

Breaking into Brown

written by Anne Mackie | August 16, 2026



[The International Socialists (IS), an American revolutionary socialist organization of the 1960s and 70s, was the most successful of the many left groups involved in labor organizing in that era. The IS helped to organize and found Teamsters for a Democratic Union and was active in the auto, steel, and telephone workers unions. And the IS created Labor Notes. Its members were also involved in supporting the Black liberation struggles, the anti-colonial movements, and in broader international solidarity. The IS advocated independent political action to the left of the Democrats, helping to create the Peace and Freedom Party. Now Andrew Stone Higgins has written a history of this group—*From the Free Speech Movement to the Factory Floor: A Collective History of the International Socialists*—by assembling short memoirs of many of its members. With the kind permission of the publisher, Haymarket Books, two of those memoirs are included here, by Thomas Harrison and this one by Anne Mackie. These are followed by a review of Higgins’ book by Alan Wald.]

This is the story of the rise of a rank-and-file movement called UPSurge at United Parcel Service (UPS) during the mid- to late 1970s. It addresses the role of women as UPS workers in the early days of the Teamster reform movement, explains UPS working conditions, personal stories of struggle, and the “red-baiting” campaign against socialists. Converging in this story are rank-and-file activists, corrupt Teamsters Union officers and their goons, and revolutionary socialists working shoulder to shoulder with shop floor organizers. UPS workers fought against the “Big Brown Machine” in the 1970s and have been at the center of the Teamster reform movement since. This historical legacy is shared from my perspective as one of the first women UPS drivers hired nationally in the early 1970s and from my position as the editor of UPSurge, a national rank-and-file newspaper for UPS workers published from 1975 to 1979. (Note: I refer to the union officials as the IBT—International Brotherhood of Teamsters— not to be confused with the rank-and-file Teamsters Union members.)

Thursday nights were check-cashing nights at the Lamplighter Bar on East Seventy-First Street, a block from Cleveland’s United Parcel Service metro hub. Every UPS facility had its nearby watering holes where workers gathered after their shifts to let off steam. Drivers showed up one by one as their ten-, eleven-, or twelve-hour days ended. Overtime was mandatory. The eight-hour day meant nothing at UPS. While sharing beers and camaraderie, we’d talk about how to get the job done without being a “runner,” without skipping lunch breaks, and without drawing too much heat from the “stupidvisors”—our nickname for the guys in ties who had given up their browns to join management. We were a tight-knit group.

On one of those Thursday nights in July 1975, we hung on the edge of our barstools watching the

breaking TV news: Jimmy Hoffa had disappeared in Detroit. An ominous mood fell over the bar. Despite Hoffa's thuggery, prison incarceration, and mob connections, many saw him as a hero of organized labor, having served as president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) from 1957 to 1971. Hoffa's disappearance was huge and spawned an array of conspiracy theories, books, and movies as America became fascinated with the mystery. For Teamsters Union rank-and-file activists, one thing was no mystery: Anyone who dared challenge the increasingly corrupt IBT leadership might come in harm's way. To be a fighter in the union at that time was to accept the threat of violence. Many of us were willing to take that chance.

In August 1975, just weeks after Hoffa's disappearance, a rank-and-file group of Teamsters met in Chicago to launch Teamsters for a Decent Contract (TDC). I was there as a UPS driver, along with members of the Alliance of Concerned Teamsters (Local 136, Indianapolis); Concerned Rank and File Teamsters (Local 249, Pittsburgh); Teamsters for Democracy (Local 695, Madison); and others from Memphis, Little Rock, New York, and Rochester.

TDC's immediate goal in 1975 was to get one hundred thousand signatures on a petition to reject the upcoming 1976 Master Freight Agreement if the contract proposal did not include job protections, safety improvements, and decent wage increases. The majority of the Chicago meeting attendees were freight workers, and for them these demands made sense; but UPS workers had a uniquely different and intensely oppressive work environment. Like our fellow freight workers, contract negotiations and union reforms were important; but unlike freight, our fight was dead centered on one company. UPS was a work environment unlike the rest of the freight industry. UPS drivers were often disparaged by freight drivers in the industry for being "runners" and "Under Paid Slaves." It was clear that organizing, focused specifically on UPS workers, was essential. In September, the first edition of the *UPSurge* newspaper was published to help lead the fight.

Today, it's hard to imagine life before the internet, which provides instant communications and organizing tools. Historically, political movements had used "the underground press" to organize, and during the 1970s rank-and-file Teamsters Union papers included the *Seattle Semi*; *The Grapevine* (Los Angeles); *From the Horse's Mouth* (Pittsburgh); and *Fifth Wheel* (Bay Area). Following the Chicago TDC meeting in August 1975, two newspapers were added to the list from Cleveland: *Teamster Power* (later to become TDU's *Convoy-Dispatch*) and *UPSurge*.

A Personal Turn to Labor Organization

My path toward *UPSurge* began with the Vietnam War and the massive struggle to end it. As a student at the University of Washington in Seattle, I joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and was present at the organization's 1969 national convention in Chicago, which turned into a chaotic, sectarian battle between the Maoist group, Progressive Labor Party, and the Revolutionary Youth Movement. It was during those crazy convention debates of dead-end ideologies—either blindly following China or promoting violent domestic "Weather Underground" bombings—that I met members of a "third alternative" organization that seemed amazingly sane with a world vision. This group later formed the International Socialists (IS), of which I became a founding member.

When thousands of protesters shut down Seattle's Interstate 5 on May 5, 1970, to protest the killings of four students at Kent State University, I joined in. Hundreds of thousands of people across the country took similar action. This experience shaped my thinking and drove me deeper into political activism. As a student activist I had organized in support of the civil rights movement, the United Farm Workers, and the Black liberation movement. By 1970, I had joined the feminist movement for an abortion rights referendum in Washington state that passed by popular vote in November 1970, making Washington the first state to adopt abortion rights. I had marched in downtown Seattle with coat hangers around my neck carrying a sign that read: "Never Again."

My activism continued after graduation when I moved to Portland, Oregon, and landed a teaching job, where I was active in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Soon after, however, when a local school levy failed, I was laid off and found a job at UPS. Momentum in 1972 for the Equal Rights Amendment, with congressional support and just three states short of ratification, had impacted hiring policies: Doors were opening for women into many male-dominated industries. I got a UPS driving job in Portland, and a year later moved to Cleveland and was rehired. As a member of the International Socialists (IS), I was part of an organizing drive in specific cities, strategic unions, and industries. As socialists we aspired far beyond union contract fights. We envisioned a long-term movement that could link up with other industries and be part of a larger workers' movement to fight capitalism.

Three of us from the IS—myself, Celia (Dunlap) Petty, and Christina Bergmark—got jobs in the Cleveland UPS hub. With the help of a few male comrades, Doug Passey and Dan Petty, we began publishing the *UPSurge* newspaper in 1975. As additional IS women were hired at UPS hubs in Detroit, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Los Angeles, we established ourselves as rank-and-file union fighters and encouraged the other women working at UPS to get involved. Many of these women played important leadership roles in the early days of the Teamster reform movement.

A Revolving Door

UPS's hiring policy for women was a "revolving door." Women were hired, but many did not pass their probation period. UPS's tactic was to get women to quit by piling on extra workloads, sending us out in shoddy trucks, and adding to the sexist harassment by fellow male workers who resented that women were taking jobs away from men. On a particularly cold and snowy Cleveland morning, I was sent on the road in a 1948 package delivery van with no functioning heat. The truck was sparkling clean on the outside when I drove it to the local hospital emergency department complaining of possible frostbite. The next day I was issued a truck with a heater. These daily skirmishes grew into legal battles against discrimination that worked in my favor, helping to solidify respect from male coworkers. They saw that women wouldn't buckle under management's boot. They watched women declare, "Don't mess with us."

Wives Joined The Fight

In the tightly regimented, overwhelmingly male workplace that was UPS in the 1970s, wives often played a key role. A group of Louisville, Kentucky, Teamster Local 89 wives picketed the hub in support of their husbands' fight against UPS's ridiculous appearance standards. If a driver's hair was one-eighth of an inch too long, he was given a warning letter. Mustaches could be no longer than the corner of the mouth. Sideburns could not go below the ear lobe. The back of the hair could not touch the collar. One morning a TV news crew showed up at the Louisville wives' picket line to film; the report later aired on CBS's Walter Cronkite news show. As one of the wives reported, "When the cameras started rolling, UPS had hemorrhage fits. Of course, we were very brazen, and we knew they couldn't do a thing to us. So, we had ourselves a ball."

Bringing wives and families into the UPSurge movement fostered unity at home and at work. Phyllis Davis, a Cleveland feeder driver's wife, helped with administrative duties in the UPSurge office, and like the wives in other cities, Davis joined in at meetings and on the picket lines. *UPSurge* published her comments: "When my husband got involved in UPSurge I was kind of nervous and scared about what was going on down there at the office. We had heard from supervisors that it was a socialist group and that they were out to ruin the country. Now that I've been at the office every day helping, I think it's a good group, and I'm going to stay down there and fight because I think they're helping every UPS worker." Davis handled billing, answered phones, typed, and mailed out UPSurge T-shirts. She learned how to run our new headliner machine.

"I was one of the wives down at the picket line," Davis wrote. "I was down there fighting for a good contract just like the rest of them." The UPSurge fan mail flowed in. There were poems, cartoons, letters, and tirades from UPS workers venting their pent-up rage. One poem printed in the March 1976 edition spoke to many through the newspaper:

"The Man from UPS"

Who is 30 years young but looks old enough to retire?
Who is clothed in obsolete Eisenhower attire?
Who freezes his butt, garbed in glorious brown?
As he delivers customers' packages all over town.

Who works beyond his cut-off time each and every day?
Who has splits on his truck which are out of his way?
Who makes an effort to get his work done?
By calling for cover and seldom gets one.

Who works hard and when he gets home
Has his pick of seats at the table, for he eats all alone.
Who gets his meals that are served cut and dried
With choices of reheated, rebaked or refried?

Who sees his children maybe once during the week?
The rest of the time they're in bed fast asleep.
Who lays down just to rest his eyes,
The next thing he knows it's time to rise.

Who writes grievances to get action once in a while?
Who gets their grievance tossed in a wastepaper file?
Who tries to get changes only for the better?
And receives his thanks in a Warning Letter.

Who is too tired to go out with his wife?
Who has little or no social life?
Whose company forces him to work 10-hours a day?
No wonder the man is living this way!

Who needs a wife understanding and kind?
Who has a wife who is losing her mind?
Who works for these people, the Sons-of-Pups?
Yes, he's my husband, the Man from UPS.

Signed, J.M.N.—a wife who has been down ever since UPS. Buffalo, New York

Shifting Into High Gear

With no inventions like the internet, Facebook, or Twitter, we used mimeograph machines, a printing press, snail mail, landline phone calls, and face-to-face meetings. *UPSurge's* first edition, September 1975, published four thousand copies. Papers were snuck into the back of UPS tractor trailer rigs leaving Cleveland. Within days we heard back from drivers in Columbus and Cincinnati wanting to sign up. We printed six thousand copies the next month. By now we were receiving paid subscriptions from all over the Midwest. Within a few months we went from being a rag-tag newspaper in a few Midwest cities to having a press run of fifteen thousand and a national following.

It snowballed.

A few times we shipped newspaper bundles across UPS's receiving counter, but these were mysteriously "lost." I filed a claim and, when the \$118.18 UPS reimbursement check arrived, printed a copy in *UPSurge*. Members in IS helped distribute the paper while selling their *Workers' Power* newspapers at UPS hubs, helping our network grow.

Kentucky Signs Up

After *UPSurge* copies made it south across the Ohio River, a check for \$650 arrived in our office with the attached note: "Everyone at the Louisville HUB is signed up for a subscription." Vince Meredith, Local 89 chief shop steward, had sent the check on behalf of the 130 full-time employees in Louisville. Today, there are twenty-five thousand workers at the Louisville UPS Worldport with working conditions not unlike 1975.

Upon receiving Vince Meredith's check, I hightailed it down from Cleveland to meet him and his group of shop stewards. Pitchers of whiskey sours were shared into the wee hours. He wanted to know the "who, what, and why" about *UPSurge*. I explained that our funding came from subscriptions and the sales of T-shirts, buttons, and bumper stickers. His group later added *UPSurge* license plate brackets to our merchandise.

I explained my socialist beliefs, my antiwar activism, and women's liberation stance. He was unshaken by my "big reveal." I learned that being up front about my socialist politics was essential to maintain credibility with him and others down the road. Before we'd sipped the last drink, Meredith indicated his approval of *UPSurge*. Moving forward, his leadership would be key in the contract battles ahead and for the upcoming reform movement in the Teamsters. For me, meeting him was like theory coming to life. His deep commitment to justice and workers' rights, coupled with amazing organizing skills, were the embodiment of working-class leadership that I had only read about.

Meredith wrote for *UPSurge*: "The only way you're going to have support is to show the men you're going to fight for them and do what's right." He shared key strategies for building solidarity at work through organizing self-managed funds: a sick fund that was collected every time someone got sick, and an employee's fund that was used to pay employees if they were unjustly fired or to pay attorney fees if needed. Meredith explained how full-timers and part-timers should work in unity: "If we don't all get together and fight this thing, then the company's going to split us up and shove down our throat what they want to. There's no doubt about it. Part-timers and full-timers must stick together. If we could all get together in the 13-State Contract Agreement, we can make this company do anything we want. We'd give this company hell! We have to start somewhere, and I'm not too old to see it happen." By 1979, his dream of a national UPS contract was realized.

As our friendship and comradeship grew, Meredith was frequently confronted about the question of socialists behind *UPSurge*: "They're not *behind* *UPSurge*, they are *in* *UPSurge*, just like you and me." His message of unity never wavered. At this time the Louisville UPS hub had only white drivers. It was a city of extremes, with Ku Klux Klan demonstrations against court-ordered school desegregation. At one point the National Guard was activated, school buses were damaged, one was burned. Within the *UPSurge* organization, racism was actively opposed; Louisville's leader Meredith was outspoken about not allowing divisive tactics of racism, sexism, or antisocialist red-baiting. As the big Midwestern cities converged to form the *UPSurge* organization, there was strong leadership and involvement by Black workers—both fulltime and part-time. After years of cultivating a network of shop stewards throughout the lower Midwest and working toward his long-held vision to win one national UPS contract, Meredith was intolerant of anything that would interfere with that fight. That

goal was coming into focus for him under the banner of UPSurge.

Membership Growth Explodes

During the 1976 contract fights, UPSurge meeting attendance exploded: 250 UPS workers showed up in Chicago; 100 in Cincinnati; 100 in St. Louis; 175 in Kansas City; 225 in Minneapolis; 450 in Detroit; and many other cities throughout the UPS 13-states' Midwest region. For the Eastern UPS, 10-state contract region meetings were held in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, New York, Baltimore, and Boston. West Coast meetings were held in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, Portland, and Seattle. I traveled to many of these meetings while keeping my full-time driver job and catching a red-eye flight home so I could punch in at 8:00 a.m. on Mondays. Meredith hit the road with his cadre of shop stewards to lead several meetings, as well. Often our meetings were coupled with TDC meetings as the two organizations were on the same path to build the growing union reform movement.

Turning Point

UPSurge officially formed as a national organization, not just a newspaper, when 650 UPSers rallied in Indianapolis, January 31, 1976. The meeting was a turning point for UPS workers. We had planned for 200, but turnout was successful beyond our imagination. Two chartered buses came down from Detroit. Caravans of cars traveled from around the Midwest. People flew in from both coasts. Earlier that afternoon a TDC meeting held at the same location was broken up by a squad of IBT goons. Strong-arm tactics worked then, but later that night when 650 UPSers showed up there were no goons willing to take on the huge crowd. We were beginning to "Use the Union's Power," our slogan. The enthusiasm, solidarity, and militancy of the Indianapolis meeting lit a fire. We called ourselves "UPSurge Country USA." Meredith spoke to the crowd: "If a strike is necessary to do this, then we're ready to strike. The question is not can we afford to strike? The question is, can we afford *not* to strike?"

UPSurge had hit a nerve and uncovered UPS's common management practices across the country. Workers who dared to speak up or fight back were harassed, as were Blacks and women. Our newspaper reported the story of a Black Cleveland driver who had been fired for "stealing" \$30. That's \$30 he forgot to turn in at day's end but later found at home in his shirt pocket and turned in the next day. He was singled out and fired, although white drivers had frequently made similar mistakes and had not been fired.

An example of ongoing harassment was shared in a published letter from a worker's seven-year fight in Pinehurst, Massachusetts: "The company has screwed me as a pre-loader, package car driver, feeder driver, and car washer. In the past year I had just about given up hope. After reading *UPSurge* I feel like a rejuvenated warrior. Your (our) paper is just what we need to force these people to come back to the realistic world of working conditions. Just in case you didn't notice, this letter is written on the back of a grievance form. I may as well use it as stationary. When I fill out the front of it, my BA (union business agent) gets it and I think he uses it for scratch paper. The last thing this company wants to see in print is the real truth and that is exactly what you people are printing." As the letters and donations poured in, it became clear that UPS was a hellhole everywhere.

1976 Contract Issues

The 1976 union contracts were still regionally based, which gave the company the upper hand. UPSurge's contract demands in all regions were: equal pay for part-time workers; protect full-time jobs; no new part-timers to be hired; jobs should be phased back into full-time; and at the very least,

part-time employees should be first in line to bid on fulltime openings over outside new hires. The loss of full-time employment was the biggest issue in 1976. Many UPS hubs still had full-time jobs for the pre-load shifts. The corrupt IBT leadership sat by and allowed full-time jobs to disappear while raking in more union dues from newly hired part-timers.

Another key contract issue was the grievance procedure. UPSurge proposed a rehaul: innocent until proven guilty, no disciplinary action until the entire grievance process had been exhausted, and institute the right to strike over grievances; all overtime to be voluntary and paid at double time; and no supervisors doing union work—a common contract violation. Additional demands addressed health, welfare, and maternity leave; unsafe working conditions and shoddy equipment; an increase in paid sick days; and additional holidays. We wanted no restrictions on use of CB radios or personal radios in company trucks. Finally, our demand for the elimination of UPS's archaic appearance standards about hair, mustache, and sideburn lengths hit the nail on the head to win rank-and-file support.

Finally, UPSurge called for one national master UPS contract. Regional contracts allowed the company to do workarounds of striking facilities. An example from Pittsburgh in 1973 had taught the lesson of how regional contracts weakened UPS workers' power. When Pittsburgh workers went on strike, supervisors drove truckloads of packages to Cleveland (covered by a different contract) for sorting and loading. Cleveland workers refused to handle the "scab" packages and set up a picket line at the gates before the trucks arrived from Pittsburgh. At first the Cleveland IBT Local 407 officials—all nonelected appointees—tried to force us back to work, but we shamed them into supporting our refusal to handle Pittsburgh's scab packages. We faced off in a show of unity with Pittsburgh workers and against UPS's strike-breaking tactics.

Militaristic Management

It was well-known that UPS hired former law enforcement and FBI agents to oversee their loss prevention program, which went far beyond the prevention of lost packages. They spied on drivers by following them on their routes, took pictures of trucks parked together for breaks, quibbled over petty appearance standards, and wrote workers up for small infractions, like unpolished shoes. They followed loaders around doing time studies. One day I had three supervisors on a "ride along"—each had their own clipboard and stopwatch. They kept bumping into each other in the small cab of my truck while I tried to drive and deliver. Pure harassment!

One summer weekend I attended a socialist conference in rural Ohio where a UPS supervisor from Dayton was spotted in his van using a telephoto camera. A few days before the conference, the supervisor had visited the site and shared a list of names with the office personnel, telling them he was concerned that these people might attend the conference to organize a strike at UPS. In addition to his behavior being flat-out nutty, he also was violating National Labor Relations Board laws that protect workers' rights to attend meetings without being harassed by management.

A typical day in a UPS hub had supervisors pacing back and forth along overhead catwalks, shouting out orders like drill sergeants. Many workers had served in Vietnam—a war that had just ended in April 1975—and now they were subjected to a militaristic management style, performance time studies, petty harassment, a grueling work pace, and mandatory overtime. UPSurge members confronted this Gestapo management style with a militant, back-in-your-face attitude that appealed to many veterans who were fed up with disrespectful, tyrannical supervisors. The UPSurge movement was a workplace expression of the rebellion that had swept the country.

Confrontations with Goons

The 1976 Midwest UPS strike ended after two weeks when the union bureaucrats ordered strikers back to work without a signed contract. UPSurge supporters then organized an unsanctioned “wildcat” strike in eight cities.

In Cleveland the wildcat picket line was met with carloads of union goons carrying baseball bats ready to beat some heads. As their cars pulled up at 11:00 p.m., our picketers went “live” on the TV news. As soon as the goons saw the TV cameras, they jumped back in their cars and drove away. When physical intimidation didn’t work to end the wildcat, UPS got an injunction and threatened to fire striking workers. The union said it would not defend fired strikers, police were brought in to break up picket lines, and the wildcat strike collapsed.

Later that year the Eastern states went on strike for thirteen weeks. UPS took a hard line, trying to disappear full-time inside jobs, and proposed to manage all part-time health and welfare benefits as a company plan, not as part of a union contract. UPS dug its heels in to lower the Eastern contract standards because it anticipated a national contract coming soon. It wanted to lower the bar in the East in preparation. The next year in New York City, UPS offered full-time warehouse workers buy-outs to quit their jobs. Some did.

Retaliation

UPSurge continued to grow after these contract fights, but now, UPS began to wreak havoc on key organizers while IBT officials looked the other way. In the pamphlet *The Big Brown Machine*, by Mary Deaton, a UPS driver and IS member in Los Angeles, the retaliation was documented. Eleven New Jersey drivers were fired for hair length and beards. A Cleveland Black driver was fired for failing to report a minor truckyard accident until the day after. He got his pink slip the same day the company featured him for excellent customer service in the company magazine, *The Big Idea*. Company hypocrisy was rampant.

A Harrisburg, Pennsylvania sorter was fired for repackaging merchandise from a split-open box. He was accused of stealing. St. Louis workers were fired when boxes on a jammed belt fell on a catwalk. A woman part-timer in Detroit was fired for filing too many grievances against harassment. She was found to have returned from a break one one-hundredth of a second late. The list of fired activists went on and on with no protection by the IBT.

The Big Brown Machine pamphlet also documented personal testimonies. For instance, one Indianapolis UPS maintenance mechanic heard someone calling for help and raced over to find a worker trapped in the conveyor belt. As the mechanic reached for his knife to cut the man free, a supervisor ordered: “Don’t, don’t. You can’t cut the belt. We won’t be able to run if you do that.” The Indianapolis building plans had originally called for safety guards on those conveyor belts; but as a contractor later explained to the mechanic, instead of installing the safety guards UPS had cut corners to save money. After that accident, guard rails were installed.

Another report explained that when UPS introduced its fiberglass cabs on feeder tractors it was to cut down on weight, to allow more packages to be loaded. A Chicago feeder driver, after inspecting his tractor one rainy night in 1975, thought the tires looked unsafe. He notified his supervisor who refused to pull the rig out of service for repairs. The driver was forced to drive his double trailers onto the highway where winds were gusting up to fifty miles per hour. He hit a pool of water, his trailers jackknifed, and he was crushed and killed in the fiberglass cab.

UPS workers were paying the price with preventable tragedies, arms caught in conveyor belts, falling packages that break bones, slips on wet floors, hands injured while greasing moving belts, concussions sustained while jumping out of package cars with loaded arms, and thousands upon

thousands of back injuries.

In 1977, UPS tried to declare distribution of the *UPSurge* newspaper illegal. We fought back, claiming it was protected activity under National Labor Relations Board laws. We hired a lawyer and filed a lawsuit. Our evidence proved a pattern of illegal activity by the company against *UPSurge* supporters: interrogation, threats of discharge, surveillance, and forcing warehouse employees to remove *UPSurge* buttons. When we won the lawsuit, UPS was forced to post notices stating that protected union activity was allowed: distribution of the paper and wearing buttons inside; we had won.

(An interesting historical footnote: The UPS center manager in Cleveland, Ray Srp, who violated NLRB law by not allowing *UPSurge* to be distributed, was the Ohio National Guard captain at Kent State in 1970 when four students were killed. This odd coincidence was discussed by *UPSurge*'s attorney while working on our NLRB case. When this UPS manager's name came up, our attorney recognized it because his law firm had handled lawsuits filed by parents of the murdered Kent State students.)

Red-Baiting Campaign

By May 1976, the IBT leadership and UPS management had joined hands to try discrediting *UPSurge* and TDU (TDC was now Teamsters for a Democratic Union). Anonymous letters were handed out in UPS hubs in Baltimore, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and other cities with horror stories about communists trying to take over the union. (This was just one year after the end of the war "against communism" in Vietnam.)

The IBT hired a public relations firm and launched a national "red-baiting" campaign. Fred Schwarz of the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade was one of their "investigators," who served up a tossed salad of misinformation. What his report did get right was that *UPSurge* was focused on union officials for "lack of action," and *UPSurge* described UPS's working conditions "as a concentration camp type of environment."

At the founding convention of TDU in Kent, Ohio, in September 1976, IBT officials arrived in a chartered bus with their own "rank-and-file" group, setting up a picket line against TDU. They called themselves BLAST (Brotherhood of Loyal Americans and Strong Teamsters). TDU remained undeterred by the goon squad.

Later that year, a mysterious fire caused damage to the office building in Cleveland where *UPSurge* and TDU shared an office. Going forward we took shifts sleeping in the office with fire extinguishers, a garden hose attached to the sink, and a loaded shotgun. In 1976, Cleveland had earned the nickname "Bomb City USA" because thirty-six bombings had taken place in the city that year. Assassinations of known mobsters was a normal occurrence. Even Cleveland's then mayor, Dennis Kucinich, had attempts on his life and began to wear a bulletproof vest.

One day that year, I was greeted at a shipping dock on my route by a very large, intimidating man called "Mouse." He made it clear to me that my union activism needed to end. A few weeks later, my Teamster Local 407 business agent called me aside at a union meeting, gave me a pinch on my cheek, and said, "You don't want me to be putting a wreath on your door, now do ya?" I don't think he was talking about a Christmas wreath.

Despite the gooned-up style of the IBT and physical attacks against key TDU leaders, the organization continued to grow. That year, Pete Camarata (a friend and longtime Detroit rank-and-file leader who had joined the IS) and Steve Kindred (a friend from the student movement, longtime

TDU organizer, and member of the IS) were attacked in Las Vegas at the IBT convention and sent to the hospital. They were lucky to have not been killed. At UPSurge meetings we had bodyguards and strict security to keep our leaders safe; but the atmosphere of violence in Cleveland, coupled with the intense red-baiting campaign, made organizing there more and more difficult. Ultimately, TDU moved its national office to Detroit, where it had deeper local rank-and-file support. At its November 1979 convention, it merged with PROD (the Professional Drivers Council), a longtime reform organization with similar strategies and goals to TDU.

In 1979, UPSurge also left Cleveland. I had quit my job at UPS in late 1977 to start a family but continued publishing the newspaper for two more years. I had discovered that it was difficult to manage a national publication and travel to meetings with two small children in tow, so I transferred the organization to Meredith in Louisville. Ultimately, UPSurge merged into TDU.

Different Directions

At its core UPSurge was a shop floor organization in a fight against a monolith, not a reform movement in the Teamsters. While IS members in UPSurge participated in the IS national Teamster fraction, the tidal wave of UPSurge activism from 1975 to 1979 seemed to perplex the IS leaders who remained focused on freight workers, internal union reform, and legal actions. UPSurge did not fit the mold of a union reform movement. Blacks and women were still uncommon in the freight industry, but at UPS issues of harassment and discrimination mandated a response. UPSurge championed the cause to integrate the trucking industry.

Looking back, I believe a direct line can be drawn from the early days of UPSurge and its national shop-steward network that through the years led to victories at UPS. The 1991 election of Ron Carey, a former UPS driver from Local 804 in New York City, to become president of the IBT was the result of massive numbers of UPS workers who had his back in the fight against union corruption and mob rule within. The 1997 national UPS strike furthered that power, and in 2023 the UPS workers' contract win is testament to a deep sense of rank-and-file power that TDU has bolstered.

The 2023 UPS contract gains are an inspiration to a resurgence of an American labor movement witnessed at Amazon, Starbucks, and other nonunion shops. Many of the lessons learned through UPSurge in the 1970s are instructive for organizers today. Together, the socialists within the Teamsters reform movement planted a flag for rank-and-file control of the union, about which all participants can be proud.

Special thanks to Celia (Dunlap) Petty, Mary Deaton, and Duncan West for their contributions to this story.