STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD STAFF UNION  
May 23, 1987

We are paid staff members working for the National Lawyers Guild. As members of the staff union (Legal Division, District 65, UAW), we find strength in our coming together at these annual conventions, and have learned the importance of having the national organization devote time to addressing our concerns during the course of the convention when the national leadership is assembled and able to fully discuss important matters and reach concrete and timely decisions. The convention is also a time we as staff can focus the attention of individual Guild members on our points of view.

We came to the Guild with a commitment to progressive political goals. We understand the special needs of a non-profit organization, especially one with chronic financial problems. However, there are some problems that are not necessary.

Guild members need to practice what they preach. Some chapters and projects have developed management styles that are sensitive to and respectful of the needs and views of the staff. It can be done. It is a question of commitment to the task, and breaking with an old style of management--the same style many Guild members litigate against in their labor law practices.

The union desires to resolve the long-term problems at the National Office and wants a meeting with the representatives of the leadership at this conference. We feel the actions of the San Francisco Chapter leadership in placing its staff on continual notice of layoff, in denying union members the financial resources mandated under the contract to bring them to this convention for the annual union meeting, as well as other ongoing problems, constitutes bad faith. We feel the national organization has an obligation to struggle with a chapter that is acting in bad faith towards its unionized staff. We expect the NEC will deal with this problem expeditiously.

Elitism is a chronic problem in the legal profession, and many in the Guild have successfully struggled against a patronizing and arrogant attitude toward staff. Others need to pay more attention to their attitudes and practices. But our main concern is rooted in the more structural and procedural problems of relating to Guild management, not as individuals
with flawed personal approaches to staff-management issues, but in terms of an organizational management style.

The problem of benign negligence is the process of management dealing with a permanent state of crisis in finances and workload. The style and process of crisis management has unintentionally created oppressive working conditions at the national office and several other work sites.

The National Office is understaffed. There is far more work mandated by the National Executive Committee than can be accomplished with the number of staff for which salaries are allocated. There is an unconscious lack of respect for the negotiating and grievance process which has materially and objectively resulted in a capricious and elitist management style. This style fails to take into consideration the effect of decision-making on staff members who are working for a living and are not expendable pawns to be rearranged at will to meet constantly shifting political and organizational priorities. This style burns out the staff so that even if the eventual outcome is equitable, the emotional cost of the process may be too high. Several union members have quit recently under these very conditions. They found management response to the grievance procedure so offensive that the vision of future such interaction with management made further employment seem futile.

The staff should not be the first place to cut the budget when a financial crisis arises. Management has an obligation to anticipate financial commitments and to honor prior job description commitments despite changes in management and committee leadership. The staffing situation in some larger offices has resulted in a reliance on underpaid work-study students as a source of cheap labor, which, due to the contradictions inherent in student financial aid, has meant the exploitation of a disproportionate number of minorities and women.

We would like national leadership, chapters, task forces, projects, and other groups and individuals in the Guild to take to their home agendas as a priority issue the problems of the Guild as management. Through struggle comes victory, and by struggling through these thorny issues together, with mutual respect, we are confident we can resolve these problems inherent in labor-management relations.
In struggle,
Flo Beaumon, Chip Berlet, Anna Maria Freund, Beti Garcia, Deb Gilbert, Larry Goldsmith, Paquetta Palmer, Gail Pendleton, Steve York, Catherine Daligga