

Cracks in Teamster empire

By Dan Marschall

Ever since the McClellan Committee hearings of the late 1950s and the later jailing of Jimmy Hoffa for jury tampering, pressure for change in the 2.2 million-member International Brotherhood of Teamsters has come primarily from forces external to the union, especially from governmental agencies, the mass media and the AFL-CIO. The typical truck-driver-on-the-street didn't particularly mind that union representatives were ripping off millions, so said the conventional wisdom, as long as he got his cut in the form of hefty wage hikes.

In recent years, however, a variety of factors have generated growing dissatisfaction among Teamster members and notably reduced the ability of the union bureaucracy to gobble up and digest potential opponents. Now rank and file Teamsters, who have battled internally for years to democratize the union's totalitarian power structure, may be on the threshold of making significant inroads into its administrative guts.

Dissident candidates for local union elections this December have been nominated in a half-dozen cities and are given serious chances of victory in some.

Campaign in Detroit.

In Detroit, the home turf of Hoffa and current Teamster president Frank Fitzsimmons, Pete Camarata, a national leader of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, is running for vice president of Local 299, one of the biggest and most influential in the union. He recently galvanized rank and file support in a successful effort to defeat a move by the international to expel him. (ITT, April 13)

His campaign coincides with the second national convention of the TDU to be held in Cleveland September 24-25. The organization, which has mushroomed to 2,000 dues-paying members in the last year, will discuss, among other topics, a national campaign to win the right to vote directly for top union officers, now chosen at union conventions every five years.

Bob Janadia, another Detroit TDU member who has been a Teamster for 25 years, will run for president of 14,000-member Local 337 against Robert Holmes, one of the union's pension fund trustees who was forced to resign earlier this year. He and other members of a reform slate have a solid chance to win, observers say, since they garnered about 43 percent of the vote when they challenged Holmes three years ago.

In St. Louis Mark Albrecht, an articulate young reformer who supplements his truck driving by teaching at a university labor studies center, is running for president of Local 600, the largest in the city. He also has a good shot at victory, local observers contend, since he appears popular with local members and the incumbent has failed to win the unreserved support of the international.

In Omaha an active member of the Professional Drivers Council (PROD), another reform group, declared his candidacy last June for president of Local 554. Though not running specifically as a PROD candidate, Tom McGrath, a long-haul driver and former Teamster organizer, is campaigning against union corruption, sweetheart contracts and other complaints popularized by both PROD and TDU.

The list goes on, and stretches from coast to coast. Reformers will run for assorted offices in New Jersey; Cincinnati, Ohio; Cape Girardeau, Missouri; Baltimore, Maryland; Oakland, California; Hagerstown, Maryland; and several other cities.

New phase in fight.

While the politics and campaign approaches of these candidates vary widely—few are committed to the comprehensive reform program of TDU—the fact that they can mount serious election campaigns in this highly-centralized



Teamster insurgent Pete Camarata (left) is challenging Teamster president Frank Fitzsimmons' (right) authority in Detroit.

The fact that Teamster insurgents can mount serious election campaigns in this centralized union signifies a new phase in the fight for a democratic union.

union signifies a new phase in the fight to "return the union to the members."

"A lot of people are no longer taking the view that 'I don't care how much they steal as long as I get mine' because they see that they're not going to get theirs," comments Steve Earley, PROD staff attorney. "The pension fund corruption has gotten so bad and the lack of internal democracy so great that they're undeniably being screwed. It seems that more people are willing to be active and open in their opposition to the union bureaucracy at all levels."

The Teamster reform movement, which has so far entailed efforts to reform local by-laws and defend individual workers' rights, now has the legitimacy and influence to combine these activities with contests to crack the union's entrenched, 20,000-strong bureaucracy.

Insurgents point out that the movement in the Teamsters, while still facing tremendous odds, is actually more developed than reform efforts in other unions. The top-heavy structure of the union, along with the absence of a Jock Yablonski or an Ed Sadlowski figure (charismatic reform leaders in the United Mine Workers and the Steelworkers) has impelled activists to adopt a long-term, grass-roots approach to transforming the union.

Unlike either the Miners For Democracy or Steelworkers Fight Back, which were primarily vehicles for national election campaigns, neither PROD nor TDU are mainly dependent on outside fi-

ancing. Their budgets are provided by membership contributions.

Victories already.

Part of the inspiration for the dissident campaigns comes from two key local election triumphs in the U.S. and Canada. In June an insurgent slate of Teamsters, running under a reform banner toppled the leadership of Washington, D.C. Local 639, with 7,000 members the largest in the area.

Headed by a 41-year-old black man, Daniel George, the slate included a prominent PROD member, John Catlett, in the secretary-treasurer slot.

Catlett had earlier filed charges, with two other Teamsters, to have Fitzsimmons removed as international president. (ITT, May 24 and July 6)

In January a TDU activist, Jack Vlahovic, won the presidency of Local 213, the largest in Canada and the home of union vice-president Ed Lawson, that country's most powerful Teamster officer.

Located in British Columbia, this construction local is particularly important because it encompasses the workers who will build the newly-approved natural gas pipeline from Alaska.

Lawson and his associates have filed charges against Vlahovic to invalidate the election.

"The rebel forces there, who represent the members, have won everything that Lawson has tried to hit them with. He's tried to divide the local and bring

charges against them and censor their newspaper. But he's only losing more support—just like Fitzsimmons lost support in Detroit when he tried to throw out Camarata," says Ken Paff, TDU national secretary.

Hoffa disappearance helped.

Ironically, the 1975 disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa, at a time when he was trying to rebuild his base of support within the union after being released from prison by President Nixon, also fueled reform efforts by shifting the burden of activism squarely onto the backs of rank and filers.

Various pockets of resistance existed before the kidnapping, one commentator pointed out, "but much disillusionment was channeled into fantasies about Hoffa" regaining power. While removing an immediate threat to Fitzsimmons, the assassins also eliminated the one person who could have successfully "managed" the union's rising discontent.

"The Hoffa case gave publicity to the corruption in the union," adds Bob Janadia. "Hoffa put the noose around our necks and Fitzsimmons has tightened it."

The inquiry into Hoffa's disappearance has now collapsed, after the Federal Bureau of Investigation spent \$1 million following leads. Observers speculate that he was killed by organized crime figures when he threatened to reveal their ties with the union.

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ORGANIZATIONS

Unity and diversity in Women's Caucus

By Claire Greensfelder

SAN JOSE, CAL.—Opposition to right wing attacks upon abortion and the ERA was the rallying point for moderate and left of center feminists at the Third Biennial convention of the National Women's Political Caucus here Sept. 9-11.

Entitled "Women, Power and Politics," the convention drew over 1500 delegates, alternates and observers for three days of workshops, speeches, resolutions and the election of new officers for the six year old organization.

The delegates, representing 35,000 mostly middle class Democratic and Republican women, were unanimous in their support for the ERA and Medicaid paid abortions.

There was also much discussion of the International Women's Year conference to be held in Houston in November, including strategy sessions on how to prevent expected right-wing political sabotage by the John Birch Society, American Nazi Party, Mormon church and other conservative forces.

The Caucus has an unusual diversity in its ranks; there is no comparable organization in the male political establishment. This diversity was reflected in the speakers: from Mary Louise Smith, ex-chair of the Republican National Committee to Willa Mae Reed (not a Caucus member), 1976 candidate for Vice President on the Socialist Worker's Party ticket; from Jill Ruckelshaus, a Republican activist, to Liz Carpenter, one-time press secretary for Lady Bird Johnson and currently co-chair of ERA-America.

The Caucus is about 60 percent Democratic, 25 percent Republican and 15 percent Independent. It has active black, Chicana and lesbian caucuses. A new labor caucus was formed at the convention, as well as an older women's caucus and a legal support group composed of members who are attorneys and judges.

Political aim of movement.

Unlike the convention of the National Organization for Women earlier this year, other political parties such as the SWP were not actively present. Willa Mae Reed told *In These Times*: "We [the SWP] do not see the NWPC as a next step in the development of the women's movement. The most attractive organization for activist women is NOW."

NOW, which is a larger organization with 55,000 members, "addresses issues and does consciousness raising," Iris Mitgang vice-chair-elect said. "NWPC is a political organization. We're considered the political arm of the women's movement. We see our task as affecting the system by electing women to public office because the men aren't doing it for us." Although many of the members of the Caucus are also members of NOW (including Mitgang), no attempt has been made to coordinate the two memberships.

The topics presented in workshop sessions underlined the determination of the caucus to place more women into elected and appointed political offices. Election targeting, direct voter contact, basic and advanced campaign strategy, fundraising at the grassroots level were just a few of the 36 workshops offered. Discussion was steered away from generalities as the moderators of the sessions focused on the specifics of election techniques.

Differences in party loyalties were kept distinctly low-key, as the group applauded speech after speech attacking Carter's stand on abortion and urging the passage of the ERA. Frances "Sissy" Farenthold, president of Wells College, brought the delegates to their feet for a three minute standing ovation

National Women's Political Caucus members see themselves as the "political arm of the women's movement," and set as their task the election of women to office. They include Democrats, Republicans and Independents.

Gloria Steinem told the gathering that "The system is so radically wrong that when we demand simple justice like the ERA, it makes us come off as radicals."

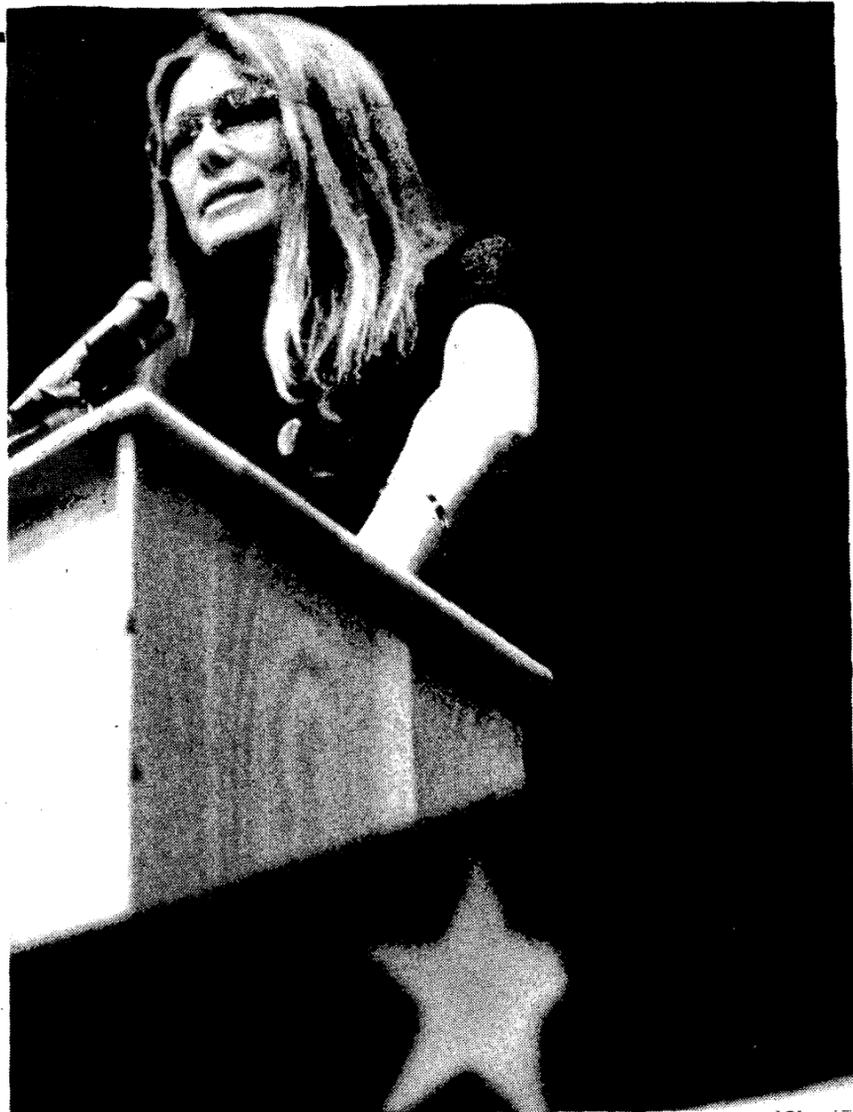
when she declared, "The right to an abortion has become a class issue, a race issue, a privacy issue and even a consumer issue, but above all it is *our* issue."

In an action resolution (one that had a financial impact on the organization) around the ERA, the caucus voted to "commit the maximum available resources of the NWPC to that effort."

Controversy over racism.

While resolutions on abortion, the ERA, displaced homemakers, comprehensive childcare, civil rights and campaign finance reform generally passed easily, emphasizing the mood of unity and agreement that ran throughout the proceedings, the convention was not without discord.

Racism and minority participation in



Claire Greensfelder

the Caucus were the issues that sparked the most controversy.

C. DeLores Tucker, black Secretary of State of Pennsylvania, said in her address to the group: "Black women have their own priorities, and most of them still consider racism a greater barrier than sexism. They see white women as interested in only white women's issues and particularly in white middle class women's issues."

There were also heated debates around by-laws revisions proposed by California's Alameda County caucus. The delegation presented a change that would eliminate the requirement that three of the five national vice-chairs be members of minority groups. Other delegates responded angrily to this move as they felt that the Caucus had not been doing enough to recruit minority mem-

bers, and that this would only hinder any progress that was being made. The proposal was blocked by the San Francisco delegation before it had a chance to come to a vote.

The convention was not all plenary sessions and debate. On Friday night there was a concert with feminist musicians Holly Near, Meg Christian, Mary Watkins and Malvina Reynolds. For many of the women present, this was their first contact with a woman-produced feminist concert.

Yet the general theme was network building and the social time was no exception. Women took advantage of receptions, lunch and dinner breaks, and free time to meet delegates from other states and establish contacts for future work.

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EDUCATION

Milwaukee aroused over busing

Plagued by calls for "neighborhood schools" from both white opponents of any desegregation and blacks upset that very few white students have been bused to schools out of their neighborhoods, the Milwaukee, Wisc., school year got off to a troubled start.

Last year, the first in a three-year, court-supervised effort to end segregation of the 103,000-student system, desegregation efforts were relatively successful and peaceful. Employing a variety of voluntary methods, the school system managed to meet Federal Judge John Reynolds' guidelines for the year.

"This community has gone through an enormous transition without a ripple," Special Master John Grounouski, the court-appointed overseer of the desegregation plan, said last summer. "I think the desegregation plan will go down in history as the model of human relations for the nation, not just human relations, but desegregation and quality education as well."

However, despite reassurances from the school board to the black community that blacks would not bear the brunt of busing in the second year—as they had in the first—figures released in August showed that 87.6 percent of the 14,500 students to be bused would be blacks. The number of black students to be "voluntarily" bused had been artificially increased by a school board de-

cision to close neighborhood schools. Students from those schools got to choose their new schools, hence the "voluntary" aspect of the choice.

"Blacks for Two-Way Integration" was formed in protest. Their survey showed strong sentiment among black parents for sending children to neighborhood schools. White opponents of busing, led by the Concerned Citizens for Freedom and Justice, strongly backed the new resistance to busing among some blacks.

The situation was further confused by court and school board decisions just before school opened on September 6. The Milwaukee school desegregation order had been appealed to the Supreme Court, which referred the decision back to the Circuit Court of Appeals to judge whether the city had acted intentionally in its original segregation. Two days before school opened, the case was returned to Judge Reynolds in Milwaukee by the Appellate Court, encouraging anti-busing parents to hope there would be a reversal of the desegregation order.

Then, the evening of the first day back to school, the school board—with an anti-busing white majority—voted in favor of a resolution that would allow students to transfer back to neighborhood schools if there was sufficient space. Administrators were left in a muddle. In protest, confusion or whatever else,

many students stayed out of school in the first week.

On September 8 the Appeals Court amended its earlier order to state that Judge Reynolds' desegregation plan was still in effect, overriding the school board position on neighborhood schools.

The future of the desegregation plan now is in doubt. Nearly everyone agrees that voluntary means alone will not be sufficient to meet the original goal of 102 desegregated schools—73 schools have now met the court guidelines. On the other hand, if Judge Reynolds does not satisfy the Appeals Court that his desegregation order meets Supreme Court criteria, the desegregation process will probably be stalled where it is.

Blacks and whites who have worked hard for desegregation and busing are distressed that the once promising plan is now threatened, even if they also empathize with the black criticism of largely one-way busing.

And, in another grace note to the complicated desegregation fugue, Native Americans have complained that they are being bused as "non-whites" in order to meet desegregation guidelines, and that busing disperses Indians who have recently managed to win special programs in schools where they have been concentrated.

This article was based on information supplied by Ian Harris.