Editors Claim Firing by Nader Based on Unionization

By Peter Perl
Washington Post Staff Writer

Three editors fired by consumer advocate Ralph Nader's organization have filed charges of unfair labor practice against him, claiming he fired them primarily for trying to form a union.

In a bitter dispute at the Nader publication Multinational Monitor, Nader's group has changed the locks on the office door and attempted unsuccessfully to have the chief editor arrested, alleging he took away files on a crucial story.

Nader, in an interview, said the charges filed against him last month with the National Labor Relations Board are a "ploy," and that the reason for the firings was that the editors disobeyed his strict orders by publishing a highly controversial story about alleged bribery by Bechtel Corp. before Nader had a chance to read the final version.

The Bechtel story, which drew nationwide publicity in April, revealed that federal authorities were investigating whether the giant California-based multinational firm paid bribes to win approval of nuclear power plants in Korea during the time when Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger and Secretary of State George P. Shultz were top officials of Bechtel.

The firings have sparked numerous petitions and letters of protest to Nader from the Monitor's small but loyal liberal readership and have prompted threats of legal action on both sides.

The dispute, according to the two sides, is either a question of editorial control over a publication or a matter of troubled labor relations. In either case, it has placed Nader in the uncomfortable role of being an employer criticized for using heavy-handed tactics, a characterization he adamantly disputes.

The alleged labor problems within the Nader organization are not uncommon for "public interest" or nonprofit groups, where long hours and low salaries often prompt complaints, staff conflicts and occasional efforts toward unionization. Public Citizen, founded by Nader, was the subject of a recent union effort, and employes there formed an association to discuss workplace issues.

"Ralph has said, and he is very adamant about this, that there is no need for unions at public interest groups," said Tim Shorrock, 33, who was fired last month after 18 months as editor of the Monitor, a 5-year-old publication with about 6,000 subscribers that focuses critically on the international role of giant corporations.

Shorrock, who earned $13,000 a year, said he and the other editors had long complained about 60- to 80-hour work weeks, publication pressures, working conditions, and lack of grievance procedures. Nader's response to complaints, Shorrock said, was: "You shouldn't think of this as a job," but rather as a higher calling of serving the public interest.

Nader said he sees no reason for union activity within his or similar organizations. "I don't think there is a role for unions in small nonprofit 'cause' organizations any more than . . . within a monastery or within a union," Nader said.

"People shouldn't be in public interest groups unless they believe in it and are ready to work for it," he said. Recalling his early days in consumer advocacy, he said, "I worked weekend after weekend after weekend . . . . Now, people come here and say they want to fight polluters and unresponsive agencies, but not after 5 o'clock and not on weekends."

The Bechtel story was a long-running collective project of the Monitor, Mother Jones magazine and Nautilus Research of Massachusetts, but it ran into a last-minute snag when the writers heard The New York Times [illegible]
subject[illegible]
editors[illegible]
Audett[illegible]
that th[illegible]

Nad[illegible]
violate[illegible]
privile[illegible]
level [illegible]
had [illegible]
wished[illegible]
respon[illegible]

Sh[illegible]
tion, [illegible]
severa[illegible]
Nader [illegible]
want[illegible]
vario[illegible]
Nade[illegible]
ship [illegible]
pora[illegible]
emp[illegible]

n Unionization Attempt

rather as a higher calling of serving the public interest.

Nader said he sees no reason for union activity within his or similar organizations. "I don't think there is a role for unions in small nonprofit 'cause' organizations any more than . . . within a monastery or within a union," Nader said.

"People shouldn't be in public interest groups unless they believe in it and are ready to work for it," he said. Recalling his early days in consumer advocacy, he said, "I worked weekend after weekend after weekend . . . . Now, people come here and say they want to fight polluters and unresponsive agencies, but not after 5 o'clock and not on weekends."

The Bechtel story was a long-running collective project of the Monitor, Mother Jones magazine and Nautilus Research of Massachusetts, but it ran into a last-minute snag when the writers heard The New York Times was preparing an article on the same subject. Shorrock said he and two assistant editors, Kathleen Selvaggio and Rose Marie Audette, agreed with the other publications that the story had to be published quickly.

Nader said he was furious because they violated his only absolute rule. "I had the privilege of subsidizing the magazine to the level of $50,000 to $60,000 a year, and they had the privilege of running it as they wished, provided on one thing . . . . I am responsible" for final reading, he said.

Shorrock was fired shortly after publication, but was later told he could stay on for several months. The three editors wrote Nader several weeks later, saying they wanted to bargain with him collectively on various workplace issues, including the firing. Nader then said he was transferring ownership of the Monitor to another nonprofit corporation, which chose not to continue their employment.