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Also includes

Marxism and the Capitalist State

Squeals from Carey's Left Chorus

Revolutionary Strategy to Defend the Unions Government Out of the Teamsters!

by Evelyn Kaye

The federal government has made clear that it is the decisive power in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the largest union in the AFL-CIO. In November, after government authorities had decided to re-run the 1996 election for the IBT presidency, court-appointed monitor Kenneth Conboy tossed union president Ron Carey out of the contest. Carey is the immediate victim, but the ranks of labor will inevitably feel the boot of the state's intervention.

Carey is widely portrayed as the honest reformer who led the battle to cleanse the notoriously corrupt union of its mob ties. He is charged with diverting \$650,000 in union funds into his 1996 election campaign — mainly via an elaborate scheme implemented by his hired campaign consultants in cahoots with Citizen Action and other liberal reform outfits associated with the Democratic Party. Carey's "old guard" opponent is Jimmy Hoffa Jr., whose biggest achievement is that he is the son and namesake of Jimmy Hoffa Sr. who led the IBT when it was dominated by mobsters. Hoffa may also be knocked out of the race for violations of finance rules.

Despite his reputation, Carey surrendered control of the IBT to the feds without a fight. This should make any union loyalist, let alone a socialist, react with anger and scorn. Yet Carey's collaboration is accepted by many militants and even the phony revolutionaries who make up Carey's left chorus..

AN ATTACK ON THE WORKING CLASS

The state's latest foray into the Teamsters opens the door for an even wider intervention. All the major union leaders associated with AFL-CIO President John Sweeney's "New Voice" team are under investigation in connection with the Teamster money laundering charges. There is no way to determine yet how many heads will wind up on the federal chopping block or how deep this immediate attack will penetrate into the house of labor.

The federal intrusion is an attack on the whole working class, not just a question of nailing a few labor bureaucrats. The IBT's successful United Parcel Service strike last summer was an instigating factor. *Business Week* magazine

pointed to the problem from the capitalist point of view:

For the first time in nearly two decades, the public sided with a union, even though its walkout caused major inconveniences. Polls showed the public supported the 185,000 striking UPS workers by a 2-to-1 margin over management. The message: After a six-year economic expansion that has created record corporate profits and vast wealth for investors, Americans are questioning why so many of their countrymen aren't getting a bigger piece of the pie.

The left has described the government hit on Carey as payback for a major working-class victory, but the truth is more complex. As we pointed out in *PR 55*, the UPS strike was a victory, although Carey and Co. settled for very little. Still, for the first time in nearly two decades, a union won something and even showed some evidence of sustained militancy, enough to awaken class-wide support.

Through its steadfast containment of militant mass action over the years, the labor bureaucracy has reinforced a widespread sense of powerlessness in the working class. But the bosses are acutely sensitive to any stirring. They know that keeping their profits up rests on deepening their wholesale attack on working-class living standards. They fear that even a small victory, even one led by a collaborator like Carey, could waken the sleeping giant.

Contrary to the left hype, the UPS strike and the government response do not show that the bosses feared Carey, the big militant. In fact, they nailed him precisely because they knew they could get away with it. Election Officer Barbara Zack Quindel, a liberal Clinton appointee, stated that she reached her decision to re-run the election during the UPS strike — but kept it quiet because she didn't want to interfere with the strike. Sure. In reality, when the workers were mobilized, the government held back; when Carey was alone, it attacked, knowing from his record that he would not rally the ranks to defend the union.

Clinton was already under pressure from right-wing Republicans to cripple Carey and his allies. Some wanted to destroy the union, others wanted simply to install Hoffa. The AFL-CIO tops' support for Dick Gephardt's quest for the

Democratic presidential nomination — in opposition to Clinton's designated heir, Al Gore — also helped convince Slick Willie to OK dumping on Carey. As well, the financial manipulations charged to Carey and Co. are associated with the Democrats' other campaign funding scandals.

The last straw was the effort by Sweeney, Trumka, Carey et al against Clinton's "fast track" legislation. The capitalist establishment viewed fast track as a major weapon in its intra-imperialist competition and its ability to exploit workers across the globe. If the UPS strike agitated the ruling class, their defeat on fast track infuriated them. Clinton himself was humiliated. Although they relied on lobbying and avoided mass mobilizations of workers, the New Voice leaders' role was an unpleasant signal to the capitalists. Beneath even the weakest acts of a shrunken working class institution like the AFL-CIO, there is an enormous mass threat.

Thus the government's anti-Carey ruling was no conspiracy; it resulted simply from a class fear communicated via thousands of nerve cells to the bourgeoisie's office-holders. Labor has to be shown who's boss.

THE MASTER FREIGHT AGREEMENT

The decapitation of the IBT has obviously had some demoralizing impact. The government intervention not only removed Carey but exacerbates the ongoing rivalry between reform and old guard blocs in this severely divided union. Thus we can say that the UPS spark has not gone out, but it has not yet ignited an explosion within the Teamsters or other unions.

An early settlement in the Master Freight Agreement, which covers all Teamsters in the trucking sector, was announced as we go to press, a few days before solidarity rallies were to occur in various cities. It came without the fanfare that accompanied the UPS struggle and settlement.

Full details are not yet available, and the membership is yet to be heard. Thus the full political impact of the deal can not yet be judged. Yet to this writer the available information suggests that this contract, while far from a smashing defeat, hardly lives up to even the UPS standard.

According to the *Wall Street Journal* (Feb. 10), the union settled for a \$750 bonus instead of a raise in the first year, while raises thereafter would be 35 cents per hour in each of four years. It is estimated that the wage-and-benefits increase comes to 2.5 percent a year, compared to about 3.7 percent for the UPS contract. Probably most important is that while pensions are improved, the unions's priority issue, job security, is not seriously addressed. According to *Newsday* (Feb. 10), the contract "requires the companies to first offer jobs to Teamsters laid off by any firm covered by the national agreement before hiring 'from the street.'" Thus the acceptance of layoffs, which has marked trucker contracts in the past two decades, continues.

The contract also makes no headway in restricting the use of non-union firms and offers only small change for poorly-paid casual workers. The union's press release of February 9 claimed "new protections against the use of non-union trucking subcontractors when freight is railed"; but the *Newsday* report said the contract only "limits the use of rail to the current 28 percent of freight mileage." And, in contrast to the Teamster statement, the *WSJ* reports that "the trucking firms also got some increased flexibility to use railroads to move freight." The *WSJ* sums up, "For the



companies, the settlement promises to continue a recent renaissance." Nevertheless, despite the recent upturn in freight profits, this is a shaky industry where real protection against layoffs is sorely needed.

We expect that this contract will be understood by most workers as a bearable offer under the circumstances but not an inspiration for further struggle. Of course, union publicists already say otherwise. They claim that the lack of a hard line by the trucking bosses, based on their fear of a strike because of the consequent loss of business to non-union firms, made the "victory" winnable without a strike. However, if the bosses were so afraid of a strike, why couldn't more be won? In part the answer is that "victory" without a strike was also the line of the "reform" wing of the bureaucracy, which promoted the notion of "reasonable," i.e. curtailed, demands all along, before and after Carey departed.

Thus the apparent absence of more serious givebacks can be attributed to the luck of specific circumstance rather than a fighting strategy that other union and non-union workers can look to adopt. In this regard, note that this contract was negotiated by a possible Carey successor and member of the 1996 Carey slate, Richard Nelson, an international Vice President and the head of the Freight Division. In fact, fear of a strike and consequent layoffs among Teamster truckers was utilized by the leadership to avoid serious preparatory mobilization for a struggle that could have been won more meaningful gains. This fear was in no small part due to lack of confidence in the Carey leadership, which had led the '94 strike to an unsatisfactory settlement.

Even though the Teamsters and the unions as a whole are no longer the symbol of power they once were, the work-

ing class still has the ability to shut the bosses' economy down! This power was hardly used by the bureaucrats, neither by Carey, Nelson or any other, in the run-up to the contract. Once again we see that what invites the attacks against labor is not that the unions are inherently weak; it is the proven weakness of the union misleaders. The bureaucrats accept the capitalist system and its voracious quest for profits and therefore fear to awaken the power of the working class, lest it get out of hand.

PROFILES IN COURAGE?

The IBT leadership's failure to pose a militant fight in trucking was no surprise, in the light of Carey's last acts.

Instead of issuing a call to arms in reply to the charges against him, Carey not only reaffirmed the state's right to control the union's votes but approved the government's appointment of an "independent" auditor to run the union's financial affairs. The next day he deserted the presidency, taking a sudden leave of absence. He made no attempt to rally those forces in the IBT and beyond who had shown their willingness to fight back.

Sweeney's stance has been equally heroic. He backed the right of labor leaders to plead the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination. He commented in *Business Week* (Dec. 1) that the scandal "certainly distracts from the momentum we got from the fast-track victory. We don't want this prolonged any longer than it has to be."

The same article also noted:

[Gerald] McEntee, president of the public employees union and a big Sweeney supporter, is cooperating with prosecutors. His indictment would be a big setback for Sweeney. Worse yet would be an indictment of Trumka, Sweeney's No. 2. [Judge] Conboy said Trumka may have helped Carey by authorizing a \$150,000 contribution to a liberal group. The Teamsters then donated that amount to the AFL-CIO, and Carey's campaign received some money back from the group. Trumka's lawyer denies he did anything wrong. But for weeks, AFL-CIO officials have quietly debated whether to pressure him to resign if he's indicted.

Carey's cowardly move, the ongoing "cooperation" of AFSCME president McEntee and other bureaucrats with the investigation, plus Trumka's taking the Fifth, all show that the "New Voice" is the same old whine in a new cask. The millions of dollars and votes they gave to Clinton and the Democrats won't help them. Once again, events have proven that the bankruptcy of leadership is the essential problem facing the working class.

Carey's lickspittle reaction to Washington's ban is particularly indecent given that the IBT is the union directly under attack. Decades ago, Robert Kennedy, who spearheaded Washington's attack on the union in the days of the Hoffa Sr., pointed out in his book *The Enemy Within*:

The Teamsters Union is the most powerful institution in this country — aside from the United States government itself. In many major metropolitan areas the Teamsters control all transportation. . . . They control the pickup and deliveries of milk, frozen meat, fresh fruit, department store merchandise, newspapers, railroad express, air freight, and of cargo to and from the sea docks. Quite literally your life — the life of every person in the United States is in the hand of Hoffa and his Teamsters As Mr. Hoffa operates it, this is a conspiracy of evil. Hoffa has too much power for one man.

The evil that so frightened Kennedy was not Hoffa's

longstanding ties to the mob but that the union had won a Master Freight Agreement which made real the threat of a national strike. At the time this would have tied up the country exactly as Bobby Kennedy laid out. Of course, Hoffa used his bureaucratic power to see that such a strike never occurred. But the mere possibility terrified the bourgeoisie.

The MFA no longer thoroughly dominates the trucking industry, large sections of which are now non-union. Nevertheless, the strategy of a militant strike by truckers, with the goal of spearheading a larger class action, could have had a powerful impact. A fight for demands that speak to the interests, not only of the affected Teamsters but of non-union truckers and all workers, union and non-union alike, could have brought out the entire working class in a general strike. Then Kennedy's nightmare would have become a reality.

THE TDU AND "RANK AND FILISM"

The success of the latest government attack was assured by the bureaucracy's complicity. But the long-term opposition group, the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), whose supporters have claimed to control about 40 percent of Teamster locals, has also favored government intervention into the union — as means of gaining democracy! For example, TDU saluted government supervision of Teamster elections in 1991 and again in 1995. According to its paper *Convoy Dispatch* (January 1996):

This was the most democratic election in the history of our union. It was conducted by mail ballot voting. The ballots were safe with layers of security. The whole process was supervised by the staff of the Court-appointed Election Officer who slapped both sides several times during the election with protest decisions.

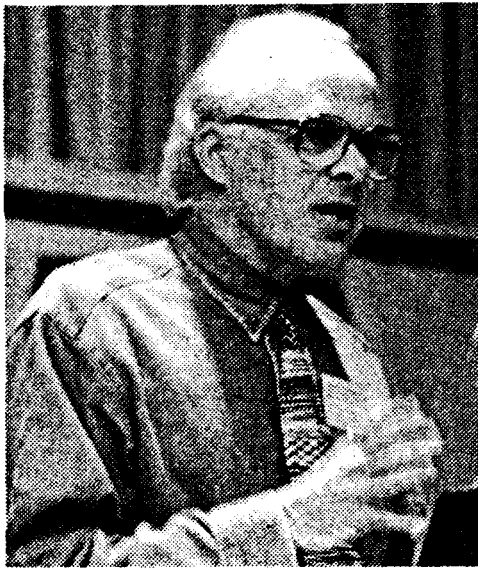
In the years before the old guard was forced to sign a consent decree giving the government broad sweeping powers over Teamster elections and other matters, the TDU was already taking the union to court and calling for state intervention as a matter of course. TDU also accepted the consent decree. (See "Teamster Rank and Filism: A Bogus Victory," in *PR* 41.)

A new Solidarity pamphlet, written by one of TDU's co-founders, Dan LaBotz, brags:

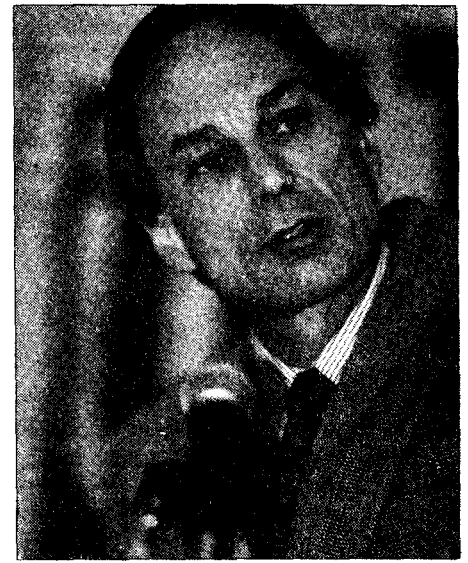
TDU's first major victory in protecting Teamster rights to democratic procedures in bargaining occurred in 1984. General President Presser and UPS secretly bargained a contract and printed ratification ballots. TDU found out and blocked this illegal contract in federal court. In 1987 TDU won the right to an informed contract vote. A federal judge ordered the International to turn over to TDU the tentative agreement so that TDU could inform members of its contracts. . . . In 1988, in separate legal actions, TDU and Ron Carey challenged the two-thirds rule in federal courts. . . . In 1989 TDU successfully fought to include the members' Right to Vote as part of the Consent Decree settling the government's racketeering suit against the International. (*The Future of the "New Labor Movement."*)

How does control by the bosses' government jibe with workers' democracy? This might seem too obvious a question. The TDU's answer is to deny that they rely on the state intervention — at the same time that they insist on bringing it about! In fact, it is leftists who have labored to produce rationalizations for this practice. LaBotz commented in his previous book, *Rank-and-File Rebellion*:

Obviously there are dangers in government involvement in unions, as TDU's leaders are among the first to acknow-



Kim Moody and Ken Paff: court socialists for not-so-left bureaucrats.



ledge For almost fifty years the Democrats and the Republicans have attempted to subordinate the Teamster union to their political agenda and have largely succeeded in doing so

However, he then goes on to cite approvingly the pro-government views of TDU National Organizer and Solidarity supporter Ken Paff:

Until the union is fully democratic and the rights of individual members are completely respected, says Ken Paff, TDU will find it necessary to continue to seek government intervention. "We don't rely on the government or the law. We use the government and the laws, and we rely on the rank and file." The RICO suit has clearly demonstrated that the government is not monolithic and that Teamster reformers can win significant reforms by taking advantage of the openings that present themselves.

(RICO refers to the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act, which was used to force the old guard to agree to the consent decree or face jail time.)

Paff thinks he and the TDU used the government. Now that the state has decided who the real boss is in the IBT, we ask LaBotz and Paff: who's using whom?

Even after Carey was knocked out, Paff called for continued government intervention:

Let's hope that they do the same kind of investigation, from congressional committees to the FBI on Hoffa that has been done on Carey. (*The Militant*, Dec. 8.)

Because of TDU's ties to the bourgeois state, we have argued that the TDU should not be built by militants, much less by revolutionary workers. Its reformist program can only cripple union democracy and undermine the class struggle strategy that our class needs.

THE LEFT AND THE TDU

The far left is small in numbers but has played a decisive role in building "rank and file caucuses" in a variety of key unions. The support provided by these groupings proved indispensable for important elements of the bureaucracy: without the TDU, for example, Carey could not have won the IBT leadership in the first place. Through this alliance they have helped dampen any possibility for united mass action that goes beyond what Carey & Co. would favor. In particular, they reject fighting for a general strike against the capitalist attacks as beyond the "practical."

Although pseudo-Trotskyist organizations in particular have always played an important role within the TDU, the situation is veiled because the groups believe in concealing their purportedly revolutionary beliefs from their co-workers. Instead they present themselves as ardent reform unionists. This behavior derives, not mainly from the need to protect themselves from a repressive labor bureaucracy or government, but rather from the assumption that socialism isn't relevant to other workers in the here and now — it's just a noble ideal for some day in the future. And since reforming the trade unions is the task for today, revolutionary conceptions can be submerged in day-to-day union work.

Nevertheless, the left outfits do attract workers who are looking for an alternative to the bureaucracy. We in the LRP address our propaganda today to revolutionary minded workers, including the cadres drawn to these organizations, in an effort to convince them that a decisive break with their present strategy is necessary.

A split within the former International Socialists took place in 1977 over the question of whether socialists should continue to adhere to rank and fileism. The alternative was to ally with bureaucrats who put forward positions similar to those of the rank and file groups. Those who formed the International Socialist Organization (ISO) argued for adherence to the old rank and fileism, while those who remained in the I.S. and later formed the Solidarity organization argued for the shift toward the more militant-sounding wing of the bureaucracy.

As we pointed out at the time (in *Socialist Voice* No. 5), "rank and file" groups having basically similar programs as more established union figures would inevitably be drawn into their wake whether they liked it or not. And so it happened with Solidarity and Carey.

Today, Solidarity supporters are involved in *Labor Notes* magazine, which serves as the overall voice for varied rank and file groups. Solidarity is also the main far left group inside the TDU. However, many others on the left have done their bit to rally workers to support the TDU. Some issue occasional criticisms of Carey along with their overall support, in order to avoid total subservience. Others are Carey press agents pure and simple. (See p. 28.)

Whatever excuses they've made in the past, the left Careyites' refusal to repudiate state intervention *now* is even more stunning, since the inevitable consequence has already

occurred. So is their reticence to deal with his ties to the capitalist Democrats.

It matters little that a few voices in the left of the TDU try to hold on to some vestige of revolutionary claims by citing the traditional Marxist understanding of the capitalist state in their analytical journals and internal meetings. They nevertheless refuse to break with the TDU, which has been wedded to state intervention and the pro-capitalist bureaucracy for years.

THE TDU AND CAREY

The TDU itself would be wholly hypocritical if it took up the cause of opposing government intervention against Carey — because it continues to cry *for* intervention against Hoffa. But fear of hypocrisy is not the reason the TDU didn't raise a call for mass mobilization to defend Carey. TDU has tied itself to the tails of "progressive" bureaucrats like Carey, and such a challenge would lead to a political rupture. If the TDU posed a real fight over the right of the state to intervene — not just a legal challenge over Carey's guilt or innocence — it would mean a confrontation with Carey, who has made it clear he wants no such fight. It would mean that TDU would have to reverse its own past policies. And it would mean a delay in the "practical" work of rallying workers behind the next reformist candidate.

No surprise then that Carey was applauded vociferously at the TDU convention in November — even though he made clear that he was relying on the courts and didn't favor any mass action in his defense. As he told TDU, "the outcome of my appeal will be in the hands of judges and lawyers, and no one in this room can predict what will happen." (*Socialist Action*, December 1997.)

Diane Feeley of Solidarity disparaged leftists who circulated a petition around the convention floor asking Carey to lead a fightback. As Feeley put it in *International Viewpoint* (via internet, Dec. 16):

In a sense Carey freed TDU when he stated that his fate is in the hands of judges, while the future was up to them. ... The convention passed two resolutions. One, in solidarity with Carey and in support of the direction in which he led the union over the past six years. Two, in the event that Carey steps aside as the candidate, the convention directs the TDU leadership to work with other reformers to support another reformer. ...

At the convention some leftists proposed organizing a defense committee for Carey and picketing in front of the courthouse. They pointed to the right-wing attacks against Carey as proof of a ruling-class offensive and called for opposition to "government intervention" in the union, ignoring the reality that there would have been no election of top officers in that case.

But the leftists who wanted Carey to lead a fightback didn't force a challenge in any serious way. And Feeley gives them too much credit, since they didn't actually demand a rejection of the policy of support for government intervention altogether. Rather the petition stated:

Our rights as Teamster members are what are really under attack by the government's decision to void the election and to rule you off the ballot. We call on you, Brother Carey, as our General President, to continue to lead us in defending our rights as Teamster members to nominate and elect the leaders of our choice. This petition is to let you know that we are ready to join with you in a fight to overturn the government's unjust decision.

No thought of uniting with Hoffa supporters, even though *their* rights as Teamsters are also under government attack! And a continuing cover-up of Carey, who cannot "continue" to lead a fight that he has never led. The near-complete kowtowing to Carey at the TDU convention revealed the sham in TDU's claim to rely on the ranks.

THE REAL CAREY

The TDU has in fact been covering for Carey for years, including supporting his anti-democratic measures under the guise of democracy. In addition to backing the consent decree and government control of Teamster elections, TDU defended Carey's imposition of over 70 trusteeships, many under recommendation of the government's Internal Review Board (IRB) set up by the consent decree — under the excuse that the trusteeships would be way-stations to democracy. But instead of raising workers' consciousness, sense of power and ability to control their own destiny, trusteeships do the opposite, and should be opposed.

A number of Carey's takeovers have been exposed as anti-democratic frauds through and through. For the real



Detroit campaign rally for Carey. Sellout of newspaper strike was covered up by his supporters.

flavor of Carey's moves, it is worth quoting from a recent article in a New York paper by labor analyst Bob Fitch:

In the last election, of the five Teamster regions, the East and the Midwest provided over 300,000 of the 460,000 votes. The old guard Hoffa forces controlled the Midwest. Carey needed the Eastern old guard as an electoral counterweight. Above all, he had to win over the forces in Joint Council 16, in New York and New Jersey — the union's largest and perhaps most corrupt council, which had backed his 1991 opponent, Walter Shea. Former Shea supporter Joe Patellar received several New York-New Jersey-area trusteeships after Carey was elected in 1991. The trusteeships in New York City — there were 19 in all — form the graveyard of Carey's reputation as a corruption fighter. The real heroes of union democracy, working Teamsters like Anthony Veltry and Teddy Katsaros, were buried alive. (*Village Voice*, Dec. 2, 1997.)

The article goes on to quote New York ex-TDU leader Katsaros in substantiation of Fitch's allegations. Fitch's exposé was hailed by a former TDU activist, Mark Rembe, who wrote in a letter to the *Voice* (Dec. 23):

Finally an article from a progressive point of view that doesn't treat Ron Carey as if he's the best thing the labor movement has seen since Joe Hill. ... As a former shop steward in Local 810 (and a member of Teamsters for a Democratic Union), I witnessed the pathetic Carey appointments referred to by Fitch. ... In hindsight, the trusteeship was just a smoke screen: bread and circuses for the rank and file. Nothing fundamentally changed. It will take a lot more than a single middle-of-the-road reformer backed by a misguided reform group like the TDU to mobilize the union membership and take the Teamsters forward.

Note that the ever-"practical" TDU not only covered up Carey's anti-democratic measures but also his continued alliance with conservative hacks. He pursued this alliance despite his much praised shift away from the old guard after they scabbed on the 24-hour UPS strike Carey called in 1990. An earlier article in the *Voice* by Fitch (Dec. 31, 1996) analyzed his 1996 electoral victory:

One way Carey offset local warlord clout was by cutting deals. He offered vice-presidential slots to key local leaders in the East, and won big there. And Carey stopped some from joining up with the Old Guard by threatening to take over their unions by trusteeship. Take Carl Haynes, the African-American head of New York City's Local 237. He leads the largest Teamster local in the East. Haynes inherited the top job of the 25,000 member security guard union when Barry Feinstein was forced to step down from this historically corrupt local. Haynes, not much of a reformer, didn't change things much. His lack of reform-mindedness was demonstrated by his reaction to the plan to introduce 130,000 welfare recipients into the city workforce, undoubtedly at the expense of his membership. Haynes' voice in the debate over this plan has hovered just above a whisper. With 237 showing its old-guard tendencies, Carey chose to be pragmatic. Instead of trusteeship, he put Haynes on his ticket. Haynes is now the only African American vice president in the Teamsters, and 237 delivered more votes to Carey than any other local in America.

The proof is always in practice. The practical realism of the TDU and its left components has once again proved to be only *realpolitiik*.

CAREY VS. UNION MILITANCY

Nationally, in two government-supervised elections, Carey won only narrowly. The votes of thousands of truckers and other workers who belong to some of the locals still dominated by old guard warlords were in effect controlled for Hoffa Jr. But many such votes were freely given. And despite governmental "protection," only a minority of Teamsters bothered to actually vote.

Why such a lack of support for reform and democracy? One reason is that the working class understandably maintains a large measure of disbelief in all politicians, including labor bureaucrats, and their promises. As well, some workers went for Hoffa Jr. for quite practical reasons. Why not elect a tough s.o.b. of our own, since there is no alternative we can really trust? Hoffa Sr. might have been a crook, but he delivered; maybe his kid will too. After all, Carey and the clean reformer types haven't brought much meat and potatoes.

TDU has not only covered up Carey's not-so-democratic (and Democratic) practices, but his not-so-militant practice too. For all their criticism of Carey's reliance on consultants, the left choristers miss the main point. Carey knew he was in

trouble in the last election because, until the UPS strike, he hadn't delivered the kind of contracts members wanted. In the pivotal Detroit newspaper strike, far from playing a progressive role, he had stabbed it in the back. That's why Carey needed to get votes via bourgeois means, just like his buddies in the Democratic Party. He couldn't call on the ranks to mobilize because he had no fighting record or program to stand on.

Contrary to the elitist dreams of do-good reformers, workers fight for concrete gains to meet material interests, not simply for abstract democracy. Through such struggles, they do become aware of the need to control the course of battle and, thereby, become the best champions of proletarian democracy. The quest for democracy is a by-blow, not an end in itself. Unable to lead such a real fight, Carey and the TDU had no other choice but to rely upon modern witch-doctors — and the state — and take the consequences.

CAREY, TDU AND FREIGHT

Had he not been barred, after the UPS victory it would have been much easier for Carey to beat Hoffa, because he was now associated with a genuine gain, not just reform rhetoric. The TDU, which had supported Carey's 1994 contract, knew that his record was a big reason members weren't so wild about the pre-UPS Carey. As *Socialist Action* noted in October 1995:

The freight industry is a maelstrom of mergers and closings, with firings and forced relocations taking a heavy toll on what once was the core of the Teamster membership. ... Despite his militant leadership of the 24-day national freight strike in 1994, which ended with a settlement ratified by a 81 percent margin, the decline is continuing on Carey's watch, so he's sure to pay a political price. ... In 1996, a united opposition that benefits from an anxious, anti-incumbent mood could close the gap and topple Carey's slate.

Some leftists understood that Carey's problem was his inability to satisfy members' economic needs. Of course, rather than identifying with the ranks' dissatisfaction and using the opportunity to point out the inadequacy of Carey's reformism, they went on to blame the Hoffa forces for taking advantage of the discontent.

In reality Carey's leadership of the 1994 freight strike was hardly militant, and the contract was shameful. While the bosses' drive for part-time labor was restrained, Carey pushed significant concessions that had a comparably weakening effect on the union. This included an increase in the differential between new hires and higher seniority workers; a wage freeze for about 8000 "casual" (temporary) workers, also paid on a lower tier; an increase in subcontracting to non-union rail shippers; and the surrender of the right to strike over grievances in favor of binding arbitration. As well, the settlement came as a result of Carey's call for government mediation. The alternative, fighting against the isolation the strike was suffering (both because of the sabotage of the old guard and the lack of support of the AFL-CIO), was never posed by Carey or the TDU.

TDU's inability to offer an alternative in freight had a long history even before Carey. This is revealed inadvertently in LaBotz's *Rank and File Rebellion*. The book catalogs how deregulation and depression hit the freight industry in the early 80's; it also details the TDU's defeatist response in the decisive struggles in freight, when management imposed an MFA laden with union givebacks for the first time.

TDU argued that, given the depression and deregulation, some companies were bound to go out of business. "There is little the union can do to stop this from happening," argued TDU in the pages of *Convoy Dispatch*. "But the union can work to negotiate a job security clause in our contracts that make sure that the Teamsters whose companies go out of business are hired in seniority order by those large union carriers that will continue to grow in years ahead."

Instead of posing a fight against all layoffs, TDU sent out the message that layoffs would occur even under their strategy of opposing concessions. This attitude underlay the the different approaches to UPS and Trucking Management Inc. in the latest rounds. Striking against a company with fat on its bones is one thing. Taking on the trucking bosses in a serious strike was another. Yet most workers face situations closer to the freight scenario than to UPS. The economic fragility of the trucking industry, despite its momentary uptick, and the ever growing threat of non-union competition, could have made it a far more decisive struggle in showing how labor could move forward.

TDU's position was to be prepared but to agree with the bureaucracy's idea of avoiding a strike if possible.

The employers are desperate to avoid a strike. They want to bargain early and settle early. We don't want to strike either, but we can be prepared and use the employers' concern to our advantage. The employers are asking to get a tentative agreement by January. Let's let them know the only way that will happen is if they meet reasonable union proposals and forget about any takeaways. (*Convoy Dispatch*, April/May 1997.)

Convoy suggested "reasonable" and vague proposals. No mention of ending the pay differential to casual labor; rather it said "we need to bring up the substandard casual wage." No concrete proposals for serious job protection.

The TDU line of raising only vague proposals obviously reflected the need to prepare to conciliate to the Carey slate as in 1994. TDU miseducated its followers by pretending that a serious strike strategy was not necessary to win meaningful job security and stop other concessions.

If there is no way to fight for the needs of workers for job security in industries like freight, then there is no way that the AFL-CIO or the IBT can organize the masses of non-union workers or defend the interests of its present membership. If union workers face the same or more threats of layoffs than do non-union workers, then a major ingredient for winning workers to unions is clearly missing. As long as the union strategy of accepting layoffs and limiting demands to what bosses can "afford" is not challenged, the unions will be unable to make serious gains. Over and again Sweeney, Trumka, Carey, the TDU and the court socialists have openly acknowledged in word and deed that they will not challenge this strategy. You can be even more sure that the bourgeois state, now deeply embedded within the unions, will try to see that the lid remains on.

THE COMING TEAMSTER ELECTION

All the gnashing of teeth over Carey's imperfections covers the fact that the TDU leftists are re-examining nothing and just going ahead in the hope of accepting what they hope will be a white-knight anti-Hoffa candidate in the new government-controlled election. They are certainly not demanding that their candidate adhere to the TDU program, any more than they did with Carey.

In relation to the upcoming elections, Paff argued in his TDU convention speech:

Our union is headed in a new direction, toward rank and file power. It's not perfect, it's not always going in a straight line and we've seen some bad deviations, but it's headed in a new direction and labor with it. And Hoffa would reverse that direction.

Yes, a Hoffaite victory would be a setback for the union. Tragically, the TDU's bloc with Carey's reformist successor, based on little more than an anti-Hoffa stance, wouldn't be any better. The cooperation with the government is one indication of this.

The crowning touch bestowed by the rank and filist TDU leadership on the selection of the "rank and file's" new presidential candidate is to leave it up to a decision by the bureaucrats rather than the ranks.

TDU's 15-member steering committee will vote on which candidate to support, but the group's national coordinator, Ken Paff, said he expected the contenders to try to reach a decision amongst themselves about who will run. (*Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 23.)

The ranks got to cheer for Carey at the convention but not to discuss whom to support next.

THE RANK AND FILIST METHOD

The TDU is considered the model opposition within the labor movement in this country. It boasts a 10-point Program for a Democratic Union, but is mainly dedicated to cleaning out corruption as the first step to establishing rank-and-file democracy. It has had this central theme for its 22 years.

For revolutionaries, the main enemy of the working class is the capitalist class and its state power. The TDU "socialists" may privately acknowledge the state and the capitalists as the enemy, but this is buried when they address working-class militants. Then the big enemy is the mob. But no one can argue that the key turning points in the decay of the American unions were the acts of mobsters.

The reformist bureaucrats, mainly through their friends in the Democratic Party, have drawn the bourgeois state more and more into the unions. The bureaucracy capitulated to the state during the Cold War, scabbed on major wildcat strikes in the early 1970's and swallowed a wagonload of boss-dictated concessions ever since. The surrender was capped by the AFL-CIO's refusal to defend PATCO from Reagan's smashing in 1981.

Of course the gangsters must be fought — but not by allying with the greater danger, the bosses' state, which now accords itself the right to determine workers' leaders.

Instead of "saying what is," instead of fighting openly for working class politics, the court socialists within the TDU argue that "democracy is power." They claim that if democracy is allowed to flower in the unions, it will translate into militant struggle, which will then turn into revolutionary action.

This stagist method is something our tendency has fought against since our struggle against the TDU leftists in the 1970's. Thus it can lead only to opportunism. That is because stagism means not only the recognition that stages of development exist in the overall class struggle; it means politically advocating limited struggles and programs based on a pre-conceived, elitist idea of what the working class is ready to hear or understand.

For the stagists in the TDU, their original Marxist identification with the objective needs of the ranks inevitably

Marxism and the Capitalist State

The fundamental difference between reformists and revolutionaries stands out in bold relief when looking at the capitalist state. Revolutionaries understand that this state is exclusively a weapon of the bosses. Whether or not it is forced to allow democracy is important, but this does not determine the nature of the state. Underneath, it is always a bourgeois class dictatorship. Democracy goes out the window when bourgeois state power is challenged.

The essence of the capitalist state is the police force and army as well as prisons and other institutions of coercion that maintain the system of private property and labor exploitation on behalf of the capitalist class. As Lenin put it, "the state is the manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms."

The capitalist state exists not only to protect the rule of the capitalists from the exploited and oppressed classes. In this epoch of capitalist decay, it also serves as the main agent of increasing exploitation, oppression, racism, poverty and imperialist war.

The only solution is for the working class to overthrow the capitalist state through revolution and replace it with a workers' state on the road to socialism. In contrast, the reformist strategy is to use the working class to reform and thereby preserve the capitalist state.

From this understanding comes our hostility to capitalist police power. We oppose the imperialist army abroad, even when it intervenes in "humanitarian" guise. We oppose the cops, even when they claim to be protecting us from crime, as the biggest criminals of all. We oppose all government intervention in the unions, even when "fighting corruption."

Opposition to state intervention into the unions is not an abstract moral principle handed down from on high. It is a Marxist principle derived from the experience of the

working class: only the independent working class, organized on a consciously anti-capitalist basis, can end the misery of humanity under capitalism. In particular, the history of U.S. labor shows that every act of government intervention has in fact weakened the fighting ability of the working class.

While revolutionaries not only support but often advocate struggles for reforms, our point in so doing is to build class confidence, class consciousness and class independence. This lays the basis for the fight to build the revolutionary party of the working class and to advance the class's struggle for power against the capitalist state.

Reformists, including the labor bureaucracy and organizations like the TDU, are not satisfied with the current policies of the capitalist state and its parties; their goal is to change the state into one more friendly to workers and the oppressed. In order to maintain such hopes, they cling to the argument that this state and system can be pressured into bending to the will of the working class. As opposed to revolutionaries, reformists believe that there are good government interventions and bad ones.

Thus when the state intervened in the Teamsters Union under the guise of kicking out the mobsters, we wrote, "Whatever the immediate pretext, the state is motivated to intervene in the unions in order to protect and extend capitalist control over labor." Many others, including the TDU, simply cheered the government-run elections and Carey's "victory" in 1991. But we warned:

Count on the state in the future to perform a more openly oppressive role in the Teamsters. The reformist opposition's reliance on it has set a dangerous precedent and miseducated the members about what to expect from the general staff of the ruling class. (PR 41.)

These chickens have now come home to roost.

turned into an opportunist adaptation to the current level of consciousness — which in turn is defined by capitalist "reality." In the early 1970's, the bureaucracy acted to keep strikes divided factory by factory, through guerrilla "apache tactics," instead of centralizing and uniting the struggles. Over the years, their misleadership convinced a once self-confident working class that it is toothless and has to give back its past gains. Adapting to each "stage," the court socialists over time drop their demands to what seems possible as decided by the bureaucracy, fooling themselves into thinking that they are only being in tune with the workers.

RANK AND FILISM, THEN AND NOW

The phrase "rank and filism" once was associated with fighters. The TDU itself was originally formed by ardent militants, socialist and non-socialist alike. It included many who had defied the bureaucracy as well as the state in wildcat strikes. Groups like Solidarity once argued that trade union militancy was the level of consciousness of workers and therefore should be the level of consciousness advocated by socialists at that stage. But as the entrenched labor bureaucracy, including the progressive wing, successfully bulldozed the ranks, the leftists marched backward as well.

Thus TDU de-emphasized the militant stage in favor of

a stress on democracy, in the effort to make contact with what it understands to be the level of consciousness of the ranks. The argument for democracy as a necessary stage to militancy became routine, and with it, the evident need to ally the TDU with the democratic reform bureaucrats. Rank and filism turned into an effort to tail the recognized power of well-known "left" bureaucrats who already had a base of support. This is the "practical" approach that allowed Carey, the best candidate who could win (in their minds), to become a necessary stage to the full program of democracy of the TDU — which of course Carey himself didn't adhere to.

It then became necessary to advocate contracts — like the 1994 MFA — that the most militant workers already objected to. It further became necessary to continue to advocate government intervention, even when militants were ripe for rejecting the idea once and for all. In sum, starting out from the notion that they were simply echoing the beliefs of their fellow workers in order to bring the ranks forward one step at a time, the TDU ended up as a barrier to the consciousness of workers — whose own experience was leading them to question and reject TDU's reformist practice.

The TDU doesn't recognize that it has become part of the problem and not its solution.

The difference between communists and centrists is not

over *whether* to work in the trade unions but over *how* to do it. Centrists see reformism as a partial movement forward, a limited form of progressive politics that just doesn't go far enough. Therefore they see no reason not to simply echo reform consciousness, which they attribute to their fellow workers. They have no qualms about confining their union work to a reformist outfit like TDU and becoming indistinguishable from it, for all intents and purposes.

Communists recognize reformism as counterrevolutionary and fight it as such. We participate with reform leaders in joint actions all the time, even for limited demands. And of course we unite in struggle with our fellow workers, most of whom are not revolutionary. But in all such activity, communists attempt to prove throughout the struggle that the reformist leadership, because of its belief in capitalism, will not fight for the workers' needs when these come into sharp conflict with the capitalist profit drive — as they are doing today. We try to separate the ranks from the leadership by demonstrating the material difference in objective interests between the working class and the middle-class labor brokers that domesticate the unions today. To accomplish its task of guiding fellow workers through the lessons of our common struggles, it is critical that the communist voice not be confused with the organs of reformist groups, thereby inevitably blending in with the reformist misleaders.

REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY

After Carey was disqualified, the TDU did not make government intervention or the need for a battle over the MFA into issues in the upcoming election. It refused to talk about the militant mass action that would be necessary to wage a real battle for job security. In addition to raising popular demands as in UPS — like no “casual” work and no two-tier wage schedules that divide workers and undercut all wages — it would have meant including demands that are not considered “practical”: no layoffs, union rates and unionization for all truckers, and jobs for all. This is the way to forge the unity of union and non-union truckers and win union representation — now, not in the bye-and-bye.

It is objectively true that only such radical mass action can defend the unions and win gains. The LRP has pushed for years the idea of a general strike, not confined to already

unionized workers. The general strike will make sense to more and more workers as they are compelled to fight back. Action is the mother of consciousness. An incredibly powerful display of working-class strength which brings profits to a halt across the country will produce an understanding of the need to confront the state and a recognition that the united working class can successfully do so.

When PATCO was attacked in 1981, AFL-CIO chief Lane Kirkland admitted that he had never received as many telegrams from workers as he did then asking for a general strike. (See *Socialist Voice* No. 15.) He laughed them off and was able to divert the budding sentiment. Today, a lot of workers, including leftists, already realize that nothing short of mass action like a general strike can stop the attacks on unions and workers in general. But many advanced workers, far better intentioned than Kirkland, still think it is “unrealistic.” Nothing is built in a day; however, the turn must be made and it can only occur by initiating the open fight for such a mass action and classwide political strategy now. If advanced revolutionary-minded workers keep saying that workers must accept the limits of capitalist profit-making; if worker militants keep acting as if no mass militant action is realistic — then who can blame ordinary workers for not engaging in mass action? Who can blame them for rejecting socialism as utopian, if socialists themselves do?

A turn away from rank and filism must be made by advanced workers now, before the already rampant demoralization within the class and the government stranglehold on the unions becomes even deeper. Through joint struggles, revolutionaries can begin to convince fellow workers of the absolute necessity for our class to build its party for socialist revolution. Not only union busting but cuts to wages, job conditions and social services, anti-immigrant legislation, slave-labor “workfare” schemes, vicious police brutality and mounting racist attacks on Black and Latino people are ravaging the working class.

Working classes in other countries are re-launching their mass struggles. The American working class will inevitably enter the struggle. In the course of fighting the immediate battles, the advanced workers must seize the chance to build their revolutionary party as the leadership necessary for our class to achieve victory. ●

Squeals from Carey's Left Chorus

Despite their agreement that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with their bloc with Carey, Carey's left admirers have been squabbling over what to do, and not do, now.

At the TDU convention, Ken Paff labeled Carey's reliance on consultants a “monumental blunder.” He warned:

Brothers and sisters, if you are going to take on corporate America, if you are going to win major strikes, if you are going to start turning the labor movement around, you better make sure you are not vulnerable.

In other words: Carey was innocent, but since he was a big militant and therefore a likely target of a government frame-up, he should have known he needed to be more than innocent: he needed to be squeaky clean.

Paff held back from really blaming Carey for anything. However, in *Labor Notes* (January 1998), Solidarity supporter Kim Moody, the political eminence behind the paper, went a bit further. He pointed explicitly to Carey's responsibility and even hinted that there was a problem in the relations

between “top-level labor” and the Democratic party:

The problems now faced by Ron Carey and the Teamster reform movement were born in the actions and political culture of top-level labor and their Democratic Party “friends.” ... Carey, too, must share some of the responsibility. All that happened did so under his presidency. He hired the consultants. In choosing old style money-driven electioneering in 1996, he in effect, chose business union methods over the rank and file campaign advocated and conducted by the TDU.

But Moody makes clear he'll stick up for Carey: **It wasn't always like that and nothing was proving the old business unionism wrong more than the reforming, fighting rank and file Teamsters, above all the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, and the leader of the reform coalition Ron Carey.**

Obviously attempting to put a little distance between the TDU and Carey, Moody really demonstrates the pseudo-rev-

olutionary left's inability to break with Carey.

Labor Notes' Jane Slaughter took it a step further. In an op-ed piece in the *Boston Globe*, she repeated the argument about depending on the ranks, and concluded:

The ultimate lack of faith in the ranks was Carey's decision to bring in slick consultants with no union background to run his 1996 re-election operation. . . . The downfall of Ron Carey provides a lesson for all union reformers That lesson is: don't count on leaders who don't count on you.

Yet none of this represents any break with Solidarity's strategy of tailing reformist bureaucrats. And there certainly is no basic re-evaluation of how to deal with the real union boss, the bourgeois state. Rather, the criticism about reliance on professional hacks rather than the ranks has become a mantra for the wing of the left that wants to tie itself to the Carey types but won't accept the consequences of reformist politics. As the adjoining article points out, given his record, Carey could go nowhere else but to big-time money and the chiselers who deal in it, if he was to beat Hoffa.

NO RIGHT TO CRITICIZE?

Nevertheless these criticisms horrified another voice in Carey's left chorus. *Socialist Action* put out a Special Edition in December headlined, "In Defense of Teamsters' President Ron Carey." For *SA*, Carey is guiltless on all counts. Slaughter is attacked because "she left the impression that she believes that Carey is guilty as charged . . . and therefore is not entitled to support during this critical time."

Slaughter was indeed wrong to put an opinion piece in the bourgeois press that omits raising the defense of the unions from the state. But there is no question that she does not support Conboy's ruling. *SA's* real objection is to any criticism of Carey at all. They state:

Isn't this the time to set aside the debate of what Carey should have done yesterday and focus on what Carey and all partisans of rank-and-file power and democracy ought to be doing today? Isn't the government's new level of intervention in the Teamster Union and its threats against other labor leaders the paramount issue at this time?

In effect, *Socialist Action* calls for "partisans of rank-and-file power and democracy" to give up the right to criticize their leaders. *SA* also attacks Moody and even Paff and the TDU for criticizing Carey rather than defending him.

Indeed, the top TDU leadership seems to think that the Carey era is over, and so did not encourage Carey to hold out against the government assault. But judging from the tumultuous reception that the delegates gave Carey, they

were prepared to do more than just settle for a contingency game plan for the rerun election.

SA does recognize that "such a proposal would have needed the authoritative backing of key TDU leaders, or failing that, Carey himself." And there lies the rub. *SA* wants to avoid criticizing Carey, so they aim their fire at TDU leaders who failed to urge Carey to lead a fightback — while barely hinting at Carey's failure to lead.

The next *Socialist Action* (January 1998) reached the level of fantasy in its "Open Letter to Ron Carey":

We are certain that an appeal by you to Teamster members and the millions of American working people whose hopes and expectations were raised to the sky by the strike victory over UPS would start a rolling mobilization in defense of the right of American workers to maintain a democratic union movement free from government control. We respectfully suggest that an excellent forum for mounting such an appeal would be an open hearing organized by the GEB [General Executive Board of the union] to consider the recommendations of the IRB. Knowing a little about you and your fidelity to your slogan — "the members come first" — we are confident that you will take a course of action such as the one sketched above.

Knowing a little about Carey ourselves, we are confident that Carey could do nothing of the sort. When *SA* snidely labels its opponents as "former revolutionary socialists who have for the most part been gravitating toward the labor bureaucracy," it is accurately characterizing its own sycophancy as well.

Based on the evidence, we think it likely that Carey played games with the members' dues; to us that's a crime, and it certainly should be for rank and filists. However, it is the height of hypocrisy for the government, whose politicians are liars and thieves by profession, to bring such charges. They are a cover for the real attack, and we defend Carey from them. Yet it is also a cover for Solidarity and *Socialist Action* to debate Carey's guilt or innocence on this matter alone: his political crimes against the cause of the working class hardly began with this incident.

In the squabble within the TDU left, one wing mildly criticizes Carey but can't pose any strategy for fighting government intervention. The other wing won't criticize Carey at all, and therefore ends up proposing a strategy to fight government intervention that won't ever happen.

The working class will inevitably see the need to defend the unions against the state, regardless of the cowardice of the present bureaucracy and its left tails. But in this debate workers aren't offered that choice. ●