

The labor history of news in the US before World War I

John Nerone*

SUMMARY

The article attempts to provide a labor history of the news through the period of the industrialization of the news system in the United States. It begins by characterizing newswork as labor and questioning the division between intellectual and mechanical labor in the news industry. It then surveys the mode of production of news, identifying occupational pressures and the evolving division of labor. Using the minutes of select locals of the International Typographical Union (ITU), it offers observations on craft unions in newspapers; it then contrasts that history with the professionalization project of newsroom workers. It concludes by considering the counterfactual possibility of journalists organizing as craft workers in concert with typographers, and wondering whether such a project would have offered a way of redressing persistent class biases in capitalist news systems.

Key words: journalism, newswork, labor, history, unionism, typography

Introduction

News is the product of labor. This has been common sense among journalism scholars since at least the 1970s, when titles like “Making News” (Tuchman, 1978), “Making the News” (Golding, 1979), and “Manufacturing the News” (Fishman, 1988) appeared. Those titles seemed disruptive at the time, because journalism’s embrace of an identity as objective observation, in the US at least, rested on an assumption that news was found, not made: journalism meant “Discovering the News” (Schudson, 1978). Ethnographic and historical research (Tuchman, 1978;

* John Nerone, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Institute of Communications Research (University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign), USA. E-mail: jnerone@illinois.edu.

Darnton, 1975; Gans, 1979; Smythe, 1980; Wilson, 1985) explored the newsroom as a manufacturing site. Journalists worked beats and desks as moving parts in an assembly line; news factories had divisions of labor and management practices designed to regulate supply according to demand just as any other modern industrial enterprise (Chandler, 1977). This perspective did not necessarily please journalists, who aimed to think of themselves as doctors and lawyers rather than miners and autoworkers, but at the same time it answered to their sense of grievance at low pay and long hours that sounded more blue- than white-collar.

One landmark in the US historiography was a collection of essays, edited by Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt, titled *Newsworkers* (1995). The title itself makes a significant move, proposing to think of journalists as workers rather than as professionals. Many of the individual chapters approach newswork through the lens of labor history. The volume suggests that the labor of news has been neglected by the scholars who call themselves journalism historians, but even more so that newsroom personnel have chosen not to think of themselves as workers, and that that choice has been a bad one. Subsequent work (McKercher, 2002; Mosco and McKercher, 2008) has built on the notion that journalists and journalism would be better served, especially in North America, if newsroom labor had organized in coordination with other news industry workers and in the same way as labor in other industrial settings. Journalists would be better served because they would have more resources and more control; journalism would be better served because journalists would be more free and far more inclined to correct the class biases of the news. This perspective naturally follows from the argument that there is a consistent class bias to news content in the US and other capitalist countries, and that it flows in part from the fact that journalistic professionalism is a kind of false consciousness.

If journalism is labor, it follows that it is alienated labor. In capitalist enterprises, labor is deployed to produce commodities that can be profitably sold. The value of a commodity is a direct product of the labor time that goes into its manufacture. Time and time-discipline are essential components of all industrial labor (Postone, 1993; Thompson, 1967). Time is an even more essential factor in the production of news as a commodity, in that the value of a particular news medium depends on its reliable production of valuable news items, and the value of a news item depends on both its timeliness and the amount of time it is delivered to consumers ahead of rival consumers of rival news media. So news work is notorious for its time pressure.

But the received image of time pressure in news manufacture is distorted by two factors. One is the glamorization of investigative journalism and the consequent elision of the great majority of all reporting, which consists primarily of compiling routine information. The implication of this is that successful reporting is distinguished by intelligence and public service, rather than efficiencies in the division of labor and industrial discipline.

This is compounded by a second distortion, the neglect of every other form of labor besides reporting in the production of news commodities. As alienated labor, journalism is similar to other forms of alienated labor in the production of news media. But journalists, and to some extent the literature on the history of newswork, distinguish journalism from other labor in the same industry, like typography or, in broadcasting, camerawork. Obviously the various occupations in the news industry bear qualitative differences that make it a matter of common sense to differentiate editorial workers or content producers from production workers or clerical workers. But the specific bundle of tasks associated with any particular occupation is anything but obvious.

Take proofreading, for example. In the age of letterpress and Linotype printing, proofreading was production work, often done by the female members of the typesetting workforce. In the age of computerized typesetting, the proofreading that is not automated has shifted to editorial workers. Some tasks seem to naturally go together, but that seeming naturalness is often quite artificial. Proofreading migrated not because it became more intellectual but because the production system literally moved the chairs that best accommodated it from the composing room to the newsroom. A similar story could be told about layout.

The parsing of news industry labor, in other words, has been a historical process. Like labor generally, it has been a function of changing markets, machines, and capitalization. It has also been a plotline in the larger story of attempts by owners to achieve control over the workplace (Mosco and McKercher, 2008). And, because news is supposed to be central to the process of self-government and infrastructural to the public sphere, the development of the various occupations has also been ideologically fraught. The work of the news industry and the ways its workers approach it have been subject to the prevailing discourses of political democracy.

In the US, and in much of the world, the occupations of the news industry crystallized during a process of modernization and industrialization that climaxed in the first third of the twentieth century. By around 1930, the various divisions of the news world had come to seem natural. So, for instance, the division of news content into sections like sports, business, or “women” – all sections which had developed as assemblages of specific kinds of content, audiences, and advertising – had become routinized in a division of editorial labor (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). Likewise, a “Chinese Wall” dividing the news and editorial functions of an organization from its circulation and advertising functions had come to seem like an ethical imperative. Along with those, a grand division between intellectual and mechanical labor had also solidified.

The craft to industry: Dividing intellectual from mechanical labor

This last division, between intellectual and mechanical labor, had a much longer history. Such a division was prefigured in the craft structure of printing, in which the most junior employees – apprentices; printer’s devils – did the dirtiest work, breaking down type and cleaning type and other equipment. But every printer was expected eventually to do every task in the production process, and every journeyman printer was also de facto qualified for certain kinds of editorial work. This was true in all sorts of print establishments but especially those producing newspapers, where the rhythms of weekly and then daily production on manual print machinery did not accommodate elaborate specialization.

The practicalities of printing combined with notions about the importance of print and news to the public sphere to produce a normatively charged image of the virtuous printer as a public person (Botein, 1975; 1980). In the English-speaking North American colonies, the icon for this culture of print was Benjamin Franklin. Franklin himself nurtured his place in the craft discourse. His personal history, as an apprentice who learned the craft, then taught himself to write by studying Steele and Addison’s *Spectator*, then mastered the business of publishing, then launched a political career that took him to the capitals of the western world, signified the connection between manual, intellectual, and political work. When he reached the pinnacle of his international reputation as Ambassador to France, he made a point to keep a working printing press at his residence in Passy; he published pamphlets there, and introduced his grandson, Benjamin Franklin Bache, to the craft. US printers in the early nineteenth century adopted Franklin as their patron saint. Printers in New York, Boston, and elsewhere named their craft organizations the Franklin Typographical Society, and printers and publishers held annual Franklin Dinners (Fee, 2013).

But this iconic Franklin mystified the emerging divisions within the craft. As metropolitan printing establishments grew in scale, proprietors came to realize that dividing labor, and deskilling some of it (Braverman, 1974), could reduce costs and increase productivity, factors that eventually led to the decline of employers’ commitment to traditional apprenticeships (Jacoby, 1991). Setting type, which required speed and dexterity, could be separated from presswork, which required steadiness, stamina, and animal strength. Menial work, like breaking down type, was traditionally performed by apprentices. Workers resisted deskilling, and appealed to a strong craft culture; their employers were often receptive to such arguments, in part at least because proprietors usually came from a craft background, and it was not uncommon for their operations to fail: “Because printing offices were so small, entrance so easy, the product so unstandardized, and buyers of printing so uncritical of quality,

this two-way movement of skilled craftsmen – from journeyman to master printer and from master to journeyman – was characteristic of the trade ...” (Baker, 1951: 224). This shared workplace culture weakened gradually over time, especially as the division of labor became more elaborate, but it endured through most of the nineteenth century.

Nationally specific factors affected print industry labor relations in the US. The most obvious particularity was the political environment. Perhaps the least important aspect of that is the one most often mentioned by historians of the news industry: the legal and ideological commitment to freedom of the press. Although it encouraged a more rapid development of the newspaper and printing industries, formal legal freedom was probably less important than a series of subsidies built into the postal system (McChesney and Nichols, 2010), along with the patronage that came from requirements to publish laws and other notices at advertising rates, and the more pervasive and less formal patronage from political parties in a system of mass electoral democracy. Other nations, notably Britain and the Netherlands, display similar characteristics.

The Dutch and British news systems, however, like most nations’, have been more highly centralized. News and printing in the US was remarkably decentralized, even with the emergence of New York as the largest and most dynamic city (Baldasty, 1992). Newspaper publication was especially decentralized, and its postal infrastructure insured that the news system would be open-ended as long as the major source of content was printers exchanging newspapers among themselves. In the second half of the nineteenth century the telegraph system contributed to a commoditization of news that in turn intensified centralization (Blondheim, 1994), but even then the sprawling geography insured that most newspapers, as opposed to most news, would have to be produced near to where they were consumed.

Within this decentralized economy, different places experienced modernizing factors at different times and paces. Economies of scale, and the mechanical innovations that coevolved with them, appeared first in metropolises (even if stylistic innovations were as likely to come from the provinces). So at the same time there might be metropolitan dailies with presses driven by electric engines running plates set by Linotype machines in New York and Chicago while printers in nearby towns still set type out of wooden cases.

Uneven modernization in printing was not a simple matter of a developing urban core and a periphery playing catch up, however. The two zones interacted in often perverse ways. Smaller country shops, for instance, found it economical to employ multiple apprentices, but offered them no opportunity for full employment upon completing their apprenticeship. As Horace Greeley put it in his 1850 Presidential address to the Printers Union of New York, “some two or three hundred boys, I fear,

are annually driven to the city, because the country printers cannot afford to keep them at journeymen's wages. Of course we cannot employ them all, and they immediately enter into competition with the workmen already here" (Stevens, 1913: 220). Print workers, full-grown as well as "boys," were highly mobile, migrating with the seasons as well as with the expansions and contractions of the overall economy in an era of turbulence. The fact that there were, and are, establishments in which it is useful for every worker to know how to do every task would have a significant effect on the way workers could be integrated into new production routines as well as on their capacity to resist change. To mention just the most obvious implication, it was difficult for the typographers to strike when a ready pool of available replacement workers occupied the newsroom.

The industrialization of news was both good and bad for worker control. For typographers, the introduction of new and more sophisticated machinery threatened to reduce the number of positions in a typical newspaper establishment; as it happened, though, a booming economy and reductions in print costs associated with the efficiencies of new technologies produced such an increase in the print marketplace that relatively few employees experienced long bouts of joblessness. Meanwhile, the new machines required specific skills, which allowed unionized workers to maintain a closed shop. Training replacement workers for a Linotype machine was a complicated affair. But as typographers maintained control in their own craft, they ironically encouraged the other crafts in the news industry to organize into unions with separate and sometimes competing interests and strategies (Mosco and McKercher, 2008: 83–94).

This divergence of craft unions in the age of the Linotype weakened workers when the next wave of technological change appeared. The digitization of news reduced the skill differential between typographers and other news personnel, who, already working at keyboards, could be trained up more easily. Digitization hastened the demise of the unionized typographer, though how it impacted a specific newspaper depended on how labor relations at that newspaper were structured (Sleigh, 1998).

Newsroom labor also industrialized, and in many ways newsroom workers faced the same issues as typographers. In the age of Franklin, and in the age of Duff Green, newspapers got almost all their news from other newspapers through networks of editorial exchange. Composing the editorial content of a newspaper was a matter of selecting items and then typesetting them, tasks that a printer could accomplish without an elaborate staff of editors. Partisan newspapers required more input from a political editor, who would craft original paragraphs, but that kind of work could also be accomplished by a printer, or by, say, a lawyer, in his or her spare time. Other original matter was usually the work of "correspondents," a term which referred to letter writers, who were sometimes paid but usually not full-time on

staff. Newspapers before the 1830s, when most newspapers were weeklies, did not emphasize local news, which would already be old and well-known by the time of publication. Printer-editors selected their local news with an eye toward generating interest in their network of exchange editors, emphasizing events that would have national implications, or that would appeal to readers because of drama or weirdness. In any case, few newspapers needed reporters.

That situation changed in the 1830s as daily newspapers became more common, as newspaper markets became more competitive, and as the news system in general became more commercial. Newspapers began to hire reporters to gather information at the institutional centers that produced news: police precincts, courts, markets, churches, hospitals, hotels. The work of these men, mostly, was routine. A reporter was meant to be a recorder, gathering data rather than explaining. At important speeches, sermons, and political events, a reporter was supposed to act as a stenographer. These reporters were quite different from correspondents, who were supposed to have a voice and point of view. Reporters were blue-collar workers.

In the competitive urban markets of the middle of the nineteenth century, steady production of reported news added value to a newspaper. Moreover, this value came to exceed the value added by a partisan brand. Newspapers continued to cultivate a party identity, but sought to distinguish themselves further from their competitors by the volume and timeliness of their news.

The importance of this investment in reporting was augmented by the rising importance of advertising as a revenue stream. A modest circulation advantage might translate into a massive advantage in ad payments. This advertising-driven economy of scale would continue to operate within the industry, driving in turn increasing investments in both newswork and in production technology.

Reporters became industrial labor. As such, they could be put to work on an assembly line, and paid like piece workers. In fact, newsrooms in the second half of the century came to resemble textile sweatshops, with reporters, seated at long tables in front of typewriters, overseen by a city editor (Solomon, 1995; Wilson, 1985; Hardt and Brennen, 1999). Many of them were so-called “space men,” paid by the amount of their textual production that appeared in the newspaper, measured by the line or the column inch. Space men were in a constant war of position with the copy desk, where copy editors had the power to edit their incomes (Solomon, 1985; Smythe, 1980; 2003).

On a common-sense level, newsroom workers and typographers seem to do very different things. Nevertheless, both sets of workers work in a knowledge industry, and can be meaningfully thought of as knowledge workers (Mosco and McKercher, 2008). The line between mechanical and intellectual work is arguably artificial, as I’ve suggested. But even granting the legitimacy of that line, it remains the case that newsroom workers and typographers occupied similar positions in the relations of

production. Both worked to counter attempts at de-skilling, for instance, and struggled to prevent the entry of new workers (women and children, mainly) who would be unable to command prevailing wages. Both saw their work transformed by new technologies – the Linotype, for typographers, and the typewriter, camera, and telephone for reporters.

But they chose different paths for labor organization. The typographers formed a craft union that supported their position as members of a labor aristocracy. The reporters signed on to a professionalization project that was led by publishers. This divergence fragmented news industry labor, and made it possible for owners to play their workers against each other. The lack of a unified workforce, in turn, might help explain the absence of a worker orientation in news content.

The remainder of this article turns, first, to the typographers, looking at how they dealt with the challenges of technological innovation, workforce diversity, and the broad politics of labor in the years before World War I. Then it discusses the development of the professionalization project for reporters, showing how they came to identify themselves as men (usually) of letters under the sign of journalism rather than as newswriters. It concludes by addressing the ways that both workforces built neutrality into their occupational definitions, with typographers adopting a hands-off stance to the matter they set, and reporters embracing objectivity.

Typographers unionize

Typographers were among the earliest and most successful of the crafts that unionized, successfully forming a national and later international union, after a number of false starts, in 1850. Much of what follows is based on the records of three locals affiliated with the International Typographical Union (ITU): Galveston, Texas; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Chicago, Illinois. These three represent very different social and political environments, but in each case similar struggles resulted in similar outcomes. Locals governed a mobile membership through membership rules and traveling cards, while dealing with controversies over age and gender; locals mobilized to enforce a scale of prices in the face of constantly changing types of printwork and print technology; and locals networked with other organizations of working men and women both locally and nationally.

Mobility

Artisanal workers in the western world had developed systems of traveling in search of work. The term “journeyman” is itself evidence of a norm of mobility, at least for a stage in a worker’s career. Craft workers in Britain developed formalized national

tours before the nineteenth century (Hobsbawm, 1951). Sending workers out to tramp was a way of addressing labor surpluses and/or shortages, of providing useful experience to workers, and of alleviating problems of relief payments during strikes. Printers were among the more mobile workers.

Local meetings always featured inductions of new members. The standard procedure was for a candidate for membership to be nominated, then investigated by the membership committee, then, upon positive report, admitted to membership at the next month's meeting. Two things that stand out from sustained reading of the minutes are the sheer quantity of incoming members and the largely placid, ritualistic manner in which they were accepted. There were always disputes: some candidates came with baggage from a previous local, some owed back dues, and some stood accused of having worked in "unfair" shops. Almost all of these disputed cases were eventually resolved. The cumulative result was that new members could constitute a very substantial percentage of the total membership of a local.

Chicago, because of its dynamic and turbulent growth, represented an extreme of mobility. For the year 1881, for instance, the Chicago Typographical Union's Secretary Treasurer reported a total membership of 1044, almost 600 of whom had been initiated that year (replacing 550 "withdrawn") (CTU vol. 2, 18 January 1882). The same report estimated 400 non-Union printers at work in the city. The Secretary reported on 25 Jan 1885 (CTU, vol. 2) that in the last quarter 398 traveling cards were deposited and the same number, 398, were withdrawn.

Two factors mitigated the effects of such mobility. One was the system of traveling cards, issued by locals to departing members, and certified after 1850 by the National (later International) Typographical Union (ITU), which eased the entry of union workers into new markets and allowed locals some measure of control over the labor supply. The other key factor was a stable core of older members. The names of office holders and committee members in locals recurred over decades, indicating a solid leadership population. My general impression is that, within the craft as a whole, over half the members were securely settled in a local, and at any given time perhaps a third were migratory. This is a higher figure than Hobsbawm records for British compositors, for whom an average of just under 25% received traveling cards in the 1870s (Hobsbawm, 1951: 309).

This large body of transient printers presented an acute problem during downturns in the general economy. Migrating to major print centers, they formed a body of potential replacement labor, and tempted publishers to try to depress wages. At best, they troubled the conscience of the craft, appealing to their "brothers" for help. The ITU leadership tried to inform members of the state of the market in various localities; locals also made an effort to communicate with mobile workers. In Chicago, following the great fire of 1871, the problem of surplus union printers became se-

vere (CTU vol. 2, 30 November 1872). The local settled on two measures to address this. One was a communication to other locals, telling them not to send members to Chicago. The other was a fund to help printers move out of Chicago. Through the next year, the union periodically sent circulars to other locals advising their members not to come to Chicago. This was a typical strategy for controlling the labor supply.

Such measures were not fully effective, and the implications for maintaining the scale of prices were obvious, especially because the same economic climate that drove printers to move was also cutting into the revenues of publishers. The result was usually a suspension of the prevailing wage scale (for example, CTU vol. 2, 22 March 1874).

The ebb and flow of workers followed cyclical downturns and upswings in the general economy. The dislocations that ensued also impelled printers to form unions. Each shock to the economy prompted organizing drives in cities like Philadelphia and New York, with especially strong attempts in the wake of the Panic of 1837. These were all temporary until 1850, when a national structure was successfully built. Further shocks in the 1850s, 1870s, and 1890s challenged but ultimately solidified the authority of the ITU.

Age and gender

If mobility was a cyclical factor, at least in part, the controversies over boys and women in the typographical workforce were continuing problems. They were also common across industries, features of the general shift from craft to industrial production. Occupations which had traditionally relied on a gendered culture of recruitment and advancement from childhood had to reckon with efficiencies that could be achieved through nontraditional workers. (Race was also a frequent issue, but did not often surface in the almost entirely white workforces whose papers I've examined.)

Strains on the apprenticeship system were especially notable among printers (Rorabugh, 1988). Even in healthy times, the print industry overproduced apprentices. Some apprentices opted not to complete their five-year indenture, and instead ran away, seeking independence as what were called "halfway journeymen" or "two-thirders." Some proprietors, like the Jacksonian newspaper publisher Duff Green (Pretzer, 1985), systematically exploited such labor, depressing wages for fully qualified journeymen. Union printers argued that this was a problem for the industry in general, and appealed to the common sense of publishers: "The system--or rather want of system -- at present adopted, in the employment of Boys, is not alone injurious to the interests of journeymen, but destructive to the character and standing of

our business; and also, we believe, calculated in time to prove a source of serious annoyance to the employers, by lowering the standard of capability, and producing, instead of Printers, mere “typesetters” (Philadelphia Typographical Union, vol. 4, 13 September 1856). This kind of appeal, and the tangible pressure the union could put behind it, induced publishers to agree to limit the number of apprentices they would employ, but there was nothing a metropolitan local could do to change the behavior of country printers. Competition from “boys” persisted as a problem.

Women were generally regarded by union typographers in the first half of the nineteenth century as a similar problem. By the end of the century they had achieved a limited measure of acceptance. (Biggs, 1980) In Philadelphia, a crisis occurred in the early 1850s when a new newspaper, the Daily Register, hired two “girls” in its office with an intention to hire more. This prompted the union local to resolve “That from and after this date, July 8, 1854, it shall not be lawful for any member of this Union to work in an office where Females are employed at case, or to continue in the employ of any Printer or Publisher engaging such hands” (Philadelphia Typographical Union, vol 4. 8 July 1854). With the union hands called out, the Register sought to bring in replacement workers from out of town, but the union’s Vigilance Committee found out, and met nine printers recruited from New York, “who, when told how matters stood, refused” to work for the Register. In return, the union lodged them, paid their passage back to New York, and voted them honorary members (10 July 1854). Meanwhile, a job shop associated with the Register, the Model Job Printing Office, hired more women, ultimately employing “ten she-compositors” (14 October 1854). It was declared an unfair, or rat, office and union members were forbidden to work there. Eventually the office succumbed to union pressure, and, on 13 January 1855, the union’s Business Committee reported visiting the Model office and being told that no one was being paid below scale, that although some hands were not Union members they wished to become so, and that the office would abide by Union rules. The committee then declared it a “fair” office. This last report does not explicitly mention women compositors, but the likelihood is that they simply joined the union. But the Philadelphia local remained alarmed by the issue, and instructed its delegates to 1855’s ITU convention in Memphis “to oppose any recognition of the employment of females as compositors” (14 April 1855).

The panic over female members subsided, though the issue didn’t disappear. For a time, the ITU considered encouraging women typesetters to form their own union locals, and in 1869 it recognized Women’s Typographical Union no. 1, in New York City, as a local affiliate, alongside no. 6. This experiment in parallel locals didn’t take, however, as employers remained resistant to paying women union scale. Instead, the ITU turned to recruiting women as members of existing locals (Baron, 1991; Biggs, 1980). The Chicago local used surprisingly correct gender-neutral lan-

guage when it revised its constitution in 1872 (CTU, vol. 2, 16 November 1872) “In Section 1 of Article 3, inserting ‘male and female’ after ‘printers,’ and changing ‘workmen’ to ‘workers,’” and “In Section 5 of Article 4, substituting ‘printer’ for ‘journeyman.’” One of the reasons why tensions eased is that female members were concentrated in proofreading, traditionally a typographer’s task but one that carried little prestige or joy.

Prices and technology

Print work was on the cutting edge of innovation, both stylistic and technological. This meant that typographers continually wrestled with new kinds of jobs and texts that challenged prevailing wage scales based on price per 1000 ems. Whenever a new design feature or a new tool was introduced, printers and publishers tussled over how to price it into the scale.

One example was the way recurring disputes over the distribution of “phat” and “lean” matter within the print shop were handled. In any particular shop, but especially newspaper shops, there were especially desirable typesetting jobs that involved “phat,” or emphatic, type, like headlines and display ads. The typical scale of prices charged by the “em,” referring to a unit of size measured by the width of the letter “m.” Depending on the market and the type of shop, a printer might command 40 cents per em, for instance. When figuring the pay for display type, though, the “em” used was the body face, which might be 9-point or 8-point. Someone typesetting a headline might be paid as if he or she had set the same space in 8-point type. Although typesetters would mostly be paid by the piece, any shop also included a few “time hands,” like the foreman, who would be paid a weekly salary. Publishers, and their foremen, had an interest in seeing that the phat was set by a time hand, rather than putting it “on the hook,” the term for the usual assignment rack, from which typesetters would take jobs in turn. Work disputes often involved getting managers to guarantee that the phat would be put on the hook (e.g., Galveston Typographical Society). Conflicts over phat (or fat) and lean matter persisted through the nineteenth century, becoming more intense as the varieties of fat matter increased.

One particular source of conflict was stereotyped matter. Stereotyping, a process by which a printer cast a mold of set type or woodcuts and then produced an indefinite number of duplicates for distribution to different printers, became common in the first half of the nineteenth century. When the Typographical Association of New York drafted its first constitution in 1831, it included rules about pricing stereotyped matter (Stevens, 1913: 106). Philadelphia’s (Minutes, vol. 4, 13 September 1856), response was typical: “Resolved, That all wood cuts or stereotype plates, without

regard to size, be charged accordingly to the type in which they occur, whether matter precedes or follows the cut, or is placed in any other part of the paper.” Obviously, such a rule ran counter to the most efficient use of the technology. It is a mark of the power of the union that rules like these persisted through the middle of the twentieth century. Union shops were able to insist that incoming “plate” matter be re-set in shop, even though the re-set type would in fact never be used. It was called “bogus matter.”

One of the more interesting problems arose when newspapers began sponsoring the design of new typefaces. A key motivation for them was the possibility of reducing typesetting costs by manipulating the size of letters: some new typefaces could set the same text in fewer “ems.” Chicago’s local (vol 2, 29 March 1873) undertook an extensive examination of this problem, and proposed a standard – e.g., pica 12 ems to the alphabet; nonpareil, 14 ems to the alphabet. This would obviate the problem of the weird em – typefaces designed to produce fewer ems for the same amount of work – by standardizing measurements. These recommendations were forwarded to the International, which recommended tweaks but postponed definitive action. The increasing complexities of the scale of prices evolved out of a continual dance of innovation in style and technology set to the beat of the competing interests of workers and owners.

This dynamic came to a climax with the introduction of machine typesetting, especially the Linotype. The specter of machine typesetting haunted typographers long before it became a reality, with the CTU (vol. 2, 28 November 1880) appointing a committee “to investigate type-setting machines” in 1880. The CTU also wrote letters of support to printers locked out by Whitelaw Reid’s New York Tribune when it adopted typesetting machines. Drafts of these letters were written on the back of single-sheet circulars from the ITU about the dispute, addressed to “the Members of the National Republican Convention” (which met in Chicago) and called on the Republican party to repudiate Reid, an important partisan publisher, as an enemy of organized labor and the workingman who “has systematically abused and misrepresented labor organizations in his paper, and in every way has proven himself a brutal and tyrannical employer and a foe of the workingmen.”

The handbill cited an agreement between the Tribune and New York’s Typographical Union #6 on 19 November 1883, promising to pay union scale and to be a union office. In return, the Union agreed “not to interfere in any way with the type-setting machines or machine men, so long as they are paid the scale, \$22 per week, now in use in said Tribune office.” The Union also promised not to interfere with the apprentices or boys in the Tribune office. This agreement was “broken by Whitelaw Reid on December 12, 1883, ... when a crowd of disreputable printers entered the composing-room of the Tribune office, and, aided by a squad of police, summarily

ejected every Union man from the office.” Reid and his Tribune would remain an enemy of the union for the next decade.

But the ITU managed to ride out the wave of machine type-setting. It did so by being flexible on the introduction of machines and letting locals calibrate a “machine scale of prices” that would be agreeable to publishers and at the same time keep typesetting in union hands. As mentioned previously, it helped that the introduction of the Linotype coincided with a great expansion of the print marketplace. The next revolution in typesetting technology, the introduction of computerized typesetting, coincided with a contraction of newspaper markets, while at the same time decreasing the skill threshold required for successful practitioners. It effectively killed the ITU.

Labor movement involvement

Typographers were leaders among the craft unions in the United States. When labor activism accelerated in the 1830s, and again in the 1850s, the typographical unions in various cities were in the forefront within their own industry and were quick to cooperate with other craft unions in forming union councils (e.g., Philadelphia Typographical Union, vol. 4, 13 November 1858; 12 March 1859; 18 June 1859; 13 August 1859; 10 September 1859). On the other hand, the scale of prices could trump labor solidarity. In 1860, a labor newspaper in Philadelphia, the *Leader and Workingmen’s Advocate*, fell into arrears in paying compositors and appealed to the good will of its employees, who “expressed their intention to ease work until something acceptable could be effected.” The publisher then sent the paper to the *Argus* office to be printed, and the Typographical Union’s business committee wrote to the pressmen at the *Argus* and told them to refuse the work (Philadelphia Typographical Union, Business Committee minutes, Jan. 11 1860).

Printers were also quick to join coalitions opposing anti-labor legislation. In Illinois, the Chicago Typographical Union (vol. 2, 29 March 1873) protested against a proposed state law against union agitation. They held that the legislation was “exclusively ... for the protection and through the interests, of capitalists and monopolies, and mainly with a view to benefit railroad kings, while these are allowed to plunder, abuse, maltreat or maim the unprotected public ...” Their coalition partners included farmers’ organizations as well as other craft unions. Attempts to pass “Anti-Conspiracy Laws” persisted, so that the CTU formed a special committee to follow action in the legislature and communicate with other unions and with state legislators (vol. 2, 24 Feb 1875). The CTU also joined the Amalgamated Trades and Labor Unions (30 January 1878), supported the Working Women’s Union (25 September 1878), attended festivals sponsored by the Socialistic Labor Party (26 Feb 1879), and supported the movement for an eight-hour day.

The eight-hour day movement became a crucial point of organization for labor generally. In Chicago, famously, a rally for the eight-hour day was the occasion for the bloody bombing that became known as the Haymarket Riot. Albert R. Parsons, one of the leaders of the movement, was a printer of German-language publications and an activist in the German-language printers' association, *Typographia* no. 9. The relationship between *Typographia* and the CTU was complicated but usually fraternal, with the two formally allied for most of the decade before Haymarket. Albert Parsons addressed the CTU on the eight-hour day (28 May 1879) and the union resolved that it be brought to the attention of the ITU (25 June 1879), accepted an invitation to an eight-hour demonstration on July 4 and 5 and resolved to attend "in a body;" 240 of their members attended (30 July 1879).

This friendliness to movements on the left waxed and waned. A decision point came in the first half of the 1880s, as the largely Anglophone CTU broke up with the increasingly radical German *Typographia*. The labor movement generally broke between radicals, often based in immigrant communities, and conservative trades unionists who would go only so far in entertaining notions of class conflict (Nelson, 1986).

Intervening in the public sphere

Typographers were keen to have their interests correctly represented to the public, especially when they were in conflict with newspaper proprietors. At first, the bonds of craft identity that linked printworkers and their employers made it possible to find support among the ranks of newspaper proprietors. Thus, in its labor dispute with the *Register* in 1854, Philadelphia typographers learned (Special meeting, vol. 4, 10 July 1854) "that the Proprietors of the "Daily News" and "Reporter" had tendered the use of their columns free, for replies to any article the "Register" may contain against the Union." The Union then appointed a committee to reply to any negative articles, and ordered that an ad be published warning printers not to come to the city to work on the *Register* because its hands were on strike.

ITU locals found other ways to use public channels to put pressure on "unfair" proprietors. One tactic was to pressure candidates for public office not to advertise in "unfair" publications, or, once elected, not to patronize unfair papers with official printing business. In Philadelphia (vol. 4, 10 April 1858), the Union tried to force candidates to promise not to print advertisements in newspapers trying to lower wages, threatening that any who refused would be reported "to all the Trade Unions in this city." This succeeded in getting most candidates to promise not to patronize the *Bulletin*, the newspaper that was the main target (14 August 1858; 11 September 1858), but after the election it turned out that the *Bulletin* continued to get city business (10 December 1859). Similarly, in 1860, the Union printed 5000 copies of a

circular containing a blacklist of all the elected officials who had sent patronage printing to “rat” shops, and formed a Committee to Interrogate Candidates whose task was to get signed statements from candidates promising not to patronize non-union printers (vol. 5, 14 April 1860).

But the typographers were reluctant to endorse or oppose candidates or tickets for any other reason than a tangible matter of self interest. Chicago’s union, in 1882, (vol. 2, 29 October 1882) after a long discussion on the question of endorsements, passed a motion condemning a particular candidate in these terms: “Whereas, James B. Bradwell, candidate for the legislature, is a notorious enemy of Chicago Typographical Union, and employer of non-union printers, Resolved, That we employ every means within our power to secure his defeat. Resolved, That a committee of fifteen be appointed to work against Bradwell with power to draw not exceeding \$200 from the union for expenses.” Bradwell went down to defeat. But again, this was an extraordinary case.

Typographers generally shied away from political parties and political movements. Even in the most politicized moments for the labor movement generally – in the agitation for an eight-hour day, in the turbulence surrounding Haymarket, and in the flourishing of the Knights of Labor – the ITU remained somewhat aloof, offering support to workers in other unions, but otherwise limiting their activity to matters that concerned the print and newspaper industries and their own interests. (See, for instance, resolutions questioning activities of the Chicago Trade and Labor Assembly, CTU vol. 2, 25 October 1884).

Ironically, very little evidence exists that these labor activists reached across the wall that divided them from editors and reporters. Only rarely do they refer to the content of newspapers, and even in cases when they called on newspapers to take a particular editorial position, it might have been in lieu of stronger action. New Orleans typographers, for instance, were divided on whether to join in the city’s 1892 general strike, so they compromised by passing a resolution calling on newspapers to “publish only editorials that will tend to settle amicably the existing trouble between the merchants and their employees ...” (Cook, 1983: 382). Instead, printers adopted a stance of neutrality toward the matter they typeset. Considering the generally anti-labor position of the majority of US newspapers, one must wonder what went through the minds of unionized typographers as they typeset reports and editorials condemning union activities. The official line was a kind of stoic detachment, but the temptation to sabotage must have been felt.

The same detachment could apply to other workers in the same shop. The typographers were the best organized and most successful of the mechanical trades, but the pressmen, deliverers, paperboys, stereotypers, electrotypers, and others also formed craft unions. Some of these, like the pressmen, spun off from the ITU. These different

unions were often in harmony when dealing with publishers, but could be played off against each other under certain circumstances. Such was the case in the great Chicago strike of 1912, when the newsboys were the vanguard and the typographers failed to support them (Taft, 1978). In the New Orleans 1892 general strike, the typographers joined the striking unions over the objection of the ITU leadership, but reacted to the failure of the strike by turning away from future action in solidarity with other unions and withdrawing from the city's Workingmen's Amalgamated Council (Cook, 1983). Even more striking is the mutual indifference between typographers and newsroom employees. Only on occasions when editorial workers with some practical printing experience seemed poised to scab during a strike did typographers actively recruit or seek to charter unions of editorial workers. The ITU did charter a series of News Writers locals in the years around World War I, but these were short-lived (Solomon, 1995). Newsroom employees, for their part, felt little solidarity with the mechanical workforce.

Reporters professionalize

The major resource for knowing about reporters as workers is a weekly newspaper called *The Journalist*, which began publication in 1884. The title is somewhat misleading. "Journalist" meant someone who worked on a journal, not someone who practiced journalism, a term which was slowly coming to have a deeper meaning (Nerone, 2015a). Instead, the early volumes of *The Journalist* often include items on people who worked for newspapers but would not be called journalists at a later date, like typesetters.

Part of the advancing alienation between newsroom labor and other newspaper labor was the elaboration of journalism as an "ism," an ideology or set of professional values. I've discussed this in more detail elsewhere (Nerone, 2015b). My argument is that journalism as a professional ideology was crafted through a negotiation among publishers, an outraged public, and an aggrieved newsroom workforce, each with its own agenda, and each making a tradeoff. The publishers wanted to remain free from the sort of industrial regulation that had been forced on the railroad industry; the outraged public wanted the news system, which they considered vital to democratic governance, to be insulated from the self-interest of the moneyed class who owned the media; the newsroom workforce wanted prestige, income, and creative autonomy. A professionalization project for news was the result. That professionalization project took the work of making the news and turned it into journalism.

Inventing a journalism that came to embrace objectivity as its central value and practice offered something to each of the contestants in the three-sided war over the news industry. Publishers would have to give up some of their control, but would

get in return the freedom to make large profits in a monopolizing industry free from intrusive regulation. The public would get a guarantee of ethical behavior, but would have to accept a militant interpretation of the First Amendment and forswear any scheme to limit publishers' freedoms (Lebovic, 2016). Newsroom employees would become journalists, with all that that entailed.

Being journalists meant aligning their attitudes and practices with the learned professions. In superficial terms, this included embracing the importance of degree programs in universities, crafting codes of ethics, publishing journals of press criticism, and finding rhetorical and social means of credentialing themselves in order to establish a line between real journalists and a wild frontier of pseudo-journalists. By the 1930s, this set of tactics had become successful to the extent that journalists and the public viewed their occupation as solidly middle-class. It seemed contrary to common sense that skilled craftsmen like typographers would continue to command higher wages. Ironically, this sense of professional entitlement, activated by the layoffs and paycuts caused by the Great Depression, seems to have been a major stimulant to the formation of the American Newspaper Guild (ANG) in the 1930s. Even so, the ANG was not a reliable partner to the ITU; publishers were often successful in getting these two powerful unions to undercut each other in contract negotiations.

Professionalization offered weak workplace protections for journalists. Unlike the mechanical unions, reporters and editors could not claim an exclusive skill on specific machines that would allow them to close their shops to less skilled or unskilled workers. In hard times, it was easier for newspapers and other news media to downsize their editorial than their mechanical staffs. For professionalization to have offered job security and something like a closed shop, journalism would have to have been able to lay claim to some body of arcane knowledge, something on the order of medical science. Journalism has never had this.

Instead, journalism in the US tried to elevate objectivity into something like medical science – something you had to go to college to learn; something that would guarantee that journalism worked in the public interest. There is no space here to rehearse all the reasons why objectivity failed to work in this prescribed fashion. But it is worth noting the ironic parallel to the typographers' embrace of a similar attitude of stoic detachment. It was a similar retardant to a more politically engaged workforce.

Conclusion: Workers and citizens

History does not offer us a basis for utopian hopes for a unified news industry workforce, at least not in the US, and at least not since the age of Franklin. There have been moments, however, when appeals to solidarity and economic justice have resonated across divided economic interests. The most hopeful moments, in my judg-

ment, are the cases in which typographers and publishers worked together to float the industry through hard times, cooperation which often involved publishers foregoing the opportunity to hire replacement workers at radically decreased wages. What comes across in those moments is something like brotherhood (alas, not sisterhood, generally), a sense of common identity based on the shared genes of the printer's craft.

The craft culture of printing lasted long after industrializing workplaces had displaced its material basis. Printers in a particular shop still had their "chapel," led by its "father," who could enforce discipline in parallel with and sometimes in opposition to the shop foreman and publisher. Publishers like Adolph Ochs, who turned the New York Times into the paragon of journalistic professionalism, still bragged about earning their printer's traveling cards. So in its best moments, the newspaper industry could take care of its workers as if they were members of a community.

Journalists, for all their sanctimony, were not members of the chapel. Their aspirations as "intellectual workers" (Leab, 1970) did not harmonize well with the humble disciplines of the printer's craft. They sometimes combined with the mechanical unions for tactical reasons, but did so without any particular sense of community.

Communities include, but they also exclude. In the US, the most enduring communities of workers were those with the strongest barriers to entry or the strongest ethnic demarcations. Jewish garment workers, enclaved in dense ethnic communities served by Yiddish-language media, stand out as particularly successful (Dolber, 2017). In Chicago, foreign-language workers mobilized more radically and effectively than their Anglophone counterparts (Nelson, 1986).

For the workers in the news industry, the ability to form closed communities of labor reinforced the trend toward specialization and division of labor that modernization encouraged. What made workers specifically more successful made them collectively less effective, as crises continually found their interests pitted against those of their fellow workers.

Democracy works on the myth of the community of citizens. It is necessary to believe that everyone in a polity is in a meaningful, substantial sense part of the same political community, and that that community has a common interest that supercedes the specific interests of sects, tribes, crafts, estates, professions, or classes. It is a myth that works, but it works better for some than for others. The myth of the community of citizens has not been working well lately for the working class, especially in the US.

The reasons for this may seem obvious, but, considering the numerical strength of the working class, its political weakness must be far from inevitable. In fact, multitudes vote – and think – contrary to their interests because they continually misrecognize themselves. The news media have a major role to play in that misrecogni-

tion. So it is tempting to believe that overcoming the conflicts of interest that fragmented labor inside the news industry could lead to an enhanced consciousness of working class interests in the larger public.

History is disappointing in this regard. As news industrialized, its workers grew increasingly alienated and fragmented. While some occupations did quite well for a time, others experienced grim exploitation. In the long run, every news industry occupation found itself vulnerable to economic pressure, even when publishers enjoyed profit margins of 20-30%.

How much worse now. It is not necessary to recite all the ways in which the news workforce is under strain, though it bears mentioning that the number of journalists – by conventional counts – working in the US has been cut in half in the past decade. Would journalism as an occupation be in better shape if newswriters had thought of themselves as workers rather than as professionals? Who knows, but it's hard to think it would be worse.

REFERENCES

- Baker, E.F. (1951) "The printing foreman, union man: An historical sketch", *ILR review*, 4(2), 223–35.
- Baldasty, G.J. (1992) *The commercialization of news in the nineteenth century*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Barnhurst, K.G. & J. Nerone (2001) *The form of news: A history*. New York, Guilford.
- Baron, A. (1991) "An 'other' side of gender antagonism at work: Men, boys, and the remasculinization of printers' work, 1830–1920", pp. 47–69. In: A. Baron: *Work engendered: Toward a new history of American labor*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Biggs, M. (1980) "Neither printer's wife nor widow: American women in typesetting, 1830–1950", *The library quarterly*, 50(4), 431–52.
- Blondheim, M. (1994) *News over the wires: The telegraph and the flow of public information in America, 1844-1897*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Botein, S. (1975) "'Meer Mechanics' and an Open Press: The Business and Political Strategies of Colonial American Printers", *Perspectives in American history*, 9, 127–225.
- Botein, S. (1980) "Printers and the American revolution", pp. 11–57. In: B. Bailyn and J.B. Hench: *The press and the American revolution*. Worcester: American Antiquarian Society.

- Braverman, H. (1974) *Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Chandler, A. (1977) *The visible hand: The managerial revolution in American business*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Chicago Typographical Union (CTU) (n.d.) Minutes. Manuscript collection in the Chicago History Museum.
- Cook, B.A. (1983) "The Typographical Union and the New Orleans general strike of 1892", *Louisiana History*, 24(4), 377–388.
- Darnton, R. (1975) "Writing news and telling stories", *Daedalus*, 104(2), 175–194.
- Dolber, B. (2017) *Media and culture in the U.S. Jewish labor movement*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Fee Jr, F.E. (2013) "Breaking read, not bones: Printers' festivals and professionalism in antebellum America", *American Journalism*, 30(3), 308–335.
- Fishman, M. (1980) *Manufacturing the news*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Galveston Typographical Society (n.d.) Minutes. Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
- Gans, H.J. (1979) *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Pantheon.
- Golding, P. (1979) *Making the news*. London, Longman.
- Hardt, H. & B. Brennen, eds. (1995) *Newsworkers: Toward a history of the rank and file*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hardt, H. & B. Brennen (1999) "Newswork, history, and photographic evidence: A visual analysis of a 1930s newsroom", pp. 11–35. In: B. Brennen & H. Hardt: *Picturing the past: Media, history, and photography*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hobsbawm, E.J. (1951) "The tramping artisan", *The Economic History Review*, 3(3), 299–320.
- Jacoby, D. (1991) "The transformation of industrial apprenticeship in the United States." *Journal of Economic History*, 51(4), 887–910.
- Leab, D. (1970) *A union of individuals: The formation of the American Newspaper Guild*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lebovic, S. (2016) *Free speech and unfree news*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- McChesney, R., & J. Nichols (2010) *The death and life of American journalism: The media revolution that will begin the world again*. New York: Nation Books.
- McKercher, C. (2002) *Newsworkers unite: Labor, convergence, and North American newspapers*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

- Mosco, V. & C. McKercher (2008) *The Laboring of communication: Will knowledge workers of the world unite?* New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Nelson, B.C. (1986) “‘We can’t get them to do aggressive work’: Chicago’s anarchists and the eight-hour movement”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 29, 1–15.
- Nerone, J. (2015a) “Journalism’s crisis of hegemony”, *Javnost–The Public*, 22(4), 313–27.
- Nerone, J. (2015b) *Media and public life: A history*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Philadelphia Typographical Union (n.d.). Minutes. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA.
- Postone, M. (1993) *Time, labor, and social domination: A reinterpretation of Marx’s critical theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pretzer, W.S. (1985) “The British, Duff Green, the rats and the devil”: Custom, capitalism, and conflict in the Washington printing trade, 1834–36”, *Labor History*, 27(1), 5–30.
- Rorabaugh, W.J. (1988) *The craft apprentice: From Franklin to the machine age in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schudson, M. (1978) *Discovering the news: A social history of American newspapers*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sleigh, S.R. (1998) *On deadline: Labor relations in newspaper publishing*. Bayside NY: Social Change Press.
- Smythe, T.C. (1980) “The reporter, 1880–1900: Working conditions and their influence on the news”, *Journalism History*, 7(Spring), 1–10.
- Smythe, T.C. (2003) *The Gilded Age press, 1865–1900*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Solomon, W.S. (1995) “The site of newsroom labor: The division of editorial practice”, pp. 110134. In: B. Brennen & H. Hardt: *Newsworkers: Toward a history of the rank and file*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stevens, G.A. (1913) *New York Typographical Union No. 6: Study of a modern trade union and its predecessors*. Albany: J.B. Lyon.
- Taft, P. (1978) “The limits of labor unity: The Chicago newspaper strike of 1912”, *Labor history*, 19(1), 100–29.
- Thompson, E.P. (1967) “Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism”, *Past & present*, 38(December), 56–97.
- Tuchman, G. (1978) *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. New York: Free Press.
- Wilson, C. (1985) *The labor of words: Literary professionalism in the Progressive era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Povijest vijesti kao rada u SAD prije I. svjetskog rata

John Nerone

SAŽETAK

Ovaj članak pokušava dati povijesni pregled vijesti kao rada kroz period industrijalizacije sustava vijesti u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama. Počinje tako da označava prikupljanje vijesti radom i propitkuje razliku između intelektualnog i mehaničkog rada u industriji vijesti. Zatim istražuje načine proizvodnje vijesti, identificira pritiske na poslu i rastuću podjelu rada. Koristeći zapisnik odabranih lokalnih članova Međunarodne udruge tiskara (ITU), daje zapažanja o zanatskim sindikatima unutar novina, a zatim suprotstavlja tu povijest projektu profesionalizacije zaposlenika redakcije. Zaključak rada je razmišljanje o udruživanju novinara i tiskara kao obrtnika, te pitanje može li takav projekt ponuditi rješenje za ispravljanje stalne klasne pristranosti u kapitalističkim novinarskim sustavima.

Ključne riječi: novinarstvo, novinarski rad, rad, povijest, sindikalizam, tiskarstvo