

Ex-Teamster aide gets McCormick Place pact

By William Gaines

A POLITICALLY connected public relations man who has ties to the Teamster union has won a lucrative contract to sell display advertising at McCormick Place, the Tribune has learned.

Robert W. Billings, who was awarded the contract as the sole bidder, told The Tribune that he has no prior display advertising experience.

Billings is a former Chicago Daily News reporter who was the \$4,500-a-year spokesman for the Central States, Southeast and Southwest Areas Pension Fund of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Eugene Heytow, chairman of the board that supervises McCormick Place, has close financial ties to the same pension fund.

HEYTOW IS A member of a partnership that owns McCormick Inn, a hotel next to the exhibition center. He financed construction of the hotel through a loan from the pension fund.

Heytow is also chairman of Amalgamated Trust and Savings Bank, which holds an account that is used to issue Teamster pension benefit checks.

While the spokesman for the pension fund in 1977, Billings publicly disputed charges that the pension fund's account in Heytow's bank paid no interest.

Heytow, appointed to the McCormick Place board by Mayor Byrne, became chairman in December.

Soon after, The Tribune learned, plans to award the advertising contract to James V. Riley, who handles advertising at O'Hare International Airport, were scuttled and specifications were drawn.

Bidders were given two weeks in which to pick up specifications and make a bid. Billing's Trans Ad company was the only company that returned the specifications with a bid.

THE CONTRACT is the first of its kind to be awarded at McCormick Place.

It allows Billings to construct signs and sell advertising space on them. About 200 illuminated signs will be placed in corridors and at entrances to the convention center.

A sign is leased to advertisers for as much as \$350 a month, depending on size and location. Billings estimated that

the gross revenue from the advertising will exceed \$400,000.

Billings' firm will collect a percentage on a graduated scale up to 40 per cent of the gross revenue.

He said he has "one of the major companies" prepared to lease 30 of the signs.

Billings told The Tribune that he saw the bid offer in a legal advertisement and that he used no influence to get the contract.

He said he didn't remember having any dealings with Heytow before receiving the contract.

THE TRIBUNE reported in February that Heytow upset some board members when he placed John Hank, a former employe of the Teamster pension fund, in the \$37,500-a-year post of assistant general manager of McCormick Place.

Six of the members of the board are appointed by the mayor and six by Gov. Thompson.

Dan K. Webb, an appointee of the governor, said that the contract let to Billings complied with state statutes. He said he did not know about Billings' background.

On Saturday, Heytow said: "I was not aware Mr. Billings had done work for the Teamsters when we awarded him the contract. I knew him only as a former Daily News reporter. It would have made no difference had I known because bids were published twice and he was the only bidder. As I understand the state purchasing act, the fact that he had done work for the Teamsters is not a legal impediment barring him from the contract. Since he was the only bidder, he would have been entitled to be awarded the contract."

Billings served two years as a spokesman for the Teamster pension fund, which has been the target of federal investigations of corruption and mismanagement for more than a decade.

PROD, Inc., an organization of dissident Teamsters, filed a protest with the U. S. Department of Labor in 1977 charging that Billings' job and other public relations expenditures by the Teamster pension fund were "unjustified and wasteful" and a violation of the federal pension law.

BILLINGS' JOB was eliminated in 1978.

He has since served as a public relations spokesman for Duncan Meter Co., which has a contract to service all Chicago parking meters.

Billings said that his association with Jay McMullen, Mayor Byrne's husband, press aide, and political adviser, who also was a Daily News reporter, was not a factor in receiving the McCormick Place contract.

"Sure I know him, but I've never even had a cup of coffee with him," Billings said. "I know a lot of Tribune reporters, too."

Billings said he plans next to bid on taxi advertising space.

Convicted spy is executed in China

TOKYO (AP)—A Chinese national, convicted of spying for the Soviet Union, was executed in northern China on Saturday, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

It said Wang Jiansheng, 37, was sentenced to death in Mularjiang City for collecting intelligence and murdering a policeman who tried to arrest him on July 3, 1978.