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This paper is not a scientific or systematic assessment of the effectiveness of the union corporate campaign vs. more traditional methods of persuasion, especially the strike. It is rather an account of one labor conflict, at one company, in one city, at one time. True, the *Daily News* War was a protracted conflict on a grand scale in the communications capital of the nation. It received enormous publicity because of the size and visibility of the companies involved and because, when the strike that ultimately settled the conflict finally occurred, it was one of the largest, most expensive, and violent in recent U.S. labor history. And for that reason it was extremely visible.

Moreover, the conflict was in some way archetypical of the labor conflict we are likely to see in this era. The heart of the conflict was a struggle over control of the destiny of industrial companies in the information era. The core issue of the strike was how, if at all, unions fit into industrial companies whose production techniques, and even more importantly, whose very culture and ethos are being transformed by automation.

Newspapers are among the oldest industrial enterprises in the nation, among the first to be unionized (because despite their industrial character most newspapers were organized by old craft unions that arose from the printing trades) and among those earliest and most profoundly transformed by the advent of computers. In all these ways the *Daily News* strike of 1990-1991 was emblematic of the labor conflicts of our times.

In several respects however the News strike was more anomalous than typical: New York City is far and away the most heavily unionized city in the nation with in excess of 40 percent of the city’s work force organized; the strike involved multiple craft unions working in an industrial setting (as newspaper strikes tend to); the city and state governments were overtly pro-union, and the most effective of the unions, the Newspaper and Mail Deliverers’ Union of New York and Vicinity, (the drivers union) has a long history of mob involvement or even domination. In fact it was the first — and to my knowledge the only — union in American history cited by law enforcement agencies as being in and of itself a criminal organization.

To start at the conclusion, the moral of this one strike in this one city, is that management facing the prospect of a major, fundamental, labor conflict should go to church, light a candle, and pray for the union to decide a strike is too risky and opt for a comprehensive corporate campaign instead. For at the News the unions had been convinced of just that strategy, and were sure that a strike would be a disaster.
Management, for its part, seemed quite content to have a strike. It was widely believed that management preferred and tried to provoke a strike. In the event, the unions finally struck only by accident and in an almost suicidal spirit. And only by that accident and in that spirit did the unions ultimately prevail.

For both sides the situation was a desperate one. This is crucial. When the issue at hand is a few percentage points in wage raises, perhaps annoying management with the tactics of a corporate campaign may make sense. At the News, both sides should have realized from the beginning that the differences between the two sides were so fundamental and the mutual distrust so great that the only alternatives for the unions would be total war or a swiftly negotiated peace on substantially the company’s terms. Neither side would back down in the face of the Vietnam style measured escalations that, on both sides, constitute most comprehensive corporate campaigns.

The News had been for decades (until surpassed by the LA Times a few years before the strike) the largest local newspaper in the nation. Once it had also been the most profitable, but in the 10 years preceding the strike the News lost well over $100 million on revenues of more than $4 billion. The News, like all the New York papers, including the more than half a dozen that had died in the 1960s and 1970s of labor trouble, had a history of extremely acrimonious labor disputes and had been repeatedly frustrated by the unions in its attempts to bring the latest in technology to the paper. The paper had switched to computerized typesetting in the 1970s, but since then no further advances had been made. As of the time of the strike (and still today) the paper was printed on 50-year-old letterpress printing presses incapable of printing in color and which produced at best a mediocre black and white product.

Labor inefficiencies were immense and productivity disastrous. The 10 news unions worked under rigid rules that virtually guaranteed huge losses. Press manning rules, for instance, required crews of from 11 to 14 men on presses that management believed could be run by five to seven (as they eventually were during the strike). Maintenance crews were paid by shift, but worked by piece so that after servicing a limited number of items in a day they went home even if they had worked only a few hours. As a result maintenance costs were exorbitant and the plant was filthy and the presses rarely in condition to produce a quality product. The rules for the drivers’ unions were if anything more burdensome. The contract included dozens of, in effect, no-show jobs, including a half-dozen man crew assigned to deliver a few hundred papers to Grand Central station every morning. Other drivers, paid for a full eight hours to complete a run, regardless of how few hours it might take, were given two or even three runs a night, being paid for eight hours in each case, with the additional runs paid at overtime. The drivers union, long a sewer of corruption and mob influence, gave out these favored slots to politically favored members who supported the union administration with votes, and probably kickbacks.

So much for the work rules. Professor Herbert Northrup has noted that one corporate campaign tactic is to “strike while working” or “bring the strike inside the plant” by among other tactics, “working to rule.” At the News working to rule would