LABOR LAW: EVIDENCE OF BARGAINING HISTORY EXCLUDED IN DETERMINING ARBITRABILITY OF A SUBCONTRACTING GRIEVANCE

In determining when promises to arbitrate contained in collective bargaining agreements are enforceable under section 301 (a) of the Taft-Hartley Act,¹ the United States Supreme Court has imposed the burden of proof on parties who seek to avoid submitting grievances to arbitration.² Those parties have often sought to discharge that burden by presenting extrinsic evidence of bargaining history manifesting an intention to exclude particular issues or disputes from arbitration.³ In International Union of Elec. Workers v. General Elec. Co.,⁴ the Second Circuit Court of Appeals held such bargaining history evidence to be an improper subject for judicial consideration in determining arbitrability.

The union in General Electric sought to compel arbitration of a subcontracting grievance⁵ arising from the company's hiring of an independent contractor. General Electric asserted that the grievance was nonarbitrable since bargaining history clearly indicated that the parties intended to exclude subcontracting grievances from arbitration.⁶ Although the history disclosed several

³ See, e.g., Local 12298, UMW v. Bridgeport Gas Co., 328 F.2d 381 (2d Cir. 1964); Pacific Northwest Bell Tel. Co. v. Communications Workers, 310 F.2d 244 (9th Cir. 1962); Local 725, Int'l Union of Operating Eng'rs v. Standard Oil Co., 186 F. Supp. 895 (D.N.D. 1960).
⁵ The union contended that the company's action violated provisions of its collective bargaining agreement, specifically those provisions for: (1) union recognition as exclusive bargaining representative; (2) job description; (3) seniority. 332 F.2d at 487.
⁶ Brief for Appellant, p. 36. The arbitration provision stated that "any grievance which remains unsettled after having been fully processed pursuant to the (grievance procedure) . . . and which involves . . . the interpretation or application of a provision of this agreement . . . shall be submitted to arbitration." 332 F.2d at 488.
unsuccessful union attempts to insert contractual limitations on subcontracting in their collective bargaining agreements, the court of appeals ordered the company to arbitrate. It reasoned that an issue may not be excluded from arbitration unless an unambiguous exclusion clause or some other term of the agreement manifests beyond a doubt the intention of the parties that the particular matter was not to be arbitrable. In the absence of such a clause, the use of bargaining history to deny arbitration would be an improper encroachment upon the jurisdiction of the arbitrator.  

The role played by extrinsic evidence in the interpretation of arbitration provisions has recently undergone a significant change, precipitated by the 1957 decision of *Textile Workers v. Lincoln Mills*. In rejecting the former practice of applying traditional contract law to labor agreements, the Supreme Court there called for the evolution of a federal common law regarding the adjudication of labor-management contracts. In 1960, the Court decided its famous trilogy of *Steelworkers* cases, the most important of which was *United Steelworkers v. Warrior & Gulf Nav. Co.* There a con-
tract provision broadly excluded "functions of management" from arbitration. The Court held a subcontracting grievance could not be included within the scope of such a broad provision and therefore was arbitrable. The decision stated that the fundamental policy of the labor law, promoting stability in labor relations by limiting judicial interference with the arbitral process in industrial self-government, would be thereby effectuated.\(^{14}\)

The result of the Steelworkers decisions was to restrict severely the scope of questions open to judicial consideration in the area of labor-management arbitration.\(^{15}\) The Court held that a decision on the merits in arbitration cases is within the province of the arbitrator,\(^{16}\) whereas the judicial function is limited to questions of arbitrability. In deciding whether an issue is arbitrable, *Warrior* created what amounts to a presumption of arbitrability, rebuttable only by an express clause of exclusion or by "forceful evidence of a purpose to exclude the claim from arbitration."\(^{17}\) This change in judicial emphasis from opposing to promoting arbitration in labor cases has obviated the necessity for claimants to rely upon bargaining history to secure arbitration, and increased the use of such evi-

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\(^{14}\) 363 U.S. at 582. The arbitrator was viewed as more qualified than the courts to divine the true nature of the grievance and formulate a solution to the dispute. This was consonant with theories which called for a more limited role for court decisions in labor arbitration. See Cox, *Reflections upon Labor Arbitration*, 72 *Harv. L. Rev.* 1482, 1509 (1959); Cox, *Current Problems in the Law of Grievance Arbitration*, 30 *Rocky Mt. L. Rev.* 247, 262-65 (1958); Shulman, *Reason, Contract, and Law in Labor Relations*, 68 *Harv. L. Rev.* 999, 1024 (1955).

\(^{15}\) An extensive list of district and appellate opinions since the *Steelworkers* decisions, indicating that most of the courts have permitted or required arbitration to proceed without judicial intervention and have upheld awards despite challenges going to the jurisdiction of the arbitrator, may be found in Smith, *The Question of "Arbitrability"—The Roles of the Arbitrator, the Court, and the Parties*, 16 Sw. L.J. 1, 14 & n.27 (1962). For arbitration decisions arising from court decisions ordering arbitration, see Fleming, *Arbitrators and Arbitrability*, 1963 *Wash. U.L.Q.* 200.

\(^{16}\) "The courts . . . have no business weighing the merits of the grievance, considering whether there is equity in a particular claim, or determining whether there is particular language in the written instrument which will support the claim. The agreement is to submit all grievances to arbitration, not merely those which the court will deem meritorious." United Steelworkers v. American Mfg. Co., 363 U.S. 564, 568 (1960).

\(^{17}\) "In the absence of any express provision excluding a particular grievance from arbitration, we think only the most forceful evidence of a purpose to exclude the claim from arbitration can prevail particularly where, as here, the exclusion clause is vague and the arbitration clause quite broad." 363 U.S. at 584-85; see authorities cited note 2 *supra*. 
dence by defendants in order to rebut the presumption of arbitrability.

Bargaining history has subsequently been considered in three basic contexts as a defense against claims to the right of arbitration: (1) to indicate the scope of a broad exclusion clause;\(^\text{18}\) (2) to demonstrate the intended extent of an arbitration clause;\(^\text{19}\) and (3) as “forceful evidence” of an intention to exclude a particular issue from arbitration.\(^\text{20}\)

Those decisions which have considered the scope of broad exclusion clauses have generally favored the party who seeks the arbitration.\(^\text{21}\) Most courts have held that a broad grant of arbitration cannot be limited by a broad clause of exclusion,\(^\text{22}\) hence the use


\(^{19}\) See, e.g., Independent Soapworkers v. Procter & Gamble Mfg. Co., 314 F.2d 38 (9th Cir. 1963), cert. denied, 374 U.S. 807 (1963); Pacific Northwest Bell Tel. Co. v. Communications Workers, 310 F.2d 244 (9th Cir. 1962), aff'd on rehearing, 337 F.2d 455 (9th Cir. 1964).


\(^{21}\) See authorities cited note 8 supra.

\(^{22}\) There is good inferential authority for that result. In *Warrior* it was held that orders to arbitrate grievances should not be denied unless it could be said “with positive assurance that the arbitration clause is not susceptible of an interpretation
of bargaining history to define the latter is inappropriate. When used to define the scope of the arbitration clause, however, courts have been more receptive to such evidence. A history of negotiations indicating unsuccessful attempts to include certain matters expressly within the arbitration clause has been held admissible since it goes to the "judicial issue and not to the merits."23

The most frequent use of bargaining history has been in the third context, where a party asserts that such history presents "forceful evidence" that the parties intended to exclude a subject from arbitration.24 The Second Circuit in General Electric reasoned that although this evidence might be useful to an arbitrator examining the merits of the grievance, it is of no use to a court making the determination of arbitrability.25 The court gathers support26 for this position from its own prior decision interpreting the Steelworkers opinions,27 from the parallel holdings of at least one other circuit,28 that covers the asserted dispute. Doubts should be resolved in favor of coverage."

363 U.S. at 582. It would seem almost inconceivable that a broad exclusion clause could ever be sufficient to arouse the "positive assurance" required of a court to deny arbitration.

In General Electric the court summarily rejected the company's argument that the "wrap up" clause was an exclusion clause sufficient to remove subcontracting grievances from arbitration when account was taken of bargaining history. 332 F.2d at 489. But see Smith, supra note 15, at 30.

23 Independent Soapworkers v. Procter & Gamble Mfg. Co., 314 F.2d 38 (9th Cir.), cert. denied, 374 U.S. 907 (1963); Pacific Northwest Bell Tel. Co. v. Communications Workers, 310 F.2d 244 (9th Cir. 1962), aff'd on rehearing, 337 F.2d 455 (9th Cir. 1964). The majority opinion in General Electric distinguished these cases by limiting them to considerations of bargaining history of the arbitration clause itself, and at the same time emphasized that it intimated "no opinion as to the view expressed in those cases that some types of bargaining history may be used in resolving arbitrability." 332 F.2d at 490 n.6.

On analysis, it is doubtful whether there is any substantial distinction between the use of bargaining history in defining the scope of the exclusion clause, and its use in defining the scope of the arbitration clause. Since both clauses are determinants of the extent to which the parties have promised to arbitrate, evidence of bargaining history would seem either to go to the merits in both instances or in both instances to present justiciable issues.

24 See note 20 supra.

25 "[B]y the reasoning of the majority we are pretty close to the point of holding that every claim must be arbitrated because at the very least it involves the question whether by some process of reasoning the claim may involve tangentially some provision in the agreement." 332 F.2d at 494 (dissenting opinion). See also Local 1229 UMW v. Bridgeport Gas Co., 328 F.2d 381, 384 (2d Cir. 1964) (dissenting opinion).

26 332 F.2d at 488.

27 Procter & Gamble Independent Union v. Procter and Gamble Mfg. Co., 298 F.2d 544 (2d Cir. 1962) (Medina, J.). "[E]very grievance is arbitrable, unless the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement concerning grievances and arbitration contain some clear and unambiguous clause of exclusion, or there is some other term of the agreement that indicates beyond peradventure of doubt that a grievance concerning
and from the fact that although similar bargaining history was before the Supreme Court in *Warrior*, that history received no comment in the majority opinion.29

The Seventh Circuit, however, has taken a position opposed to the Second Circuit on the issue of using bargaining history as "forceful evidence" of an intention to exclude a grievance from arbitration.30 That case was similar to *General Electric* in that the company had rejected union demands for contractual limitations on the company's power to subcontract, and the union had later sought arbitration of subcontracting grievances. The Seventh Circuit denied arbitration and held that bargaining history has "some significance and may be properly considered."31

The basis for the position advanced by the Seventh Circuit has been articulated and adopted in a subsequent decision by the Ninth Circuit.32 There the court held that a grievance arising from a disciplinary suspension of employees was nonarbitrable in view of the parties' bargaining history.33 The Ninth Circuit reasoned that a judicial evaluation of the parties' intention in the area of collective bargaining should not be limited to a consideration of the four corners of the bargaining agreement and its collateral writings.34 Although it felt such a rule of evidence "would indeed be a most workable rule of thumb for the courts in this difficult area"35 it

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30 It has been suggested, however, that the court in *Warrior*, had it wanted to bar the use of bargaining history, could have easily foreclosed the issue by specifically denying its admissibility. Maryland Tel. Union v. Chesapeake & Potomac Tel. Co., 187 F. Supp. 101, 108-09 (D. Md. 1960). But see Metzler, supra note 11, at 470.
31 Yet it is noteworthy that the bargaining history in *Warrior* indicated an intent to preclude arbitration; nevertheless, the Court did not consider this evidence in reaching a contrary result. United Steelworkers v. Warrior & Gulf N.w. Co., 363 U.S. 574, 590-91 (1960) (dissenting opinion).
33 Communications Workers v. Pacific Northwest Bell Tel. Co., 337 F.2d 455 (9th Cir. 1964).
34 This was the second time the case had appeared before the court. See 310 F.2d 244 (9th Cir. 1962). Its re-examination was occasioned by recent opinions on the issue in other circuits. Communications Workers v. Pacific Northwest Bell Tel. Co., supra note 32.
35 Id. at 459. But see note 27 supra.
36 337 F.2d at 458-99.
found itself unable to "square such a rule" with the nature of the judicial function asserted by the Supreme Court. So long as the courts are to determine whether grievances are arbitrable,36 in the Ninth Circuit's opinion, bargaining agreements must be read in the light of bargaining history.

The Ninth Circuit, therefore, has emphasized those aspects of the Warrior opinion which permit a court to consider "forceful evidence" of an intention to exclude an issue from arbitration. The Second Circuit, on the other hand, emphasized the Warrior admonition to avoid considering the merits of these controversies and to permit the arbitration where doubts exist.37 It may be argued that bargaining history is not "forceful evidence" because it does not explain why the parties omitted to mention the grievance in an exclusion clause. Nevertheless, the "doubt" found by the court in General Electric may have been dispelled if bargaining history was held admissible. Whether or not such evidence would constitute a decision on the "merits" is an open question, as the standard for distinguishing between the merits and determining arbitrability is at best vague. In large measure, this conflict among the circuits is the result of judicial attempts to reach a balance between two conflicting objectives: on the one hand, the preservation of the process of arbitration as a means of minimizing industrial strife and, on the other, the prevention of a party from seeking anew before an arbitrator what he has lost at the bargaining table.38

While support can be found in recent Supreme Court opinions39 for both positions taken by the circuits, it is difficult to reconcile the admissibility of bargaining history evidence with the philosophy of the Warrior decision. In Warrior, the court sought to promote labor peace by reducing judicial interference with the process of

38 See, e.g., 332 F.2d at 494 (dissenting opinion). See also Local 12298 UMW v. Bridgeport Gas Co., 328 F.2d 381, 384 (2d Cir. 1964) (dissenting opinion).
self-government through arbitration.\footnote{United Steelworkers v. Warrior & Gulf Nav. Co., 363 U.S. 574, 582 (1960).} It is reasonable to assume that this policy contemplates the expeditious disposition of industrial disputes instead of time-consuming trials for the introduction of extrinsic evidence. In order for this policy to be effective, the judiciary should assume the responsibility of summarily dismissing contests over arbitrability interposed for purposes of delay. They can do this only by barring all considerations of extrinsic evidence, including bargaining history.\footnote{See authorities cited note 14 supra.} The effect of this approach would render the Warrior "forceful evidence" test virtually inapplicable, and courts would actually determine arbitrability only in those instances of clear contractual restrictions on arbitration. In the final analysis, this limitation on the forceful evidence test is clearly outweighed by the disastrous effect which judicial delay would have on arbitration as a system of efficient industrial self-government.\footnote{This does not necessarily mean, however, that the parties are denied all recourse to the courts. Professor Cox has suggested that "after the arbitrator has made his award there may be additional room for judicial scrutiny." Cox, supra note 14, at 265. While the Supreme Court has held in United Steelworkers v. Enterprise Wheel & Car Corp., 363 U.S. 593, 596 (1960) that the arbitrator's decision on the merits of an award is not reviewable, one decision subsequent to the Steelworkers opinions has reviewed such an award to determine whether it exceeded the "scope of the submission." Textile Workers Local 1386 v. American Thread Co., 291 F.2d 894 (4th Cir. 1961).}