

The 1997 Teamster Victory at UPS Twenty Years Later

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Twenty years ago this month the reform leadership of the Teamsters union, led by President Ron Carey, with the assistance of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), a reform caucus within the union, led a successful strike against United Parcel Service (UPS) that paralyzed the company, inspired labor unionists, and seemed to open up new opportunities for the workers movement. The UPS strike remains a model of strike strategy, organization, and tactics.

A few months later, however, in November 1997, the United States government removed president Ron Carey from office, because of illegal financial contributions to his union election campaign, though he had not been found personally guilty of any wrongdoing, and was in fact found innocent by the courts. In December 1998, the attorney James P. Hoffa, son of former Teamster Jimmy Hoffa, was elected president of the union. Hoffa junior failed to enforce the UPS contract and many of the gains won by the Teamster rank-and-file in their strike were lost. The ousting of Carey from office demonstrated the importance of building not only rank-and-file power, but also a powerful political organization in the union based on that power in the workplace.

Those interested in these issues will want to attend this event on the “UPS Strike’ 20th Anniversary in New York City tonight where Teamster activists will talk about the significance of the strike and its relevance for today.

I republish here the pamphlet that I wrote in November 1997. In this article I attempted to explain the Teamster strike’s context as well as the strategy and tactics used to win it. Those particularly interested in the Teamster reform movement may also want to read my book *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union*. I have also written a chapter about the role of socialists in helping to organize TDU that can be found in *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s*.

Almost forty years since it was founded, Teamsters for a Democratic Union continues to organize rank-and-file workers to fight for decent contracts and a more democratic union. In 2016, TDU as part of a coalition effort to unseat Hoffa, saw Teamsters United and Fred Zuckerman win nearly 50% of the vote. Teamsters United carried strong majorities at UPS and other major Teamster jurisdictions. That bodes well for reform efforts going forward and will be important to monitor in the run up to the expiration of the 2018 UPS contract.

The Fight at UPS:

The Teamsters Victory and the Future of the "New Labor Movement"

The Teamsters' victory over United Parcel Service in August 1997 represents the biggest strike and the most important labor union victory in the United States in the last twenty-five years. Building on the recent struggles and smaller victories of other workers—particularly autoworkers, farmworkers and university employees—the Teamsters victory at UPS has created a new sense of momentum in the American labor movement.

The size and scope of this strike—185,000 workers on strike from coast to coast in virtually every town and city of the country—put the UPS workers and their union in the public eye. This strike held the nation's attention in part because it dealt with some of the most important and vexing questions posed by contemporary capitalism and its organization of work: part-time jobs and the contracting out of services. Our jobs seemed to be slipping through our fingers; now we see a way to get a grip on them again.

This victory's significance comes in part from the public's perception that this was a strike for everybody, the labor movement fighting for us all. When UPS workers went out, they not only fought for themselves, but—with their demand that the company create more full-time jobs for part-time workers—they also fought for millions of other people. Studs Terkel, author and radio commentator, pointed out that “with the Teamsters' astonishing victory against United Parcel Service, a word long considered quaint-solidarity-has found a new resonance among the great many, hitherto unconcerned.”

The UPS workers' sixteen-day strike was seen by the public as a fight between ordinary working people and a gigantic multinational, multibillion dollar company greedily demanding concessions from its workers—and so it was. Millions of ordinary people identified with the strikers—and partly because of that broad if amorphous support, the workers won.

After years of frustration and failures for the union movement, what an amazing change!

Rival Interpretations

As with any important social and political event, our understanding and interpretation of the event—what we make of it—can be nearly as important as the event itself. How we analyze this strike and the social forces involved in it is vitally important, because it will shape our actions in the future. The most important question without a doubt is: Who won this strike and how did they do it?

Labor officials and politicians have rushed forward to claim the UPS workers' victory for themselves. “America's labor unions are back” AFL-CIO President John Sweeney told a Labor Day rally. Clearly he meant, labor was back, he was in charge and he would take the credit. U.S. vice-president Al Gore told workers at that same event that the United States has a “new unionism.” Gore linked the UPS workers victory to the recent increase in the minimum wage. The insinuation was that the Democrats had somehow made it all happen. Such an interpretation keeps the union, the workers and the strike safely within a “status quo” based on the corporate domination of our society.

We offer another interpretation. We believe that to understand this strike one has to look not at the top, but at the bottom. The victory belongs not to Sweeney and the AFL-CIO leaders—although they helped—nor to Gore and the Democratic Party, but rather to the union's rank-and-file members. The Teamsters union and the UPS workers won in large measure because of the existence within their union of a rank-and-file movement.

For nearly a generation, rank-and-file Teamsters—led by Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU)—have been working at the grassroots, laying the basis for the rebuilding of their union, the

International Brotherhood of Teamsters. In doing so, they have also been laying the foundation for rebuilding the U.S. labor movement.

A grassroots movement like TDU has profoundly radical implications for the union, the workplace, and society. The thrust of TDU's work, over the long haul, is to place power in the hands of ordinary working people. As a rank-and-file group, TDU fights for democracy so workers can make their own decisions in their union. TDU fights both to make the ranks more powerful within the union, and the union more powerful within the workplace, and thus to make workers more powerful within society. TDU and other such grassroots movements in other unions (as well as in communities) work to shift the balance of power toward working people and away from the corporations.

In a society where corporations dominate the government, control our culture, and shape every aspect of our lives nothing is more radical than the demand for democracy, for people's power in the workplace, society and politics.

How to Make the Possible A Reality?

The Teamsters victory thus illustrates the potential for a new social movement for economic and political change in American society. Were such a movement to emerge, the Teamsters victory over UPS could be considered the opening battle. What are the stakes involved? What would it take to make that possibility a reality?

The strike against UPS was not only about full-time jobs, pensions, subcontracting and wages. It was also a strike against the authoritarian character of the workplace. Implicitly it was about dignity, democracy and workers' control.

Values such as democracy, dignity and control have radical implications that challenge not only UPS, but all corporations. Employers want top-down authority, hierarchy, and insecurity among the workers to keep them hunkered down. Democracy, dignity and the idea of workers' control over their jobs and lives challenge the entire social system we live in, a system that places profit as the ultimate value. Any strike, but especially a strike with the size and scope of the UPS strike, questions the employer and, implicitly, the corporations' domination of our lives.

A militant labor movement—rebuilt around ideas like democracy and workers' power in the workplace—would have a tremendously radicalizing impact upon our society. That is why we should look closely at this strike and its implications.

The Teamsters Prepare

UPS on the one side, and Teamster President Ron Carey and the New Teamsters on the other, approached the negotiations with an equally aggressive posture. In itself this tended to level the playing field. The key to the Teamsters' success, as the *New York Times* explained, was a year-long effort to mobilize its members.

Taking a cue from TDU, the Teamsters began preparing for the contract a year before. They developed a "Countdown to the Contract" booklet that provided tips on how to pressure the company and how to build an effective communications network. They began with a survey of all UPS workers, asking them what they wanted in the contract. In the survey, 90% of the part-timers expressed their desire for full-time jobs. Responding to the members' views, that became the union's central demand. By taking up the issue of full-time jobs for part-time workers, the Teamsters had chosen a demand that found broad support both in the organized labor movement and among those who had never been in a union.

The union also decided to take a stand against the contracting-out of union tractor-trailer drivers' jobs.

Finally, the union took a strong position against company control of the pensions. The Teamsters demanded that UPS stay in the multi-employer plans to help provide pensions to workers whose companies had gone bankrupt because they were driven out of business by other companies.

The pension issue was by no means simple. During the 1990s, many UPS workers had become dissatisfied with their pensions. Rank-and-file UPS workers had held meetings involving hundreds of workers who had collected thousands of dollars to promote withdrawal from the multi-employer plan, hoping to raise their own pensions in an independent plan. The company was aware of the dissatisfaction and hoped to use it.

Once the members had been consulted, the union moved on to collect 100,000 signatures in support of the union's demands. Eighteen full-time field representatives were freed up to organize work sites and encourage visible, do-able actions such as wearing "Ready to Strike" T-shirts to work. All shop stewards received a seven-minute video about the UPS negotiations.

Months in advance the Teamster research department put out packets explaining to the news media the union's demand for full-time jobs for part-time workers. And in preparation for a series of rallies, the Teamsters distributed tens of thousands of "It's Our Contract. We'll Fight for It." stickers and 50,000 whistles in order to "blow the whistle on UPS." On March 7, four days before negotiations opened, representatives from each of the 206 UPS locals attended a rally in Chicago. On March 10 there were ten rallies at UPS workplaces; thirty more took place on March 30.

Carey also created a fifty-member UPS bargaining committee, several members of which had been long-time TDU activists. The committee also included four UPS rank and filers and part-timers, something virtually unknown in union bargaining committees.

By mid-July, when negotiations were stalled, a strike vote was conducted. UPS workers voted 95% for to 5% against authorizing a strike.

The Teamsters were also prepared to pay \$55 dollars a week to each UPS striker. Given the number of people on strike, this would have amounted to ten million dollars a week. To meet this big cash outlay, Carey went to John Sweeney, the new head of the AFL-CIO, and asked for a multi-million dollar loan to sustain the Teamsters in their strike. Sweeney promised the Teamsters \$10 million a week in loans to sustain the strike for many weeks if necessary.

Once out on strike, the union kept members informed by faxing bulletins to Teamster locals, setting up a toll-free hot line for strikers and updating its World Wide Web site every few hours. In addition to pulling picket-line duty, UPS drivers were encouraged to drive their route and introduce a part-timer to their customers and explain the strike. Strikers also distributed pro-Teamster score cards at baseball games.

But perhaps most impressively, just about every Teamster interviewed by the media explained the issues of the strike in their own unique way. A national press conference in Washington, D.C. in the middle of the strike led off with two rank-and-file workers explaining why they felt a strike was necessary. They were confident and articulate but obviously not "professionals" hired to do a job.

The Teamsters had certain advantages in facing UPS that were not of their own making. The American economy was booming, with the lowest unemployment rate in years at 4.8%. UPS workers were not so afraid to strike as Teamsters and other workers had been between 1979 and 1997. In addition, a demographic change had taken place in the workforce. The first born of the baby-boom

generation (1940-50) were now beginning to retire, opening jobs for other workers. For the first time in decades, the working class employed in industry and services was growing younger.

The UPS workers were among the youngest workers in the country; most sorters, loaders and package car drivers were in their twenties and thirties. This may also have made a difference. During the bitter strikes of the 1980s and 1990s workers like those at the Staley sugar plant had asked themselves, "What do I have to give up to keep this job?" Young workers like those at UPS asked themselves different questions, like: "Do I want to be a part-timer earning ten dollars an hour for the rest of my life?" UPS management was shocked to find these young, part-time workers prepared to fight.

Nevertheless it should be recognized that the backbone of the UPS Teamster locals and of the strike were the full-time package car and feeder drivers.

Finally it should be mentioned that the UPS workforce nationally as well as in many particular cities was extremely diverse ethnically. Racial divisions have often undermined the struggle of American workers, but not in this strike. Black, white, Asian and Latin workers worked in all job categories, and while the workforce experienced the usual racial tensions present in American society, this was a group united through its union and in its commitment to the strike. No racial antagonisms divided these workers. While women represented a smaller part of the workforce, they too could be found in all job categories, and also felt an equal stake in the struggle.

Labor's Twenty Years in Retreat

To fully appreciate the importance of the UPS victory, we should step back and take a look at the experience of the U.S. labor movement over the last twenty-five years. Despite some victories, the balance sheet shows a series of defeats.

The process began in 1979 when the leadership of the United Auto Workers (UAW) accepted the Carter administration's Chrysler "bailout," and negotiated the contract which broke the "Big Three" pattern agreement covering workers at GM, Ford and Chrysler. Thus autoworkers lost their master contract, setting a precedent for the steelworkers and other industrial unions that would also soon lose theirs.

The Chrysler bailout was followed immediately by Ronald Reagan's attack on the Professional Air Traffic Controllers (PATCO) in 1980. When PATCO went out on strike, Reagan (following a plan developed by Jimmy Carter) fired all 13,000 controllers, in what was a devastating and shocking defeat for the labor movement. Although European air traffic controllers showed tremendous solidarity in the opening days of the strike, U.S. labor didn't aggressively support the PATCO workers.

The Chrysler bailout and the destruction of PATCO opened an era of government and employer attacks on labor unions.

The events of 1979 and 1980 broke what had been a forty-year labor-management truce (like all truces interrupted from time-to-time by hostilities). From the end of World War II generally unions won higher wages and increased benefits with each new contract, even as they gave up control over working conditions on the shop floor.

The Employers' Assault

The Chrysler bailout became the model for corporations. They demanded “takeaways” or “givebacks” from labor unions and aggressively conducted what business schools call “concession bargaining.” Throughout the 1980s employers demanded that workers take wage cuts, accept two-tier wage systems, pay a larger portion of their health care costs, and accept lower pensions as their price for having jobs.

A few employers went so far as to bring in union-busting law firms to eliminate labor unions altogether or got “loyal” employees to call for representation elections and vote out the union. Some employers, especially in the trucking industry, opened parallel non-union lines, a practice called double-breasting. Other employers entering the market, simply fought to keep labor unions out. Thus labor union representation fell from its high of 35% in 1955 to 14.5% in 1996.

At the same time Presidents Carter and Reagan, and later Bush and Clinton—that is both Democrats and Republicans—supported legislation that gave big tax breaks to corporations and the very wealthy, while putting the tax burden on working-class people. Social programs that protected workers and the poor: workers’ compensation, unemployment benefits, public welfare, public health programs, and public education were cut. The combined result of all of these policies was a redistribution of power and wealth away from working people towards the corporations and the wealthy.

The Employers’ Partner

What was the response of the labor union leaders to the employers’ attack and the government’s policies? In general—though there were some important exceptions—most national labor union officials provided little or no leadership in dealing with this government and employer onslaught. Few labor unions had any political, contract or shop floor strategy for fighting back in self-defense. Doug Fraser, when he was head of the UAW, complained that the corporations were conducting a one-sided class war, but he certainly never developed a strategy of fighting back.

Why didn’t the labor movement fight back? What had happened to the unions? During the 1930s workers had organized sit-down strikes, seized factories, put up massive picket lines and faced down the police and the national guard. Out of that experience had come the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a new industrial union movement led by people with a broad social vision. Many of those who were pivotal in the CIO had been activated in the unemployed movement. What had happened to that radical union movement?

The fact is that the government played a significant role in taming the unions. During World War II (1941-1945), the government, employers and the unions cooperated to increase production and prevent strikes. Government agencies and the employers convinced union officials that they should help maintain discipline over workers in order to win the war. Soon union officials began to see their job as policing the working class, for example, by preventing strikes during the war.

After the war a wave of strikes broke out. Workers were no longer willing to delay their demands, while it was clear that corporate profits were going through the roof. By 1947 Congress reacted to the growth in the unions’ power by passing the Taft-Hartley Act, which prevented solidarity strikes, limited boycotts and outlawed Communists in the labor unions. During the Cold War that followed Senator Joseph McCarthy launched an anti-Communist witch hunt that successfully drove radicals out of workplaces. Generally their unions did not defend them; the CIO itself aggressively purged alleged or actual Communists from the unions.

Prosperity also acted as a conservatizing force. During this period, when the United States dominated the world markets and the U.S. economy was powerful and prosperous, employers were generally and grudgingly prepared to give pay increases with every new union contract in order to

prevent strikes, or—in the cases where there were strikes—to get production rolling again.

During the 1950s there were plenty of strikes but they were more often situations in which the union threw up a token picket line. The total work force and the surrounding community were not mobilized to defend the union and win the battle for the hearts and minds of the larger public. These strikes were more limited and more self-contained than the post-World War II battles.

During this period too, most unions leaders could claim that they could “deliver the goods” to their members. In turn, national union officials demanded and got higher salaries, luxurious automobiles, expense accounts, golden parachutes, multiple salaries and pension funds.

With this new life style labor union leaders, especially the national leaders and the professional staff, became a bureaucracy, a social caste within the unions. With secure, well-paid positions, these leaders no longer shared the experience of the workers they represented. They became incapable of effectively representing people with whom they had little in common.

The Concept of Partnership

The company and the union officials had a kind of partnership, as they saw it. Union leaders tried to convince the employers that the union was good for business. The company and the union undertook the joint enforcement of the contract, working together to prevent or suppress strikes or to eliminate absenteeism (and thus increase production and profit).

In the worst of cases, unions—which had started by protecting the workers—gradually began protecting the employers from the workers. But more typically union officials saw their role as mediating between workers and management, arbitrating their differences. In any case, they no longer saw their job as fighting for the workers and against the employers-and even against the government when necessary.

During the prosperous years in fact the union bureaucracy developed a rather comfortable and cozy relationship with management. Few union leaders—outside of farmworkers, teachers and public employees unions that had fought for their rights in the 1960s and `70s—had much experience leading major strikes or mobilizing the membership. Rank-and-file movements among miners, teamsters, postal workers, and autoworkers radicalized sections of the union members-but, with the exception of the miners, the movements were not able to obtain their objectives.

The vision of a union as a social movement fighting for its members and working people in general was replaced by the union as a kind of insurance company.

So when in the mid-70s management began to turn on the unions, the labor bureaucracy was completely surprised and utterly unprepared.

The Re-Engineering of America

Why did management suddenly change its policies? By the 1970s, the U.S. economy no longer dominated the world. The economies of Germany and Japan had begun to rival that of the United States. To meet the challenge, U.S. corporations had to become more competitive. One of their strategies was to invest in new technologies. But the other, and equally important, tactic was to lower their labor costs through a concerted attack on their workers.

The attack on labor during the `70s and `80s was multifaceted. Corporations closed their old steel mills and factories, throwing hundreds of thousands of union workers out of jobs. Companies ended pattern bargaining and began concession bargaining, taking away wages, benefits, and conditions

won by unions over decades of struggle and pitting workers in one plant against workers organized by the same national union in another. Management spent millions on new technologies, completely altering the organization of the workplace and disrupting union rules and past practice. The pace of change was dizzying.

By the 1980s personnel departments adopted new methods intended to undermine the unions and win over the workers. These practices included Quality Circles, Team Concept and Total Quality Management. Within a decade American society and the workplace had been transformed—and the losers were working people. With unions in retreat, between 1973-97 real wages fell by 18%. In most working-class families husbands and wives both had to work to pay the bills.

Before 1980 the number of strikes had never fallen below 200 in any given year. In 1980 the number fell to 187 and by 1982 it tumbled below 100. During the '90s, in fact, the annual number of strikes plunged below 50. For example, in 1994 there were 45 strikes involving 322,000 workers and in 1995 192,000 workers participated in 31 separate strikes.

The media questioned whether strikes were outdated, but the real issue was that the days of the routine strike were past. With injunctions and the right to use “replacement” workers, the corporations were more combative than ever. Any union voting to go out on strike had to be prepared with a strategy to win, including a willingness to defy court injunctions and a capacity to unify and mobilize its members and supporters.

Supporting Democrats as an Alternative

The union leadership was baffled, bewildered, and battered at the bargaining table. Unable and unwilling to resist the employers in the workplace or in the collective bargaining arena, many union officials put their hopes in the Democratic Party.

Despite a long tradition of voting for working-class candidates in local labor parties—or for socialist candidates—by the end of the 1930s the CIO entered into partnership with the Democrats. After the CIO's merger with the American Federation of Labor in 1955, the AFL-CIO became an important part of the Democratic Party. If labor unions could “deliver” the votes of its membership to the party, then presumably the candidates would “take care” of labor once elected. But it didn't work out that way, particularly not since the crunch of concessions in the 1970s.

Carter, Clinton and the Democratic Congress proved nearly as conservative as the Republicans, and the union bureaucracy's political strategy proved to be a failure. For example, the most important piece of legislation Clinton and a Democratic-led Congress passed is NAFTA—a piece of legislation every trade union and grassroots community group opposed. That, not outlawing the use of scabs in strikes, was the Democratic Party's priority.

During these years, regional and local leaders, and rank-and-file workers in many areas resisted the government and employer attack. The P-9 United Food and Commercial Workers at the Hormel plants, United Auto Workers at Caterpillar, the workers at the Staley sugar processor, the Detroit newspaper workers, and many others fought long, difficult strikes against the employers.

But without the backing of a national union, and without an organized rank and file within the union, it was almost impossible to win. In fact, most of these strikes—despite the workers' often heroic efforts—were defeated. In the case of P-9, the UFCW International leadership itself actively worked to break the strike. With national union leaders who failed to defend the union, to negotiate decent contracts, and to ensure passage of pro-worker legislation, many workers had lost faith in unions.

The Mafia and Sweetheart Contracts

But if the 1980s were difficult for most unions, for the Teamsters they were tragic. A combination of politicians, Mafia-connected union officials, and trucking employers came to dominate the highest levels of the Teamsters. Under the control of these outsiders, during the worst years of the employers' attack on the unions in the 1980s, the Teamsters negotiated a series of sweetheart contracts. These contracts sold out the interests of the union members and weakened the labor movement as a whole.

How had such a situation come about? The Teamsters had been founded back in the 1890s as a craft union-like the carpenters or plumbers-made up of local cartage drivers. Under the leadership of Dan Tobin, the Teamsters formed an important part of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). But Tobin was a conservative leader, dedicated to the AFL's craft union model, uninterested in organizing immigrants, African Americans, or industrial workers whom he called riff-raff.

The Teamsters' heroic years began in 1934 when rank-and-file truck drivers and warehouse workers from Minneapolis, Minnesota led a series of strikes, culminating in a citywide truck-drivers' strike. The leader of that strike was Farrell Dobbs, a socialist and a brilliant strategist, who went on to organize over-the-road freight drivers and other dock workers and warehousemen throughout the Midwest.

In this way Teamsters underwent a transformation from a craft union to a kind of industrial union of the transportation industry, a development that paralleled the rise of the auto, rubber, and electrical workers' unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Dobbs trained other Teamsters in his strategy of organizing the rank and file to hit the economic weak points of the companies. One of his students was Jimmy Hoffa.

Dobbs and the team around him provided political leadership within the Teamsters from 1934 until the eve of World War II. They played a decisive role in organizing Teamsters throughout the Midwest and in making Minneapolis a union town. They also forged ties with the unemployed movement, helping Minneapolis-area workers in government programs to win the highest wages in the country.

But the government, in concert with Tobin, orchestrated a witch-hunt with the approach of World War II. Dobbs and more than two dozen militant trade unionists and socialists were the first to be indicted under the newly passed Smith Act. Eighteen were eventually convicted and sentenced. With the leadership core of the Minneapolis Teamsters out of the way, the door was open for other elements to come to the foreground.

Jimmy Hoffa-and the Mafia

Jimmy Hoffa rejected Dobbs' socialism and his rank-and-file approach, but adopted the strategy of analyzing the economic linkages between companies. Hoffa extended Dobbs' organizational work throughout the Midwest and the South, and also won the Teamsters first health, welfare and pension funds. On the basis of these achievements-and with the support of some of the mob's "paper" locals (so called because they had no members)-Hoffa was elected Teamster president in 1957.

In addition to being an aggressive organizer, Hoffa also established close ties to Mafia figures, like Allen Dorfman, whom he brought in to manage the Teamsters' Central States Pension, Health and Welfare plans. Hoffa's lieutenants included Mafia-connected union officials such as Roy Williams in Kansas City and William Presser in Cleveland.

Hoffa and the corrupt union officials he supported or put into power cut dirty deals with employers, including payoffs for labor peace. Hoffa also bought trucking companies in his wife's name and

became an employer.

To keep his control of the union, Hoffa established a kind of dictatorship, where the General President held all the power. He could put locals into trusteeship, he effectively controlled the pension plan—using it to build his image as a labor leader who could produce for the membership but also through his access to the money, could corrupt union officials at the local or regional level. Even the master contracts—which take labor in one area out of competition with another, and are therefore an important step forward for worker—were used by Hoffa to build his base of power. Through these various carrot and stick mechanisms local unions found it impossible to resist Hoffa's machine; democracy disappeared from the Teamsters.

By the 1950s a series of Congressional investigations brought the Teamsters' corruption before the public. The public outcry forced the AFL-CIO to expel the Teamsters for corruption in 1957. By the early '60s President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy decided to go after Hoffa.

While Hoffa was guilty of corruption, the politicians' interests were not entirely altruistic. Employers and the government both saw the prosecution of Hoffa as a way to weaken the Teamsters and the labor movement.

After several indictments and trials, Hoffa was finally convicted of jury tampering and stealing Teamster members' pension funds in 1964. He remained out on appeal until 1967 when he was finally imprisoned.

During the decade that Hoffa had headed the union, the Mafia had first cast a shadow, and then cast a net over the organization. Ensnared by the mob, first the union stumbled and then it fell.

Fitzsimmons and Nixon Make a Deal

Hoffa went off to prison, leaving the union in the hands of Frank Fitzsimmons. Hoffa believed Fitzsimmons a loyal flunkey who would give the union back when he got out of jail. But Fitzsimmons proved more ambitious than Hoffa had imagined.

Fitzsimmons made a deal with President Richard Nixon to let Hoffa out of jail on the condition that Hoffa be banned from all union activities for ten years. With Hoffa thus ineligible to run for union office, Fitzsimmons would continue to head the union. In return for keeping Hoffa out of the union, Fitzsimmons and the Teamsters supported President Richard Nixon and the Republican Party. Even after the Watergate revelations, which exposed Nixon's illegal wire-tapping activities, the Teamsters stuck with Tricky Dick.

When Hoffa got out of prison in 1970 he began a campaign to take back control of the union, appealing both to his corrupt Teamster official friends and the Mafia. Perhaps Hoffa threatened to blow the whistle on somebody, or maybe his return just created unwanted problems. In any case, in July of 1975 Hoffa disappeared, and is presumed to have been murdered by the mob.

The Dictators, the Mob and the FBI

As head of the Teamsters, Fitzsimmons let union officials with ties to the Mafia, such as Roy Williams in Kansas City and William Presser's son Jackie Presser in Cleveland, dominate union affairs. As the employers turned up the pressure in the 1980s, Fitzsimmons, Williams and Presser negotiated a series of sweetheart deals permitting the trucking companies to rewrite the contracts in their own interests.

Fitzsimmons died in 1981 and was succeeded in office by Williams and then by Presser. In this manner the Mafia thus came to control the presidency and the highest councils and the coffers of the union. Williams was indicted and convicted of corruption, while Presser, to save his skin, became an informant for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Presser and Harold Friedman were indicted for racketeering, but Presser died before the trial, while his co-conspirator Friedman was convicted.

During the `70s and `80s, the people with the most influence over Teamsters' national policy were Presidents Richard Nixon and, later, Ronald Reagan, Mafia bosses Williams and Presser, the FBI, and the trucking employers to whom the union was rapidly selling out. Everybody was involved in the Teamsters leadership-politicians, bosses, and the Mafia -everybody but the workers.

The Beginnings of Rank-and-File Rebellion

Faced with such corruption and seeing their union fail to represent the needs of its membership, rank-and-file Teamsters began to organize. Local unions had resisted Jimmy Hoffa in the 1950s and `60s as he extended his dictatorial control over the union and in 1970 freight workers organized wildcat strikes in several states against Frank Fitzsimmons' attempt to sell them a sweetheart contract. That same year workers came together to found Teamsters United Rank and File (TURF), an important, but short-lived effort to create a national rank-and-file organization.

Then the union's older activists were infused with some young blood. The early 1970s were years of important social movements throughout the United States. A powerful national movement that had begun in the 1960s continued to fight against the war in Vietnam. African Americans worked to extend the gains made by the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. Women organized an important feminist movement fighting for, among other things, the Equal Rights Amendment. Many college students and other young people, transformed by the experience of the anti-war movement became committed reformers, radicals and socialists.

These rebel youth argued that business interests dominated U.S. society, while the working people's interests took second place. They wanted a country where people, rather than the corporations and the rich, would control the economy democratically. Some of these young idealists entered the labor movement, either taking jobs with labor unions, or going to work in a variety of industries. They believed that the U.S. labor movement could be a great force for social justice, if only it could be reformed.

One group, the International Socialists—one of the forerunners of Solidarity—had members in the trucking industry and in the Teamsters union. Those socialists sought out the union's long-time activists, and together they began to organize around local union democracy issues and union contracts.

In 1975 a group of Teamster activists from around the country, some of them young radicals and others older, long-time fighters, created a coalition called Teamsters for a Decent Contract (TDC) to fight for a decent freight contract the following year. At the same time, they created a parallel organization called UPSurge to organize UPS workers to fight for their 1976 UPS contract.

During 1975 and `76 both TDC and UPSurge organized hundreds of workers in cities throughout the United States in the movement for a decent contract. TDC and UPSurge pressured both the employers and their union officials with demonstrations at trucking companies and union halls and resolutions at local union meetings. The contract campaign planted seeds of change.

Teamsters for a Democratic Union

The relative success of the TDC and UPSurge contract campaigns led a number of activists to decide to create an on-going rank-and-file organization. At a convention in Cleveland in 1976, a couple hundred Teamsters founded Teamsters for a Democratic Union, committed to returning the control of the union to its members.

TDU had grown out of a contract campaign, but the recessions of 1974-75 and 1979-80 took much of the militancy out of the labor movement. Teamsters were afraid to engage in militant action on the job or to strike for fear of losing their jobs. They also knew that they could not count on their union officials to back them up. In this more conservative climate, TDU began a long, slow task of fighting for rank-and-file workers' rights: the right to elect stewards and business agents, the right to vote on contracts. TDU also organized campaigns throughout the 1980s against the sweetheart contracts negotiated by Fitzsimmons, Williams and Presser.

TDU organized among all kinds of Teamster workers: freight drivers and dock workers, car haulers, grocery warehousemen, and Mexican-American cannery workers out West. TDU created special committees to analyze the problems in the industry, survey the workers, and come up with rank-and-file contract demands. TDU worked with Teamsters from coast to coast, and in Puerto Rico and Canada. One of the companies TDU organized workers to fight was United Parcel Service.

What TDU was doing was building a militant minority within the Teamsters. The history of the labor movement is the history of such militant minorities who take the lead, and by doing so bring others up behind them. The militant minority acts as the leaven in the loaf.

If we look back, for example, at the history of the great sitdown strikes of the 1930s, we find that in most cases only a few thousand or even a few hundred workers occupied the plants. But thousands of workers marched outside. And tens of thousands of workers offered their moral support by staying away from work. Later, when union elections were held, those tens of thousands of less active supporters voted to uphold the union. The fact that they did not participate in the factory occupations did not mean that they were unconvinced or uncommitted.

The key thing is often to create that militant minority that through its courage, its dedication and its perseverance convinces the larger majority to give its moral support and take action. Teamsters for a Democratic Union over its twenty-year history has built a structure whereby Teamsters can become organizers and thus part of that militant minority.

United Parcel Service

United Parcel Service was founded in Seattle in 1907 by James E. Casey, a messenger boy. Casey bought some bicycles and went into the business of delivering department store merchandise to customers. By 1919 Casey had expanded to California; in 1930 he moved the company headquarters to Manhattan. In the 1950s UPS became a common carrier, that is, a freight company specializing in packages. When Casey retired in 1962, younger UPS managers took over the company, following his management methods. By the 1990s UPS had become a multinational company with operations not only in the United States but in a number of other countries throughout the world.

Back in the twenties, Casey had adopted what is called "scientific management." The founder of scientific management, Frederick Taylor, believed that managers, not workers, should completely control the work process. Managers had to study how workers work, analyze that work process, and break it down into separate pieces. Managers and supervisors could then control the work process and instruct workers on the most efficient way to work.

Later Henry Ford combined Taylor's methods with the machinery of the modern assembly line

factory. In Ford's factories, the machines set the pace and drove the human beings. Taylor and Ford influenced Casey and his successors.

UPS management attempts to control the worker completely from the moment of arrival until departure. The UPS worker's every move is planned precisely by company managers, from picking up the keys to loading the package.

UPS became a fabulously successful corporation largely through its oppressive management techniques. The day begins with a management pep talk and ends in exhaustion. Under the threat of discipline and with the promise of promotion, UPS package car drivers run all day, racing up and down the streets of America, spending their energy on making managers happy and stockholders rich.

With its control not only over the worker's actions, but also its intrusion into the worker's mind, UPS could be called a totalitarian management. It may be said that UPS has mastered the art of managing fatigue. Workers are pushed to their physical and psychological limits, leading to a high incidence of accidents, injuries and occupational illnesses. The pressure to perform is so great that some workers even donate their unpaid time before and after work or work through their lunch break to meet production goals.

The pressure, tension, and sweat of the UPS workers are transformed first into organizational efficiency, and then into more than one billion dollars a year in corporate profits shared by about 20,000 UPS managers who are also stockholders.

But UPS profits have not been shared with the workers. During the 1970s and 1980s, UPS began to expand the number of part-time workers and negotiated contracts that allowed the company to pay them lower wages and fewer benefits. The combination of the efficient exploitation of the package car and over-the-road drivers and the lower-wage and benefit packages for the backbreaking work of the sorters and loaders earned millions for the company and fueled its international growth.

UPS managers also attempt to learn about the workers' off-the-clock activities through eavesdropping on workers' conversations, taking notes and making diagrams of workers' friends and associates. UPS sends spies to labor union or TDU meetings.

Campaigning for a Decent UPS Contract

Frank Fitzsimmons, Roy Williams and Jackie Pressure negotiated substandard, sweetheart contracts against the wishes of UPS workers. But Teamsters for a Democratic Union and its UPS contract committees fought against these deals year after year. TDU organized rank-and-file UPS workers into a national network, created national contract campaigns for a decent contract, and mobilized the ranks to vote against the poor contract proposals of the Teamster leadership.

In addition to TDU, UPS management had another thorn in its side. Ron Carey, the President of Local 804 in New York, also resisted UPS management. Carey went to work at UPS in 1955, following in his father's footsteps—Joseph Carey was a UPS worker for forty-eight years. Thirteen years later, Carey was elected president of Local 804, a union of 5,000 members.

Carey led his local in several strikes for higher wages and better conditions in the 1960s and '70s. When Local 804 was brought into regional and national contract bargaining, Carey became an outspoken critic of the sell-out contracts negotiated by Fitzsimmons, Williams and Presser. When TDU organized against UPS and the national Teamster leadership, Carey too could be expected to oppose the Mafia-dominated national leadership. Carey never joined TDU, but was an ally in the struggle against the company and the Teamsters corrupt Old Guard.

The RICO Suit and Ron Carey for President

In 1988, the U.S. government decided to take action against the corrupt Teamster leadership. Using the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) Act, the U.S. Justice Department floated the idea that it would take over the Teamsters. TDU intervened, arguing that rather than putting the union into trusteeship, the government should simply oversee elections in order that Teamsters could democratically elect their president and other top officers.

TDU launched a national Right-To-Vote campaign that gathered 100,000 signatures, held rallies around the country, and organized members at the local level to support this position. It also outlined how a fair and honest election could be conducted. In March 1989 the government dropped the trusteeship idea and the Justice Department and the union agreed to the alternative: a one-member, one-vote for the top union officers. The agreement also included the Justice Department's continuing to monitor the union for corruption.

Two months after Carey announced his candidacy for president, TDU's members voted to support Carey. Carey, in turn, picked several TDU leaders to run with him for positions on the union's General Executive Board.

Carey was the underdog in the three-way race. The other two candidates-R.V. Durham, supported by the majority of the General Executive Board, and Walter Shea, supported by the minority of the board, especially those who had closer ties to organized crime-had enormous financial resources. But the Old Guard made a critical mistake: it never dreamed an "outsider" like Carey could win, and therefore it didn't go into the election unified.

TDU provided the Carey campaign with a ready-made national campaign organization. As Carey toured the country in '89 and '90, the national TDU office and local TDU chapters organized meetings and rallies in his support. With TDU's support, the first Carey campaign for the union presidency had the feel of a rank-and-file movement. Workers themselves passed out literature, made phone calls, organized rallies and got out the vote. TDU played an important role, arguably the crucial role, in winning Carey's first election.

The Carey slate won the election with 48% of the vote in the three-way race, much to the Old Guard's shock-and the surprise of some in the reform movement itself! Shortly after the election, TDU leaders met to discuss the future.

Perhaps some observers thought that now that a reform leader had been elected president and even some TDU members were elected to national office, TDU was no longer needed. But most TDUs disagreed. Even with a reform leadership in power, it was all important to have a rank-and-file movement from below to push for the complete democratization of the union and to make demands upon the employers. TDU decided to continue as a force for change within the union.

With Carey's reform administration pushing down from above, and TDU and the rank and file pushing up from below, it would be possible to squeeze the mobsters and the sleaze out of the union. As some TDU leaders put it, the situation was like a sandwich, or perhaps more like a vice.

Carey Holds Out an Olive Branch

In office as General President, Carey called his administration "The New Teamsters," giving that name to the union's magazine. Carey took some important measures at the very beginning of his regime, important both in substance and symbolism: He cut the salaries of the top union officials, including his own. He ended the officers' practice of "double-dipping," that is taking multiple salaries for holding various offices. He sold off the Teamsters' Lear jet planes.

Beyond those initial actions, Carey had two tasks before him: the reform of the union and the fight against the employers.

Carey's strategy for union reform was cautious. First, Carey made a tactical decision to hold out an olive branch to the Teamster leaders who had been associated with the old regime. Except in flagrant cases of corruption, he attempted to win over his former opponents. Considering the closeness of the vote, Carey's strategy-to break-up the opposition, win part of it over and neutralize another part-was critical to moving the Teamsters forward. The broadest possible unity is always a desirable goal, but it was particularly important for Carey since immediately after the election sections of the Old Guard-such as Larry Brennan, president of Michigan Joint Council 43-threatened to withhold dues payments from the International.

Unlike most other unions, the Teamsters is formally a decentralized union and the Old Guard network continued to control most of the centers of organizational power even after their surprising defeat in the elections. For example, only 13% of the dues money goes to the International.

While a strategy toward established officials was essential, the details were difficult. Where to draw the lines? How to pose the issues? How to draw in local officials without alienating and demoralizing supporters and more militant forces?

Carey's olive-branch-strategy was partially successful. He won over a few of his former opponents. It also demonstrated to a significant portion of the membership those who stood in the way of Teamster unity. At the same time his administration became somewhat more conservative and, in some cases, unable to mobilize the membership. Sometimes it seemed as if Carey tried to keep TDU and its leaders at a distance. Although not repudiating TDU and its support, Carey attempted to incorporate more of the typical union officials.

Following his own vision, Carey pushed his olive branch strategy as far as he could. Only when most Old Guard Teamster leaders made it clear that they wanted nothing to do with Carey, and moreover that they would do everything they could to sabotage both his regime and union reform in general, did Carey challenge the Old Guard by abolishing the regional Teamster Conferences that formed their power base. The Teamster Conferences represented a great drain on the union's economic resources, served no useful function, and helped prop up Carey's political opponents.

Among its many challenges, the Carey administration faced one particularly difficult problem: the handling of corrupt local unions. Where the U.S. Justice Department or the Carey administration had removed corrupt union officials, the Teamsters International union had to take over the unions and run them, a practice known as trusteeship. Out of about 600 local unions, by 1997 approximately sixty unions had been put in receivership. (The Courts directly oversaw two trusted locals.)

While corrupt local unions had usually been dominated by the mob, employers and corrupt officers, the problem of corruption often reached down into the membership. Corrupt officers may have involved some local members in labor-peace payoffs, embezzlement from health, welfare or pension funds, extortion, hijacking, robbery, gambling, drugs, prostitution or other crimes. The majority of rank-and-file members were often fearful of gangsters, union officials and the employers, ignorant of their union rights and without any experience in union democracy.

The goal of a good trustee is to weed out the crooks, establish democratic functioning of the union, and help to develop local leaders who can manage their own affairs. Under any circumstances it would have been difficult to find scores of honest, reform-minded, effective, strong leaders to undertake this difficult work. Unfortunately, Carey appointed some trustees and trustee supervisors who came over from the old regime when he held out the olive branch, and who are not committed

to union reform. Partly because of this, the clean-up and reform of the sixty trustee locals has not been altogether successful.

Looking at the union as a whole, while several important local unions remained in the hands of Old Guard Teamsters with their authoritarian, conservative and sometimes corrupt practices, the International union underwent a dramatic change. Carey, with several TDU leaders on the General Executive Board, opened up the union to local leaders and the membership. Carey adopted many of TDU's programs of education, information, and organization. He worked with local officers and rank-and-file members to begin to reverse the years of criminal control, corruption, and conservative unionism that had plagued the Teamsters.

The Teamsters Take on the Employers

During those first five years in office, Carey put the employers on notice that the old sweetheart deals were at an end. He prepared the union for strikes but showed he was flexible enough to negotiate contracts without them whenever possible.

- The national carhaul contract, covering 17,000 Teamsters, had already expired when Carey took office. A previous tentative settlement, with a two-tier wage scheme and other concessions, had been rejected by the membership with a 74% margin. The main issue was double-breasting, that is, when a company opens a non-union subsidiary and transfers work from its union to non-union operations.

The new leadership took a harder stance at the bargaining table and attempted to mobilize the membership through contract bulletins. They launched a corporate campaign against Ryder, the largest carhaul corporation and the worst double-breasting offender. Although prepared for a strike, the Teamsters were able to reach an agreement in April 1992 that prohibited the corporations' parent companies from using non-union subsidiaries.

- In 1993, after sluggish negotiating, UPS got serious about a tentative contract only when the membership voted 94% in favor of strike authorization and the Teamsters decided to stop extending the old contract. The agreement won the use of Teamster drivers for the new three-day select service and the union negotiated into the national contract an "innocent until proven guilty" clause that was a first for a U.S. union.

But the big problem remained: a work force in which the majority were part-time workers with a wage half that of the full-timers.

- During the 1993 contract talks, when the union raised the issue of weight limits, UPS had stated it had no intention of increasing the weight limits. But in January 1994 UPS announced its intention to increase the weight limit on packages from seventy to 150 pounds. Negotiations between UPS and the Teamsters made no progress and the new weight was scheduled to take effect on February 7. So Carey set February 7 as the strike deadline.

The company sought a temporary restraining order against the strike, and a federal judge issued one. But Carey felt the issue important enough to break the injunction and defend the union members' health and safety. For their part, the Old Guard used the order as an excuse to keep their locals from participating. Consequently only about 30-40% of the Teamsters at UPS struck. The action, however, forced the company to negotiate a settlement: the higher weight limit stands, but UPS agreed to bargain over how the heavier packages will be handled. In the meantime, Teamsters are not required to lift packages over seventy pounds without help from another member of the bargaining unit.

Violating the restraining order was a bold step that forced the company to compromise. It also demonstrated the willingness of the membership to participate in a job action, paving the way for the successful 1997 strike.

- On April 6, 1994, 120,000 Teamsters began a twenty-four day strike against Trucking Management, Inc. TMI is the largest of several employer groups in the freight industry, comprising twenty-two national companies. The union signed interim agreements with nineteen of the twenty-two, who agreed to accept whatever the other TMI companies negotiated. In exchange, the Teamsters allowed them to continue operating.

In the end the union forced TMI to withdraw the demand to replace 15,000 full-time dock workers with part-timers. On other issues the settlement was mixed, with some union gains and some concessions.

The freight and UPS strikes proved to be modest successes, despite the attempt of some union officials to undercut the Teamsters' stance by charging that the issues weren't worth striking over. Carey, on the other hand, showed himself to be a leader willing to mobilize the membership against the employer. As a result, employer opposition to Carey hardened.

Carey's First Five Years: An Assessment

During his first five years in office, Ron Carey proved to be a daring leader on a few fronts. As a matter of principle, Carey opposed employers' cooperation schemes—Quality Circles, Team Concept, Total Quality Management. He called them by their right name: an attempt to undermine the union and negate the contract. Carey discouraged Teamster locals from entering into such agreements and encouraged the union's education department to organize an educational campaign against them.

Unlike most other labor leaders, Carey did not see the boss as a partner. In taking this position, Carey prepared the ground for the UPS strike. Had he not taken this stand, UPS management would have been in a far better position to demand "loyalty" from its workers.

Unlike his predecessors Fitzsimmons, Williams and Presser who had a partnership with the trucking companies and other employers, Carey saw his job as fighting the company to win economic improvements for the workers. To win the fight with the company, Carey was prepared to mobilize the workers, even if it meant an illegal strike. While he did not share TDU's more radical rank-and-file perspective, Carey's brand of unionism opened up more space for the ranks.

Carey also became the foremost labor leader in the struggle against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its destructive impact upon American and Canadian workers' lives, as well as those of Mexicans. While the Teamsters' initial statements about Mexico and Mexican workers were sometimes awkward and insensitive, the union learned quickly from its mistakes. Soon the Teamsters entered into an alliance with several Mexican trucking associations and labor unions, and adopted the language of international labor solidarity.

Within the labor movement, Carey's New Teamsters played a progressive role. When Lane Kirkland retired from the presidency of the AFL-CIO he picked Tom Donahue as his successor. However, when John Sweeney, head of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) decided to challenge Donahue—resulting in the first contested election in the AFL-CIO executive board's history—Carey and the Teamsters backed Sweeney. Whatever Sweeney's weaknesses and limitations, and there are many, his election—together with Rich Trumka of the United Mine Workers and Linda Chavez-Thompson of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)—represented an important shift in the AFL-CIO leadership.

On the political front Carey turned the Teamsters union away from its decades-long support for Republican presidents including Nixon and Reagan. Carey steered the Teamsters straight into the Democratic Party. But if others might have preferred Carey to join with Bob Wages, President of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union and build an independent labor party, such a project found no resonance for Carey.

Yet the Teamsters was the only prominent AFL-CIO union that did not endorse Bill Clinton's re-election in 1996. They held back an endorsement because of Clinton's role in the passage of NAFTA.

The Old Guard and Jimmy Jr.

The Old Guard Teamsters, the conservative and often corrupt holdovers from the old regime, had every interest in opposing union reform. The Old Guard's goal was the re-establishment of the status quo ante. Their slogan might have been: "Forward to the past."

The Old Guard knew they had to unite behind one candidate, who could hopefully defeat Carey. Their preferred candidate was Jimmy Hoffa, Jr., son of the former Teamster President. Hoffa Jr. had never been a working Teamster and had never held elected office in the Teamsters. An attorney, much of his business came through the Old Guard Teamsters with whom he associated, and everyone recognized the name.

Hoffa decided to run against Carey in the 1996 election, and hired Richard Leebove to help manage his campaign. Leebove was a former follower of the kooky, but dangerous right-wing extremist Lyndon LaRouche.

Hoffa and Leebove sought out the support of businessmen, the Republican Party, and conservative newspapers. In media interviews Hoffa criticized Carey and the Teamsters for their mobilizing of the membership in the freight and UPS contracts, sending a clear signal to employers that his regime would mean labor peace.

While Leebove and the Old Guard leaders who controlled some big Teamster locals used mud-slinging and red-baiting to attack Carey, Hoffa projected the image of a negotiator who would be able to handle all problems. His image projected the feeling that it wasn't necessary to do anything except back him-he'd make sure the union got the best contract possible. His slogan was "Restore the Power," an effective slogan that harkened back to the days when his dad was "in charge."

Ken Paff, National Organizer of TDU, explained the appeal Hoffa had for Teamsters:

"The allure of a strong leader who will slay the corporate dragon still resonates. "Hoffa's rap to the 100,000 freight Teamsters who struck in 1994 to stop the introduction of part-time workers to handle freight was, 'You struck for 24 days and your companies are still jacking you around.' And many Teamsters nodded.

"Without internalizing that the contract represents the truce line between corporate power and union power, some Teamsters fell prey to Hoffa's 'I will personally negotiate your contracts' appeal.'"

Unlike the first Carey campaign, which depended upon Teamsters for a Democratic Union and Local 804 in New York City for support, in the second campaign Carey turned toward professional public relations firms like the November Group. The hiring of the November Group, with its ties to the Democratic Party, would prove to be a huge mistake.

In the 1996 election-where 456,707 Teamsters voted out of the 1.4 million eligible-Carey succeeded

in winning by a narrow margin, receiving 51.71% of the vote to Hoffa's 48.28%. What really won the election for Carey was not his professional public relations firm—which sent out a last-minute mailing that arrived days after the ballots were received—but his record over the past years and the support he had from fellow Teamsters. TDU loyalists and rank-and-file activists campaigned for Carey, and this time around he received increased support from many local officials.

On Strike for a Job and a Pension

The strike against UPS, which began on August 4, was completely effective in stopping the operations of the company from coast to coast. Out of the work force of 185,000, UPS management suggested that between 5,000 and 10,000 workers had crossed the picket line to scab. That is, the company could command the loyalty of between 3-6% of the workers, while the union had the support of 94-97%.

While UPS did use management employees and a few scabs to move some trucks, UPS never attempted during the strike's duration to hire replacement workers. Given the company's strict methods of operation, it would have been a difficult process to recruit, hire, train and mobilize enough workers to really move significant amounts of freight. UPS would not have wanted to put just anybody in its complex carousel conveyors, behind the wheel of its package cars and tractors, or in charge of millions of dollars worth of merchandise.

Where UPS did use scabs, the results were sometimes disastrous. One UPS manager accidentally drove a truck off an overpass and was killed.

Another essential element in UPS' inability to conduct business as usual were the UPS pilots, who themselves have been locked in battle with UPS, and have been without a contract. The 4,000 pilots wholeheartedly pledged themselves to support the Teamsters' strike. Their active participation in strike solidarity verified for the U.S. public the intransigence of UPS management. (Should UPS be foolish enough to force the pilots out on strike, the Teamsters have pledged to honor their picket lines.)

UPS certainly played hardball with the strike. In many parts of the country, the company sought and got injunctions to limit picketing. The company fired some workers, and in some places, such as the Boston area where picket lines were more militant, workers were arrested.

Once the strike occurred, UPS banked on the possibility of government intervention. While the company got local injunctions, President Clinton never invoked the Taft-Hartley Act, which would have permitted him to stop the strike at least temporarily. Clinton realized that it would look absurd to argue that the UPS strike constituted a "national emergency." This hands-off position no doubt helped the Teamsters maintain a strong position. At the same time, it should be pointed out that Clinton never spoke out against the company's part-time jobs policy or pension grabbing, and did nothing to assist the union or the UPS workers. Clinton's was a policy of benign neglect.

Waving the flag of democracy, the other strategy UPS employed was to demand that the union—in the middle of the strike—conduct a referendum vote on the company's last offer. This demand was designed to fool people—both strikers and the public at large. In this scenario UPS was supposed to be viewed as the democratic beacon flooding light on the union leadership, who were undemocratically trying to prevent the rank and file from voting. But the whole campaign fell flat, brushed aside by union spokespeople and rank-and-filers the media interviewed.

Throughout most of the country, the tone of the strike was in keeping with the particular work force at UPS. Known for politeness, the workers used their "familiar face" to advantage. That strategy

paid off when the media began to interview small businesspeople. Instead of finding a group of people angry at the strikers, the general response was “While this strike inconveniences me, I know my driver needs to win this one.”

The War of Wits and Words

UPS had a great deal at stake in this strike, hundreds of millions of dollars in lost business each week, and the possibility of losing customers to other carriers in the long run. As soon as the strike began, freight companies, the air-freight companies, and the U.S. Postal Service all nibbled away at the UPS quasi-monopoly of the small package express business. Workers at Emery Air Freight reported being inundated with UPS freight, and with some UPS workers who were temporarily hired to move it.

With the union’s strike effective, and the company prepared to take losses to win, the strike became in part a matter of public relations. The Teamsters won the war of words, not because they adopted the deceitful public relations techniques, but because they mobilized the members.

The union turned the company’s own image-making upside down. The polite UPS workers who usually appeared at your home or business to take your package now appeared in the press and on radio and TV to explain their union’s demands. Who could deny these young American men and women, Black and white, Asian and Latino, the right to a full-time job? Who would take away their pensions?

The UPS corporation, however, with its demands to continue part-time jobs, outsource union work, and make a grab for the workers’ pension funds appeared to be what it really is—money-hungry, insensitive, uncaring, ruthless.

Opinion polls showed that over 50% of the American people supported the UPS strikers, while less than 30% supported management. The Teamsters campaign for the hearts and minds of the people was so successful that one tends to forget that other outcomes were possible. Often the media portrays people on strike as high-paid workers who have it so much better than lower-paid workers, so what are they complaining about?

Clearly one of the lessons of the UPS strike is that when the union makes demands that have an appeal to working people and society at large, it can win broad public support.

The Settlement

As an internally-owned corporation, UPS was in good financial shape to withstand a lengthy strike. But after two weeks of a solid strike, UPS management decided to cut their losses. Surely one important factor in their decision must have been the public’s support to the Teamsters. In negotiating, the company pulled back from its aggressive stance and agreed to meet virtually all of the union’s demands:

First, UPS agreed to create 10,000 new full-time jobs by combining existing, low-wage, part-time jobs. In addition, the company and the union expect another 10,000 full-time jobs to be created through normal growth. The agreement provides that five out of six new full-time jobs must go to UPS workers, up from four out of five in the previous agreement.

Second, UPS agreed that it would remain within the multi-employer pensions funds. The Teamsters stated that, “Under the Teamsters’ largest fund, the Central States Pension Fund, a UPS worker will be able to retire after thirty years of service with a pension of \$3,000 per month-50% more than the current amount.

Third, UPS agreed to limits on subcontracting demanded by the union. This means that UPS will not subcontract the feeder (over-the-road) drivers' jobs.

Fourth, the union also won substantial wage increases for UPS workers. But while the union fought for more full-time jobs, it was unable to end the huge gap between full-time and part-time wages, and the new contract reinforces that gap. Full-time workers won \$3.10 an hour, or 15%, which will bring them to \$23 by the end of the contract. The part-timer won an extra dollar an hour, raising them from \$11 to \$15 an hour by the time this contract expires.

Fifth, one of the big health hazards at UPS is lifting. The union also won an agreement from UPS that if the company increased weight limits, it would first negotiate with the union a safe way to do so.

At the same time, the company forced the union to extend the new contract to five years (the previous contract had lasted four years and many major industrial contracts last only three years). This gives the company a long period in which to consolidate its position before facing a possible strike. Members, who may not strike during the life of the contract, may become demobilized.

The Biggest Victory in Twenty-five Years

The Teamster-UPS strike and the new contract represented the most important victory for organized labor in a quarter century. Certainly there have been other recent victories—the United Auto Workers (UAW) members at General Motors who struck for more jobs, the drywall workers in California, or the Justice for Janitors campaigns. But the Teamsters' UPS strike, as nearly everyone has recognized, has taken on a special significance.

The Teamsters have shown that organized labor can represent not only the needs of its members, but working people as a whole. Nothing is more crucial to the well-being of our society than the creation of well-paid jobs with decent benefits. The Teamsters put that issue at the forefront of their demands. When the Teamsters stood up for the working class, the working class and the public stood by the Teamsters.

As important perhaps as the victory, was the public perception of victory. Unlike so many of the labor conflicts of the 1980s and '90s, management was unable to humiliate the Teamsters. UPS management won over no significant portion of the workers to scab or to the demand that their leadership organize a vote on the employers' last offer. UPS workers were not starved out in a prolonged strike but stood up for their rights and won in a relatively short and sweet struggle. Nothing moves a movement forward so much as a victory.

The Teamsters victory at UPS had an immediate impact upon the labor movement. At Labor Day picnics, parades, and demonstrations around the country, UPS workers took center stage.

Whose Victory Was It?

What accounts for the victory? There is of course no one simple answer. As a high-profile company always in the public eye, with terminals throughout the country interacting with hundreds of thousands of customers, UPS was under national scrutiny.

In political terms, the benign absence of President Clinton and the federal government helped. John Sweeney and the AFL-CIO solidarity loan made a difference. Of course it was Ron Carey, the Teamster executive board and the UPS bargaining committee who organized, led and won this strike.

But Carey would never have been elected, the strike would never have taken place, and the members would never have given it their support had there not been a tradition of rank-and-file activism in the Teamsters.

The existence of Teamsters for a Democratic Union played a critical role in this strike. Twenty years of organizing had given UPS workers and other Teamsters the confidence to stand up and talk about their views. Year after year TDU had reached out to the newer, younger workers, drawing them into the fight for union democracy and economic justice. Only an on-going rank-and-file organization could have incorporated wave after wave of new hires into the movement.

TDU had taught Teamster members how to make a leaflet, how to put out a local rank-and-file paper, and how to run for steward, business agent or local officer. TDU has organized contract campaigns even when voting down the contract meant defeating it by more than two-thirds. TDU has created a militant minority within the union, a small social movement, and that movement had helped to change the direction of the union.