

1-4-01

Lou Gelfand
Readers' Representative
Star Tribune
425 Portland Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55488

Dear Lou,

I'm increasingly disturbed by the Star Tribune's failure to adequately and fairly report on antipoverty activity in Minnesota.

On December 22nd, I complained to you by phone that the previous night's Homeless Memorial Procession and Service had gone unmentioned in the 12-22-00 Star Tribune. That event, involving some 40-50 marchers and later, at Simpson Church, about 200 more people, memorialized the 74 homeless Minnesotans--ranging in age from 2 weeks to over 70--who died during 2000. It's an annual event, always happening on the Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year. The previous year's walk and service had similarly gone unreported, an oversight you criticized--at my behest--in one of your Sunday columns.

Last week I protested that a story on possible welfare policy changes by the new legislature quoted only lawmakers and two lobbyists from nonprofits, the Children's Defense Fund and a legal services agency, completely neglecting to seek or quote the views of the people most directly impacted by such policy changes: poor people and welfare consumers themselves. I forwarded to you a flyer announcing a January 3rd rally at the State Capitol co-sponsored by a panoply of antipoverty and welfare rights groups. Which leads to my third point.

I attended yesterday's demonstration at the Capitol from start to finish. It lasted at least two hours, took place first on the Capitol steps and then in the rotunda, involved 150 to 200 participants (of all ages, genders, and colors, some coming from as far away as Moorhead and Duluth), featured a host of speakers (from the Hmong, Latino, and Black communities, labor, and the Green Party, among others), and concluded with a truly dramatic moment: the release of more than 5,000 hand-cut paper figures of children from the rotunda balcony, symbolizing the thousands of kids who will be thrust into even deeper poverty--and probably homelessness--if welfare "time limits" continue and "sanctions" aren't dropped. I enclose one of those child cut-outs, together with a press release explaining the several goals and demands of the protesters.

This is the shamefully trivial and irresponsible coverage accorded the demonstration and the issues it raised in this morning's Star Tribune:

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 4 • 2001

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Out-of-work visitors

Visitors to the Legislature's opening day included about 150 pro-welfare protesters and Rod Grams, whose U.S. Senate term expired Wednesday.

The welfare protest on the Capitol steps focused on the first scheduled arrivals next year of a five-year limit on benefits to an individual.

I trust you'll agree that this is not ~~credible~~ ~~credible~~ journalism. ~~Not~~ even-handed. Not even accurate.

Disappointed,

Sanford Berman

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and poverty

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