

"Kid Blink and the Newsies: Bringing Down Goliaths.' 'Part Seven. Shifting Gears in a New Century'" from *We Were There, Too! Young People in U.S. History* by Phillip Hoose; Farrar Straus Giroux; 2001. Text copyright c2001 by Phillip Hoose.

"Mr. Pulitzer, the people seem to be against us."

Kid Blink and the Newsies: Bringing Down Goliaths

New York City, 1899

William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer were two of the richest and most powerful men in America in 1899. Each owned a giant newspaper in New York City, and both competed to grab readers with sensational headlines and extra editions. They depended on a large network of city children and teenagers to get papers to readers. When the two millionaires tried to gouge the "newsies" for a few pennies more, it was nearly their downfall.

Newsies hollered out the day's headlines from busy street corners and subway entrances, from positions outside the revolving doors of office buildings, and from sidewalks near the lunch counters where secretaries and businesspeople grabbed quick meals. Some newsies stayed on the streets all day long, avoiding school, while others raced to their positions as soon as school was finished. They made their profits by buying papers from the newspaper company and then

Newsies competed for customers fiercely at each corner and subway entrance, but they banded together as a union when they had to.



selling them to readers for a little more, pocketing the difference. They kept about a nickel for every ten papers they sold. If they didn't sell a paper, they had to take the loss. It was a tough deal, but a straight deal: At least a newsie knew what to expect.

The trouble started when Hearst and Pulitzer decided to make up for slow sales by raising the price that newsies had to pay for their papers. They didn't figure boys could do anything about it. They were very wrong. In July of 1899, three hundred newsies gathered in City Hall Park and formed their own union.

They elected officers and made up committees. They announced that they would refuse to deliver Hearst's *New York Journal* or Pulitzer's *New York World* until their buying price went back to normal. "We're here for our rights and we will die defendin' em," explained ten-year-old Boots McAleenan to reporters.

The strike lasted two weeks. The newsies demonstrated at the places where delivery carts usually gave them their bundles of papers. They put signs up on nearby lampposts that read **HELP THE NEWSBOYS** and **OUR CAUSE IS JUST**. Their tactics were not gentle: Sometimes hundreds of boys surrounded the carts and threatened the drivers, who quickly tossed the papers over the side and fled. Mobs of boys threw rocks at the men Hearst and Pulitzer hired to replace them. Soon nobody would even pick up the papers for fear of being confronted by angry boys. Police were caught in the middle—the public supported the newsies, but the companies and replacement workers demanded protection. And boys could almost always outrun the police.

The newsboys' strike spread throughout New Jersey, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. As newspaper sales dropped, Pulitzer and Hearst began to lose big money. Advertisers demanded lower rates because of the strike. But other New York newspapers cheerfully made heroes of the newsies. Pulitzer's assistant sent him a worried message: "The people seem to be against us; they are encouraging the boys and tipping them . . . and refraining from buying the papers for fear of having them snatched from their hands."

One summer night the newsies organized a mass rally in lower Manhattan and five thousand boys showed up. A great cheer arose when a leader named Kid Blink vaulted up onto the speakers' platform. He raised his hands for silence and scratched his head as if something were puzzling him. "I'm trying to figure it out," he said, "how ten cents on a hundred papers can mean more to a millionaire than it does to newsboys, and I can't see it." The newsies vowed to continue the strike until they brought Pulitzer and Hearst to their knees.

When sales dropped by two-thirds, Hearst and Pulitzer gave up. They offered a deal that kept the prices the same but let the newsies return unsold papers and get their money back. In the end it meant more money than before. The newsies took it, disbanded their union, and went back to selling papers.



Girls, too, sold papers throughout New England and in major cities to the south.