

Communications union acclaims stronger voice of women

By Paul Shinoff
Examiner labor writer

LOS ANGELES — The Communication Workers of America, the 45-year-old union that has more female members than male ones, has for the first time elected a woman as an executive director.

And delegates — most of them men — to the CWA convention here gave a standing ovation to actress Linda Lavin's appeal for a stronger female voice in leading the 650,000-member union.

Some members found those to be dramatic changes for the CWA, a leader in the U.S. labor movement that is seeking new blood and new allies.

"They (women) have not been

elected in the numbers that they should be," CWA President Glenn Watts said at a press conference here.

"In fact, we have been embarrassed by the fact that we did not have a woman on our executive board until yesterday. It remains an embarrassment that we have only one."

On Tuesday, Connie Bryant, 46, a public employee from New York City, was elected the CWA's first national director for public workers in a sharply divided election. Bryant defeated two men for the post.

Yesterday, Lavin, who plays a waitress on the television program "Alice," challenged the 3,500 delegates to change the labor movement.

"We must fill the void of female leadership," she said.

Lavin noted that although 53 percent of CWA members are women, only 27 percent of the delegates were female, and she asked the union to increase that count to 40 percent by next year's convention.

"It's so terribly important for you to recognize what's going on here," Lavin said to the men in the audience. "Women don't want to take away your jobs. They don't want to be male union leaders. They want to be female union leaders."

Lavin, a member of the National Commission for Working Women, a non-governmental advocacy group, received a standing ovation.

One CWA representative said her appearance marked a significant change in a union that had long been dominated by men.

Bryant is the only woman among CWA's five executive officers, 12 district vice presidents and six national bargaining unit directors, but women interviewed here said her election and Lavin's appearance marked a new direction for the CWA.

"We've made the potato salads, we've walked the picket lines, we've collected money. Now we are here to help our brothers run this union," Ann Crump, president of CWA Local 5500 in Milwaukee, told delegates.

Women were among the early organizers of the union, 85 percent of whose members work for American Telephone & Telegraph Co. and related companies.

But according to union officials, they held elected positions only when locals were organized along job lines

— when, for example, a local union was made up solely of female phone operators.

Then CWA unions were merged in the 1950s and 1960s, and men assumed leadership.

"The women went underground," said Crump, 29, who began working as an operator when she was 19. "We need some coups, we need to kick some butts. There is no reason for this resistance to continue."

Watts recalled that when he worked as a telephone installer, men were paid \$4 an hour, while women earned half that for comparable work.

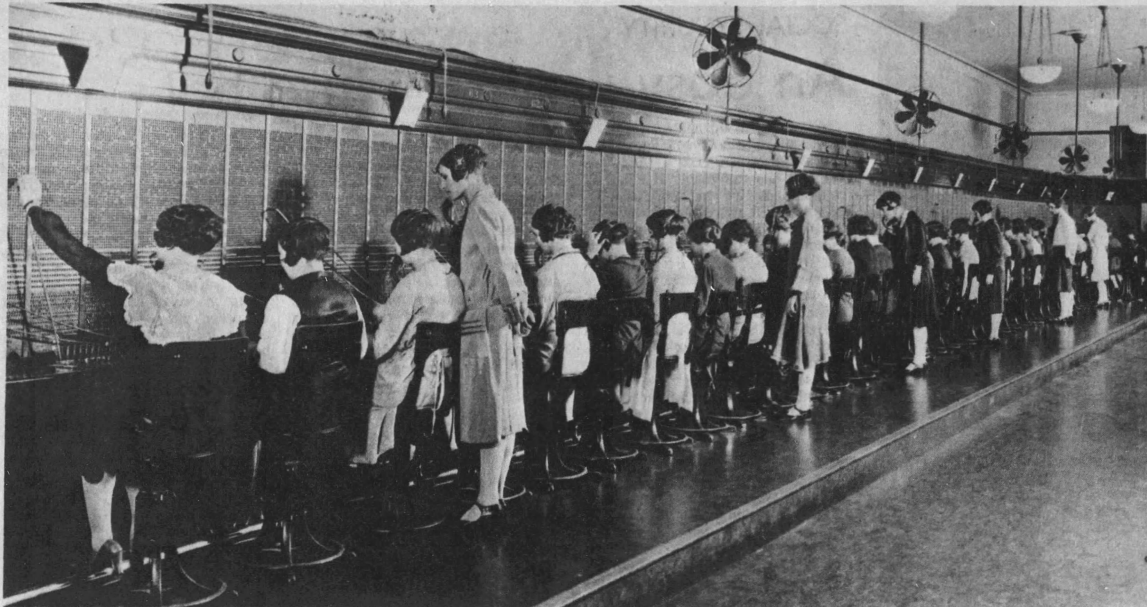
"We are trying to encourage women to raise their expectations, to encourage minorities to raise their expectations," he said. "The challenge

for every one of us is out there."

Watts acknowledged that unions are not necessarily more liberal than employers on women's rights. "I wish I could say yes, but I'm not sure that they (unions) are," he said. "I would like to feel the attitude of my union is more progressive than employers ... although there are employers who have done good work."

Crump said women have been able to assume leadership positions partially through the example of female executives who have been promoted through affirmative action programs in phone companies.

"They were forced under the law, but the women they put in were good, they were good role models — and they are supportive."



HELLO, CENTRAL

Rows and rows of operators were necessary in the early decades of the telephone industry's history, when there

was little the customer could do alone. (Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Companies photo)

Telephone operator comeback?

National Geographic
News Service

WASHINGTON — Once there was a time when Americans picked up their telephones, turned the crank, and shouted, "Hello, Central?"

Early telephone operators really were central to the life of their communities. They knew how to track down someone who had left the office to go to the store. They knew callers' voices and how to reach someone without bothering with numbers. They were used to dealing with the questions of where the fire was, what the weather was like, and how the mayor was feeling.

But then telephone service became more common, and infinitely more complex. As automation took hold to deal with the vastly increased number of telephone calls, the telephone operator became less central, and the service she gave became far less personal.

Now, in an age of automation and divestiture, the voice of the telephone operator may be heard more often in our land. That would please customers, who prefer a human voice to a synthesized one; it would please operators, who say they want to use their own initiative and give better service; and it would please the telephone companies, which could reap additional revenue by providing additional services.

There is nothing definite about any of this. Spokesmen for local operating companies and for AT&T Communications, the long-distance arm of the shrunken Bell System since the Jan. 1 breakup, say only that the changes are under consideration. But some experiments have been tried, and they have been promising.

One change would enable long-distance operators to go beyond simply making a connection, to suggesting another call when an initial call could not be completed, or promising another attempt later. Local companies are wondering whether their directory-assistance operators should make wake-up calls or calls to check in on the elderly.

Such services would go a long way toward assuaging complaints of unionized operators that they are limited to providing only rote response, to customers, and are forced by work practices to cut short the amount of time they can spend with customers.

The earliest telephone operators were young boys. When William J. Pellissier died in Malden, Mass., in 1959 at the age of 98, obituaries called him "reputedly the world's first telephone operator." He was walking down a Boston street at the age of 17 when he saw a "boy wanted" sign, walked into the Telephone Despatch Co., and was hired.

But young boys, who handled a variety of office chores in addition to making connections for owners of the earliest telephones, proved to be too rowdy, and sometimes too crude, for the job. Phone company officials soon turned to young women instead.

Historians still debate whether the

first female telephone operator was Emma Nutt of the New England Bell Telephone Co., or Margaret Kennedy of the New York Telephone Co.

Whoever was first, she was quickly followed by millions of sisters, daughters, and granddaughters. Telephone operating became almost exclusively a female occupation — even today, after more than a decade since the Bell System began hiring male operators, more than 91 percent of the operator force is female — and Americans became used to hearing a female voice respond when they shouted, "Hello, Central?"

But the growth of telephone service began to overwhelm the operator and her cord switchboard. The writer of a 1941 book on the role of the telephone described how completing a call from Maine to California required the services of eight different operators.

Automated equipment, beginning with dial telephones, began to limit the need for operators, and the rise of computers in the last few decades has cut the need even more. A survey by the Communications Workers of America found that the number of operators dropped from 244,190 in 1950 to 128,214 in 1980, a 47-percent decline.

This decline came at a time when overall industry employment increased by 61 percent, when the number of local calls quadrupled, when the number of toll calls went up 15 times.

Along with the decline in numbers has come a decrease in the amount of time spent with the customer. Agnes Kelly, a directory-assistance operator in Pleasantville, N.J., an operator since 1947, remembers spending three or four minutes with a customer when she had to rely on a collection of phone books.

Today, says a New Jersey Bell spokesman, the average directory-assistance operator, sitting at a computer terminal and searching for one among the 1.1 million phone numbers in the 609 area code, spends only 29 seconds with a customer, and new

audio response equipment now being installed will make it less.

The limited "AWT," for "average work time," has led to continuous contention between labor and management. Some operators have been fired because their AWT was too high, though most have later been reinstated.

Ann Crump, a former operator who heads a CWA local in Milwaukee and organizes national conferences for operators, says the system "puts a great deal of stress on the operators."

"They are not allowed to do anything but sit at the job," says Crump. "They're not allowed to get up and walk around, sneeze, or whatever. And there is not a second between calls; as soon as they're finished with one call, another is there automatically. Operators take pride in their ability to give service, but the companies don't enable them to do so."

On the other hand, James W. Carrigan, New Jersey Bell spokesman, says his firm is out "to process the most calls with the least number of operators to minimize the cost." The shorter the AWT, the more calls that can be handled, and what customers want is a fast, accurate response, he says.

Still, the coming of competition in the industry has led to studies of new ways to utilize operators, especially since AT&T Communications' competitors have no operators. A Tennessee experiment gave operators the chance to spend more time with long-distance customers if an operator thought it necessary. Everyone was pleased, and the company picked up an additional \$2 million in revenue.

"Our over-arching goal is customer satisfaction," says Bob Beck, vice president for operator services at AT&T Communications. "Efficiency is important, but at times we must go beyond that to see what a customer needs. We want to draw upon an operator more, and change the way we measure the job to induce call-completion. There's less rote reliance on methods and procedures. It may be essential to deviate from practice in order to complete a call."

This attitude is not universal, and many union officials take a wait-and-see attitude. But if operators are given a more important role, says James Irvine, CWA vice president for long-distance operators, "We would be with them 100 percent. That would be great."

The Spinal Column

By Dr. James W. Appel, D.C.

Occupational Low Back Injuries



Please consider the following statistics from the third annual conference of Industrial Low Back Pain, October 4-7, 1983. This symposium attracted attendance of approximately 100 professionals involved in the recognition, prevention and management of industrial lower spinal disorders.

1. Approximately 80% of the general population will suffer a disabling lower spinal disorder at one or more times during their working career.
2. Approximately 26% of the working populace in any given year will report low back pain and 6,000,000 workers in American industry will be suffering from lower spinal pain on any given day.
3. Low back pain is most frequent and most severe in the ages of 35 to 45 with males and females affected equally.
4. High risk occupations are truck drivers, who by loading and unloading are the most prone to low back pain, with manual materials handlers second, and nurses and nursing aides in third place.
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State Bell talks on; pickets up in East

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Contract talks continued late Saturday as representatives of Wisconsin Bell and the Communications Workers of America attempted to hammer out an agreement covering about 4,200 employees in the state.

John Leslie, a CWA spokesman in Cleveland, said late Saturday that Wisconsin Bell had been asked to continue talks while the contract remains in effect.

"We haven't heard from Wisconsin Bell, but I expect they will accept," Leslie said. "Ohio Bell and Michigan Bell have agreed to the extension."

Wisconsin Bell spokesman Vyto Kapocius said the talks had not broken off late Saturday.

"We haven't gotten any word on whether they will extend the contract," Kapocius said. "They are continuing to talk right now. We haven't heard anything about the proposal (to extend the contract)."

Leslie said Martin Hughes, an international vice president of the CWA, had proposed the day-by-day extension because of the complexity of the negotiations and in the interests of the public, the workers and the company.

On the national front, about 40,000 workers struck telephone companies in New York and New England shortly before midnight. But walkouts in some mid-Atlantic states, parts of the Midwest and Southwest were averted shortly before the strike deadline.

Fran Zucker, a union spokeswoman, said union leaders at Nynex Corp., the parent company of New York Telephone and New England Telephone, caucused shortly before midnight and rejected the company's last offer. Company negotiators, she said, were discussing a union counterpro-

posal when picket lines went up in New York, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Ann Crump, president of CWA Local 4600, said in Milwaukee late Saturday that Wisconsin Bell was asking for a wage freeze and concessions.

"Right now it seems pretty likely there won't be an agreement," she said. "I doubt an agreement can be reached before midnight."

In Wisconsin, Kapocius said earlier Saturday evening the talks, which continued weekly since June 17, have progressed smoothly. He declined to reveal specific proposals.

The issues include wages and pensions, Kapocius said. This is the first time since 1971 that local contract talks covered issues such as wages, he said. Previously, they were handled in national bargaining talks involving the CWA and American Telephone & Telegraph.

Wisconsin Bell has made contingency plans to assure service is not interrupted in the event of a strike, Kapocius said.

One set of talks for CWA-represented employees in Wisconsin is being held in Milwaukee, Kapocius said.

The contract talks were aimed at replacing an agreement that followed a 22-day strike in 1983.

The talks cover about 600 Wisconsin Bell employees in Madison, 500 in the Fox River Valley of northeastern Wisconsin and about 2,400 in Milwaukee, Kenosha and Racine, and about 250 in Eau Claire, Chippewa Falls and Menomonie, Kapocius said.

The CWA represents directory assistance operators, technicians who maintain switching facilities, repair service personnel and billing and collection employees.

16 people arrested in protest at Rainfair

By Paul J. Holley
Business Editor

A massive protest at strike-torn Rainfair Inc. resulted in the arrest of 16 people Tuesday morning.

Racine police estimated that as many as 500 strikers and supporters converged outside the company headquarters and plant, 3600 S. Memorial Drive, about 6:30 a.m. Police said the arrests were made when pickets tried to block cars carrying replacement workers and Rainfair managers.

Racine Police Sgt. Carl Pavilonis said the 16 were charged with disorderly conduct, issued citations at the police station and released. They are scheduled to appear in Racine Municipal Court Nov. 4.

Production workers, represented by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, have been on strike at the protective clothing manufacturer since June 19. The union and Rainfair have been at an impasse over wages, health insurance benefits, holidays and other issues.

Tuesday's protest — the largest to date — included 225 telephone operators attending a four-day Communication Workers of America national conference in Milwaukee. That group arrived in three buses and dozens of cars.

Most of those arrested were CWA members from as far away as California, New York, Washington, D.C., and Oklahoma.

Pavilonis said two officers and a supervisor who watch the Rainfair entrances during the daily shift changes called for help when the huge group pulled up at the plant. About 20 Racine officers were called in from the third and first shifts. Mount Pleasant police and Racine County sheriff's deputies also assisted, he said.

"They were totally blocking the street," Pavilonis said.

But, Kim Mussman, an ILGWU organizer, said the pickets were simply exercising their free speech rights.

"It was really beautiful," she said. "There was singing, holding hands, signs and balloons. It was the biggest show of support we've seen."

The bus trip to Racine was part of the CWA conference, said Ann Crump of Mukwonago, CWA Local 4600 president. The Garment Workers weren't told of the CWA's plans, she said.

"This is disgraceful," she said in a voice brimming with anger. "It's the most blatant disregard for human beings I've seen in the Midwest in 20 years."

Crump, who was arrested, said a car driven by Rainfair Chairman Craig Leipold ran over a protester's foot. The protester, whom she declined to identify, was taken by friends to a hospital for X-rays and was found to have a sprained foot.

Pavilonis couldn't confirm that any protester's feet were run over. He said officers reported that some protesters were placing their feet in front of some vehicle tires. No injuries were reported to police.

An angry Bruce Bartelt, Rainfair chief financial officer, denied that Leipold or anyone else connected with the company attempted to injure the pickets.

"This just shows the mentality we're dealing with here," he said. "They're standing in the middle of the road, kicking and scratching the cars."

Bartelt said a 65-year-old female Rainfair employee was assaulted by protesters when she stepped out of a city bus at the plant. She was not seriously injured.

Late Tuesday afternoon, Rainfair attorneys asked the Racine County Circuit Court for a temporary injunction against the ILGWU and its supporters. The complaint called Tuesday's disturbance "a near riot" and said police were unable to control the situation.

Racine County Circuit Court Judge Dennis J. Barry scheduled a hearing on the injunction for 1:30 p.m. Thursday.

The ILGWU's Chicago-based attorney was not available for comment Tuesday evening.

In August, a judge's order limiting picket line activity at Rainfair was dismissed after company and union representatives agreed to keep the peace.

Labor rally set for Saturday

One of the largest labor rallies in several years is planned for Racine on Saturday.

The Wisconsin State AFL-CIO has asked its 1,000 affiliated unions to join a march and rally starting at 10 a.m. at the Racine Labor Center, 2100 Layard Ave. The group will then march to the Rainfair Inc. plant at 1501 Albert St.

"There's a dual purpose to this event," said Bill Blessington, AFL-CIO spokesman. "First, it demonstrates a need for anti-strikebreaker legislation. Secondly, it shows support for Rainfair workers."

International Ladies Garment Workers Union Local 187, which represents 136 production workers, has been on strike against Rainfair since June 19. The company has hired 72 replacement workers which it says are permanent.

The AFL-CIO's last statewide rally attracted several thousand people to Cudahy in 1987, where

striking packing plant workers were replaced by strikebreakers.

Organized labor wants the Wisconsin Legislature to override Gov. Tommy G. Thompson's veto of a bill that would prohibit companies from using permanent replacement workers during strikes.

The governor turned down the measure claiming the National Labor Relations Act preempts state law governing strikes.

Sen. Russell Feingold, D-Middleton, author of the bill, has been trying to lobby lawmakers to override Thompson's veto. A vote is expected Oct. 9.

A two-thirds legislative vote is needed to override a veto. Feingold said Tuesday that he needs to pick up four votes in the Senate and eight votes in the Assembly to succeed, but opponents aren't saying if they'll change their positions.

■ COMMUNICATIONS

Phone operators find their jobs disappearing rapidly

By Erik Gunn

The Milwaukee Journal

WEST ALLIS, Wis. — Donna Jones' computer gives a beep and the screen flashes. At the other end of the telephone line, a caller asks for the number of a Milwaukee cemetery.

Jones, an Ameritech toll operator, politely directs her to call information and gives out a directory assistance number: 1-555-1212.

"That's the cemetery?" the caller asks, in a tone seeking reassurance.

"That's information," Jones says. "They can give you the number."

The pleading in the caller's voice gives way to exasperation. "Oh, good Lord," she says with a sigh as she hangs up. A knowing smile flashes across Jones' face as she takes another call.

If the talk in boardrooms and legislative chambers these days is of a sleek, new information superhighway, Donna Jones and her co-workers at Ameritech's toll-operator offices here are more like Main Street. And for all the allure of the exotic high-tech thoroughfares, this Main Street still gets a lot of traffic.

Less than it used to, however, and because of that, operators are seeing their jobs decline. The rapid advance of telecommunications technology is doing to the telephone operator what the automobile did to the blacksmith.

The Communications Workers of America, the union representing employees at the nation's large re-

gional telephone companies and at the long-distance carrier AT&T, estimates that there are 60,000 to 70,000 operators at those firms today. The number, which doesn't include perhaps a few thousand more at non-union long-distance companies, is half what it was in 1980 and roughly a quarter of the total 40 years ago.

Nationwide, AT&T is headed down to about 10,000 operators over the next several years. It now employs about 17,000.

Beginning with equipment that enabled customers to dial long-distance calls for themselves in the 1950s, technology has steadily expanded the number of things telephone users can do without an operator's help.

Calling cards now allow people to bill a call to their home phone without dialing the operator in most cases. Community 911 emergency systems mean people no longer need to call the operator in an emergency.

And more automation is on the way. Long-distance companies are beginning to use systems that will dial a predetermined telephone number simply by a caller's voice command, like "Call Mom."

"They are mechanizing every part of the call now," says Ann Crump, president of CWA Local 4600, representing about 750 workers, most of them operators, in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. And it's becoming easier for carriers to consolidate operator services into larger and larger offices.

'I was hoping to retire from the phone company. I have 12 years to go yet. You wonder — Am I going to make it that far?'

Operator Donna Jones

The trends worry Crump. It's nothing new in the current economic climate for employers to eliminate jobs wholesale, she readily admits. "But the telephone workers, unlike others, have no marketable skills out there," she says. "They pretty much assumed that if they kept their nose clean, they'd have a job."

The number of Ameritech operators is down about 8 percent since 1989, to 567, according to spokeswoman Pam Bednarczyk. But unlike AT&T, Ameritech has more than made up for the loss in other areas, adding 100 service representatives in the last four years as demand for telephone services — often driven by some of the same technological innovations — has multiplied.

But if technology has threatened the security of some operators' jobs, it also has changed the nature of the work for those who remain.

When Donna Jones joined Ameritech, then Wisconsin Telephone, 18 years ago, she worked at what operators called "a cord board" — the old-fashioned switchboard with lines plugged into jacks.

When Wisconsin Telephone's

parent company, AT&T, was broken up under a court order a decade ago — with local telephone service going to regional carriers and AT&T retaining long-distance service — Jones spent a few years at AT&T. There she operated an early generation of computerized switching equipment.

A few years later, she got the option to return to her old company, by then renamed Wisconsin Bell, and took it. Now she handles calls at a modern computer terminal that looks comfortably like a personal computer.

With every call, the gray monitor flashes on, showing the caller's telephone number. Other information also may appear — for instance, whether or not the telephone the caller is using may only be used for collect calls, like those in jails.

Years of practice have given Jones, 46, a relaxed demeanor as she operates the terminal keyboard. When callers ask her to dial a number for them, the fingers of her right hand tap swiftly and surely over the number pad.

It's a contrast to her recollections of the two-week training program she underwent to learn how

to use the computer: "After about three days, you say, 'I'll never learn this and I'll lose my job'."

With automation, the kinds of calls Jones and other operators handle have changed, or more precisely, narrowed. Many are collect calls for all manner of Ameritech customers. Others may be from credit-card callers unable to punch in the number of their card — because, for instance, they're calling from rotary telephones.

Many of the collect calls come from the Milwaukee County Jail or the House of Correction, whose inmates are not able to call direct. There are calls as well from people having trouble with a line — wanting to verify, for instance, that a particular number is indeed busy rather than giving off a busy signal because of a malfunction.

And there are calls all day from people who ignore longstanding phone company rules requiring customers to call directory assistance in search of another party's telephone number.

Many callers are elderly and show evidence of unfamiliarity with how they might place calls themselves. Meanwhile, Jones says, business customers only rarely make toll calls through her and other operators — most likely because they've learned to navigate the growing complexity of the telephone system.

The pace varied during one of her shifts last week. One caller makes a person-to-person collect call, specifying to Jones first one young woman's name, then substi-

tuting for it another. (With amusement, Jones later recalls an incident in which a caller offered first one, then another name to be identified by in a collect call.)

Another call is in fact nothing more than a baby's cry. While a woman in the background asks the youngster what's wrong, Jones stays on, repeatedly asking into her headset whether everything is all right. The woman is evidently oblivious to the operator's voice; Jones concludes there's no problem and disconnects.

During a break, Jones lets on that the job can be boring if calls are slow. "But if it's a busy day, you don't have a chance to breathe between calls," she says.

And while some operators complain of stress, Jones says she has gotten accustomed enough to the work that she no longer finds it stressful.

But she does worry about the competition that Ameritech may face and says she strives to deliver service quickly, efficiently and in as friendly a manner as possible.

She doesn't dwell on her fears, but they're there nonetheless. Divorced, with no children, she's prepared to move should her job ever be eliminated. It's a prospect that she clearly thought about in light of what's happened to friends at AT&T.

"I was hoping to retire from the phone company," she says at one point. "I have 12 years to go yet. You wonder — 'Am I going to make it that far?'"

Information highway clears roadblock

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Three large telecommunications companies have agreed to kick in a total of \$4 million toward a fund for retraining workers who might lose their jobs as the result of changes in technology, a union official told a legislative committee.

Ann Crump, president of the Communications Workers of America Local 4600 in Milwaukee, told the Joint Committee on Information Policy that AT&T, Ameritech and GTE had agreed to provide the money, and proposed legislation on the so-called information superhighway in Wisconsin was being amended to include the deal.

Crump, Ameritech executives and others urged the committee Tuesday to act quickly on the bills. They called for a special session of the Legislature to be held next month.

The CWA did not support the legislation earlier, but Crump said the agreement on the worker retraining fund had swayed the union.

"Because of the pace of change, we cannot wait any longer for passage of the bill," Crump said. "The notion that competition isn't real is very outmoded."

Ameritech President Bronson Haase urged the committee to act soon on the bills. Passage is critical to the future of Wisconsin's economy and educational system, he said.

Fund for retraining workers ends opposition of communications union

The legislation would give telecommunications companies the opportunity to move from the traditional form of regulation, in which the state Public Service Commission approves a specified rate of return, to price regulation. Under price regulation, the PSC would set a

cap on prices, but total earnings of a utility would not be capped.

Residential and small business rates would be frozen for three years and, after that, any increases would have to be under the rate of inflation.

"Failure to act in a special or extraordinary session will deny Wisconsin the chance to give its citizens the opportunity to gain the full benefits of the information age," Haase said.



Local labor leader makes bid for AFL-CIO vice presidency

■ A woman and a black man are seeking office

There are some interesting things happening on the ballot below the race for state AFL-CIO president.

Mike Paul, long the most visible Fox Cities labor leader, is attempting to become executive vice president of the state organization.

His opponent, Ann Crump, president of Communications Workers of America Local 4600 in Milwau-

kee, is the first woman ever to run for one of the three executive positions and, if elected, would be one of only four women in the country holding such a position.

If Leonard Tipton, who works for the AFL-CIO's Hire Milwaukee Center, succeeds in his bid for secretary-treasurer, he would be the group's first black officer.

"We're trying to change the face of labor," Crump said.

A group calling itself the Unity Coalition has endorsed a whole

slate of candidates. The base of the group is public employee union leaders from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, American Federation of Teachers and International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers.

Its slate includes David Newby (an AFT member) for president, Paul for executive vice president and AFL-CIO job training staffer and machinist Phil Neuenfeldt for secretary-treasurer.

Newby's opponent, steelworkers

assistant director Robert Glaser, is somewhat aligned with Crump, but they and Tipton have not formed a slate.

A late addition for the secretary-treasurer post is Tom Rayome, a paperworker from Nekoosa.

Paul has been president of the Fox Valley Area Labor Council and its predecessor for 19 years. A paperworker at Wisconsin Tissue Mills in Neenah, he has been president of Local 1279 for all but two terms since 1970. He has headed

the Sixth District Committee On Political Education (COPE) since 1979.

Crump chaired the CWA's state COPE for eight years and co-chaired the Mondale-Ferraro campaign in Milwaukee County. She has served on the state AFL-CIO executive board for eight years and four years on the smaller executive committee. She also chairs the organization's Women's Committee.

■ Written by Post-Crescent staff writer David Horst

Talks with Ameritech 'in trouble,' union says

By Lee Hawkins Jr.

Business reporter

The Communications Workers of America union is moving closer to striking against Ameritech Corp. as the Wednesday deadline approaches, a union leader said Thursday.

"Our negotiations are really in trouble," said Ann Crump, president of Communications Workers Local 4600 of Milwaukee.

But Ralph Deptolla, an Ameritech spokesman, said he expects an agreement. "We're optimistic that we will have a settlement before the midnight (Wednesday) expiration," he said.

"That's not going to happen," said Crump. "We've been in negotiations for a year and still haven't reached an agreement."

There are 3,900 CWA members in Wisconsin, with about 400 in the Madison area.

Crump said she expects a strike mainly because of disagreements about worker relocation and the health care package.

She said the workers want to be guaranteed that they will not be stripped of their "hometown jobs," being forced to move to other cities in a streamlining or consolidation plan. "We want to establish some form of stability in the job market," she said.

Crump also said Ameritech has reneged on a previous promise to pay 100 percent of health care costs for its retirees.

"We will strike if people on a fixed income have to pay for health insurance after all of the

'We will strike if people on a fixed income have to pay for health insurance ... They promised these people that they would not have to pay for their supplemental health care. This company has record profits, they have more money than Heinz has pickles.'

Ann Crump
CWA Local 4600 president

years they have spent with this company," she said. "They promised these people that they would not have to pay for their supplemental health care. This company has record profits, they have more money than Heinz has pickles."

Deptolla said that if the union members strike, the management can handle the duties as operators, service representatives in customer offices, and installation and repair technicians.

"Our managers would be six days a week, working 12 hour shifts. We fully expect to provide a reasonable level of service if there is a work stoppage," he said. "Most customers should not see a change in service. They might see some delays in directory assistance, or service orders that are placed. We would advise customers to try looking up numbers before calling."

GUEST COLUMN

Promote jobs by lifting phone price mandates

By Ann L. Crump

Who isn't familiar with the wonders of telecommunications? Blazing-fast Internet connections. Wireless phones and computers. The ability to choose competing companies and technologies to deliver service over wires into your house.

Making such whiz-bang technologies possible is an often overlooked marvel predating the Web. That marvel has existed since Alexander Graham Bell first called his colleague, Mr. Watson. That marvel is the telecom worker. But in Wisconsin, in the name of fat profits, out-of-state companies want to pull the plug on family-supporting Wisconsin telecom jobs.

At issue are government-mandated, below-cost wholesale rates SBC Wisconsin must offer MCI, TDS, AT&T and other competing providers. SBC Wisconsin employs 6,000 state residents, including 4,000 represented by the Communications Workers of America. These other companies employ comparatively few Wisconsin workers and make large, subsidized profits that they take out of state — at the expense of Wisconsin union jobs.

This jobs-killing system must end. That's why CWA and the Wisconsin AFL-CIO strongly support SBC Wisconsin's request to the state Public Service Commission to disconnect these subsidies.

Here's how it works. When these out-of-state companies lease SBC Wisconsin lines, SBC Wisconsin's union workers install, maintain and fix those lines. But the PSC now requires that these other companies reimburse SBC Wisconsin only half of what it costs for workers and materials. Wisconsin union workers over time pay the real price.

If you need more evidence, guess what AT&T testified before the PSC. AT&T said that SBC Wisconsin should pay CWA workers less and cut benefits, so it can keep wholesale rates for AT&T low. AT&T even questioned breaks hard-working CWA workers get under our

SBC Wisconsin contract. It's scandalous that AT&T expects Wisconsin workers to make less so AT&T can make more.

Also speaking out against workers' interests is TDS Metrocom, which is waging a smear and fear campaign on Madison TV and radio. Hokey TDS actors complain that SBC Wisconsin is part of Texas-based SBC Communications. Guess what? TDS Metrocom isn't homegrown but is part of a division of TDS, a corporation based on LaSalle Street in Chicago. Unlike TDS, SBC Wisconsin's roots are deep here, going back more than 120 years to the Wisconsin Telephone Co.'s founding in 1882. Making fun of our roots and ignoring our contributions, the ads insult SBC Wisconsin's 6,000 dedicated workers.

But TDS' record with union workers is no joke. TDS employs a mere 167 union workers across 28 states where it operates. TDS succeeded just this year in busting a union at Farmer's Telephone, a small company it owns near Madison. Most of TDS' lines, revenues and expenses are not even from the division competing with SBC Wisconsin but from the small telephone companies it owns around the United States. These small companies aren't affected by wholesale rates — and ironically are not even required to share their lines with any competitors.

Wisconsin's wholesale rate is among the nation's lowest. This means that Wisconsin offers one of the worst climates for job and infrastructure investment anywhere. Why invest when you can lease for cheap? When the PSC makes its decision, it should think about what type of economic future we want for Wisconsin. It should also remember that at the other end of high-tech SBC Wisconsin telecommunications networks is a CWA worker. We hope the PSC will soon be calling these Wisconsin union workers to say: "Communications Workers of America, we support you, your families and the communities in which you live."

Crump is an international staff representative for the Communications Workers of America, AFL-CIO.

GUEST COLUMNS

Phone companies spar over pricing

TDS tries to frighten policymakers

By Paul La Schiazza

In response to a quasi-judicial regulatory proceeding on wholesale telecom rates, TDS Metrocom took the unprecedented step of running negative, political-style attack ads seeking to frighten citizens and intimidate policymakers.

The ads falsely describe what will happen if TDS Metrocom, MCI and other major corporations don't get their way. The smears have no place in trying to influence a Public Service Commission of Wisconsin proceeding. I'm confident that commissioners will see through these inappropriate attempts to pressure them and will stick to facts in the case, no matter where they lead.

What generated this nastiness? Federal law requires companies such as SBC Wisconsin to lease lines to other providers. Under this same law, state commissions must set wholesale rates to allow full cost recovery. The current Wisconsin rate is well below my company's costs and is one of the very lowest in the U.S. We've requested that the PSC require TDS Metrocom, MCI and others to fully pay our costs to install, maintain and repair leased lines.

The case should turn on technical data from expert witnesses. Items such as cost of capital, depreciation, labor rates, amount of necessary spare capacity. Former PSC Commissioner Joe Mettner, now consulting to companies including mine, notes the last PSC decision is outdated, and that using new cost data, models, actual accounting and regulatory thinking should bring up wholesale rates to SBC Wisconsin's true costs.

TDS Metrocom seeks to sow baseless fears that retail consumer prices will rise and competition dwindle if the PSC properly does its job. Comparable prices and strong competition in states with much higher wholesale rates demolish this argument.

TDS Metrocom's ads raise many irrelevant issues. For example, neither SBC Wisconsin's or TDS Metrocom's ultimate corporate parents are located in Wisconsin. But SBC Wisconsin employs about 6,000 Wisconsin residents — far more than competing providers. About 4,000 of our workers are unionized, represented by the Communications Workers of America (CWA). TDS Metrocom's corporate parent? Its divisions employ just a minuscule number of union workers in Wisconsin. CWA calls TDS virulently anti-union.

Requiring TDS Metrocom to fully pay for using SBC Wisconsin's lines will help us keep them maintained and repaired — and might encourage TDS Metrocom to build new lines. Such investments would benefit our state's workers and economy.

SBC Wisconsin strongly supports competition — without government-mandated subsidies to other companies. Such competition benefits consumers because it holds down prices and encourages innovation and new product development. And it benefits Wisconsin. Allowing SBC Wisconsin to recoup costs encourages my company — and any competitor truly serious about the telecom business — to build more infrastructure to serve Wisconsin residents and businesses.

La Schiazza is president of SBC Wisconsin.

SBC abuses workers, competitors

By Drew Petersen

The aggression and irony levied as part of union leader Ann Crump's recent guest column challenging local phone competition and TDS Metrocom is profound.

What many academics and economists would classify as decades-old, union versus non-union class warfare is unnecessary — and nowhere near the heart of the debate raging about the wholesale rates local competitors should pay incumbent SBC for access to "last mile" telephone connections.

For the record, TDS has never—in public testimony or anywhere else, criticized the hard work of front-line workers in the communications industry. Since deregulation, there has been a structured partnership in place allowing former Wisconsin Bell, and then Ameritech, now SBC customers to depart in search of lower prices, value-rich packages and personalized service from companies such as TDS.

Crump is "spot on" suggesting the debate at the upcoming Public Service Commission is all about jobs. TDS has created more than 1,000 Wisconsin jobs since 1998. We regularly hire former SBC workers searching for better pay, room for advancement, more robust benefits and additional responsibilities.

Crump suggests that SBC is going to create more jobs and make additional infrastructure investments if no one is left standing to compete against them. This is nothing short of heresy. Why would a company bulk up staff and make costly investments if no one was pushing them to do so? Shareholders at SBC would not stand for it and everyone knows a monopoly does only what it needs to keep regulators off its back, nothing more.

Because TDS is SBC's largest customer in Wisconsin, regularly writing monthly checks in excess of \$5 million to pay for wholesale access, we believe (and have been told by SBC staff) that in many respects we are single-handedly responsible for significant job creation within SBC. Since we require installation and service technicians to support and process our orders, we create substantial workload for unionized workers regularly.

If the PSC accepts SBC's unrealistic request for a massive wholesale rate increase (and we hope and believe they won't), TDS will be forced to halt competitive operations to businesses and residences across Wisconsin. The resulting job loss at TDS and SBC will likely occur in equal proportions. This is not good for our economy or the public interest. As for other claims in Crump's article that TDS Metrocom is an out-of-state company, I would simply encourage her to review her company's annual report and ours. TDS' wireline operations are headquartered in Madison, our corporate leadership work daily on Junction Road and we make all corporate decisions in the 53717 zip code. SBC is from Texas.

SBC has strong-armed its union employees to speak on behalf of their corporate interests. TDS, which values and appreciates CWA employees, believes our secret weapon in this case, truthful testimony and reasonable cost figures, will resonate better with the consumers, regulators and elected government leaders who respect competition in the local telecommunications industry. Those same folks know we are not the "Chicken Little" in this debate.

Petersen is director of legislative affairs for TDS Telecom.

Voice of the People

Telecommunications merger will end up helping consumers

Dear Editor: This is in response to the July 16 guest column by Jim Butman and Drew Peterson of TDS that raised objections to the merger between AT&T and SBC. The executive board of the Communications Workers of America, which represents roughly 600,000 workers in the U.S. and Canada, unanimously approved the merger. Let's examine why.

First, there are provisions to protect jobs for our members who work at AT&T. It seems the only people who care about maintaining quality, family-sustaining employment in this country are labor unions and the actual workers themselves. You won't find Republican partisans expressing any concern in editorials about providing Americans with quality jobs. Wal-Mart doesn't provide affordable health care coverage for its workers, so the Wisconsin taxpayers pick up the tab. Outrageous.

TDS claims that 77,000 jobs have

been created in telecommunications and "thousands in Wisconsin." That looks pretty good, if you don't count the number of jobs that have been lost in the same industry in Wisconsin. If there truly were a net gain in telecommunications jobs since 1996, then let's find out where those jobs are located, how much they pay, and what type of benefits are provided to these families.

Second, competition in telecommunications has become fierce. Cellular phones and communications over the Internet through cable companies lure thousands of customers away from the traditional "phone company." In fact, customers drive the telecommunications business by demanding faster, more accurate and reliable service. If customers don't get what they want from one company, guess what they do? They find another provider. TDS would have you believe there are few choices. This is patently untrue.

Third, if TDS truly believes that "competition has done wonders for consumers and businesses," then why are they trying so desperately to squelch it? TDS was formed by acquiring rural Wisconsin telephone companies and grew into a "powerful and profitable family of companies" (a quote from their corporate Web site). TDS's opposition to the SBC-AT&T merger is not out of concern for consumers or workers, but clearly their own profits.

The merger of SBC and AT&T will not cause the sky to fall; will not cause sound, well-managed companies to fold up shop; and will not put workers out of jobs; but it will continue to foster competition for the sake of consumers. If that isn't serving the American public interest, then what is?

Ann Crump
CWA representative
Hales Corners