



## Bloggers Consider Forming Labor Union

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By ASHLEY M. HEHER, AP Business Writer

### CHICAGO — Do bloggers need their own Norma Rae?

In a move that might make some people scratch their heads, a loosely formed coalition of left-leaning [bloggers](#) are trying to band together to form a labor union they hope will help them receive health insurance, conduct collective bargaining or even set professional standards.

The effort is an extension of the blogosphere's growing power and presence, especially within the political realm, and for many, evokes memories of the early labor organization of freelance writers in the early 1980s.

Organizers hope a bloggers' labor group will not only showcase the growing professionalism of the Web-based writers, but also the importance of their roles in candidates' campaigns.

"I think people have just gotten to the point where people outside the blogosphere understand the value of what it is that we do on the progressive side," said Susie Madrak, the author of Suburban Guerilla [blog](#), who is active in the union campaign. "And I think they feel a little more entitled to ask for something now."

But just what that something is may be hard to say.

In a world as diverse, vocal and unwieldy as the blogosphere, there's no consensus about what type of organization is needed and who should be included. Some argue for a free-standing association for activist bloggers while others suggest a guild open to any blogger \_ from knitting fans to [video](#) gamers \_ that could be created within established labor groups.

Others see a [blogger](#) coalition as a way to find health insurance discounts, fight for press credentials or even establish guidelines for dealing with advertising and presenting data on page views.

"It would raise the professionalism," said Leslie Robinson, a writer at ColoradoConfidential.com. "Maybe we could get more jobs, bona fide jobs."

But not everyone is on board.

"The reason I like blogging is that it's very anarchistic. I can do whatever I want whenever I want, and oh my God, you're not going to tell me what to do," said Curt Hopkins, the founder of the Committee to Protect Bloggers.

"The blogosphere is such a weird term and such a weird idea. It's anyone who wants to do it," Hopkins said. "There's absolutely no commonality there. How will they find a commonality to go on? I think it's doomed to failure on any sort of large scale."

About 11 percent of American [Internet users](#) have created Web pages or blogs for others while eight percent have created their own online journals or Weblogs, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

With pages focused on everything from bird watching to celebrity footwear, more than 120,000 blogs are created every day and more than 58,000 new posts are made each hour, according to data from Technorati, which tracks more than 94 million blogs worldwide.

Few bloggers are paid for their posts, and even fewer are able to make a living doing the work. But many say they often devote as much energy and time to their online musings as they do to their salaried careers.

While bloggers work to organize their own labor movement, their growing numbers are already being courted by some unions.

"Bloggers are on our radar screen right now for approaching and recruiting into the union," said Gerry Colby, president of the National Writers Union, a local of the United Auto Workers. "We're trying to develop strategies to reach bloggers and encourage them to join."

Unsurprisingly, there's decidedly less support for a union movement among conservative bloggers.

Mark Noonan, an editor at Blogs for Bush and a senior writer at GOP Bloggers, said he worries that a blogger union would undermine the freewheeling nature of the blogosphere, regardless of its political composition.

"We just go out there and write what is on our mind, damn the critics," he said. "To make a union is to start to provide a firm structure for the blogosphere and that would merely make the blogosphere a junior-league (mainstream media). ... Get us a union and other 'professional' organizations and we'll start to be conformist and we'll start to be just another special interest."

But that's not how Kirsten Burgard sees it.

Sitting at a panel titled "A Union for Bloggers: It's Time to Organize" at this week's YearlyKos Convention for bloggers in Chicago, Burgard said she'd welcome a chance to join a unionized blogging community.

"I sure would like to have that union bug on my Web site," said Burgard, a blogger who uses the moniker Bendy Girl.

Madrak hopes that regardless the form, the labor movement ultimately will help bloggers pay for medical bills. It's important, she said, because some bloggers can spend hours a day tethered to computers as they update their Web sites.

"Blogging is very intense \_ physically, mentally," she said. "You're constantly scanning for news. You're constantly trying to come up with information that you think will mobilize your readers. In the meantime, you're sitting at a computer and your ass is getting wider and your arm and neck and shoulder are wearing out because you're constantly using a mouse."

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On the Net:

Committee to Protect Bloggers: <http://committeetoprotectbloggers.civiblog.org>

National Writers Union: <http://www.nwu.org>

Pew Internet & American Life Project: <http://www.pewinternet.org>

Technorati: <http://technorati.com>

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