

Iowa's unionized student newspaper may not be key to all editors' woes

By Rex Henderson

Campus newspaper editors from Michigan and California are looking to the University of Iowa for leadership in an experiment in college journalism.

Two years ago the *Daily Iowan* unionized the editorial staff, an arrangement unique to college papers.

The union, as the editors', reporters' and photographers' organization is called, has since successfully negotiated two contracts with the *Daily Iowan's* board of trustees. One of the negotiations required a federal arbitrator.

Like most labor-management disputes, the problems at Iowa centered on pay. Not the amount, but the distribution of the pay at the *Daily Iowan* led to the creation of the union.

Mike Stricklin, then the publisher of the *Daily Iowan* and now a UNL assistant professor of journalism, said the dispute began with the 1976-77 editor in chief.

Editor played favorites

At the *Daily Iowan*, Stricklin explained, the editor in chief has complete control of staff salaries. The 1976-77 editor played a patronage game, paying friends on the staff more than other employees.

Some reporters got as little as \$50 a month. The editor in chief's friends got as much as \$300 a month.

Stricklin said he originally opposed the union, but the circumstances convinced him to support the idea.

His immediate reaction was "a perceived threat to the freedom and flexibility that should be inherent in a student newspaper," Stricklin said.

The *Daily Iowan* is neither "fish nor fowl" Stricklin said, being neither a university controlled paper, nor completely independent.

The paper gets \$60,000 in students fees to pay for door-to-door distribution, but the governing board, Student Publications, Inc., is independent of the university.

No serious threat

While there was never any serious threat to strike, Stricklin said, it was apparent that the paper could not continue to operate without solving the dispute.

He agreed to the idea because the people in the union agreed to discuss their concerns before formal negotiations began and the union was an "expeditious" way of solving the problems.

The organization of the paper caused "chaos over time" according to Stricklin. The annual turnover of the composition of the board of trustees, editor, publisher and business manager "allowed for abuse" that materialized in 1976-77.

"A student publication could work with flux in two out of the four areas, but not all four," Stricklin said. The Union provided some continuity and the contract defined the responsibilities of the board of trustees, publisher and editor.

Neither Stricklin, nor current *Daily Iowan* publisher Bill Casey, nor Union President R. C. Brandeau said the arrangement at Iowa would work at other student newspapers.

National union

Since many student papers are governed by a university connected board, the union would have to be a part of a national union, the American Federation of Public Employees.

Brandeau also said many of the Iowa newspapers have refused to hire former *Daily Iowan* employees after graduation.

Iowa publishers fear that *Daily Iowan* employees will become union activists on their papers, Brandeau said.

Casey said that after the major salary disputes were settled, the union activists began using the organization to voice complaints about "petty things", like noise in the newsroom.

Last years "daily hassles" with the union have "mellowed out", according to Casey. The contract negotiated last year has satisfied the union members, and many of the "rabble rousers" who worked on the paper last year have left, he said.

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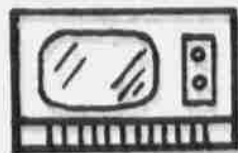
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