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Striking Differences

Item Item hoozgotta item: Patrons arriving at Wolfgang Puck's Postrio on Saturday night found themselves being pat-searched by the Secret Service, not a unique experience. At his flagship Spago in L.A., Wolfgang personally pat-searches the arrivals to make sure they can pay the check. The security precaution here was because President

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Clinton had decided, on short notice, to dine at Postrio with a party of eight. "When the dishwashers saw the Secret Service walk in,"

reports eyewitness Scott McKeller, "they panicked and ran out the back door," but Scott was joking. No joke: the president panicked the staff by ordering jambalaya because "Jim Carville had it here a couple of weeks ago and says you do it great." It wasn't on the menu, but chef David Gingrass did it great anyway. The huge tab was picked up by the Democratic National Committee. Footnote: On the way from the Fairmont to Postrio, the presidential caravan crossed Bush Street, of course. Catching sight of the street signs, Clinton said, "Hey, we're rolling over Bush again." The good old days.

Onward: It's true about the media. They/we ask the same questions over and over. Ever since the strike started, earnest interviewers have stuck mike into face and asked, "How does this strike differ from the one in '68?" and "Why are you on the picket line?", the implication being that no one as decrepit as I should be allowed to walk without the help of two sturdy chaps to keep me upright.

Short answers: The first strike had little of the rancor being

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shown by "the employer group" these days. There was no infamous, shameful ultimatum to return to work on a certain day and a certain hour or lose your job. In '68, then-publisher Charles de Young Theriot also issued an "ultimatum" to the troops, but it was conciliatory and had that "we're all one family" tone that once characterized the Chronicle. Besides that, Mr. Theriot signed his fairly stern letter "Charlie," a hint that daddy wasn't really sore at the kids.

Another example: Well into the seven-week '68 strike, a couple that had met on the picket line announced their engagement, to loud applause and cheers — loud enough to reach the third floor of Fortress Chron and the ears of Executive Editor Scott Newhall.

By the time the picket line had circled the building and reappeared on Mission, Mr. Newhall was to be seen leaning out of the his office window, feeding out a rope that was lowering a bottle of excellent champagne for the newly betrothed couple.

I can't imagine anything similar happening these days.

As for why I'm picketing (but not as much as I should), I'm out there for Kirt, Steve, Johnny Lee, Myrtle Shaw, Charlie Crawford and a lot of other people I worked with at The Sacramento Union from '32 to '36 in the pre-Guild days. We worked six days a week, no overtime, no benefits, no protection from on-the-spot firings, and primitive working conditions. I said, "Hallelujah!" the day I joined the Newspaper Guild on July 1, 1936, and I say it again. Hallelujah!