

L A B O R

In for the long haul

Ron Carey's attempts to democratize the Teamsters are breathing new life into an old union.

By David Moberg

In his first year and a half in office, Teamsters President Ron Carey has given the badly tarnished union a shiny new image. Carey, elected by the union rank and file in a historic government-supervised vote, has made the union more democratic, more politically liberal and more imaginatively aggressive in fighting for its members. For many Teamster workers, however, the ultimate test of this image will be the substance of their contracts.

Carey is currently negotiating the union's pace-setting agreement covering 165,000 United Parcel Service (UPS) workers. With high expectations for the new leadership, members have okayed a nationwide strike, the company's first if it occurs.

Carey's brand of unionism is evident in the UPS talks. The union first surveyed members on what they wanted in the contract. Then Carey sent out regular

contract bulletins through the locals. When he realized that many local leaders weren't distributing the bulletins, he directly contacted all UPS workers to encourage them to demand the information.

Carey is thus not only reforming the union from the top down but encouraging membership involvement in reform from the bottom up. That is necessary because the old guard—some of whom resist Carey's initiatives—still controls much of the intermediate union apparatus, including local unions, joint councils, regional conferences and pension funds. Carey and his slate overwhelmingly control the international union executive board of the 1.4 million-member union.

Yet Carey's aggressive commitment to organizing new members and fighting recalcitrant employers has won over one-time opponents. In Rhode Island, for example, 81 Hasbro employees were locked out last December after refusing the toy company's ultimatum: accept massive

concessions in wages, benefits and hours or the factory will be moved to Mexico.

The union employed traditional tactics such as keeping trucks from crossing the picket line. But the Teamsters also employed a broad-based "corporate campaign," an increasingly common labor strategy that the union had never used before, launching an attack on Hasbro's corporate image. They took out ads featuring Hasbro's popular "Barney the Dinosaur" figure to show how the company was unfair to workers, and sent out leafleters in Barney costumes to toy stores. Hasbro gave up most of its demands and brought the workers back.

"I'm not a 'new Teamster,'" said Jim Boyajian, the longtime president of Local 251 in Providence that includes the Hasbro workers. "I'm an 'old Teamster.' We used to just put 'em out on strike and do it with muscle. Now it's a new concept. It's tremendous. They're going to boardrooms, banks. I didn't vote for Carey, but I'd support him next time."

Carey was elected because the federal government, in negotiating a deal to permit the old leaders to avoid racketeering prosecution, arranged for government-supervised direct election of top officers by the members. The government has removed hundreds of Teamster officials for misdeeds, including links to organized crime. But rank-and-file democracy has proven the most effective weapon against corruption. The election that brought Carey to power—the first time in history that Teamsters voted directly for their international leadership—cleaned out the top ranks of a union whose previous presidents had long been directly picked by the Cosa Nostra. Democracy also is the key to rejuvenating the union and restoring lost members and power.

When Carey took office, he cut top officials' salaries

(including his own) and got rid of perks and expensive trappings, like the union airplanes. He established the union's first ethical practices committees, with representation from members, local officials and international officials. He has put trustees in charge of 15 local unions or joint councils.

The government has continued to play its role through an Independent Review Board (IRB) with three members chosen by the union and the government. Carey has clashed with the IRB and the government-appointed independent administrator, Frederick B. Lacey, over what Carey sees as government interference in the union. Carey also objects to exorbitant legal expenses, such as Lacey's fees of \$385 an hour, that the union must pay. For their part, some government attorneys have questioned Carey's commitment to rooting out criminals.

Much of the controversy surrounds some local unions in which Carey appointed trustees after the government had removed corrupt officials. Carey slipped up early when he named William F. Genoese as trustee of a corrupt New York local, only to have Genoese removed later for having mob ties. Carey concedes it was a mistake, and has since retained an independent firm to check out backgrounds of all appointees. He argues that he's done as well as possible in a relatively short time: he doesn't have the investigative powers of the FBI and federal prosecutors, and he has acted to clean up tainted locals, often going beyond what the IRB recommended.

"I made it clear when I first came into office," Carey said. "The government should do what it's doing, get rid of corruption wherever it is—in the union, corporate America or on Wall Street—but I don't think the government knows how to run a union. Sure we've made some mistakes. Anyone would. Hopefully they'll be minimal and be on the basis of being overenthusiastic about getting rid of the past."

Susan Jennik, executive director of the Association for Union Democracy, an independent labor watchdog group, thinks that both Carey's trusteeships and the union's Ethical Practices Committees have not been particularly effective. "He's doing best where he's trying the most," she said. "He's putting effort into mobilizing members and into politics, contracts, NAFTA—the issues that mean the most to members. Unfortunately, he's not paying as much attention to cleaning up the union. I only wish he'd recognize the need for the government to finish up the job. I don't understand his resistance to continued government involvement."

Carey's prickly relationship with federal overseers in part reflects union suspicion of all intervention by a government that has been so hostile to unions. He wants the union's own ethical practices committee to replace the IRB.

Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), a rank-and-

file reform group whose longtime work laid the foundation for Carey's victory, wants the new president to promote democracy even more vigorously. "Some of our members in New York City want to work on corruption from the bottom, and they need more help from Carey," argues TDU organizer Ken Paff. "The change from the old guard in the Teamsters is a change from night to day, but

he could do more in areas of corruption. The key for Carey is to find ways to empower members to change locals, not to find ways to empower more policemen."

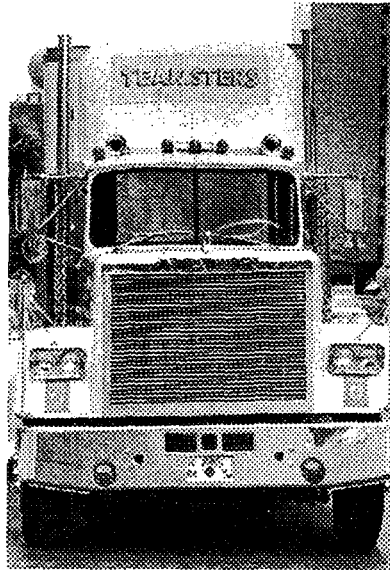
Though Carey still maintains cordial relations with TDU, he avoids taking sides in local elections. Since he was elected, the TDU and its allies have made some small gains (including forging a successful reform slate in Los Angeles with some old guard elements). But there has not been a wholesale revolution at the local level. Some local leaders have tacked with the winds of change and embraced Carey's program (or ironically even decided that the only way to oppose him was to be even more militant).

Despite his shortcomings, Carey has tried to involve members more in their union. He has promoted a set of model bylaws—including a groundbreaking provision that all stewards be elected—that some insurgents have used to reform their locals. In a dispute with Consolidated Freightways, he organized workers to participate in a successful employee-stockholder campaign. And the 500 permanently replaced strikers at Diamond Walnut in California—mainly women and minorities—have taken their call for a boycott across the country and to Europe, and have recently engaged in a hunger strike.

Members are also being recruited to supplement staff for new organizing drives. Although the union—whose ranks have declined by more than one-third since the late '70s—continues to lose members, the Teamsters' major coordinated organizing campaign at Pony Express has been a success, with victories in each of 29 elections held so far.

Carey and other leaders crisscross the country to address local union meetings, attend rallies and shake hands on truck-loading docks. "You never saw a president on the picket line before," says John Morris, the only international vice-president who did not support Carey. "You saw them on golf courses and at country clubs. He's a rank-and-file type guy. Even though I was not on his slate, I think he'll go down as a great president."

The story of Chicago's Local 705 illustrates the strange twists of Teamster reform. In the 1991 election, Daniel Ligurotis, the secretary-treasurer and thus the top officer of the local, was a leader of one of the two slates that opposed Carey. Rather than regard Ligurotis as a permanent enemy, Carey spoke last fall, at the invitation of Ligurotis, to the



local union. He also visited work sites and met with rank-and-file members. It was part of Carey's strategy to focus on union goals, seeking support from anyone—from TDU to Liguoritis—who agreed with his program.

Later, Liguoritis was removed by the IRB for embezzlement of union funds. Carey took the initiative to install a trustee, Ed Burke, Carey's former campaign manager and a veteran of democracy battles in the Mineworkers.

While serving as temporary trustee, Burke discovered that an organizing drive among 500 workers at a K-Mart in nearby Kankakee, Ill., was faltering. He quickly recruited 10 staff members, including two secretaries, and put them through a quick course in organizing. Then—in roughly a week's time—they visited 200 workers at home, a common strategy in other unions but rare in the Teamsters, and turned the tide for victory.

According to Carey's new communications director, veteran labor journalist Matt Witt, corruption in the union "also has to do with the sweetheart [or sell-out] contract, the grievance procedure that doesn't work, elections that aren't fairly run and the even more pervasive way that a union doesn't fight for members, doesn't involve the members. So when you communicate with members and involve them in political action and organizing campaigns, all of that is relevant to overcoming the corruption of spirit that took place in this union."

The gritty day-to-day reality of union business often focuses on handling members' grievances, but the Teamster grievance procedure has traditionally been closed to members or their stewards. In the back rooms, members have long complained, high-ranking Teamster officials have colluded with management, abandoned members' legitimate complaints and persecuted militants that neither the company nor the union liked.

In his first national bargaining, Carey opened up the grievance procedure with auto transport companies and blocked company efforts to shift work to non-union subsidiaries. But two old-guard leaders—who had been found guilty of tolerating mob influence and abusing members—tried to block these grievance reforms. Carey rallied support from workers, then charged the two with colluding with employers and sought to remove them.

At UPS, Carey is fighting not only for a more open grievance procedure but for a precedent-setting reform in corporate rules: any worker accused of breaking company rules would be considered innocent until proven guilty.

The union strike vote was precipitated by a company offer of a wage increase of only 35 cents an hour in each year of a six-year contract (about 2 percent per year), compared to 50 cents an hour in the last contract. But the issues go far beyond money. For the past decade, Teamsters bargainers permitted UPS to expand its part-time employees to about 55 percent of the unionized workforce, while cutting their wages. Full-timers make \$17.70 an hour, but part-timers start at \$8 and earn at most \$9.50. Essentially, the old guard financed decent wages and pensions for the politi-

cally more active full-timers by exploiting relatively transient part-timers. Now UPS wants to cut part-timers' beginning wages further and use non-union subcontractors to provide certain new services.

Carey adamantly opposes such subcontracting, and wants UPS either to expand full-time job opportunities or at least raise part-timers' pay. He also wants to increase pension contributions to permit earlier retirement. The union is also fighting for changes that would reduce worker stress and exposure to exhaust, the kind of workplace issues that members care about deeply but have long been ignored.

This commitment to rank-and-file activity has made the Teamsters a new force on the left in union and Democratic politics. Carey has been a forceful critic of the North American Free Trade Agreement, a proponent of Canadian-style national health insurance and an opponent of any compromise on legislation banning permanent replacement of strikers. Among cynical and overly cautious labor leaders, Carey is a refreshing "radical democrat," in the words of one of his staff, a union president who believes in rank-and-file mobilization. Earlier this year the union delivered 200,000 "Teamstergrams" to the White House backing Carey's legislative program.

Carey's innovations—including a lively new magazine open to controversy—have been greatly helped by a new staff that includes many of the best and most militant labor professionals from other progressive unions. But a number of his moves—such as the appointments of non-Teamsters and the elevation of rank-and-file members to top positions—have angered many veteran Teamster officials.

The union's ability to implement Carey's ambitious strategies is limited by its finances. Carey claims that the old guard was running the union at a deficit, diverting money from the strike fund for general expenses. Also, the combination of new militancy and expanded strike benefits, approved at the last convention, has added to financial pressures. Carey is "absolutely" convinced that there must be a special convention, probably early next year, to approve a dues increase. "That's what the good old boys are waiting for," Carey acknowledged. "That kind of battle I don't mind. These guys created [the problem] and keep trying to walk away from it."

When asked what he's achieved for the union, Carey says "respectability." He continues: "Members now have a general president working for them. I'm involved in all negotiations. Our communications and education are among the best in the country. Am I making any headway? A little bit, not a whole lot."

"Working people are being kicked in the ass, and nobody except the union speaks for working people," he said. "We've got to be the best we can be. We've got to prove to non-union people we can do the job. Democracy, unions, America—it all goes together. It's about working people in this country and a simple equation: nobody will look out for working people except a union that works in their interest and not for the top leadership."

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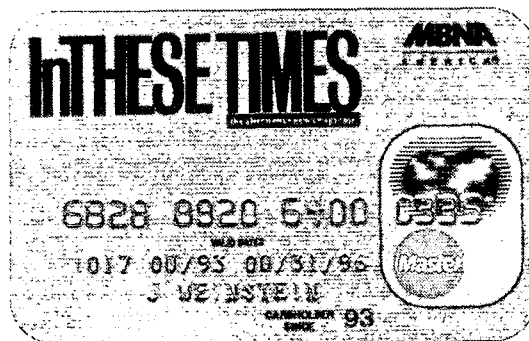
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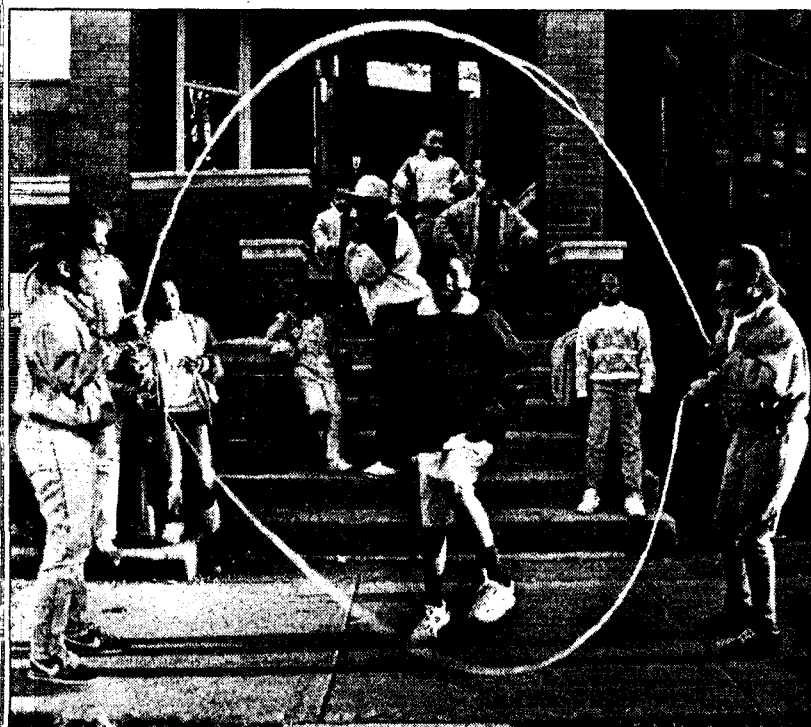
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POLITICS

Grand Old Parting

D

The best thing the Democrats have going for them is a deeply divided Republican Party.

By John B. Judis
WASHINGTON D.C.

Democrats' hopes that the election of Bill Clinton would precipitate a new Democratic majority have already been dashed. Clinton's performance during his first year has more clearly resembled that of Jimmy Carter than of Franklin Roosevelt.

But even saddled with an unpopular president, the Democrats could retain control of statehouses and of Congress. The reason is the quality of the opposition.

Under Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, the Republicans showed fleeting signs of forging a new majority coalition. But by the 1992 vote, the party was hopelessly divided between two camps: the Christian zealots of Pat Robertson and Pat Buchanan on one side, and the patrician Tories of George Bush and William Weld on the other. The only thing uniting these two

groups is the prospect of victory.

Sometimes that's enough. In the first nationally important elections this year—in Texas and Arkansas—Republicans were able to unite against Clinton and the Democrats. But in major elections this fall in Virginia and New Jersey, the GOP's underlying weaknesses have dramatically surfaced.

In Texas' by-election to fill the Senate seat vacated by Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, both wings of the Republican Party united around pro-choice patrician Kay Bailey Hutchison. A stilted politician plagued by charges of corruption, Hutchison nevertheless rode pervasive anti-Clinton sentiment to the most lopsided Republican victory ever in a Texas race. She won 67 percent of the total vote and 82 percent of the white vote against appointed incumbent Bob Krueger.

The GOP posted a similar victory in the Arkansas special election in July to fill the lieutenant governor's post vacated when Jim Guy Tucker moved up to replace Clinton as governor. Arch-conservative Mike Huckabee, a broadcasting executive without any

political experience, became only the fourth Republican since Reconstruction to win state office. Huckabee, running against tax increases in Arkansas and Washington, defeated Clinton protégé Nate Coulter by 51 to 49 percent.

But Virginia and New Jersey look like a different story. In Virginia, Republicans had a good chance this year to regain the statehouse they lost in 1981. Sen. Chuck Robb and Gov. Doug Wilder, who led the Democrats' statewide resurgence in the '80s, have become locked in a bitter feud, splitting the party. Wilder is stepping down, because by law Virginia governors can only serve one term. But his growing unpopularity—as well as Clinton's—has clouded the chances of the Democratic gubernatorial nominee, Attorney General Mary Sue Terry.

Virginia Republicans have been divided themselves, however. The Christian conservatives of Robertson and Jerry Falwell are increasingly at odds with the upper-middle-class moderates who live in the suburbs that stretch from Washington, D.C., to Norfolk. In 1989, moderate Republican Marshall Coleman tried to square the circle by running as a conservative against Wilder. But Coleman's flip-flops ended up alienating both sides of the Virginia GOP.

This July, the Christian right showed its muscle at the state convention, when the party chose its nominees. Of the 13,100 delegates to the convention, 1,000 were members of Robertson's Christian Coalition. Nearly 5,000 were supporters of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a Christian right organization that favors home schooling as an alternative to the public schools.

The delegates chose former Rep. George Allen as the gubernatorial candidate over a suburban businessman. They