investigate a possible "lead".

Locating news then is a process which takes place in the newsroom and depends on information which is made available in that context.

A great portion of their stories are pre-selected in the sense that the reporters are able to recognize what is typically required, e.g., coverage of strikes in the largest local industries, disputes involving the government. Because the reporter's time is at a premium, these pre-selected stories must be covered before anything else. Under this category would be included any local stories which are reported by the wire services before the reporter himself had written the story. The editors also listen to a local radio news station that broadcasts labour news and many assignments originate from this source. The bulk of their work consists of stories of these kinds, and there is pressure on the reporter to anticipate which these will be as a "don't have file" is kept to show him any stories that are missed.

Editors and reporters also locate news in various written materials on the labour scene distributed by union and management groups. These include employer summaries of labour related news, union papers, press releases, government labour publications, inquest reports, union and management communiques to official agencies

such as the Workmen's Compensation Board, etc. The information made available from these sources do not constitute a "story" in the raw form. It must first be selected by the editors or reporters, "checked out", and written up into a story. Locating news may also take place in the course of checking out a possible story. Thus, a source person may be able to provide the reporter with a "tip" on a current happening or soon-to-materialize state of affairs which may qualify as a story.

Whether a story that has been located is really a story may be determined by the reporter, through conferral between the editor and reporter, or through discussion with a source person on the phone. In the case of an ongoing event which has received day-to-day coverage, for example, a slowdown by the operating engineers in the public school system, all that may be required to know the story is one piece of information, e.g., that they did not vote to strike. In such a case, no conferral is necessary with the editor and the reporter simply types up the story and submits it to the editor. Other possible stories may require discussion to decide if a state of affairs is newsworthy or not. In one such example, the reporter stated that if they don't strike, the "Star's" not interested; however, this story did become news because

the editor felt it was important enough to report on.

Both of these types of stories centre around the issue of a strike and were easily identified as newsworthy stories by either the reporter or editor. In some cases, however, what a possible story is all about may be more difficult to establish and may require several phone calls to determine what is really "happening". For example, in a case involving mine safety, the reporter consulted the Workmen's Compensation Board, the company public relations officer, a union letter to the Workmen's Compensation Board, a coroner's inquest report and a union official to determine what the story was all about. Several judgements had to be made about matters of contention between the union and the company and these were all made over the phone and in consultation with the editor.

This example is indicative of the process whereby the union's interpretation of events is "checked out" by the proper authorities and validated before it becomes news. When such validation is not forthcoming, the reporter looks for an alternative story base to "explain" labour's account, e.g., one which discredits the actions of labour.

The issue of mines safety was first recognized

as one from a union paper carrying the headline "Murders" and a letter to the Workmen's Compensation Board charging the company with illegally excluding the union from an accident investigation in the deaths of several miners. According to the reporter, the union felt the company was intimidating miners into working under dangerous conditions in order to increase production, i.e., to resume work on the threat of layoff when blasting gas fumes were still in the air (which the union claimed are difficult to detect). It had been alleged that several miners had been killed under these circumstances. The union felt that a "cover up" had been perpetrated by the company by distorting the facts to the Workmen's Compensation Board. The union was also complaining about the subsequent denial of pensions to the widows on the grounds that factors unrelated to work were judged (on the basis of the company investigation) to be primarily responsible for the deaths. The union had also appealed to the mines minister to intervene but had been refused any aid by him.

The company denied intimidating the workers, claiming that blasting gas is easily discernible and no one was pressured to work when it was present. Further, the company claimed they were within their legal rights in carrying out the accident investigation without the

aid of the union, and that no "cover up" had occurred. Their interpretation of what was really going on was that the union was "muckraking" to build up its image and stave off jurisdictional fights, and was trying to drum up a campaign to unseat the current mines minister.

The location of the actual story was the result of talking to several sources on the phone and deciding what was the issue in light of the information gathered. This case demonstrates how the reporter is limited in his investigative abilities. He consulted the Workmen's Compensation Board and was given the opinion that the union was not legally given the right to participate in the accident investigation. The coroner's inquest report was also consulted and it indicated that work related factors were not primarily responsible for the deaths of the miners. The reporter stated that what was really at issue was a case of "overkill" by the union and that he didn't know why they overreacted as they did. His story in a "nutshell" was that the Workmen's Compensation Board turned down the request (for prosecution of the company), as the regulations didn't clearly allow union participation in accident investigations.

The final story stated that the union was trying to unseat the current mines minister over this affair

and discussed the details of the inquest verdicts. These were discussed in the course of the story in terms of whether or not the deaths were clear cut enough legally to warrant compensation should these cases be brought to court. The issue of mine safety and company intimidation to increase production and "cover up" were not represented in the final version of the news. Rather, these concerns were interpreted in light of what the reporter represented as the larger issue involving the union's "real" motivation for making a lot out of the mine safety problem, or as the reporter put it, a case of "overkill" by the Steelworkers.

This illustrates the process by which an actual story is located in the process of investigating it. The reporter does not go out and investigate what was happening, e.g., whether or not blasting gas is easily discernable, or whether the miners felt so or not. Rather, he works from within the newspaper office and relies on what could be learned from talk. Further, due to the paper's concern with what can be said to be so legally, and to their faith in the legitimacy of the appropriate agencies concerned, e.g., the courts, the inquest jury, the Workmen's Compensation Board, the story was defined on the basis of documented evidence to determine "what actually happened" in light of (what came to be seen as) the union's political

purposes.

In locating and defining news, reporters are dependent on written and verbal communication with the community of reliable sources to define what is news and what is not. They do not normally go into the field to do an on the spot investigation of, say, working conditions in the mines. The union makes a claim "Murder!" The means used to test this claim do not involve further inquiry into the background situation. They involve reference to various "authorities" who warrant the factual status of a version of "what happened". The union's claim to participate in its definition was specifically ruled out.⁷

News about labour is then defined as it becomes meaningful to those groups managing and administering it, e.g., company public relations representatives and officials, the Workmen's Compensation Board, the coroner's office. These channels are used to determine if a story can be written and what can be said to be true. An ongoing condition, e.g., hazardous mine conditions, company intimidation, only becomes topical as management and government must confront it, i.e., in official contexts relating to official actions. By treating the original charge of "Murders!" in this way, the investigatory procedures which are intended to establish "what really happened" produce

an account which discredits the union version because it lacks official documentation.

These investigatory and interpretive procedures allow for the concerns of labour to be separated from their ongoing struggle for greater control in the workplace, better living and working conditions, etc., and placed in the context of "labour" as management confronts it, i.e., in the courts, in negotiations, etc.

4. Writing a Story

News is also defined in the process of writing a story and including all of the "significant" facts. As pointed out above, the emphasis on documentating the facts of the matter at hand substitutes for actually going out on the beat to investigate what could possibly be considered a story. Gathering the information required to write up a news story in cases of conflict between union and management also involves verbal reports, comments, etc., rather than going out on the "beat" to investigate. Once a reporter has decided to report on a given situation, much of his time will be spent telephoning sources to collect the "significant" facts surrounding the immediate conflict.

One of the reporters explained the type of

information which constitutes the "facts" which anyone can agree on and which should be included in the normal story: 1) who walked off the job and where; 2) whether a strike vote was taken and what was the vote; 3) how is the public affected, e.g., if civic workers are involved, what was the effect on the city, and if industrial workers are involved, the effects on industry; 4) the number of workers involved; 5) the status of negotiations; 6) the wage demands and offers; 7) the base wage and the expiration date of the last contract. Following all of these details if space allows, a brief comment from union and management officials will then be included.

In approaching an event in this way, the reporter himself performs the function of "gatekeeper" by soliciting only certain kinds of information from his sources. The information gathered is oriented to producing a news story which conforms to a typical format discussed above. This format imposes a structuring procedure on the work of investigating what a conflict is all about. This is evident in the questions a reporter asks over the telephone. Here is a report of the reporter's end of a telephone conversation with a union official about a dispute between the union and the hospital administration:

- : Hello.
- : This involves the operating engineers?
- : Any movement by the hospital toward your demand?
- : The hospital has nothing to lose by going to arbitration.
- : Was the hospital full when you started?
- : 24 hour round the clock study sessions?
- : How many patients now?
- : But they're still trying to keep things going with the supervisory staff?
- : What kind of public reaction has there been?
- : Is this the first time there's been a withdrawal of services?
- : No contact with the government?
- : Has the hospital applied for a labour arbitrator?
- : The hospital is sort of a hotbed, no?
- : You don't think the hospital can continue to operate much longer?
- : How are the trustee's taking this whole thing?
- : Who is preparing the meals?

These questions follow the general schema described above. They have the effect of structuring the information in its terms. What is elicited is programmed by the reporter and what becomes the "facts" have been shaped upon this

process.

The above interview procedure involved the judicious structuring of the kinds of information solicited from the union leader, i.e., who walked off the job, the status of negotiations, how was the public affected, the number of workers involved, the status of the contract, etc. The information provided was then "fit" into an account of events in the ways that "labour's" actions presented practical problems to management, i.e. via actual production stoppages or (further) threats thereof, costs to business and consumers, negotiations to settle these problems, and legal disputes between management and labour involving government figures. Interview procedures then construct the "event" in the information solicited from labour. Conflict is made significant as it relates to the categories of events which present practical problems to management, administrators and government officials.

The story that was written from this interview shared one of the most common structuring features of "Star" stories. Conflict is represented as the outcome of workers' actions. The lead sentence reads as follows:

Another 20 patients will be sent home today as Kelowna General Hospital cuts down its services because of a hospital workers' walkout.

The story then went on to detail the effects of the "walkout" on patient care, i.e., what services had been cut, who was taking over for the workers, who was sent home, which job categories were affected, etc. After all of these details had been laid out, the union spokesperson's reply was presented. His view of what was "happening" was that the hospital had failed to live up to the terms of a previously negotiated agreement. The details of this alleged failure, why it was so viewed, the consequences viewed to have occurred from it, i.e., labour's view of management's actions and the rationale for their own were not explained.

What was solicited from the union official was his view that the administration was responsible both for sending people home and for refusing the union's offer to ensure that minimum dietary requirements be provided to the patients. This also was a reply to who was responsible for what had "happened", however, this reply was in relation to "what actually happened" as it was constructed in the story, i.e., patients will be sent home ... because the workers walked out. His reply was just that, a reply to this problem and one which never addressed the conflict as it was originally defined by the official himself. The lead sentence of the next day's story on this situation

reproduced the initial structuring of the event only in this case, it retained the identifier of whose point of view the story was being told from:

The walkout by hospital employees could lead to some deaths among acute care patients who are now being discharged early from Kelowna General, a hospital administrator charges.

Typically, however, no reference is made to whose point of view is being expressed in statements of fact which attribute the assumed significance of a state of affairs to workers' actions (see examples, p. 31).

The limits on investigation outside the newsroom affect the reporter's ability to organize a story from a perspective which would not coincide with the standard approach to conflict. This is true both because of the time required to gather "background" information and the lack of access to information which the editor does not have to substantiate an alternative perspective.⁸

The time constraint which keeps the reporters busy in the newsroom also decreases the ability to do independent research and development of a story. The reporter is therefore less able to do investigative work on the history of an issue or on the actual work conditions involved in any issue involving labour and management. This constraint was evidenced, according to the reporter,

in a story covering the firing of several female office workers, which would not have occurred had they been organized into a union. Because this was one of the few stories which he was able to spend more time on, i.e., it did not need to be handed in immediately, he was able to "angle" the story around the need for organization in clerical work. This story, he pointed out, was covered by the city's other major daily paper, which has only one labour reporter, and was treated in the more standard way that stories in the "Star" usually are, i.e., who, what, when, where and how the event occurred.

The resulting "facts" exhibit two distinctive organizing features. One of these structures the focus of discussion, i.e., whose motives, actions, etc., are under scrutiny. Here again, not only are workers' actions assigned causal efficacy for the event, but their actions are the topic of discussion vis-à-vis the costs to industry and the consumer. Attributing the significance of an event to labour's actions as the focus of discussion is the normal manner of presenting labour in the news and shares a common feature of administratively prepared clinical reports and case records. In both, events are constructed so that all major items of information appear as predicates of the individual subject of the report.⁹ This provides for "what

is happening" as the problem of the subject and is assigned to it as his or her problem.

This may be compared to the way in which a union paper constructs a story when discussing the conflict. For example, in the following lead sentence, the conflict at hand is one that is attributed to management's unacceptable offer, attitudes, etc.:

The latest industry offer revising tradesmen's rates is unacceptable ... The arrogant manner of the employers, throwing down the gauntlet, stating that their offer is final and that there will be no further negotiations is even more unacceptable to the Union than the wage offer itself;

or the lead of an underground paper's story:

Behind closed doors: how Bill King blackmailed the woodworkers.

In both of these instances, the same structuring device that applies to labour in the business press is applied to management and government officials. The issue to be addressed revolves around the consequences of their actions, their "real" motivations, etc.

Secondly, when labour's actions are described in the "Star", the temporal sequence of their situation is broken up and the significance of their actions to business is isolated as an event. Such a practice can be seen as a "cutting down" procedure which removes an event

from the context in which it becomes meaningful to the actors being described, e.g., their preceding actions, the socio-economic conditions of their lives, etc.¹⁰

By merely stating the event as a fact, the story is given an episodic structure.¹¹ Its apparent contextlessness is a structure which suggests that the event has been made available for all to see and agree upon, that is, it is worked up so as to intend its own description.¹²

As well, the controversial character of a state of affairs is neutralized in these matter of fact portrayals. What an event is all about from the point of view of the participants can then be stated in a manner of impartiality which conceals what is problematic about that event. For example, "the arrogant manner of the employers" in presenting an "unacceptable offer" becomes part of a supposedly neutral explanation that "negotiations broke down".

The structuring procedures involved in factual news accounts of labour are consequential in the sense that the account becomes an instruction on how the public is to view an event. It is a teaching on the assumed significance and consequences to all concerned of the event at hand. When the "facts of the matter" are stated as so much production is lost, so many services are unavailable

to the public, the implications is there that the reader is to be interested in a given event as would a consumer, or someone concerned with the ongoing profitability of private enterprise, i.e., that he or she is interested in the problem as it has been defined. The temporal organization of a story and the selection of facts to be included provides a coherence to what is being talked about. The standard format of these stories, e.g., the details of the immediate actions of workers, costs to business, comments from both sides, signal the episodic character of what is being discussed and refer back to this same issue of "what actually happened".

The manner in which labour news is defined at the "Star" depends on the typicality of stories that are news, the proper manner of locating a story and the structuring procedures implicit in gathering the "facts" and organizing them into a story format. These socially organized practices structure "what really happens" in the world from within an interpretive framework which takes the perspective of management.

The scope of "events" is limited by these procedures to a category of events which focus on conflict

between labour and management, and express a management perspective of this conflict, with labour as the casual agent.

The limitations on reporters in terms of time to cover the necessary stories, space in the paper to accommodate explanations of events, and investigative freedom to go out on the "beat" militates against the treatment of labour from a perspective which would more clearly approximate its own. Once an event as news is so defined, its status as an "objective" account is achieved in the practices for establishing its facticity. In the next chapter, we will examine how the factual status of an account is warranted at the "Star".

FOOTNOTES

- 1 This explanation of mundane reasoning is found in "Mundane Reasoning" by Polner, Melvin, an unpublished paper, Jan. 1973, University of California, Los Angeles.
- 2 Heap, James L. and Roth, Phillip A., "On Phenomenological Sociology" American Sociological Review, 1973, vol. 38, June, p. 354-367.
- 3 Molotch, Harvey and Lester, Marilyn, "News as Purposeful Behaviour: On the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents and Scandals" American Sociological Review, vol. 39, p. 101-112, Feb. 1974.
- 4 Smith, p. 266.
- 5 Molotch, and Lester, p. 112.
- 6 For a discussion of 'disruptive access' to media coverage afforded dissenting groups as a means of restoring order see Molotch and Lester "News as Purposeful Behaviour: On the Strategic Use of Accidents, Scandals and Routines".
- 7 Zimmerman describes the same procedure as it is applied to the prospective welfare recipient's claim of eligibility: while the subject's account of his own circumstances is met with a thoroughgoing skepticism, an equally assured attitude is taken by the intake workers towards the assumed factuality of documented accounts originating from various public and private authorities. See Zimmerman, Don, "Fact as a Practical Accomplishment" in Ethnomethodology, Roy Turner, editor, Penguin Books Canada Ltd., Markham, Ontario, 1974, p. 128-143.
- 8 Breed, Warren. "Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis", Social Forces, 33, May 1955, p. 326-335.
- 9 Smith, p. 262.
- 10 Smith, D.E., "K is Mentally Ill: The Anatomy of a Factual Account" in J. Atkinson and J. Coulter, ed., Ethnographics, Martin Robertson, London, 1975, p. 23.

11 Smith, p. 259.

12 Smith, p. 259.

CHAPTER III

NEWS PRODUCTION AT THE STAR (B):

ESTABLISHING THE FACTICITY OF AN ACCOUNT

In the previous chapter, we have attempted to illustrate the process in which the phantasmagoria of events surrounding "labour" are worked up into a definitive statement of the news. Reporting news "objectively" begins with the routine practices for getting the "facts" and organizing them into events which are definable as news. For a story to actually achieve factual status, further procedures must be followed in order to warrant the objectivity of the account.

The organization of newswork for documenting the "facts" places the reporter in a determinate relation to the object of his work, and imposes a structure of relevance on the ways in which "objectivity" can be achieved in the news. This is the product of the ordinary practices which structure the conceptions and means of

description available to the reporter in constructing news accounts. These practices are determining for what can be conceived as news, facts, events, and issues. Tuchman provides the notion of "transpersonal replicability" to describe operationally the processes whereby "objectivity" is achieved in newswork. In these terms, objectivity is seen as a technical routinization which depends on a codification of the research procedures which are employed by newsmen.¹ These procedures provide a determinate framework for interpreting the world and are observed as technical matters in the production of factual accounts. As we have attempted to show, such procedures at the "Star" implicitly serve to articulate the purposes for which an organization exists from the perspective of those groups ruling, managing and administering it. Because of these situational exigencies, establishing "facticity" (the factual status of a story) is also a procedure by which "what actually happened" is constituted in the process of constructing an account of "it".

The factual status of a labour story is achieved in the same procedures of defining, locating, and developing an account. There are four primary considerations involved in the creation of an "objective" account which guarantee its factual status: 1) the use of proper sources

to authorize an interpretation as "fact"; 2) the appeal to an "objective" standard of interpretation; 3) the separation of the reporter from a story by excluding his opinions; and 4) the production of "facts" through consensus.

1. The Use of Reliable Sources to Authorize an Account

Since much of a reporter's work involves coordinating conflicting versions of reality, he attempts to portray both sides of a conflict as objectively as possible with particular attention to what can be seen as the "facts of the matter". The use of "reliable" sources is an operational procedure used by the reporter for determining that domain of events which have a status in the world independent from his own judgments, desired outcomes, etc.

In addition to official union and management leaders, people who qualify as "reliable" sources include representatives from legitimate government bodies, e.g., the courts, the Workmen's Compensation Board, the Labour Minister, and official negotiators. These people aid the reporter in deciding what can be said about a case where union and management disagree on the facts and in this way authorize the final interpretation used to organize a news story.

In the (earlier mentioned) case of the striking hospital workers, the "facts" were determined by discovering those events which both sides could agree upon, i.e., the workers' actions, the immediate consequences of a conflict, etc. However, while these administrative particulars speak to the issue of "what actually happened" as it is organized around the strike, the case may not always be so simple. For example, in legal disputes such as the one between the miners and the Workmen's Compensation Board, competing and contradictory claims may require some kind of resolution on the reporter's part. What can be said to be true legally acquires primary importance in such cases, both because of the legitimacy assigned to government agencies, and because of the reporter's desire not to state anything in a story that cannot be proven in court. In these cases, the word of legitimate government agencies carries special weight even if only offered as an opinion. Whether a conflict is in accord with the legalistic interpretations provided in this manner, and therefore what can be written on an issue, may have to be judged by the reporter. These opinions serve as expert advice which the reporter then uses to authorize the interpretations used in the news story.

For example, in the case involving health and safety in the mines, the chairman of the union Health and Safety Committee had charged in a letter to the Workmens' Compensation Board that a "cover up" was taking place by the company in denying the union participation in the accident investigation. The issue from the union's point of view also involved an attack on the health and safety conditions allowed to exist in that plant and criminal negligence on the part of the company. By consulting the Board, an opinion was obtained as to the legal status of the union's charge based on a "reading" of the accident prevention regulation. The Board representative stated that the regulation prescribes a duty of the Accident Prevention Committee "to assist in the prompt investigation of accidents". "Assist" was interpreted as a reference back to "assist" management earlier stated in the regulation. According to this interpretation, the regulations do not clearly place any duty on management to seek the assistance of the committee in the investigation of the accident. The reporter explained that mandatory union participation probably was intended by the committee that drafted the legislation, however, in cases of criminal prosecution, the court goes by what the regulations say and not what was intended.

Because of the joint determination of the Board officer, and the reporter, and both of their expectations regarding the way in which the legal system works, this issue was rendered a non-issue on the basis of both the assumed legalities involved and the liability to slander for writing what the reporter presumed could not be proven in court. This practice of accepting the judgments of such sources depends on a commitment and faith in those kinds of formal channels which decide what is true legally and on the finality of those kinds of decisions. Thus, in this case, the chairman of the union's Health and Safety Accident Committee was not treated as having the same legitimacy as the court, the Board and what the regulation could be seen to be saying. That is, he was not given the same consideration as a reliable source who could authorize one of the conflicting sides of a conflict, the union's side.

The assumed legitimacy and neutrality of the government administrative apparatus superseded the possibility that labour could speak for itself on the issue. This is a common practice in the treatment of labour. This was also illustrated in the more common story on a strike when the labour minister ordered 11,000 woodworkers to go back to work and obey the law; the workers engineering

the strike, the Woodworkers Rank and File Committee, were not allowed to speak on the issue as did the reliable sources on behalf of business, the government and the minority union leadership. That is, after the statements of all of these sources were recorded, e.g., the labour minister called for workers to obey the law, the regional vice president of the woodworkers' called the contract offer the best to be expected, and the employers' representatives stated the extent of production stoppages, a representative of the Workers' Rank and File Committee was quoted as saying he assumed the bulk of the workers would cease picketing and go back to work. While this statement may have appeared as an endorsement of the contract offer, his comments were not recorded in the "Star" as to why the workers could resume work; however, the same person was quoted in an underground paper as saying that the workers had been betrayed by a reactionary union leadership and that it would be necessary to build a more militant rank and file organization before their demands would be met.

In this treatment of labour, labour is delegitimized as a group which is privileged enough to explain the meaning of its own actions. In the news, labour is portrayed by others as irresponsible dissidents who

threaten other's lives and welfare. For example,

The walkout by hospital employees
could lead to deaths ... Labour
minister King orders workers to
obey the law.

Labour leaders are not allowed, however, to speak on the rationales for disobeying the law, the character of that law, etc. Responses to their actions are those of responsible or otherwise legitimate parties, e.g., the labour minister who warns against too many strikes, the Workmens' Compensation Board which defines the legal status of a grievance in court, the government mediator who is optimistic a settlement will be reached.

Union officials do receive consideration as "reliable" sources, although their statements do not necessarily address the original issue as they defined it. However, not all of them may be treated as reliable, and a judgement may be made by the editor or reporter that this is not the case. Reporters are usually expected to be suspicious of "somebody with an axe to grind", or with ulterior motives for doing or saying what they do. Because the motives of labour are the object of the most suspicion, versus those of management, government leaders, the courts, special procedures may be indicated to circumvent the questionable character of an "unreliable" source's interpretation. For example, a leader of the striking

immigrant workers was not considered reliable by the editor due to his union affiliation, e.g., "he is an autoworker", and is therefore an enemy of the steel-workers who are enemies of independent unions". His interpretation that the workers were battling the company, the police and the courts for basic immigrant rights to organize was recommended by the editor as a questionable one and the reporter was redirected to a more reliable source, i.e., the newspaper's clipping file which had a more "reasonable" interpretation of events.

Using reliable sources imposes a boundary on what can be known about an event and what can be said about labour. By only allowing those persons with privileged status to interpret issues, those with the most direct knowledge of an issue are often or regularly excluded, i.e., rank and file workers, committee and union leaders. This use of reliable sources structures an account by treating labour as an entity to be managed, administered and governed such that labours' actions and concerns become relevant in relation to the concerns of management and government administrators. Just as the particular administrative details of a production stoppage orient the discussion of a strike, the statements of

other status individuals serving governmental capacities are used to interpret events and render them intelligible in a news story. Labour appears as the subject around which an account is constructed and whose actions are treated from perspectives other than its own. This information provided by the proper sources is then used to authorize the account in "fact", i.e., that which the reporter cannot be accused of fabricating himself and which accurately records the news "objectively".

2. Appealing to an "Objective" Standard of Interpretation

Another consideration necessary for an account to be viewed as factual is the appeal to an "objective" standard of interpretation. This involves not only getting both sides of the story, but requires that these be interpreted in a "reasonable", "unbiased" fashion. According to the reporters, however, including ones own "perspectives" in the development of a story is unavoidable at times, and this is acceptable so long these are not "biased", i.e., "anti-business" or "anti-labour". Several examples were suggested of "biased" reporting against business, e.g., coverage that continually played up the activities of "militant" workers, such as grievances over unsafe working conditions, speed ups, repression of union organizing attempts, and the dramatic reactions of labour, e.g.,

"Angry workers defy Parliament", or "Victory to the Paperworkers". Although it was not mentioned by reporters as a category of "bias" against business, one subject which did not receive coverage in the "Star", but which receives continual coverage in union papers, is the "real" motivations behind a company's actions, statements, etc., such as the concern for profits over human welfare, e.g., the need for a job producing economy, a decent standard of living, protection from death and maiming on the job, democratic control over working conditions.

An example given of "anti-labour" bias would be stories about "union bureaucrats exploiting the workers", i.e., conflicts of interest between workers and union leaders. This type of coverage is largely not available to report for two reasons: 1) Rank and file "activists" or other internal forms of opposition, e.g., the loggers' Rank and File Strike Committee, do not receive day to day coverage. Their concerns fall into the category of the editor and reporters of "internal" union activities which are not considered to be "political" in the same sense as labour (or other) news involving official leaders; and 2) the paper attempts to avoid becoming a party to the conflict. An example of this occurring would be if the

/ news encouraged workers to be critical of the actions of their own leaders for failing to adequately represent their interests against management. This situation arose in the earlier cited case of the "terrific" settlement up for ratification in which the union official claimed that he was not being treated fairly by the paper, due to the suggestion that the offer poorly represented workers' interests (and indeed the reporter agreed that the quotation marks should not have been there but had been accidentally included in the composing room when the story was laid in type).

What "anti-labour" and "anti-business" biases both have in common is the pitting of "militant", rank and file workers against union or management leaders, government agencies, etc. The focus of conflict seems to be a crucial factor in determining whether an "unreasonable" interpretation has been made. Hence, when conflict is assigned to the actions of normally "reliable" parties, e.g., management, the police, the courts, (or when union leaders are associated with these groups in opposition to rank and file actions) the interpretation is suspected of being opinionated, "biased" and unreasonable. This will be indicated by the editor either verbally or by way of an inter-office memoranda. For example, in one case,

where conflict was assigned to the actions of management, the police and the courts, one editor suggested that the real conflict was over "some of the bitterest inter-union politics". Another editor suggested that this interpretation was only one side of the story - the union's, and for this reason it warranted comment.

Another example of an unreasonable interpretation was the union's charge of "Murders" and company intimidation of mine workers. This also was considered "biased" by the reporter and a more reasonable interpretation was one which attributed the cause of conflict to the union itself, i.e., that it was muckraking to stave off jurisdictional disputes.

Reasonable interpretations locate conflict as was illustrated in the standard story format for a strike, i.e., labour's actions are defined as a precipitating a "crisis" or other, and all the attempts to alleviate it are explained, e.g., negotiations, union leaders' approval of a contract, public dissatisfaction with halted services adding urgency to the situation, etc. An example of "reasonable" thinking was illustrated in the case of the 32,000 striking woodworkers who had received, in the reporter's estimate, a "reasonable" contract offer with good benefits and wage increases. Interpretations which locate otherwise conflict are considered "biased", as in

the case where the artistic woodworkers' activities were interpreted as a struggle of workers against the police, the courts, the company for violently repressing union organizing attempts. The more reasonable interpretation put forth, i.e., one that treated the issue as an inter-jurisdictional dispute, relocated conflict in the arena of labour (between labour leaders) and conform with the editor's definition of (political) news, as that which involves elected or official leaders.

Unreasonable interpretations then include those which delegitimize the actions of what would otherwise be understood as responsible parties, i.e., government agencies, courts, police, and management, by attributing the causes of conflict to their actions. Interpretations which question the adequacy of these groups to administer fairly and manage the affairs of labour are suspect of bias. As well, so are those which stress the need for worker solidarity as a solution to the problem created by such a situation. Thus, conflict which is explained in terms of infighting among personalities legitimately recognized as the representatives of labour, i.e., interjurisdictional disputes, qualifies as a more reasonable interpretation than one which defines workers interests in opposition to the given institutional structures, i.e., private

property, capitalist enterprise, the party in government, etc. Stories which are identifiable in these terms are viewed as biased. In order to interpret reasonably, a conflict must be treated in terms of its immediate ramifications as these relate to the ongoing activities of business, and government to end it and return to normalcy.

3. The Separation of the Reporter from the Story

A third practice which warrants the facticity of an account is the separation of the reporter from the story by the exclusion of his opinions. This is accomplished by carefully checking out the significant facts associated with an event, and by using reliable sources to back up what is quoted or stated as fact in the story. These must accord with the organizational procedures for making "reasonable" interpretation or else the reporter will be suspected of inserting his opinions in the story.

In organizing and stating the significant facts, the objective character of an account is determined. Administratively organized information provided by government agencies, business, unions, etc., is thus presented in the body of a news story in such a way as to separate the reporter's work in organizing these particulars in

the final version of the account, i.e., they are stated as facts. The factual appearance of a story dis-associates it from the institutionally situated actors who were responsible for interpreting reality as it is in the news. The apparent contextless character of facts originating in these processes sets them in a relation of equivalence to the subjectivities of those who read the accounts (anybody) and therefore assigns to them the qualities of neutrality and impartiality that is characteristic of factual accounts. In the context of the newsroom, accounts then are recognizable as factual ones due to the organizational practices for establishing their facticity.

4. The Production of Facts Through Consensus

The last consideration in establishing the factual status of a story is what will be referred to as the consensus practices of the newstream. These practices are crucial because arriving at an authoritative version on the basis of conflicting ones demands that somehow the "facts" are distinguished from mere opinion, misinformation, etc.

The practices for reaching such "agreement" provide the reporter with a substantiation procedure, i.e., one which authorizes his work with the editor or

senior reporter, as the case may be. This method of substantiation is determined by the hierarchial sub-structure of the newspaper and introduces an organizational dimension into the structure of labour stories. The reporter works up his story until the editor is satisfied and in this way "agreement" is reached and facts are produced through "consensus".

Reaching a consensus occurs as a result of information and opinion exchange throughout the entire career of a story. For the day reporter, this begins with the initial verbal and written exchanges between himself and the editor. The reporters also receive "assignments" from the editors, usually to cover wire service stories or to see if there is a news story in an as-yet-incomplete "lead". He also receives various written materials (described earlier) which are passed from the editor's desk to his own. The city editor will include written or verbal comments on possible stories to be "checked out" on the phone by the reporter to determine if a story can be written.

The reporter will then phone his contacts to discover what is "happening". As he gathers more information, he will often inform the editor of what he has found out and exchange opinions on the possible inter-

pretation of a state of affairs, whether a story is "news" or on a lead paragraph he has written.

Discussion with the editor and the reporter is collegial in nature, with an attempt to discover what a reasonable interpretation of events may be or whether it is time to "break" a story or not. This discussion in some cases is preparatory for more investigation of a story. Since the reporter may get enthusiastic about a story that the editor does not, this written and verbal exchange serves as a sounding board for determining what stories and the best chance of being placed in the paper. Additionally, it allows the reporter to compare his "news" sense" with the editor so that he can share any knowledge on the "facts of the matter", the best angle on a story, or what might be reasonably be expected from the actors involved in an event to be reported. Working closely with the editor in this way appeared to be a matter of checking out ones views with an experienced newsman, one who is able to recognize what makes a story a story, and someone to verify the "sense" of the reporter's own opinions.

The flow of communication between the city editor and the day reporter had its counterpart in the relationship between the day and night reporter. The reporters view themselves as a team, and they divide their

work between themselves as well as share in the preparation of stories. Communication usually occurred by written word or by phone, as they work on different shifts. The day reporter also leaves assignments with the night reporter, as well as contacts to check on, or comments on a previously written story. Over the phone they exchange information on the status of events, question each other on their predictions or interpretations of the labour scene or comment on the success of a recently written story in being printed. The night reporter also works with the night assistant editor and receives assignments and edited work from him and the day editor.

The reporters and editors do not always agree on the matters they discuss, and reaching a consensus may involve accommodating one or the other's views. For example, the reporter may decide that it is too early for a given story to be "news", e.g., by stating "I don't want to break it until it's news" or "if they don't strike, the Star's not interested". However, the editor may feel a story is news already and the reporter may then type it up anyway. The "angle" of a story may also be determined through conferral on what is really important about a conflict and worthy of coverage. This occurred in the case of the mining accident incident, where the reporter was

initially interested in and sympathetic to the plight of a widow denied a pension. He sent an inter-office memorandum to the editor soliciting his opinion on this angle of the story and received a negative reply; he then responded, "you hard hearted hannah!" and continued by investigating the interjurisdictional aspects of the situation.

In more difficult cases of conflicting opinion the editor may suggest several organizational procedures for objective reporting, e.g., getting "both sides" of the story, arriving at a more "reasonable" interpretation, or checking the library files on other "reliable" sources.

The general discussion which takes place between the reporters editors also occurs between the reporter and the telephone contacts. Reporters may attempt to gain insights, for example into what the contact feels the next move of their adversary will be (whether union or management leaders) and what action will be taken in such an event. Further, the reporter may add his interpretation of what should happen, e.g., on a strike vote, negotiations etc., and at times engage in a discussion of what could be reasonably expected (from the workers, the company, etc.). This dialogue contributes two things directly to a story: 1) what are considered the "facts" of a matter,

i.e., those things which union and management leaders agree on, such as "x" number of workers walked out, the labour "crisis" in the forest industry intensified, so much production was halted, etc.; and 2) a statement of their interpretation of events, which differs from that of the other reliable sources, e.g., who is justified in a conflict, etc. Indirectly, the process of reaching a consensus may contribute to the angle used on a story, or whose interpretation is to be considered closest to the facts. For example, in the case of a worker reported as dying from breathing blasting gas in a mine while suffering from a heart ailment, the reporter may test out his own views against the contacts for what seems to have been a reasonable course of action in the situation, e.g., "what is a guy with a heart ailment doing working in a mine for anyway?"

In addition to helping the reporter decide how to angle his story, reaching agreement through these channels provides a reporter with grounds for warranting a particular version to the editor. In cases of doubt, this group can be relied on as authoritative sources of factual statements. For example, in the case of determining who was at fault for the deaths of the miners, he may state that there was some doubt in two of the four

cases under review, and state it as a fact in the story. He may do so even though the union spokesman asserted that it was a clear case of negligence on the part of the company (i.e., "Murder"), and the company representative has no doubt of its innocence. However, after reading the inquest jury's report which cited "work related factors" as contributing to death and by talking to the Workmen's Compensation Board representatives, the reporter made an interpretation authorized by these sources and stated it as a "fact" in the story.

Hence, in establishing the facticity of an account, the reporters use each other, the editors, and the community of reliable sources to verify the reasonableness of an interpretation of events that will be stated as fact. From within the newsroom, the factual status of a story is constituted in those processes of locating, checking out, interpreting and writing a story. News judgments rely heavily on what can be learned from the community of reliable sources and the mutual fact determinations made in discussion between the reporters and editors. The assumption that there is an objective view of events which is inter-subjectively available to newsmen guides the process of news "gathering" and the coordinates to which they address themselves in reaching a consensus

on the "facts". Agreement or lack of disagreement on the part of reporters and editors is crucial in this process because it is the basis for arriving at an authoritative version in the news. This also provides the sense that a world exists "out there" independent of ones means for addressing it and which is more or less equally accessible to everyone.

The neutrality of the reporter and the "objective" status of labour stories are constituted in these practices. They are the accomplishment through and through of organizationally situated actors but are attributed a quality of independence from their own practices and methods for achieving them. The practice of using proper sources to authorize an interpretation defines labour "objectively" from a management perspective. Appealing to an "objective" standard of interpretation externalizes this view as if its use implied no political stance on the world. Separating the reporter from the story by excluding his opinions means that accounts will be constructed in a warrantable fashion from an organizational point of view. This is guaranteed in the substantiation methods for producing "consensus" in such a way as to preserve the

managerial frame of reference in news. Producing "objective" accounts which are warranted in fact is achieved in these organizational practices and incorporates this structure of relevance into the news. What "union" newsmen view as a pro-business slant on the news is the result of an effort to carefully document the world in such a way as to preserve its "objective" features and qualities so that anyone who attempted to do likewise, given the circumstances of reporting at the "Star", would find the same world there for the looking.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Tuchman, Gaye, "Objectivity as a Strategic Ritual; An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity" American Journal of Sociology, vol. 77, Jan. 1972, p. 660-79.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study of ideology in this paper has attempted to delineate the ways in which a practical activity such as labour reporting is implicated in a larger process of constructing a view of the world from the perspective and in terms of the enterprises of those who "rule". In this context, ideological practice is portrayed as organizational practices which structure news so as to represent a particular view of reality while providing the appearance that no such particularity is present in these accounts. This mediation structures the relationship between public knowledge of the world and the way it is organized for those who live in it.

At the "Star", labour is constituted as a news-worthy subject in the organizational procedures for factually representing the world. The social organization of this work is an intrinsic part of the administrative

procedures for producing what can be seen as reliable, factual recordings of events of the world in this setting. The methods employed in their production preserve a managerial relationship to labour in the practices of constituting accounts of it. These depend on and reproduce the historically situated organizational and authority relations embodied in the means of apprehending labour news.

In the factual appearance finally achieved in the news story, the practices which structure our relationship to the world vis-à-vis the facts are not available for scrutiny. The use of administratively organized knowledge to authorize an account obscures the historically situated organizational practices and the structures of relevance which mediate our knowledge of the world.

Structuring procedures which are a part of the news enterprise are then obliterated once the facticity of an account is established. The practices which generate these kinds of factual accounts and which warrant their "objectivity", however, introduce a fundamental source of bias so that a managerial perspective is represented. Routine practices for locating, defining and writing news on labour assign to it an episodic character which allows it to appear as a state of affairs which is merely

reported. Questions reporters ask in soliciting certain kinds of information about "what actually happened" structure what can be known; however, they are not visible as his practices in the final account, only the administratively organized particulars from business, labour and government groups remain to constitute the actuality as we can know it. Labour then becomes known from within a ruling view of the world, i.e., as it is to those groups involved in managing, administering and governing the world.

In order to establish the facticity of these accounts, the use of reliable sources authorizes the interpretations of events related to labour. The use of this administratively assembled information provides a contextless description of labour, i.e., one which is temporally and spacially independent of the surrounding circumstances, actions and rationales for action of labour. The assumed legitimacy of these reliable sources institutionalizes a view of labour which is produced from the perspective of the "other", i.e., those ruling groups in positions of authority in business and government. The use of these ruling groups to make authoritative statements on the labour "scene" then institutionalizes a ruling relation to our knowledge of labour in the media.

The social organization of this form of "knowing" however disappears in the final story. The problematic character of events in the world is neutralized in the administratively recognizable ways of talking about labour, e.g., negotiations broke down, patient care is threatened due to the walkout of the hospital workers. Although relevant to those groups amassing such administratively organized forms of knowledge, the relationship of an "episode" and its construction to ruling enterprises is no longer visible in the news as it is for you or me, even though that relationship determines what will be there to be read as news.

From within this ruling relation, labour becomes a category which only privileged groups may interpret, from within a perspective that precludes labour's own definition of what actually happened. The frame of reference from which labour is constructed is one which attributes conflicts with labour to labour and excludes serious criticism of business and the government by labour in these contexts. These individual incidents outline business and management interests as these confront those of labour, i.e., in those events surrounding the disruption of production or threat of reduced profitability and control of private enterprise. The interchangeability of

the perspectives of administratively assembled knowledge on labour is used to construct that assumedly "objective" reality to which newsmen and readers have common access in the "facts". All of the organizationally correct procedures for constituting the news construct this reality in the process of making an account of it.

The organizational methods of apprehending "labour" rupture the forms of thought available in the news on labour from the circumstances and meanings which would make the subjectivities of its participants intelligible. These ideological practices structure our relationship to that world of events and articulate a view as it is to those who rule, rather than those who are ruled. Hence, an ideological view of the world is then guaranteed in the routine organizational practices which structure talk, opinions and judgments into the "objective" accounts of the news,

Appendix - Field Notes Sample

This is the first day of observation of the labour reporter. I met him in the newsroom and introduced myself. He informed me that it was not possible to interview him at the moment as he had a "hot one". I sat and observed him at the desk next to his. The following notes are made on the basis of his discussion of what he was doing and my observations of his work activities.

He is doing a story on the United Steelworkers, who are pressing the government on the deaths of four miners. He must call the Workmen's Compensation Board and Cominco to get answers to the latter's refusal to allow independent observers inspect work sites. There is also the issue of a widow receiving a pension.

He is checking out "input". He left the desk to see Jack, an editor. He returned and phoned Mr. White - to find out why no pension was given to Mrs. Hummel. (No answer)

George: The tough part of the business is getting information, e.g., from public relations people, who go into the business and see if they want information to go out. If not, he says, finally, "no comment".

Calls Cominco public relations officer, Herb. According to reports (from labour), Cominco threatened workers with layoffs if they complained about being gassed. Is this true? (end conversation)

Note: This is a report on four mining deaths

George: You may get enthusiastic over an article you are working on, but the editors may find "holes" in the story and blip it, or may just not be enthusiastic and not use it. (He types for a while).

Incoming call: Cominco did not reprimand people in this situation. Note: almost a negotiation occurs over the wording of their reply: George says - so it's their job to do such and such? ...

George (cont'd): A few more specific questions Why didn't Cominco let Kwalsky go in and take a look at this thing? (the union representative). (He laughs) He is not an expert. But Kwalsky is a member of the Steelworkers ... that's his job. Why did Cominco oppose Mrs. Hummel's pension and why were the facts distorted? Find out.

George explains that this is a labour story, in which the miners are complaining about mine safety. It is an issue of the workers breathing in fumes (blasting gasses) or getting the job done.

George says he must call on the first inquest ... (he calls): could someone read the verdict? (George appears anxious for a minute as a lawyer is around who he thinks wants him to testify ... but he wants to avoid him). The verdict ... no other circumstances. On the night shift... negligent in his own death. The verdict is from a jury of lay people.

He receives a call back: Jim - George tells him that from looking at his stock pile on the steelworkers' press releases, he is just trying to put this thing together and find if it's a story or not. Kwalsky, check the ventilation system. (They talk for a while). This is easily discernable (fumes), eh? They're saying the opposite. The coroner's jury says it was ... Blast smell is something you can discernible, eh? (blasting fumes). They're saying the opposite - the coroner's jury says it was ... Blast smell is something you can easily detect. Government regulation is that an employee cannot return to work unless fumes are gone. What have you told the employees? What you are trying to do is make them live up to the regulations. Is there are change in the regulations that Cominco would ... You're seriously convinced: muckraking to build up their image and stage off jurisdictional fights? (Cominco gave Kwalsky the run of the complex when he first arrived one year ago, but in view of his past performance (a barage of allegations to newspapers without telling the company first) Cominco does not feel that he wants to assist in this.) Why did Cominco oppose the pension on alleged distortion of the facts? George reads the inquest report, and says that if you have any more information on Hummel it will be appreciated. On the petition: the Workmen's Compensation Board's report is claimed to be distoring the facts by the miners. (They talk about the weather, skiing, etc.) Would you? ... because I think It's in the public interest?

I ask question: Is this a "atstraight" news story? George: Yes, and it is documented to keep the law off our backs.

George: Cominco does not trust Kwalsky ... There is some justification on two out of four of the deaths only.

Note: In the Steelworkers' paper the headline on this story reads "Murder!"

George calls (union): On Mr. Hummel; tranquillizer case - jury did not make recommendations on gas, etc. I'll put it in on your statement. Doctors should inform the company. On second case: locking device on truck (which crushed worker) - there was none. On third case: guy walking over cliff ... Developed into a relationship with steelworkers; write Barrett, Leo Nimsick won't do anything; How do the workers feel? Pressing charges against Cominco for violation of workmen's Compensation ... faulty equipment. Zinc plant room. Fine you and then withdraw it? Do you think a reporter should go into Trail? If I went, I'd go with a camera without announcing. It would be February/March? I plan to go up there in February, anyway, when the representative vote is held. A year long battle...

New phone call: chatter ... those are the hard cold facts of the corporate structure ... more talk (jokes, sports)

George consults an editor first before writing story to see if it's O.K. Also works on lead (sentence) ... while waiting for editor's opinion. His lead: Mines minister Leo Nimsick - bid to have his sacked or shuffled; conflict between United Steelworkers and New Democratic Party; fourth case is not justified. Note: Ongoing effort to determine whose interpretation was realistic.

New phone call: Did you know that in the inquest verdict a contributing factor was blasting gas? ... Then the guy shouldn't be in there ... its like the guy on tranquillizers ... shouldn't be driving. Do you know why no pension on Hummel? Because it wasn't a work related factor ... but jury did say ... Coronary thrombosis. If you have that kind of ailment, what are you doing in the mine? Other workers in area unaffected. Complained of being ill for some time but did not do so when put on this job.

George typing ... 11:45 I leave: 2½ hours observation.

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