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They Won't Go Quietly

Editorial cartoonists howl as the Tribune Company cans more of their brethren.

By Michael Miner

There's something about the Tribune Company. Other newspapers lay off lots of people, but when Tribune papers backed up the truck a couple weeks ago, MoveOn.org Civic Action responded with an online petition accusing "corporate owners" of putting profits before their papers' responsibility "to deliver strong watchdog journalism to the public."

Other newspapers dump their editorial cartoonists. But when some Tribune papers decided to do without, the cartoonists of America declared war. December 12 became "Black Ink Monday," and 100 angry cartoons were posted at the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists Web site, editorialcartoonists.com, about half them attacking the Tribune Company by name. Black Ink Monday was also, said the Web site, "a commentary on newspapers everywhere who have lost sight of the value of having a staff editorial cartoonist," but riled-up visitors to the Web site were instructed to e-mail Tribune spokesman Gary

Weitman in the Tower.

What's the beef? *Tribune* cartoonist Jeff MacNelly died in 2000, opening one of the most desirable positions in journalism, but the *Tribune* has never filled it. Last month the Tribune Company's *Los Angeles Times* fired its cartoonist, Michael Ramirez, and said it would run syndicated cartoons instead. *The Christian Science Monitor's* Clay Bennett, who's president of the AAEC, protested to the Tribune Company's CEO, Dennis FitzSimons. "There are few journalists in a newsroom who can define the tone and identity of a publication like an editorial cartoonist does," Bennett wrote. "By discarding those who make a newspaper unique, you rob it of its character. By robbing a newspaper of its character, you steal its spirit. The fate of several editorial cartoonists now hangs in the balance as other newspapers within your company look to make staff cuts."

Bennett says FitzSimons didn't reply, and a few days later the Tribune Company eliminated



Clockwise from top right: Nick Anderson (Louisville Courier-Journal), Rick Cole (Trentonian), Ted Rall (Universal Press Syndicate), Stephen Breen (San Diego Union Tribune), Daryl Cagle (MSNBC)

The Straight Dope® by Cecil Adams

“I can’t buy a City Council reporter through syndication. I can’t buy an investigative reporter through syndication. But I can get the cartoonist.”

hundreds of jobs, among them the one held by *Baltimore Sun* cartoonist Kevin “KAL” Kallauger. “He took a buyout,” says Bennett. “He had good reason to believe his position was in danger. They announced they wouldn’t replace him.”

On December 5 Bennett and the *Tribune’s* Bruce Dold talked considering on *All Things Considered*. Dold, the editorial-page editor, has tantalized cartoonists for years by dangling MacNelly’s job before them without ever offering it to anybody. On the radio Dold pretty much admitted what cartoonists assume—the bean counters won’t give him the money to fill the position.

“Do you hire an investigative reporter?” he said. “Do you hire a City Council reporter? Do you hire a cartoonist? I can’t buy a City Council reporter through syndication. I can’t buy an investigative reporter through syndication. But I can get the cartoonist.”

Nick Anderson once believed Dold was about to make him MacNelly’s successor. Anderson eventually gave up on the paper, and this year he won the Pulitzer Prize at the Louisville *Courier-Journal*. “Dold’s logic, that it is a zero sum game pitting reporters against cartoonists, is fallacious,”

he e-mailed me. “You need both to have a thriving, vibrant newspaper that can retain readership into the future. . . . We think we’re part of the solution, not part of the problem.”

I told Anderson on Black Ink Monday that the problem was the public would never see the 100 cartoons. He said CBS was posting a story on its Web site that linked to the cartoons, and bloggers were starting to hook up. “I think it will snowball,” he predicted. The next day the AAEC reported 19,238 visitors to the site. The previous Monday there’d been 2,804.

Much response? I asked the *Tribune Company’s* Gary Weitman Monday evening. He said a “handful” of e-mails had arrived. He told me he’d answer all of them, but he wouldn’t tell me what he’d say.

The Medill School of Media Management?

Visit the Medill School of Journalism home page and you’ll find yourself staring at two boxes and a question. The boxes are labeled “Journalism” and “Integrated Marketing Communications,” and the question asks, “Where would you like to go?” To a lot of Medill graduates (and some professors) this design represents not merely a choice but a divide.

And that’s why so many were troubled last week when Northwestern University announced unexpectedly quickly that a new dean will take over

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A recent move has brought me to a comfy apartment building in friendly Medford, Massachusetts, complete with washer and dryer hookup. However, while having such a hookup is helpful, it’s much more practical to have a *working* hookup, which alas I do not (dirty scamming realtors are to blame). So I’m left with a dilemma: (a) walk up the street to the laundromat; (b) drive home to mum and dad (3.5 hours) once a month; or (c) screw it and give up washing altogether.

My fear with respect to (a) lies in what sort of evil lives in the neighborhood laundromat’s great tumbling vats. I’m not suggesting the locals or even the owners of said facility are dirty; I’m just curious what kind of statistics you can throw out concerning sanitation and public laundering facilities. I’m concerned that my girlfriend and I will suffer some itchy affliction if we don’t boil our clothes after washing them in a public spot. Let me know!

—Another minion boggled by your prodigious gray matter

One doesn’t hear much about the dangers of laundromats, no doubt due to efforts by the coin-op cartel to suppress the grisly truth, and I regret to say I’ve been unable to put my hand to any reliable enumeration of injuries, epidemics, and deaths. But if you’re determined to lose sleep over what might happen to you come laundry day, maybe the following will help: **▶ Snails.** OK, so this report comes from Ethiopia, where many wash their duds in streams. Presumably matters are more advanced in Medford, but if they let the laundry hookup in your apartment go to hell, who’s to say what goes on in those rusty pipes beneath the laundromat, unseen by wary eyes? The Ethiopians know. Specifically, they know about the snail *Biomphalaria pfeifferi*, intermediate host to *Schistosoma mansoni*, a parasitic worm. You can guess where this is going: the schistosomes contaminate water with their eggs (I’m not telling exactly how the

eggs get in the water, other than to recommend you keep a close watch on those dirty locals), the eggs develop inside the snails, then the mature parasites get into the water and from there they get into you—to be precise, into your liver, lungs, intestines, or bladder. The resultant condition, schistosomiasis, afflicts some 200 million people worldwide. Streamside laundry is evidently a major transmission route in Ethiopia, where folks have been experimenting with a natural soap and snailicide known as *endod*, which makes your whites whiter and your snails dead. Some may say: *Who needs endod? Nobody gets schistosomiasis in the U.S.* Spoken like somebody who’s looking to be the first.

▶ Microbial contamination. Browsing through the September issue of *Journal of Hospital Infection*, I see where “textiles sent to hospital laundries contain many types of pathogenic organisms,” which may be of pestilential effect. A study in—OK, Slovenia, but let’s not put on airs—found on

investigation that “the sanitary condition of [a local hospital] laundry did not reach the required level” (probable translation: the place was a sty), wherefore “fundamental sanitation measures were instituted,” which I take to mean they sent in a squad of babushkas to kick some housecleaning butt. We’ve already established that mol-lusks and parasites may be an issue at the local lavanderia. On the assumption that some of your fellow patrons will be washing bedclothes after their forthcoming bouts with schistosomiasis, you’d better set out a petri dish for microbes, too.

▶ Uveal melanoma. i.e., cancer of the pigmented layer of the eye. Recent research has found that European laundry workers have triple the usual rate of this dreadful ailment. No one is publicly saying why, but for those of us capable of putting two and two together (see snails, etc., above) the message is all too clear: see what you can do about that washer/dryer hookup, or learn to love the dirt.

im a 16 year ol physics student i have been noticing when im stiring my coffe int he morning that the bubbles go into the center now i would expect as i have been on many anti gravity rides that they would go outwouds eg centrefugal foces. now as the bubbles are lighter that the actually liquid you would expect it can you please help me as none of my teachers can answer —jared

I’m not saying you don’t need my help, kid, but it isn’t with physics. You’ve answered your own question. Since the bubbles are lighter than the liquid, they’re shoved out of the

way—that is, into the center of the cup—by the denser coffee crowding its way toward the rim. For the same reason, if you have a helium balloon floating inside your car and you slam on the

brakes, the balloon paradoxically will be thrown backward while—indeed, because—everything else in the car, including the heavier-than-helium air, is flung to the front.

Comments, questions? Take it up with Cecil on the Straight Dope Message Board, www.straightdope.com, or write him at the Chicago Reader, 11 E. Illinois, Chicago 60611. Cecil’s most recent compendium of knowledge, *Triumph of the Straight Dope*, is available at bookstores everywhere.

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unexpectedly soon. John Lavine comes out of the IMC program. He's a professor of media management and strategy and he'll succeed outgoing dean Loren Ghiglione on January 9, in the middle of the school year.

The university's announcement quoted Lavine in worrisome fashion. "We need to develop a more profound understanding of audiences and consumers," he said, "of what they value and of how to present journalism and the new digital media to them." No one can argue with that. But then he plunged into language that to a lot of journalists is jargon: "We also need to have a far deeper understanding of media

brands and marketing communications and how to use them to engage media audiences." And he declared the divide will exist no more: "Building on the strategic goals developed by the combined faculties, we will urgently work together to remake the school's entire undergraduate and graduate curricula."

Before I could ask Lavine to elaborate he left the country. He's a man of mystery, and a listserve that connects Medill graduates has gone wild debating his appointment. "I would be extremely dismayed to see Medill's primary focus shift to marketing, but I am confident that our students, faculty and alumni will never let that happen,"

one alum commented. Another wrote, "Seems to me Medill is just going where the money is. What kind of alum donations do you think roll in from reporters vs. advertising and communications consultants?" A recent grad who went into marketing sounded squeamish nonetheless: "I always saw Medill as a place of independent thought and old-school journalistic ideals and this is definitely not a return to its roots."

Other alums argued that it's not a bad thing to teach the business of journalism along with the profession of journalism. A professor I talked to said he believes Lavine wants Medill "to think about itself from the ground up, but I wasn't interpreting what he

was saying as throwing the baby out with the bathwater." Lavine's appointment was announced to the Medill faculty by NU president Henry Bienen and provost Lawrence Dumas, who left some professors with the impression that they believe Medill's reputation has slipped and they intend to restore it in the only way some academics understand—more and better research. Lavine told the faculty he'd try to lighten their teaching loads so they'd have more time to do it.

"I can't in all honesty say that research is anything approximating Medill's strength," said the same professor. "We have always produced journalists who hit the ground running." No wonder

alumni sound happier with Medill than the scholars do.

News Bite

A year ago Richard Cahan and his collaborators Michael Williams and Neal Samors brought out a terrific picture book, *Real Chicago: Photographs From the Files of the Chicago Sun-Times*—the *Sun-Times* being where Cahan was picture editor until he left to run the Chicago in the Year 2000 project. Now Cahan, Williams, and Samors are back with *Real Chicago Sports*, more photos from the same files going back to 1930. **Q**

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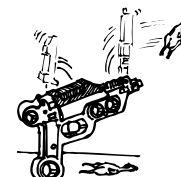
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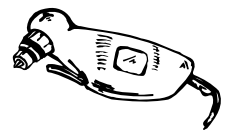
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