Americans imagined was a thing of the past: dehumanized working conditions. He decided to highlight growth jobs rather than those in fading heavy industries that have been the focus of much reporting on blue-collar America.

Choosing poultry plants as his main example, Mr. Horwitz faced two obstacles: investigating a rural industry tucked away from public view (and reported on previously only from the outside), and putting a human face on poor workers who often are made anonymous by statistics and stereotypes. Donning work clothes but prepared to acknowledge his Journal affiliation if asked, he sought jobs at factory gates to experience firsthand what it’s like to labor in slaughterhouses that recall Upton Sinclair’s "The Jungle."

Hired for the night shift at two plants, he faced another hurdle: how to report his story without attracting attention and while also performing a backbreaking job. Mr. Horwitz scribbled notes in toilet stalls during brief breaks. He whispered into a pocket tape recorder. He arrived at work early and stayed late, to chat with supervisors and explore other parts of the plants. And like those he worked beside, Mr. Horwitz sustained bruises, cuts and the crushing fatigue of 13-hour shifts.

All told, Mr. Horwitz spent a month in the South, working on the line, talking to workers at dozens of plants, and interviewing lawyers, doctors, social workers and safety inspectors. He also studied years of reports by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and other agencies to establish a pattern of labor and safety violations, and to set his story in both a national and international context. To profile the other workforces in "Nine To Nowhere," Mr. Horwitz visited rural prisons, spent days at recycling plants so rank that workers routinely vomit on the job, and succeeded at getting inside an "electronic sweatshop" where workers are snooped on by camera and computer. By delineating themes common to growth jobs nationwide, Mr. Horwitz provides broad and surprising insights into the transformation of work in the 1990s. He shows, for instance, how safety regulations have lagged behind economic changes, leaving workers exposed to serious workplace hazards. Mr. Horwitz also drives his story into readers’ homes by tying each job to the food that Americans’ eat, the trash they recycle and the checks they write to charities.

"Nine to Nowhere" provoked an immediate and overwhelming response. Readers called and wrote by the hundreds; the story was cited by OSHA’s director, Joseph Dear, and by the Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich. It also has prompted Senator Nancy Kassebaum, head of the Senate’s Labor and Human Resources Committee, to plan hearings on the poultry industry to further investigate the conditions described in Mr. Horwitz’s article.

I am pleased to submit "Nine To Nowhere," "Class Struggle" and "Getting Nowhere" for consideration for the Pulitzer Prize for reporting on national affairs.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
January 23, 1995

Pulitzer Prize Office
702 Journalism
Columbia University
New York, NY 10027

To the Judges:

In 1994, Tony Horwitz didn’t just write about the plight of America’s working poor. He went to work himself, on the kill floor of chicken plants in Mississippi and Arkansas. The result is a shocking expose of a world in which workers are maimed, degraded and discarded in exchange for a poverty wage.

Mr. Horwitz’s experience on the chicken line forms the centerpiece of "Nine To Nowhere," a broad portrait of working conditions in low-wage America. Mr. Horwitz takes readers to some of the bleakest outposts of the nation’s economy, from Midwestern garbage plants known as "dirty MuRFs," to "the cage" of an Orwellian office in Maryland, to South Bronx tenements undergoing "gut rehab." Mr. Horwitz ties together his four-month tour with an unsettling analytic thread. He concludes, paradoxically, that new technology and concern for public health and safety are helping to create a vast 1990s underclass trapped in often-dangerous, dead-end jobs.

This was not a one-shot assignment. For two years, Mr. Horwitz has chronicled the declining status and dashed expectations of Americans enmeshed in the gears of wrenching economic change. Two of those articles from 1994—"Getting Nowhere" and "Class Struggle"—are also part of this nomination. In "Getting Nowhere," Mr. Horwitz profiles a little-known but fast-growing underclass: the working homeless. In "Class Struggle," Mr. Horwitz takes his reporting beyond the blue-collar world to show how economic trends in the 1990s are also constricting opportunities and expectations for professionals. Revisiting his sources over a period of months, he uncovers raw feelings of inadequacy and anger over downward mobility. In so doing, Mr. Horwitz opens a window onto the gnawing sense of insecurity and lost status felt by so many Americans as the economy undergoes convulsive change.

"Nine to Nowhere" grew from Mr. Horwitz’s earlier reporting. While writing about the dwindling wages and benefits that unskilled workers receive, he was struck by an added affliction that many