ROAD NOT TAKEN: DISSIDENT TEAMSTERS AND THE END OF THE NEW DEAL ORDER, 1969-1980

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis investigates how the rank-and-file members of the Teamsters Union reacted to the economic crisis of the 1970s. I argue that they countered a variety of social and economic problems of the era with the tools of union reform as they adhered to the ideal of unionism throughout the decade. When their movements, which were scattered around the United States, came together, they showed a steady belief in rank-and-file unionism modeled upon the Depression-era labor upsurge. However, they struggled to find a balance between the egalitarian ideology of class-solidarity and the pragmatic focus on truckers, who were exclusively white men. As a result, although racial and gender equity was always one of their goals, they could not present a more inclusive form of unionism. I conclude that the movement which aimed for the expansion of postwar liberalism turned into a vehicle for working-class white men to protect their privileges.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters[1] is and was the biggest, and perhaps most notorious union in the history of the post-World War II American labor movement. In 1976, its membership reached 2 million (including Canadian affiliates), meaning about one in ten unionized workers in the United States was a Teamster.[2] On the other hand, of the ten men who have served as the general president in its almost 120-year history starting in 1903, eight were convicted of crimes. Behind the scandals of union officials, however, militant rank-and-file workers have been fighting for justice at workplace. In fact, they sometimes have not stayed in the background. They fought on the road, in union halls, canneries, warehouses, courthouses, and on the picket. This thesis is a story of their fight, their potential, and their limits.

Throughout the 1970s, rank-and-file Teamsters both inside and outside the trucking industry formed dissident movements against the union leadership. Their

[1] To avoid verbosity, I will use "the Teamsters Union" instead of their long official name in this thesis.

[2] 17 million American workers belonged to union in 1976. In 2018, Teamster membership of 1.4 million (including Canadian affiliates) remains one of the highest in the nation where 14.7 million workers are unionized. Union Membership Trends in the United States, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

motivation varied but they all attributed struggles at work—among others low wages, lack of job security, and discrimination—to the mismanagement of union officials. These activists kept the faith that if only the union functioned properly to protect workers, the economic and social situations surrounding them would be improved. Therefore, union reform became their strategy to break through the economic hardships, discrimination, and employers' offenses during the 1970s. In the mid-1970s, these separate movements came together, starting a notable dissident organization, Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). Through militant reform activism, TDU developed a critique against the previous Teamster style of unionism which focused on bread-and-butter issues. Because Teamster leaders neglected the voice of rank-and-filers, workers had lost control on the shop floor, and dissident Teamsters suggested rank-and-file unionism as a solution. Such discourse depended on their admiration for the Depression-era unionism, and the rank-and-file activists strove to embody that ideal in an era when employers were more hostile, and the government was less supportive, than the 1930s.[3]

[3] Despite being of two million members strong, the Teamsters Union in the postwar decades has attracted relatively little scholarly attention. Robert Bussel, *Fighting for Total Person Unionism: Harold Gibbons, Ernest Calloway, and Working-Class Citizenship* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Liesl Orenic, "The Base of the Empire: Teamsters Local 743 and Montgomery Ward." *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 15, no. 2 (2018): 49-75; David Witwer, *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); David Witwer, "'Not a Man's Union': Women Teamsters in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s." *Journal of Women's History* 13, no.3 (Autumn 2001): 169-92; Thaddeus Russel, *Out of the Jungle: Jimmy Hoffa and the Remaking of the American Working Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001); Samuel Friedman, *Teamster Rank and File : Power, Bureaucracy, and Rebellion at Work and in*

By the mid-1970s, American postwar economic growth had ceased, and the U.S. economy plunged into a new era, so-called deindustrialization. During the 1960s, the nation's economic growth averaged 4.1 percent per year but in the 1970s, GNP grew only by 2.9 percent per year. In addition, such increase mostly came in the early 1970s and there was virtually no real income growth after 1973. U.S. manufacturers were incapable of competing in the global marketplace as the trade deficit with Japan reached $10 billion in 1980. The U.S.'s major exports shifted from manufactured to agricultural items, whereas they now imported consumer goods such as automobile and electronics from Japan.[4]

The severe competition caused the U.S. corporations' profits to shrink and forced them to adopt new strategies. Firms partially attributed the profit squeeze to the rules and regulations with which unions had purportedly strangled their flexible use of labor since the New Deal era. When the nation was enjoying economic prosperity

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a Union (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Dan La Botz, *Rank and File Rebellion : Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990); Kenneth Crowe, *Collision: How the Rank and File Took Back the Teamster* (New York: Scribner, 1992).

Book chapters by Aaron Brenner and Dan La Botz are the only academic examination of the history of TDU. This thesis, unlike their analysis, tries to critically analyze the movement's focus on truckers. Aaron Brenner, "Rank-and-File Teamster Movements in Comparative Perspective," in Glenn W. Perusek and Kent Worcester ed., *Trade Union Politics: American Unions and Economic Change, 1960s-1990s* (NJ: Humanities Press, 1995); Dan La Botz, "Tumultuous Teamsters of the 1970s,"in Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow ed., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from below During the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010), 199-226.

[4] Barry Blueston and Bennett Harrison, *The Dendustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 4-5.

(with persistent economic and social inequality among its population), corporations could afford their concessions to organized labor, which had been the precondition of the New Deal order. During postwar years, unions could gain increased job security and limitations on the power of management. In the 1970s, corporations asserted that this "accord" between labor and management had become too costly to maintain. Needing more flexibility in the company operation, management now sought ways to tame organized labor by circumventing rules on grievance procedure and work stoppages.[5]

This thesis will demonstrate how the rank-and-file members of the Teamsters Union reacted to this economic crisis in the 1970s. What specific problems did they have at the workplace and in the union, how did they try to solve them, and what tools did they use to fight? I argue that rank-and-file Teamsters, inside and outside the trucking industry, countered a variety of social and economic problems of the era with the tools of union reform because they adhered to the ideal of unionism throughout the decade. When their movements, which scattered around the nation, came together, they showed a steady belief in rank-and-file unionism modeled upon the Depression-era labor upsurge. However, they struggled to find a balance between the egalitarian

[5] Barry Blueston and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 14-17.

ideology of class-solidarity and the pragmatic focus on the truckers, who were exclusively white men. As a result, although racial and gender equity was always one of their goals, they could not present a more inclusive form of unionism and ended up prioritizing the protection of white men's privileges. After all, the movement which aimed for the expansion of postwar liberalism turned into a vehicle for the identity politics of white male workers.

The interpretation of the 1970s has been a major stage of contested debate among labor historians. Many scholars question how the postwar liberalism became defunct and the "conservative revolution" happened in 1980, symbolized by the election of Ronald Reagan; how organized labor slipped from the center of the nation's liberal politics, where once they had established an indispensable status; and how unions purportedly lost their power as a vehicle for progressive changes of the society. Some historians such as Judith Stein emphasize the failure of liberal forces such as the Democratic politicians while others like Jefferson Cowie favor cultural explanations, noting a shift to a focus on "individualism" vis-à-vis collective economic identity of the working-class. Such argument stresses that white male blue-collar workers defined themselves as the "Other" in contemporary New Politics against women and nonwhites and found a cultural refuge in the new populist right in the second half of

the decade. Thus, Cowie concludes that the 1970s marked the "last days of the working class."[6]

Scholars like Nancy MacLean also highlight the participation of women and nonwhites in the workforce and union movement in the 1970s. Some argue that unions failed to react to their demands for equity at workplace and that those workers sought effective means outside the organized labor. They relied upon legal measures, such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibited employment discrimination. Class turned out to be invalid as a keyword to discuss equality in the society, and unions supposedly became marginal in the nation's progressive politics. However, other historians such as Line Windham focus on the movements of women and nonwhite workers that took

[6] The literature on these questions is vast. See Thomas B. Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York : Norton, 1991); Jefferson Cowie, *Staying' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010); Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal and the Limits of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Jefferson Cowie, "Introduction: The Conservative Turn in Postwar United States Working-Class History." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74, no. 1 (2008): 70-75; Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle ed., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989);Lisa McGuirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Kenneth Durr, *Behind the Backlash: Whiter Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

place *within* major unions and thus emphasize the interconnection of class, gender, and racial identities instead of the division.[7]

Some of such marriages of "rights-movements" and union movements were articulated through union reform. Blaming the traditional union leadership for their neglect of racial and gender justice within the union and the industry, many women and nonwhites aimed for reform as an effective means of desired change. Indeed, rank-and-file dissidents—white and nonwhite, men and women—stood up against the leadership in many major unions in the early 1970s. They believed that their leadership did not serve the workers' interests anymore in the 1970s. When the New Deal order was still valid, labor unions had enjoyed more political power than any other period of U.S. history, but such conditions assumed that full time, salaried union officials were responsible for disciplining the workers. By the 1970s, rank-and-files realized that their bureaucratized, sometimes corrupt, union did not represent their

[7] For the discussion particularly on race and gender and the limits of the New Deal order, see Gary Gurstle,"Race and the Myth of the Liberal Consensus," *Journal of American History* 82, no.2 (September 1995) : 579-86; Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Tim*e (New York : Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013); Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand : American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2001); Robert Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America Since 1865* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 2007); Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is not Enough : The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge and London : Harvard University Press, 2006); Line Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Nancy F. Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990); Mary Margaret Fonow, *Union Women: Forging Feminism in the United Steelworkers of America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Dennis Deslippe, *"Rights, Not Roses,": Unions and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism, 1945-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

interest any more, encouraging militancy both against employers and the union leaders.[8]

This thesis contributes the discussion on the question over the 1970s and the postwar liberalism by situating the Teamsters Union in these contexts of economic crisis, union bureaucratization, and contemporary movements of women and nonwhite workers. I will look at the movements of both white men and nonwhite workers—mostly Latinos, many of them were women—in the Teamsters Union. I will illustrate that these diverse workers all viewed the union as an effective way to fight against different challenges they had at work. For some, it was more about the loss of control at work and job security, while for others the main challenge was discrimination. In other words, some were trying to preserve economic advantages as well as their pride and dignity that had been established by strong union protection in the postwar years, while others were demanding access to such privileges. White men in this thesis did not find cultural relief in conservative discourse. Workers of Mexican descent filed legal grievances not outside but within the framework of

[8] For the discussion of transformation of the New Deal order and labor unions, see Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Knopf, 1993); Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

For the discussion of union reform in the 1970s, see Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Calvin Winslow, *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from below in the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010).

unionism in their reform attempts. They all shared the same strategy of union democracy in the 1970s. However, the dissident truckers, who were at the center of the movement, failed to manage to maintain these different causes in the same struggle and by the end of the decade, the movement ended up focusing on the truckers, most of them were white men.

This thesis starts in the late 1960s and ends in 1980. Chapter 2 and 3 examine how rank-and-file Teamsters in various regions and occupations stood up against union officials from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. Their motivations varied, but they all viewed the misconduct of Teamster officials as the source of their economic and social problems and thus aimed for union reform as an effective means of improvement. Chapter 4 traces the foundation of TDU as a unified, national dissident organization and investigates what type of unionism they tried to create. In this chapter, I will also illustrate how the Teamster leadership reacted to the rise of reformers. Chapter 5 starts by looking at the limits of the TDU movement, with a focus on its racial, gender, and occupational diversity. Then, I will follow the TDU's organizing efforts in the end of the 1970s by placing them within the larger context of national politics and industrial transformation.

With one exception, my regional scope expands from the east to the west. This is because the Teamsters was the nation's biggest labor organization, and Locals in

various parts of the country witnessed dissident rebellions throughout the 1970s. Although the Midwestern cities such as Detroit and Cleveland were the strongholds of both the union and reformers, the east and west coasts also had locals with militant rank-and-file membership. This is particularly conspicuous when we look at the trucking industry. However, chapter 3 focuses exclusively on the cannery workers' movement in northern California. Cannery workers' movement represented one of the few organized struggles against the Teamster leadership outside the trucking industry and offers a valuable perspective that Teamster reform was not a monopoly of truckers. In fact, cannery workers formed a unified movement several years before the birth of TDU. In later chapters, cannery workers are incorporated into the national movement, but this happened in a problematic way.

My analysis is mostly drawn from dissident newspapers—both national and regional—and TDU's organizing campaign materials. Through these sources, I investigate what movement they tried to create and what critique of union leadership, employers, and the government they presented to other Teamster members. Journalistic accounts demonstrate how much of a presence dissident Teamsters successfully established in the union. Biographical accounts, including oral history interviews, have been indispensable for documenting what type of Teamster members became involved in the movement and how. Historian Dan La Botz, who was himself

a TDU member, conducted extensive interviews with TDU participants to write a monograph narrating the two decades of the TDU movement. While I am skeptical of his celebratory description of the dissidents, I use many of his detailed accounts about the stories of individual activists. By doing so, I illuminate the potential and the limits of this rank-and-file struggle in the 1970s, which continues today.

CHAPTER II

ORIGINS OF REFORM

In 1981, the year when American labor movement was under siege as more than 10,000 members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization went on an unsuccessful strike, the Teamsters Union was fighting on another front. A leaflet distributed to the union members around this time proclaimed in large print that "Teamster Ranks United To Help to protect our union, to fight international socialist fanatics, to save ourselves and our families."[1] Here, under the guise of "ranks," the nation's biggest union stated that it was at war with the International Socialists, a revolutionary New Left organization that had purportedly tried to "destroy" the union from inside as reformers. Since the 1970s, a few thousand rank-and-file Teamsters had engaged in attempts to reform the union, which had been infamous for corruption and business unionism. In response, the leadership harshly criticized all the dissidents as radicals. In truth, only a few of the rank-and-file activists were members of the International Socialists, and those revolutionaries did not even actively lead the movement. The origins of the Teamster reform movements during the 1970s were

[1] TRUTH: Teamster Ranks United To Help, Folder 1. MS 4520, Teamsters For A Democratic Union Records, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

much more complex than union officials imagined. There had already been grassroots activism within the Teamsters when those socialists joined it, leading the creation of a national movement.

Teamsters for a Democratic Union, or TDU, was one of the most notable union reform movements that emerged in the 1970s. Indeed, Aaron Brenner calls it "the lone survivor of the period" between the late 1960s and early 1970s when other groups of this sort failed to survive more than a few years.[2] In reacting to the economic downturn of the decade, workers in the TDU did not resist the participation of non-white and woman workers in a workplace dominated by white men, nor did they yield to the Blue Collar Strategy of Richard Nixon. Instead, they took on union leadership; as a solution to the economic hardships, militant rank-and-file Teamsters struggled to reform their leadership, who did not seem to represent their interests. In the years preceding the TDU's formation, Teamsters, especially freight workers, went on wildcat strikes to make the union hear their voices. The International Socialists (IS), a revolutionary socialist organization originally from Berkley, also played a role in organizing TDU, helping to develop it into a national movement. The Teamster reform movement sparked because rank-and-file workers and revolutionary socialists

[2] Aaron Brenner, "Rank-and-File Teamster Movements in Comparative Perspective," in Glenn W. Perusek and Kent Worcester ed., *Trade Union Politics: American Unions and Economic Change, 1960s-1990s* (NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), 112.

all simultaneously and momentarily chose to use the union as a vehicle for the economic, social, and political changes that each of them hoped for. Having different motivations and goals, those various activists all shared the same means of union reform for their different struggles. During the 1970s, the concept of the labor union still functioned as a central axis of progressive movements for social and economic equality.

Officially founded in 1903 as a craft union of wage-earning drivers, the Teamsters Union had long been a contested arena between officials and grassroots movements to combat corruption.[3] On the one hand, the small size of trucking firms and the decentralized nature of the union made rank-and-file organizing more likely to happen than in other industries. Radical organizers such as Farrell Dobbs, a former member of the Communist League of America, enhanced local activism in the first half of the twentieth century as shown in the Minneapolis general strike in 1934. One the other hand, notable leaders such as Dave Beck and Jimmy R. Hoffa promoted a different style of unionism. Being an opponent of militant strikes, Beck, the leader of the Seattle Teamsters, sought a strategy of stabilizing prices and wages to reduce fierce

[3] David Witwer, *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 1-4.

competition in the industry, which caused the union to collaborate with employers. By the time he took over the union leadership in 1952, Beck had developed a bureaucratized, authoritarian union structure in the West coast. Meanwhile in Local 299 of Detroit, militant leader Hoffa contributed to the success of the city-wide Teamster strike in 1937 and to the organization of the carhaulers into his local. However, frequent associations with the local mafia swirled around his illustrious union career.[4]

As the union became the nation's biggest labor organization in the late 1940s and 1950s, a series of scandals followed its growth. From 1957 to 1959, the U.S. Senate's McClellan Committee, with Robert F. Kennedy as chief counsel, exposed the misconduct of Teamster officials, including Beck and Hoffa, to the American public.[5] With the General President sentenced to five years in prison, the union leaders lost the trust of many of rank-and-file Teamsters. In reaction to the leaders' corruption, members in Teamster locals in Chicago and Cincinnati formed local movements and successfully seceded from the Teamsters Union. A similar movement later emerged in Philadelphia, but they lost the union election in 1963. In the end, local reformers failed to clean up the corrupt national leadership. Hoffa, who had succeeded Beck in 1957,

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[4] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union*. (New York: Verso, 1990), 89-136; Aaron Brenner, "Rank-and-File Teamster Movements in Comparative Perspective," in Glenn W. Perusek and Kent Worcester ed., *Trade Union Politics: American Unions and Economic Change, 1960s-1990s* (NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), 116-20.

[5] In response to these revelations, the AFL-CIO expelled the Teamsters in 1957.

was convicted of jury tampering and mail fraud in 1964 while running unopposed for reelection as the General President at the 1966 Teamster convention. After Hoffa was jailed in 1967, Frank Fitzsimmons, one of his trusted aides, took the newly-created position of general vice president to continue Hoffa's legacy.[6]

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the cycle of rank-and-file activism within the Teamsters corresponded with the renewal of the National Master Freight Agreement. Since Hoffa had first signed it in January 1964, this industry-wide, three-year national contract cemented the Teamster influence in the trucking industry. Between 1967 and 1976, union members in freight industry showed their discontent with their leaders' weak stand on the negotiations over the contract. The first to stand up were independent steel haulers—mostly white men—in Midwest, who formed the Fraternal Association of Steel Haulers, or FASH, in 1967.[7] They believed that the contract justified the company to treat them less fairly than employed truckers, and that the Teamsters Union, which did not try to have a separate contract for the independent truckers, ignored their voices. Then, company truckers followed them in 1970,

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[6] David Witwer, *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 217-34.

[7] The demography of FASH members is not available, but we can easily estimate that it was mostly men based on the fact that 97 percent of all truck drivers in the nation was male according to the 1980 census. Those men were mostly white, as the 1950 census indicates that 94 percent of all independent truckers were white. Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 245.

creating the union's first national rank-and-file organization, called the Teamsters United Rank and File, or TURF. Their critique ranged from extensive wage demands to a more flexible voting procedure in which rank-and-filers in different occupations and region could vote separately. Although these two movements had distinct motivations and strategies to make indifferent union officials hear their voices, they both indicated that the Teamsters Union failed to reflect the workers' demands in the collective bargaining agreement, and that rank-and-filers responded to it by militant strikes and self-organizing. In both cases, rank-and-file Teamsters directed their anger toward the union, instead of management or government, and expected it to help fight economic hardships and improve working conditions.

Among the leaders of FASH was Frank Decker, an independent trucker who journalist Studs Terkel interviewed in the 1970s. Since he had started hauling steel from Gary to Wisconsin in 1949, owning and driving a large vehicle provided him with a sense of dignity. However, the hard conditions surrounding his work easily undermined his pride as a truck owner and a professional driver. For example, the steel mills did not pay for the time that he had to wait before they loaded his truck. He recollected that he once waited even for twenty-five hours without receiving compensation from the steel mills. It was not only the steel mills that were responsible for the hardships that Decker experienced at work, but also his union: the Teamsters.

He had never trusted them. They did nothing but collect dues. He believed that the powerful union could have changed the situation in which the steel mills abused drivers like him. "But they're establishment," Decker lamented.[8] In his eyes, the Teamsters were "interlocked with the steel mills and the trucking companies" instead of representing workers' interests.[9] Never had the union listened to the grievances of workers--they only asked its members to pay the dues, while having conventions at the Hollywood Hotel at Miami Beach, which they owned.[10] By 1967, steel haulers' grievances had grown against the Teamsters to such an extent that they decided to make their aggravation visible to union officials as well as to the entire nation.

The 1967 National Master Freight Agreement fueled further frustrations among owner-operators. A supplement to the contract covered the steel haulers, but self-employed truckers demanded a separate contract since they, as independent contractors with the trucking firms and steel mills, had different conditions from the company drivers. Many of them owed trucking firms money for their tractor-trailers, and they were desperate for loads to make ends meet while paying the debt. Feeling that their interests were not reflected in the contract, the owner-operators demanded

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[8] Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 206, 212, 214.

[9] Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 212.

[10] Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 212.

that they have a greater voice in negotiations. In other words, because of the special status as an independent contractor, the industry-wide collective bargaining—a remarkable victory of the union—did not function in favor of those truckers. They also resented that they were paid only 72 cents for roughly each dollar that the trucking company received in revenue from the steel company for hauling the product. Furthermore, as Decker later described, independent truckers also demanded that they be paid for the extra time that they had to wait for a load at the mills, a demand which Teamster officials had long ignored.[11] Four months after the negotiation ended, steel haulers decided to take an action.[12]

On Thursday, August 17, 1967, when Decker went to the steel mill and waited for the load, one of his fellow truckers showed him a one-page pamphlet: "If you're fed up with the Teamsters Union selling you out and all the sweetheart contracts and the years of abuses, go in front of your union hall Monday morning at ten o'clock. We're gonna have a protest."[13] It was William Kusley, a 39-year old member of Teamster Local 142

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[11] "Loosely Knit Striking Truckers Grimly Determined for Long Haul," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 24, 1967.

[12] After the agreement was concluded, a group of steelhaulers from Detroit, East Gary, and Hobart, Indiana went to the Local 142 to ask for a copy of the new contract and ask the officers about the improvements of the new agreement. The Local officers refused to give them a copy–and a business agent threatened them with a black jack and told them to get out of the building. After this incident, they decided to protest at the union halls in their locals. The strike leader, William Kusley was among this group. Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union*. (New York: Verso, 1990), 24.

[13] Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 214.

in Gary, Indiana, who was leading other frustrated truckers for a strike.[14] Excited about the action which Decker had been waiting for, he went to Gary to join the picket on Monday, August 21. Afterwards, they went to steel mills and recruited other truckers, who came into town from all over the country. The wildcat strike spread like wildfire. Truckers picketed in Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, West Virginia, Kentucky and even on the East Coast--including New York and New Jersey, where strikers blew up two trucks with dynamite.[15] In Cleveland, a local newspaper repeatedly reported incidents that involved violence and gunshots against people and automobiles among "goon squads" and strikers.[16] Without support from their own union or other labor organizations, they had to set up a hastily-made headquarters in Gary, where strikers met in a tavern near the union hall, while Detroit truckers organized out of a gasoline station.[17]

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[14] "Loosely Knit Striking Truckers Grimly Determined for Long Haul," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 24, 1967.

[15] Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 215; "'Stop Everything' Vow Made, Violence Rises," *Columbus Dispatcher*, October 3, 1967.

[16] "Republic Steel Asks Ban on Picketing," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 12, 1967; "More Shootings Mark Steel Haulers Dispute in Ohio," *Cleveland Plain Dealers*, September 15, 1967.

[17] "Loosely Knit Striking Truckers Grimly Determined for Long Haul," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 24, 1967.

Teamster officials tried to persuade the strikers to take down the picket line, but they would not hear of it.[18] In fact, as journalists interpreted, this wildcat strike was more of a "revolt against the International Brotherhood of Teamsters" than a protest against employers.[19] Dissatisfied with the contract, those strikers directed their demands to the union, instead of the companies. They demanded to renegotiate the agreement so that they could receive an hourly $15 pay for the wait time at the steel mills and a 6% rate hike, which would give them 79 cents of every dollar that steel mills paid to trucking firms for hauling the steel.[20] Their primary motivation was being "fed up with the Teamsters Union," who neglected the obligation to hear the voice of owner-operators as distinct workers from the company drivers. However, they did not give up on the concept of the labor union as a protector of workers.

After a few failed attempts to find a middle ground between the Teamsters Union, strikers, and the management, on October 15, 1967 the representatives of the seven states that were affected by the strike proposed a new program, under which a driver

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[18] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union*, (New York: Verso, 1990), 25.

[19] "Loosely Knit Striking Truckers Grimly Determined for Long Haul," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 24, 1967.

[20] "Loosely Knit Striking Truckers Grimly Determined for Long Haul," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 24, 1967.

would be paid $13.70 per hour after four hours of wait time.[21] From October 21 and 23, the majority of the more than 10,000 striking steel haulers voted to end the nine-week old, violent strike.[22] On Tuesday, steel haulers began hauling the half-million tons of steel that had piled up in warehouses during the strike.[23]

In addition to detention pay and a 5 percent increase in shipping rates, the steel haulers won a special committee to represent them before the Teamsters Union. Kusley told a newspaper that his group would be eager to continue organizing with the 1970 contract negotiations as a major target. Indeed, immediately after the wildcat strike, they formed the Fraternal Association of Steel Haulers, or FASH, to represent themselves within the Teamsters Union.[24] Nonetheless, the steelhaulers' distrust of the union was deep-rooted; as historian Dan La Botz has shown, one of the FASH's resolutions implied that they would not hesitate to secede from the Teamsters if the union did not serve their needs. And they were dedicated to this commitment. After another strike, one in which the Teamsters Union used armed officials and

[21] "Steelhaulers Consider New Proposals," *Columbus Dispatch*, October 16, 1967.

[22] "Accord Accepted By Steel Haulers," *Detroit Free Press*, October 24, 1967.

[23] "Steel Trucks Roll Again as Drivers End Walkout," *The Detroit News*, October 24, 1967.

[24] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion* (New York: Verso, 1990), 26.

private security to attack the FASH members, steel haulers announced their intention to form a different union in 1969.[25]

Despite FASH's short life within the Teamsters, the 1967 wildcat strike and the formation of the organization shows that the rank-and-filers' discontent with the union officials was ripe for a mass movement in the late 1960s. Responding to problems unique to steel haulers, those workers turned their vexation upon their union, rather than the management. Although they never showed any interest in reforming the union and thus ended up leaving, the frustrated truckers initially believed that they should be able to transform the attitudes of the Teamster leaders through strike, a traditional weapon of workers. Recognizing that the collective bargaining agreement did not represent their interests, those rank-and-filers successfully improved working conditions by directly confronting the union officials. While they were disappointed with Teamter leadership, the union still stood as a primary means for protecting their rights and dignity at work.

During the 1970s, rank-and-file workers in various industries suggested a newly-emerging form of unionism through strikes and self-organizing efforts. The fights of militant farmworkers, mineworkers, autoworkers, teachers, telephone workers, female service workers, public employees and steelworkers all presented as

[25] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion* (New York: Verso, 1990), 26.

antithetical to established big labor.[26] As historian Kim Moody argues, the militancy that American workers showed in the late 1960s and 1970s synchronized with the contemporary social movements of African Americans, Latinos, women, gays, and students.[27] They were closely intertwined with each other, resisting established liberal politics in which labor unions occupied one of the central positions. In California, farm workers, many of whom were people of Mexican heritage, successfully pressured the vegetable growers to repudiate their Teamster contracts and signed with the United Farm Workers in 1970. In Detroit, militant rank-and-file workers of United Auto Workers founded multiple oppositionist organizations, including the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.[28]

In the East, tens of thousands of West Virginia mine workers intermittently went on strike from 1964 onward in resistance against both mining companies and Tony Boyle, who took the presidential office of the United Mine Workers in 1963. After a disaster at the Consol No. 9 coal mine in Farmington killed seventy-eight men in

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[26] For a discussion about the rank-and-file activism in multiple unions during the 1970s, see Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow ed., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from below during the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010).

[27] Kim Moody, "Understanding the Rank-and-File Rebellion in the Long 1970s," in Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow ed., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from below during the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010), 106.

[28] Kim Moody, "Understanding the Rank-and-File Rebellion in the Long 1970s," in Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow ed., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from below during the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010), 106.

November 1968, a massive rank-and-file rebellion exploded within the UMW, leading to the formation of the Black Lung Association in January 1969. In December, Joseph 'Jock' Yablonski, who had denounced the UMW leadership, ran against Tony Boyle for the presidential office and lost by a margin of nearly two to one. After Yablonski appealed the results to the US Labor Department, gunmen who Boyle hired murdered him and his wife and daughter in their home. At Yablonski's funeral, some of his supporters and other miners from the Black Lung Association formed the Miners for Democracy to fight for reform in the union. Their militant electoral campaigns throughout Appalachia helped to elect their leader Arnold Miller as UMW president in December 1972.[29]

The Teamsters were no exception to this trend, as the nation's biggest and most notorious union witnessed a similar upsurge of militant activism from below in the early 1970s. The National Master Freight Agreement would be expired on April 1, 1970 and since January, General President Fitzsimmons had boldly asked about $3.00

[29] Coal companies and the old union bureaucrats launched a counterattack to overthrow the new administration. In response, rank-and-file reformers developed militant activism between 1972 and 1977 targeting the mining companies and the Miller's leadership. The 1977-78 strike marked the climax of their rebellion. Trish Kahle points out that the campaign of Miners For Democracy created a space for rank-and-file activism, which women miners took advantage of for their struggle to protect their rights at the workplace and to secure union leadership. Paul J. Nyden, "Rank-and-File Movements in the United Mine Workers of America, Early 1960s-Early 1980s," in Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow ed., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from below during the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010), 173-197; Trish Kahle, "'A Women's Place is in the UMWA': Women Miners and the Struggle for a Democratic Union in Western Pennsylvania, 1973-1979," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 13, no.1 (2016): 41-63.

an hour increase of the wage of truckers, who earned $4.00 at that time.[30] However, the union and Trucking Employers, Incorporated (a national association of about 12,000 trucking firms) did not reach an agreement by the expiration date of the contract on April 1. Without any union official's call, thousands of Teamsters walked off the job on April 1, adopting the classic slogan, "No Contract, No Work."[31]

On the night of April 1, the union leadership and the employers concluded a tentative agreement which would give city drivers $1.10 hourly wage hike—27.5 percent increase—over the next three years while providing a 2.25 cent increase in the mileage rate paid to over-the-road drivers who earned 12.75 cents per mile. It also guaranteed a maximum 8-cent cost of living adjustment and an additional $4 per week toward workers' health, welfare, and pension benefits.[32] Fitzsimmons then urged the strikers to return to work. While some listened to his words, others did not.[33] Meanwhile, members of the Chicago Truck Drivers Union, which had bargained independently from Teamsters, refused to be bound by the national contract and officially went on strike.[34] Ed Fener, president of the independent union, dismissed

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[30] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990) 30.

[31] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990) 30.

[32] "Shots Are Fired at Truck Here in Teamster Strike," *Cleveland Press*, April 3, 1970.

[33] "Chicago Rejects Trucking Pact," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 4, 1970.

[34] "Tentative Accord Offers Teamsters 27 1/2% Pay Boost," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 2, 1970.

Fitzsimmons's appeal, claiming that "Chicago-based drivers have a different cost-of-living to contend with from the drivers in the South and Southwest."[35] Chicago drivers sought an hourly $1.65 increase over the next three years.[36] If Chicago drivers won the increase, it would inevitably trigger an explosion of dissatisfaction among Teamsters.

Amidst the violent struggle, on April 24, the Teamsters Union agreed to put the proposed contract with a $1.10 wage increase before its 650,000 truck drivers for ratification, while the trucking industry agreed to reopen negotiations if a higher settlement was reached in Chicago.[37] During the first two weeks of May, 450,000 Teamsters covered in the National Master Freight Agreement cast votes on the new contract.[38] On May 18, Frank Fitzsimmons announced that 71 percent of eligible voters responded, and that they voted seven to five for the approval of the contract with the $1.10 wage increase. However, while the strike ended in some cities, the dissidents in Los Angeles, St. Louis and Akron did not care about the result of the vote. Indeed, the Los Angeles wildcat lasted until June 1, when most of the California

[35] "Chicago Rejects Trucking Pact," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 4, 1970.

[36] "Chicago Rejects Trucking Pact," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 4, 1970.

[37] "Teamsters to Submit New Terms to Vote," *Cleveland Press*, April 24, 1970.

[38] "National Truck Talks at Stake," *Cleveland Press*, May 4, 1970.

carriers refused to sign a contract with an amnesty provision, leaving more than 10,000 Teamsters unemployed.[39] The defeat covered the city with a mood of despair.

At the center of the outrage was Chicago, where truckers had voted overwhelmingly against the national agreement calling for $1.10 wage increase. On July 3, Chicago drivers finally won the wage demand of $1.65 over the next three years. Due to the prior agreement between the Teamsters and the management, this victory in Chicago resulted in the revision of the national agreement. In the end, after more than two months of the strike, Teamster freight workers won the wage increase of $1.85 nationally.

Throughout the strikes, those rank-and-file workers rebelled against the decisions that union officials had made. As a Cleveland newspaper called it "an open rank-and-file rebellion," workers were protesting against the union officials no less than the companies.[40] Certainly, they were furious about the management who did not provide higher wages, but those truckers strongly believed that more than anything, the Teamsters Union was responsible for the insufficiencies of the contract. Thus, they did not listen to the back-to-work pleas of the union officials and stayed out even

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[39] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 36-37.

[40] "Teamster Call-Back Fails, Drivers 'Scared to Death,'" *Cleveland Press*, April 16, 1970.

when thousands of workers were being laid off every day during the strike. Through the upsurge of such militant actions, rebel Teamsters all over the nation increasingly became aware that they had fellow dissidents out there.

On Wednesday, July 21, 1971, Don Vestal, president of a Nashville Teamsters' Local, visited Cleveland to meet a group of Local 407 members who shared a rebellious ambition with him. They were all fighting to reform the Teamsters Union from within and let the rank-and-file members control the union. A formal meeting to unite such sentiments was planned on Saturday 24th, when representatives of approximately thirty dissident groups from thirty states would meet in Toledo. Vestal himself was particularly concerned that the union was undemocratic. The General President appointed regional directors, who appointed the directors of joint councils, who might then appoint business agents and the union representatives in each local. Thus, rank-and-filers could not elect the people who would represent them in the negotiations.[41] In the aftermath of the 1970 strike, rank-and-file Teamsters and local leaders like Vestal formally organized the rebellion through the creation of the

[41] "Teamster Revel Learns He is Not Along in Fight," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 22, 1971.

Teamsters United Rank and File, or TURF, under the leadership of Vestal and Curly Best, on July 25, 1971.[42]

Unlike FASH, the steelhaulers organization, TURF clearly identified union reform as their primary purpose and aimed for a type of unionism that depends on workers' power on the shop floor. Andrew A. Suckart, the first national vice president of the organization, declared that their goal was "to reform—not to wreck—the Teamsters Union."[43] With a national membership of 40,000 at the end of 1971, TURF suggested "rank and file unionism," which could only be implemented by the membership's "direct participation in organization, negotiations, strike machinery, contract enforcement, and every other aspect of the union's life."[44] They believed that because the bureaucratic structure of the Teamsters Union did not allow rank-and-filers to be involved in the decision-making process for union management, from the election of the national leadership to contract negotiation and strike, the union functioned against the workers' interest on the shop floor. TURF's "Code for Rank and File Unionism" emphasized that they could not "adopt for ourselves the policies of union leaders who insist that because they have a contract, their members are

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[42] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 38.

[43] "Teamsters Grew New TURF While Hoffa Labored Away," *Cleveland Press*, December 31, 1971; *TURF*, September 25, 1971.

[44] "Teamsters Grew New TURF While Hoffa Labored Away," *Cleveland Press*, December 31, 1971.

compelled to work even behind a picket line."[45] Now that the employer and the union officials were engaging in the collective bargaining without reflecting workers' demands, the labor contract had become a part of the system in which the union was suppressing the power of the rank-and-file. The ideal union, in their mind, was an organization that would carry out the programs suggested by workers, and TURF attempted to realize this ideal by bringing democracy to the Teamsters Union through their reform movement.

According to TURF's critique, the lack of union democracy and the estrangement the union's leadership from its rank-and-file resulted in the absence of non-economic issues at the bargaining table. In their newspaper, TURF suggested "a new type of unionism," under which labor unions would not confine their movements to wage and economic issues. Union should also pay attention to "conditions of work, security of employment and adequate provisions for workers and their families in times of need."[46] TURF believed that the Teamsters Union had neglected these issues which affected workers' life, and that the union had overemphasized the importance of bringing back higher wages to the rank-and-file. Thanks to the Teamsters' protection, unionized truckers did earn more than other workers in manufacturing and service

[45] *TURF*, September 25, 1971.

[46] *TURF*, September 25, 1971.

industries, but this was not the only thing that rank-and-filers needed and wanted. TURF argued that Teamster officials had failed to grasp what the union's members on the shop floor needed to maintain their lives and dignity—such as standards for health and safety—and thus the Teamsters Union had slipped out of the rank-and-file hands.

The "rank-and-file unionism" that TURF suggested would solely depend on the workers power, and thus TURF rejected the union's close relationship with politicians. Since the New Deal, organized labor had occupied an indispensable wing of the Democratic Party's liberal coalition. However, TURF argued that "in rejecting the tainted, corrupt influences of business unionism or piecardism" (pie-card means a high-paid union official who establishes and maintains a friendly relationship with the management) which was "left-over from the hey-day of the so-called labor aristocracy," TURF suggested, "we must reject the concepts of political action of that day which remain and which restrict organized labor to the role of silent supporters of so-called liberal and/or conservative politicians who masquerade as 'friends of labor.'"[47] Here, they criticized the current relationship between the union officials, politicians, and management, through which the union leaders had been incorporated into the political machine of the Democratic Party. As the term "labor aristocracy"

[47] *TURF*, September 25, 1971.

indicates, such a situation prevented the union from functioning as a space for workers to politically express their class consciousness. Thus, TURF insisted on "independent political action" of the rank and file and demanded the union to "support every action of working people" instead of maintaining an entangled relationship with political parties and personnel. To sum up, TURF aspired to a type of unionism by which the rank-and-file would control the union from the bottom up. Being independent from the political system, TURF believed, such "rank-and-file unionism" based upon workers' action would protect the interests of the working class.

Despite its lofty ambitions, TURF soon became defunct. La Botz demonstrates in his analysis that TURF failed to develop itself as a unified opposition movement within the Teamsters Union. They did not have any specific programs to reform the union, and many local leaders did not have contact with the two leaders, nor did they receive the TURF newspaper. To make it worse, TURF's leadership suffered a falling-out within a year of its creation. As a result, La Botz shows that the national organization had practically lapsed into death by 1974. Yet, La Botz also emphasizes that TURF offered reformers an opportunity to learn the importance of leadership and

programs, which would help to organize the following movements and eventually spur the foundation of TDU.[48]

Another notable rank-and-file reform movement within the Teamsters that emerged in the early 1970s was the Professional Drivers Council, Inc., (PROD). Originally, Ralph Nader, the famous consumer advocate and safety activist, organized a Professional Drivers Conference on Truck and Bus Safety on October 2, 1971 in Washington D.C. to discuss the concerns of truck drivers about their employers' unsafe practices and the union's disregard for them. The resolutions they adopted had mainly two targets: the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Teamsters. Along with the demands for stricter regulations by the DOT, the participants pointed out that the union hardly took effective political action to protect the interests of the drivers whose health and safety were suffering. Encouraged by this criticism, the PROD was formed in 1972 and they soon opened an office in Washington D.C. Its members were primarily engaged in lobbying for stricter regulations of motor carrier safety before the federal government, but as they figured out that the neglect of the

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[48] Contemporary observers also noted that although TURF proved to be a "coming together of some of the discontent" in the union, there was no leadership for it, making the organization "a body without a skeleton, no infrastructure to hold it together, give it shape and direction." *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no. 2, May 1974, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan; Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 39-41.

union leadership, namely Fitzsimmons, was responsible for the troubles that drivers had, democratizing the Teamsters Union became another objective of theirs.[49]

In 1976, they published "Teamster Democracy and Financial Responsibility: A Factual and Structural Analysis," a 176-page report. A close observation of this report shows that their criticism against the union concentrated on antidemocratic procedures and financial corruption among the leadership. First, the report emphasized that many union officials were not democratically elected by rank-and-file members. The Executive Board members and many organizers were simply appointed by Fitzsimmons. The creators of this report doubt the legitimacy of these organizers' positions and found it problematic that they might attend the Teamster conventions as delegates, who could elect the union officials, including General President. This means that Fitzsimmons was appointing people who might then vote him into the office. Second, they listed the salaries of the top officials as well as the detailed information of the union-owned automobiles and airplanes which were provided for their officers, pointing out the financial excesses of the organization. In the concluding section, the reports called on the actions of locals by means of the amendment of local bylaws, internal union disciplinary procedures, and for the federal

[49] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 42-43; Arthur L. Fox, II, and John Sikorski, *A PROD Report: Teamster Democracy and Financial Responsibility: A Factual and Structural Analysis* (Washington D.C., PROD, 1976).

judicial system to rehabilitate the corrupt International.[50] Motivated by conditions unique to truck drivers, PROD developed its criticism against the union officials and started to view union reform as a means of improving their situation.

These individual movements, which emerged from the Teamsters Union between the late 1960s and the mid-1970s, all paved the way for the creation of the larger, unified national organization of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union in the late 1970s. Many Teamster rank-and-filers, mainly truck drivers, recognized the union as a solution to the problems they each confronted. In the meantime, there was a small but important group of activists who aimed for union reform while having a very distinct goal from that of rank-and-file workers. The participation of New Left activists in the Teamster reform movement first took place in St. Louis, and then in various locals around the nation. St. Louis Teamsters collaborated with young socialists in the form of a rank-and-file caucus called the Rank and File Teamsters, or RAFT, for a short period between 1971 and 1973. Another group of revolutionary socialists originally from Berkeley followed them, eventually complementing the individual efforts of preceding grassroots activists during the 1970s.

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[50] Arthur L. Fox, II, and John Sikorski, *A PROD Report: Teamster Democracy and Financial Responsibility: A Factual and Structural Analysis* (Washington D.C., PROD, 1976)..

As historian Peter Levy demonstrates, labor was important to the New Left's development as they investigated the nature of the working-class and its radical potential. Although they did not reach any clear conclusions about whether to support the entire labor movement, the more progressive unions, or only the dissident rank-and-file during the 1960s, segments of the New Left developed a focus on the rank-and-file in the early 1970s. In contrast with the Old Left's trust in unions, they suggested the creation of a system in which the rank-and-file would independently organize on the shop floor and have the power to make and enforce contracts. This structure would lay out the foundations of "union democracy and workers' control," free from union bureaucracy.[51] Levy does not pay much attention to the trucking industry, but efforts of the New Left to create such basis took place in the Teamsters Union, too. While admitting that the International Socialists alone were not responsible for TDU's success, Aaron Brenner argues that these young radicals were essential to TDU's development.[52] Although I argue that it is unlikely that the New Left had any decisive influence on Teamster dissident movements, union reform still presented a place where workers, the young radicals, and even other contemporary

[51] Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994,) 126-27, 151, 156-57.

[52] Aaron Brenner, "Rank-and-File Teamster Movements in Comparative Perspective," in Glenn W. Perusek and Kent Worcester ed., *Trade Union Politics: American Unions and Economic Change, 1960s-1990s* (NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), 125-30.

movements met together and aimed for union democracy as a solution of their respective problems.

Local 688 in St. Louis was not necessarily a place where dissident insurgency seemed likely to happen. The Secretary-Treasurer and leader of Local 688 was Harold Gibbons, once a member of the Socialist Party, an opponent of the Vietnam War, and an initiator of the "community organizing" projects in the city's low-income areas.[53] However, just like other Teamster high officials, Gibbons received a salary of more than $100,000 a year while the working conditions that rank-and-file Teamsters experienced deteriorated. The anti-inflation programs implemented by local government and businesses caused speed-ups, lay-offs, and compulsory overtime. In this context, rank-and-file members of Local 688 felt that their leaders did not care about problems that impacted their lives, such as lack of job security, safety issues, the management's abuse, inadequate grievance procedures, and racism.[54]

RAFT emerged out of rank-and-file dissatisfaction against the conciliatory local leaders and their handling of grievances, along with the misconduct of the national

[53] For the "community organizing" programs, see Robert Bussel, *Fighting for Total Person Unionism: Harold Gibbons, Ernest Calloway, and Working-Class Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[54] George Lipsitz, "Beyond the Fringe Benefits: Rank & File Teamsters in St. Louis," *Liberation,* July-August 1973, 30-45, 53.

leadership reported by news media.[55] After the grievance committee decided against two shop stewards who had been fired because of their participation in a picket against the working conditions at UPS, angry rank-and-filers formed RAFT in 1971. Their activity mainly focused on participation in the union steward's council meetings. Its members confronted union officials on the floor in various ways, from submitting proposals of bylaw changes to demanding explanations about the financial reports. RAFT members included a diverse selection of workers in terms of race, gender, age and occupation. Although Gibbons showed tolerant attitude towards RAFT, other leaders and the management at UPS did not. Ron Gushleff, a chief shop steward and an employee at UPS, recollects that UPS charged and dismissed him after he and other RAFT members went on a wildcat strike. He filed a grievance, and then was ordered to appear before a grievance committee, where they found him guilty by placing all the responsibility on him, instead of the Local; Gushleff later said that he "fell on the sword for the Union."[56] Not long after their dismissal, RAFT slowly disappeared. Focusing on defensive actions without a clear alternative vision for the

[55] Ron Gushleff's responses to questions, April 8, 2012. Courtesy of Bob Bussel.

[56] George Lipsitz, "Beyond the Fringe Benefits: Rank & File Teamsters in St. Louis," *Liberation,* July-August 1973, 30-45, 53; Ron Gushleff's responses to questions, April 8, 2012. Courtesy of Bob Bussel.

existing union and lacking mutual cooperation within the organization, RAFT could not establish broad popular support among union members.[57]

Still, RAFT served as a showcase of contemporary social movements. Not only did antiwar and Black Power movements inspire some union members as examples of powerful activism, they also galvanized support among a group of radical, middle-class, and college-educated students for the RAFT movement. Those New Left activists created a radical newspaper called *On The Line*, which RAFT members joined by distributing the copies and writing articles. Among such young activists was future prominent historian George Lipsitz, who contributed an article about his experience with RAFT as an overall failure to *Liberation* in the summer of 1973. He reflected the collaboration between these two groups in a repentant tone: those young radicals could not develop a working relationship between "organizers"—*On the Line* members—and "those being organized"—the Teamsters. In Lipsitz's self-criticism, he argued that he and his college-educated comrades failed in relating their politics with working-class insurgency due to their neglect of sincere consideration of their own class backgrounds. The young radicals rarely discussed their own middle-class origins while connecting the intellectual knowledge that they learned through better education with working-

[57] George Lipsitz, "Beyond the Fringe Benefits: Rank & File Teamsters in St. Louis," *Liberation,* July-August 1973, 30-45, 53.

class militancy, effectively treating their activism "as an escape from the despair of their own lives." Calling it "pseudo-egalitarianism," Lipsitz even pointed out the radicals' own class prejudices against worker in the movement.[58] Although the RAFT-*On the Line* collaboration did not last long, such attempts at inter-class activism within the Teamsters Union would be repeated by the International Socialists (IS). Yet in the case of the IS, they at least succeeded in planting a seed that had already been cultivated by rank-and-file Teamsters and that would sprout a large-scale, long-lasting national organization.

The history of the IS started with the student movement of the 1960s. Student activists enrolled in the University of California at Berkeley founded the Independent Socialist Committee originally as a study group out of their civil rights struggles around 1964. After the Free Speech Movement was formed in late 1964, the Independent Socialist Committee actively participated in it. Its leaders discussed multiple political and ideological issues, but they had not yet developed any sophisticated ideas on the union movement, except for support of César Chávez's challenge to organize farmworkers in California. They were considering the necessity of a revolutionary party and supported the Black Power Movement as a potential basis

[58] George Lipsitz, "Beyond the Fringe Benefits: Rank & File Teamsters in St. Louis," *Liberation,* July-August 1973, 30-45, 53.

for the mobilization of black people with revolutionary aspirations. They also insisted upon the withdrawal of the United States from the war in Vietnam. Up until 1968, with the exception of Chávez, the Independent Socialist Committee's revolutionary ideas did not have a significant focus on the working class.[59]

This changed when students collided with the police in the *Quartier Latin* of Paris, and when millions of sympathetic workers went on strikes all over France in May 1968; at which point the Independent Socialists clearly shifted their focus from campus concerns toward the working class. Witnessing the workers' militancy in collaboration with students, those young radicals increasingly directed their attention toward strike support and away from fights with campus administrators. Having established a relationship with the British International Socialists, this small revolutionary organization of 180 members changed its name to the International Socialists on September 1, 1969. They successfully recruited new members, especially from the Students for a Democratic Society, or SDS, a notable wing of the New Left, and their membership eventually doubled to 350 by 1970. As it had originated in Berkeley, 100 of all the members were from the Bay Area.[60]

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[59] Milton Fisk, Socialism from Below in the United States: The Origins of the International Socialist Organization (Cleveland: Hera Press, 1977), 37-47.

[60] Milton Fisk, Socialism from Below in the United States: The Origins of the International Socialist Organization (Cleveland: Hera Press, 1977), 48-50.

By the early 1970s, the IS had become critical of the traditional industrial relationships in the U.S. and recognized rank-and-file militancy as antithetical to the New Deal order. To begin with, they interpreted labor laws and contracts as a system under which the union bureaucracy disciplined workers on the management's terms. The Wagner Act of 1935 had created an order in which unions were supposed to defend workers by contract, but as the system matured, an IS pamphlet argued, union leadership turned out to be less effective as a vehicle for working-class people to overcome their economic hardships. Rather than representing the rank-and-file members, union officials increasingly became "busy justifying and defending the economic system."[61] Indeed, critics have revealed that American unions entered the center stage of politics as a part of industrial pluralism during the 1950s and 1960s. Now liberal critics viewed "Big Labor" as nothing more than an interest group of the Democratic Party.[62] Under such a situation, the kind of industrial relationship embedded in the New Deal order restricted the workers' control over their work rather than constraining management.

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[61] The International Socialists, *The Struggle for Workers Power*, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 15, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[62] Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 142-56.

To secure workers' power, the IS started with the idea of "struggle groups," which would be controlled by the workers, independent of the unions. These groups would fight for political demands by working with movements of women and blacks while existing unions would be responsible for economic demands. Their model was black workers' groups such as the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement under the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. However, after internal debates, the IS soon renounced the idea of "struggle groups" and settled upon the more moderate concept of rank-and-file unionism.[63] By doing so, they solidified a strategy of rank-and-file activism, which would take place not outside but within existing labor organizations. Based on such criticism toward the labor leadership, these ex-college students expected that the future of their revolutionary movement rested on the rank-and-file. This determination to use union reform to achieve their political ambitions laid the foundation for the IS to intervene in multiple reform attempts that emerged within the Teamsters Union during the 1970s.

Since the young radicals had started to focus on the potential of the working class as a means of overthrowing American capitalism, the IS emphasized the "industrialization" of its comrades within the organization during the early 1970s.

[63] Milton Fisk, Socialism from Below in the United States: The Origins of the International Socialist Organization (Cleveland: Hera Press, 1977), 52.

They listed six industries including the automobile, telephone, trucking, steel, teaching, and the public sectors as priorities of the initiative, so members began taking jobs in these fields. The move of the national office to Detroit in the summer of 1971 symbolized this shift of attention from the college campus to the industry, as Motor City offered opportunities to work with members of multiple industrial unions. Here, they found "the emergence of national opposition caucuses in major unions" as an arena to promote rank-and-file unionism. Collaborations occurred between the IS and independent rank-and-file organizations, such as the United National Caucus in the United Auto Workers and the New Caucus in the American Federation of Teachers. To a lesser extent, they also established connection with the Rank and File Team in the United Steelworkers.[64] Nonetheless, we should not overemphasize the contribution of the IS, which was, in the end, a small organization of a few hundred people. These young revolutionaries probably composed only a part of the spectrum of various activists in those rank-and-file groups.[65]

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[64] Milton Fisk, Socialism from Below in the United States: The Origins of the International Socialist Organization (Cleveland: Hera Press, 1977), 52-53.

[65] Aaron Brenner, "Rank and File Struggles at the Telephone Company" in *Rebel Rank and File*, 266. The relationship between the IS and the rank-and-file Teamsters in the early 1970s is not clear. Dan La Botz notes that the participants of the TURF's founding meeting in Toledo included "rank-and-file activists, would-be union officials, and a few idealistic young socialists." Although we cannot identify who those socialists were, TURF's criticism of U.S. industrial relation, which I introduced earlier, had much in common with the IS's discourse with a focus on the rank-and-file power on the shop floor. Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 38.

At some point in the early 1974, the IS members within the Teamsters Union in different cities started to officially communicate with each other by forming a national caucus and issuing the members-only "Teamster Fraction Bulletin." Throughout that year, however, their efforts to establish a solid rank-and-file movement in Teamster locals remained peripheral. They engaged only in small-scale activities: communicating with other union dissidents, recruiting militant rank-and-file activists, leading campaigns of by-law changes, and helping publish rank-and-file newspapers. These operations, however, made little impact on the overall momentum of a large, united current of the militant rank-and-file Teamsters. There were only twenty members of the Fraction, scattered in thirteen or fourteen locals across eight cities; two of these locals had only one individual affiliated with the Fraction. With the exception of Locals 208 in Los Angeles and 407 in Cleveland, all these locals had only one IS member.[66]

In their effort to stimulate rank-and-file militancy, it is noteworthy that the IS attempted to utilize the civil rights struggles of African Americans for their revolutionary project. Indeed, the IS viewed black workers as a prime example of rank-and-file militancy. On this ground, they supported the federal policy of

[66] *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no. 6, December 1974, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

affirmative action in the trucking industry, where racial discrimination had prevented black workers from gaining employment and promotions. As a result of a discrimination suit in 1973 against the trucking companies and the Teamsters Union, the Justice Department had proposed an affirmative action plan with a hiring quota. The IS Teamster Fraction supported the plan not only for its egalitarian appeal but also with the intent of establishing a strong rank-and-file movement in the Teamsters.[67] As their report on the case concluded, black employment in trucking would "break down the racism prevalent among white drivers and bring the militancy and spirit of Black workers into the Teamsters in a serious way."[68] Their romanticized trust in black militancy came from the ghetto uprisings of the late 1960s, which they believed to suit their own purposes, representing "the revolutionary aspirations of the black masses."[69] The IS considered the participation of black workers in the movement as an indispensable factor to spark rank-and-file activism, and thus the entrance of blacks into the workforce was a necessary step toward fulfilling the IS vision.

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[67] The affirmative action plan proposed by the Justice Department focused on the long-haul trucking, and the IS even criticized it for its narrow scope. *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no. 2, May 1974, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[68] *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no. 2, May 1974, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[69] Milton Fisk, Socialism from Below in the United States: The Origins of the International Socialist Organization (Cleveland: Hera Press, 1977),39.

Nonetheless, there is no evidence that the IS recruited black workers more often than others. While they paid attention to black militancy, they adopted a strategy of prioritizing some industries where less blacks were employed. Since the 1972 national IS convention resolved that their industrialization program should be "intensified" and "rationalized," trucking ranked highly among their priorities, along with five other industries.[70] In addition, with the very few staff working with the group, the national steering committee of the Teamster Fraction focused their effort on the areas of freight, grocery warehousing, and UPS. What accounted for this tendency was their belief in large freight locals of big Midwestern cities as "the most organized and conscious strata" of the union.[71] Indeed, almost no IS member worked in the production and food processing industries covered by the Teamster contract in the early 1970s. As a Chicago fraction meeting in early 1975 reported, even in that area, where several powerful non-freight Teamster locals existed, there had been only two IS members who had worked in production and food plants.[72]

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[70] Milton Fisk, Socialism from Below in the United States: The Origins of the International Socialist Organization (Cleveland: Hera Press, 1977), 53.

[71] *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no. 7, January 1975, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[72] *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no. 7, January 1975, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

The emphasis on those selected industries forced the IS to face a dilemma. While they emphasized black militancy, their activities focused on the locals with limited black membership. Blacks, Latinos, and women worked in production and food processing industries much more than in freight, and the Chicago report admitted that "the workers in these locals are generally more exploited and more oppressed."[73] Nonetheless, the local report concluded that they should not invest their time and energy working in non-freight locals.[74] The lack of resources and experience in non-freight industries was critical to their decision. As a strategic choice, the IS Teamster Fraction reluctantly targeted the union's chief industries—trucking and warehousing—as a starting point for their revolutionary project. Consequently, their focus on freight workers corresponded with the major participants of the preceding movements (FASH, TURF and PROD)—skilled white men. Even though the IS problematically romanticized black militancy, unlike FASH and PROD, their ideological claim on class struggle could have created a space for more inclusive recruitment of women and non-white workers into the Teamster reform movement.

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[73] *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no. 7, January 1975, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[74] Nevertheless, there are clues that the IS paid attention to non-freight locals particularly on the West Coast, such as cannery workers. *The Fifth Wheel*, a rank-and-file newspaper created by the IS in San Francisco, regularly reported the struggle of the cannery workers committee, an organization created by Sacramento cannery employees of Mexican descent, to fight against the discrimination at the workplace.

TDU would take over this contradiction between the class-based egalitarian ideal and the strategy to focus on trucking later in the decade.

In the aftermath of the cessation of FASH and the collapse of TURF, the year of 1974 was a quiet one in the history of Teamster reformers. Except for some local-level activism, there was no national-level rank-and-file upsurge among the Teamsters. However, this does not mean that Teamster truckers, who had stood up in 1970, had lost militancy. The conditions for another uprising were set. As the IS report from the next year reported, rank-and-file movement in the union "remained fragmented and failed to break thru."[75] With the effects of the oil shock lingering, freight workers believed in the necessity of pressuring union officials into taking a firm stand at the negotiation table of the 1976 contract. In addition, 1973-75 were years of recession, as the unemployment rate in the blue collar sector jumped from 5.4 in January 1973 to 9.4 in December 1974, and then 12.7 in June 1975.[76] The tide changed in spring of 1975. Suddenly, rank-and-file Teamsters were standing up again all around the country—as they had in 1967 and 1970 but at an unprecedented scale.

[75] *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no. 10, May 1975, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[76] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Current Population Survey*.

The IS caught the rise of rank-and-file activism among the Teamsters. Their report observed that the recession, in conjunction with the expected response of the union officials, "finally forced the ranks to begin taking a new look at the situation." Indeed, in this report of May 1975, the IS Teamster Fraction energetically asserted, "in the past few months things have changed dramatically. All over the country we get reports of a molecular change in consciousness."[77] During their national tour, the IS witnessed increasing discontent at union meetings. The report concludes, "the current situation has activated a small, but sufficient, number of activists who are prepared to organize and a situation among the ranks in general which makes real mass organizing a concrete possibility."[78]

On March 30 and 31, the Teamster fraction in the Midwest had a regional meeting, and its atmosphere indicated that rank-and-file militancy was rising to the surface in the union. In strong contrast to the negative tone of their reports in the previous year of 1974, more cheerful feeling marked the meeting, which the national report described as "a great success." The participants were "excited about the

[77] *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no.10, May 1975, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[78] *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no.10, May 1975, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

prospects for building a movement in the teamsters."[79] As members of the locals in Chicago, Akron, Cleveland and Pittsburg, they witnessed rank-and-file Teamsters increasingly interested in the idea of confronting their union officials. Recognizing the moment as an opportunity, the IS proposed nationwide linkups among rank-and-file groups around the National Master Freight Agreement.

The International Socialists' campaign aiming for the 1976 contract helped isolated activists around the nation come together and form a loose network. For this, the IS did not envision that rank-and-filers could have any significant effect in the negotiations. Rather, they aimed to use it as an opportunity to make nationwide connections between dissident Teamsters, and it was in this respect that the IS made a major contribution to the TDU movement. Their project would first and foremost create a national organization, which they temporarily called National Rank and File Contract Coalition. They proposed to have a meeting of 100 - 200 activists in the Midwest on roughly October 1. The report expected this organization to be a place where they could "assemble a critical mass of activists to make the campaign credible from the beginning and that we can build even more widely on that initial

[79] *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no. 9, April 1975, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

momentum."[80] The IS Teamster Fraction planned to assist the organizing of the national campaign, in which non-IS activists would play leading roles alongside IS members.

In August 1975, a few dozen rank-and-file activists from fourteen cities gathered in Chicago to discuss their contract demands and eventually created Teamsters for a Decent Contract, or TDC. Those activists were mostly the creators of local rank-and-file newspapers, whose ranks included IS members and veterans of TURF. In November, as the IS Teamster Fraction had planned in spring, TDC held their first national meeting in Cleveland and crafted plans of protests between January and March of 1976. As seen in a series of demonstrations in Washington D.C., Detroit, and Indianapolis, the rank-and-file movement was becoming more and more vigorous and visible in the early months of 1976. They adopted slogans such as "Ready to Strike" and "No Contract, No Work." As I will discuss in Chapter 4, their repetitive effort to compel union officials to listen to their demand did not succeed, however, and the Teamster leadership harshly criticized the activists.[81] It signaled the

[80] *Teamster Fraction Bulletin*, no.10, May 1975, International Socialists Records, Box 18, Folder 1, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[81] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 52-65.

beginning of the decades-long fight between the dissidents and the national leadership for the union's control.

In conclusion, the IS's organizing effort joined the already-existing grassroots activism within the Teamsters Union and led the creation of a national movement. Rank-and-file truck drivers and the revolutionaries both targeted the reform of the Teamsters Union as an alternative to the attenuated American liberal politics put forward by the New Deal, and they both viewed rank-and-file workers as major actors in this project. Through the trajectory of Teamster reform movement, we see that these various activists had different motivations and goals, but at the same time, they came to share the same strategy for union reform. And it was not only truck drivers, who were mostly white men, that saw union reform as a means toward economic and social betterment. It should be noted that problematically, racial and gender equity rarely became a focus of dissident movements in the trucking industry, where discriminatory structures prevented non-white, women workers' entry. However, when we look outside the world of trucking, other groups of Teamsters viewed union reform as a solution to discrimination. When angry truck drivers went on militant strikes and began self-organizing, cannery workers in California initiated Teamster reform movement to fight racial and gender discrimination that they experienced in the workplace.

CHAPTER III

"THE TEAMSTERS WERE IN, WE DIDN'T HAVE A UNION"

The smell of fruit filled the workplace. Just arrived from the farms, fresh apricots, peaches, and pears on the conveyor belt might have wafted a sweet fragrance across the room. But they did not. Instead, the sour odor of rotten fruit filled the hot air. Fruits that did not meet the unyielding cosmetic standards of American grocery stores were tossed on the floor, with no time spared to clear them from the poorly ventilated building. Along each line, six to ten women stood in a line inspecting and sorting fruit. It was a monotonous labor; their eyes mechanically trained on their hands for hours on end. The women inspected thousands of items which had the same colors and same shapes. Fruits kept coming on the belt, and workers had no control of the speed. Conversation was rare. The floorladies were always on the prowl.[1]

The cannery was a transit center which transformed food on its long journey from farm to dinner table. In canneries, conveyor belts distributed fresh vegetables and fruits to different stations, where they were cut and pitted, sprayed and steamed,

[1] Patricia Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley* (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 101-5.

inspected and sorted—all under the watchful eyes and agile hands of female employees. Another machine then cut them into slices or pieces before workers sorted them again. Poured into cans, the produce was loaded into huge, extremely noisy pressure cookers which male workers operated. The last station of this trip was the warehouse; there the machines labeled the canned foods and loaded them into wooden pallets, leaving them to wait for a truck going to the market to come.

For most workers, canneries were not a comfortable place to work. Describing the harsh environment of a California cannery back in 1978, anthropologist Patricia Zavella writes in her ethnographic study, "The interior of the plant was dark, hot, and humid, and water was everywhere. The cement floor was essentially wet all over, with puddles of water and piles of garbage (fallen fruit) left lying around."[2] The plant produced canned spinach, peaches, fruit cocktail, and tomatoes; more than 1,000 people worked to get them ready for shipment to the market. Many of those workers labored with bodies wet and dirty with the tremendous amount of foods in which they dealt. The room reeked of rotten fruits and vegetables scattered over the floor. With the machines and sprays, the air inside was so hot and humid, especially during the

[2] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 107.

summer peak season, that it fogged Zavella's glasses. Under such conditions, the anthropologist felt dizzy with a headache; so did the workers.[3]

From the late 1960s through 1970s, cannery workers in northern California engaged in a movement to improve their working conditions and eliminate discrimination from their workplace. While AFL unions in northern California had paid little attention to Mexican workers, Mexicans themselves began organizing around employment issues in their neighborhoods and workplaces, challenging traditional unions in the region.[4] In this context, cannery workers took up the strategy of reforming their union, the Teamsters, which they believed did not represent their interests or protect their rights. The activism of these cannery workers, many of whom were people of Mexican descent, started out from their own specific motivations, such as racial discrimination, support for the farmworkers movement, and the seasonal nature of canning industry. On the other hand, their movement coincided with the other dissident movements within the Teamsters, and they shared the same goal of democratizing the organization and forcing the officials to faithfully represent the rank-and-file members. While cannery workers pressured the union during strikes like

[3] Patricia Zavella, *Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley* (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 107-8.

[4] Stephen Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 192.

other Teamster dissidents in freight, they also used new legal weapons such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act to expand their power on the job and within the Teamsters Union.[5] The cannery workers' movement in northern California shows us that, stimulated by regionally and ethnically unique motivations, Teamsters Union members outside the freight industry started their own autonomous reform movement, and eventually joined the larger tide of the union dissidents in the 1970s.

The work at canneries was segregated by gender from its very inception in the late 1850s. Male workers dominated the skilled occupations including tinsmithing, can capping, sealing, and bulk produce cooking. They also took the heavy labor of unloading products delivered from farms, leaving more dexterous tasks such as sorting, peeling, cutting, coring, pitting, and filling to women. The industry embraced a wave of mechanization in the late nineteenth century, but it did not change the gendered character of the cannery labor. Companies continuously introduced various new technologies such as pressure cookers, conveyor belts, filling and labeling

[5] Some historians argue that the EEOC and the Title VII caused the decline of unionism in the 1960s and 1970s, but I want to stress the fact that rank-and-file cannery workers used these legal means in their effort to strengthen the Teamsters Union. Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

machines, and forklifts. While these machines eliminated many of the skilled jobs held by men, most of the "women's work," which required small-scale hand movements, persisted until the late 1970s. As a result, canneries relied especially heavily on local women for their labor force by the mid-twentieth century.[6]

Between the end of World War II in 1945 and in the late 1970s, the canning industry in California grew rapidly and then stagnated. At the center of the expansion was the Santa Clara Valley, which produced 25 percent of the nation's canned fruits and vegetables in 1966. The average annual number of production workers in the California canning industry increased from 37,416 in 1947 to 45,146 in 1958. Many of those workers were of Mexican descent. Drawn by the economic opportunities at the canneries, the Mexican American population in Santa Clara County increased from 35,306 in 1950 to 226,611 in 1970.[7]

This movement had its roots in World War II, when the bracero program laid out a pattern of migration from Mexico to the United States. Under this program, millions of Mexican nationals crossed the border as low-wage recruits, or braceros under harsh government supervision. Carefully isolated in agricultural employment and facing

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[6] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 30-39; Peter Shapiro, Song of the Stubborn One Thousand: The Watsonville Canning Strike, 1985-1987 (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 18.

[7] Peter Shapiro, Song of the Stubborn One Thousand: The Watsonville Canning Strike, 1985-1987 (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 18-24.

difficulties securing adequate wages and working conditions, these temporary workers were sent back after the harvest time was over.[8] The family members of braceros often joined them in the United States—both legally and illegally. By the time the bracero program officially ended in 1964, more than 4 million contracts were signed. The program's legacy remained beyond that year, however, as migrants from Mexico continued to migrate to the United States to join their family members. Many of these Mexican migrants found jobs in canneries between the end of World War II and 1980, making up the largest ethnic group in canneries during this period.[9] However, as the industry moved toward automation, and as frozen and dehydrated foods became more popular, cannery work itself started to decline in 1958. In Santa Clara County canneries, 10,300 people worked in 1958, while the number declined to 8,300 by 1972. Moreover, as corporate mergers became more common, the number of canning firms decreased from 300 in 1919 to 160 in 1971. In the end, three major corporations came to dominate the industry: Del Monte, Hunt-Wesson, and Libby, McNeil & Libby (LML).[10]

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[8] Stephen Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 121-24.

[9] Peter Shapiro, Song of the Stubborn One Thousand: The Watsonville Canning Strike, 1985-1987 (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 18-24.

[10] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 51-53.

Many employees worked at the canneries only during the peak seasons. Just like the farm industry, the demand for cannery labor dramatically changed season by season. Employers tapped into the local reserves of temporary workers to fill the labor shortage during the peak-seasons. These workers not only benefited the companies by their limited period of work, but also by the rate-system. In fact, canneries mostly adopted the piece-rate system, paying for the labor by the number of boxes the workers produced in addition to the minimum wage. The seasonal nature of the labor made unionization difficult, and deprived the cannery workers of the opportunity to enjoy the benefits that other workers secured, like unemployment insurance.[11]

By 1970, the ethnic disparity of occupations had become obvious. The experience of Mexican workers dramatically differed from that of Italian- and Portuguese-American employees. White women acquired supervisory positions as "floorladies" and oversaw the work of the line workers, many of whom were women of Mexican descent. The promotion of Mexican women to supervisory jobs was unusual, with a few rare exceptions among those who had been born in the U.S. and were fluent in English.[12] The wage gap between different occupational levels was substantial. The

[11] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 31.

[12] Margo McBane, "Santa Clara Valley Women Cannery Workers," *Les Amis de Sourisseau*, July 2017, 10.

cannery jobs were classified into five different "brackets," from the highest paying bracket I to the lowest V. While floorladies, categorized as bracket III, earned $6.26 per hour, unskilled laborers, who were categorized as bracket IV and V, earned $5.58 to $5.88 per hour in the late 1970s, equivalent to approximately $19.44 to $20.48 in 2018 dollars.[13] In 1971, the Cannery Workers Committee, a grassroots organization that combatted discrimination against cannery workers, complained that while 40 percent of the cannery workforce in Sacramento area was Mexican-American, they made up only 2 percent of the higher-paying jobs.[14] In Santa Clara County, while women made up 47 percent of all the cannery workforce in 1973, they represented only 7 percent of the six highest paying jobs.[15]

In the entire northern California region, 60 percent of men and 70 percent of women cannery workers had Hispanic-sounding surnames, but only 4 percent of the highest paid workers were Chicanas. Only 0.5 percent of bracket I and 2 percent of bracket II workers were Chicanas. In bracket III, Chicanas represented only 7 percent.[16] Meanwhile, Chicano men who comprised 28 percent of the peak season

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[13] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 102-3

[14] *The Fifth Wheel*, June 1971.

[15] California Processors Inc., 1974, cited in Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 57.

[16] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 102-3

work force in Santa Clara Country's canneries in 1973, made up 40 percent of the bracket I jobs, 67 percent of the bracket II, and 60 percent of the bracket III jobs.[17] These statistics demonstrate large occupational disparities. In short, more than half of the northern California cannery labor force was of Mexican descent, but were considerably underrepresented in higher paid positions, with women clearly concentrated at the bottom of the hierarchy. Although these statistic shows that conditions were better for Chicano men than for women, we could still find a disproportion that less Chicanos worked at the highest-paying positions than white men.

Table 1. Highest-Paid Cannery Workforce in Santa Clara Valley During Peak Season, 1973

Wage Brackets	**All workers**	**Spanish-surnamed Workers**	
		Male	**female**
IA-I	28%	40%	0.5%
IIA-II	23%	67%	2%
IIIA-III	49%	60%	7%
All top brackets	100%	56%	4%

Source: California Processors Inc., 1974, cited in Zavella, Women's Work, 58.

[17] California Processors Inc., 1974, cited in Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 57-59.

Zavella recorded the workers' discontent with supervisors who treated them disrespectfully. Workers grew more resentful of floorladies who severely punished them for working too slowly or disobeying work rules. The constant surveillance increased women's stress at work. One female worker complained, "We are treated just like cattle, just driven constantly. You couldn't even pick up your head a little to look around, or else there would be a floor lady right there wondering why you weren't working hard, and they'd work right alongside of you just to show that you weren't doing your job."[18] The pressure from the supervisors increased the workers' exhaustion, along with the unending repetition of the same dull movements. In most cases, supervisors were white and many of the line workers were not. There could be a language barrier because Mexican workers might not be able to speak English. The relationship between those two different groups of workers, often intertwined with notions of racial difference, caused the tension in the shop floor.

It was not only the companies that were responsible for such ethnic and gender disparities, but the labor contract negotiated by the Teamsters Union cemented institutionalized discrimination at canneries. Marginalized cannery workers did not support the Teamsters Union, which had taken the control of the canning industrial

[18] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 105.

relationship by force in the late 1940s. In fact, canneries in northern California had been a contested arena of inter-union competitions throughout the mid-twentieth century. Just like many other industrial workers in the United States, the unionization of cannery employees in northern California, which included a large portion of seasonal workers, dated back to the New Deal period. The 1935 National Labor Relations Act covered cannery workers in its ambit, and two years later, the California Processors and Growers Association signed an agreement with Cannery Workers Union of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). This collective bargaining agreement set work and pay rates, but it also enforced a gendered division of labor and thus institutionalized the wage gap between male and female workers.[19] Meanwhile, in the southern part of the state, thousands of Chicana women skillfully created democratic locals of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (United Cannery Workers), an affiliate of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The left-leaning, more inclusive United Cannery Workers criticized the AFL as a company union and started a grassroots effort to replace the AFL-affiliated Cannery Workers Union in northern California in the late 1930s, only to fail.[20] Until the late 1940s, the organization of northern California

[19] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 44-47.

[20] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 44-47; "Unions," Cannery Life: Del Monte in the Santa Clara

food processing workers remained a challenge to the United Cannery Workers, which changed its name to the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural, and Allied Workers of America (Food Workers) in 1944.[21]

After the second World War ended, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters came on the scene of labor relations at California canneries. It was part of the union's remarkable expansion in both freight and non-freight industries during the postwar years. By taking advantage of the mobile nature of trucking, the union extended its influence to the West Coast outside of its traditional Midwestern stronghold.[22] The membership had already reached one million at the end of 1940s, making it the biggest labor organization in the nation. Building on this success, the Teamsters Union organized the drivers and warehouse workers who dealt with the products shipped to and from canneries in 1945. The AFL then decided to cede control of the Cannery Workers Union locals to the Teamsters, opening a yearlong battle between the Food Workers and the Teamsters. Matthew Tobriner, former Teamster attorney

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Valley, History San Jose, accessed October 19, 2018, http://onlineexhibits.historysanjose.org/cannerylife/through-the-years/1917-1966/unions.html.

[21] Vicki L.Ruiz, *Cannery Women Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 69-103.

[22] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990) ,103-11.

later asserted that Dave Beck, the Teamster organizer in the West Coast, threatened AFL officials.[23]

The nation's largest union prevailed, but only by resorting to ignominious strategies. When the Food Workers actually won the National Labor Relations Board election that covered more than seventy canneries, the Teamsters turned to coercion and corruption. The Teamsters Union successfully lobbied the House Committee on Appropriations to question the legality of the NLRB decision. They also put pressure on the canneries by refusing to haul goods to and from their facilities under the Food Workers contract. The most effective strategy implemented by the Teamsters Union was the creation of a cooperative relationship with employers, namely the California Processors and Growers Association. In addition to redbaiting and numerous forms of intimidation against workers, the Teamsters played on the workers' fear of losing jobs. In the end, another NLRB election was held in late August of 1946, and the Teamsters won representation at most of the northern California canneries, putting an end to the Food Workers moment in the region, or as one historian calls it, the "Death of a Dream."[24]

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[23] Vicki L.Ruiz, *Cannery Women Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 103-4.

[24] Vicki L.Ruiz, *Cannery Women Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 103-13.

The Teamsters Union brought some benefits to cannery workers, but they disproportionately favored year-round workers over seasonal workers, thus cementing discrimination in the workplace. This does not mean that the Teamster contract itself was discriminatory but instead that the union would not effectively deal with institutionalized discrimination and informal discriminatory practices in the canneries.[25] For example, they had two different seniority lists for the seasonal workers and year-round workers. Based on this, once someone was put on the seasonal list, they would never be able to move to the year-round list, and thus would remain seasonal as long as they worked at the cannery. Although the 1973 contract merged these two lists, workplace discrimination survived because they placed year-round workers above the seasonal workers on the new list. This practice was called "grandfathering," and gave year-round workers—most of whom were white males—advantages compared with seasonal workers, most of whom were women. Therefore, there remained a high wall between those two types of employees, preventing seasonal workers from being promoted to the higher-paying occupations.[26] Seniority rights, a reward that unions had won from employers, now functioned against women

[25] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 54-57.

[26] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 54-57.

and minority workers. During the 1970s, it became clearer and clearer that the foundation of the labor contract that the New Deal laid out worked against laborers who had been excluded from the mainstream labor movement.

A practice called the incumbency rule in the contract also informally functioned to block the promotion of women and non-white workers at the canneries. The canneries had pushed for this rule so that they could place a worker with low seniority in a high-paying seasonal position and let them reclaim that position in the next season even if someone with higher seniority demanded that job. Canners took advantage of this rule by allowing workers who had spent more than half of their worktime on the high-paying job to claim that position permanently. The problem was that it was often white male workers who were initially offered such high-paying seasonal jobs. As a result, those white male workers dominated the high-paying jobs, receiving full-time position the next season, making it almost impossible for women and non-white workers to get higher paying full year jobs.[27] Thus, union contract prevented the promotion of non-white, women workers at the canneries. The Teamsters Union showed no interest in challenging this disparity. These policies make clear that the Teamsters Union prioritized protecting the high-paying jobs of

[27] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 54-56.

white male employees over the improving working conditions and ensuring Chicana workers had opportunity for promotions.

In addition to the union's inattentive attitude toward institutionalized discrimination, other factors strengthened workers' distrust of the Teamsters. Many cannery workers supported the formation of the United Farm Workers (the UFW, led by the legendary César Chávez), because they had family members in the union, or they had worked, or currently worked as seasonal laborers in California farms themselves. They believed that the Teamsters "invaded" the UFW in cooperation with the growers who found Chávez's movement a nuisance in the early 1970s. Lettuce growers in Salinas and later grape growers in the San Joaquin and Coachella Valleys signed contracts giving the Teamsters, instead of the UFW, the right to organize fieldworkers. Outraged farmworkers started a series of strikes, and Teamster-hired racketeers intimidated and attacked them. Not until 1975, when the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act was passed, did the Teamsters give up their attempt to organize the farmworkers. Cannery workers passionately supported the UFW's struggle for recognition by picketing with the farmworkers, which pitted them against their own union.[28] Along with the distrust of cannery owners and the dislike of

[28] *The Fifth Wheel*, February 1973.

discrimination, disgust with the Teamsters were rising among the Mexican cannery workers.

One of those dissatisfied workers was Ruben Reyes. Born in 1930 to a mining family in Superior, Arizona, Reyes grew up in a world where he did not have much connection with white people. All the male relatives in his mother's side had been miners in Sonora, Mexico, before the whole family moved in 1912 to the copper mining area in the southwestern United States. His father was also a miner, but Reyes did not remember much about him; his parents never married, and the family left his father behind when they moved to Alhambra, just west of Phoenix, right after Reyes's birth. In 1933, they settled in South Phoenix, where the gang-ridden environment molded Reyes's aggressive character.[29]

Violence and segregation marked life in Phoenix in the 1930s and 1940s. Many restaurants, dance clubs, swimming pools, and other public places in the city did not admit Mexican-American residents like Reyes, solely because of their race. As a result, the only occasions he had to speak English were with African Americans. Such memories of segregation in Arizona deeply etched his mind with anger, even long

[29] Ruben Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, December 5, 1983, Center for Sacramento History, 1-5.

after he left the state in 1949 to work at a cannery in Sacramento, California. Resenting the "baloney" of "freedom in America," he unsuccessfully attempted to resist the draft during the Korean War. Later, at the age of 53, Reyes asserted in a calm but disgusted tone, "America doesn't belong to me and I've never been part of the melting pot."[30]

Reyes started working at a LML cannery in 1949 and his experience there deepened his suspicion against white people. Only "the White kids" could enjoy the opportunity of promotion, and foremen treated Mexican-descended workers without dignity.[31] Those white men in charge yelled, pushed, shoved and grabbed people by the back of the neck.[32] The Teamsters Union, with their "deaf ear," offered little help, which only aggravated Reyes's anger at his workplace.[33] Later in an oral history interview, Reyes summarized his indignation at the apathetic union during the postwar decades:

> Essentially, what the canneries did was they could do anything they wanted and the tradeoff was that the Teamsters would be allowed to run the retirement plan, the retirement money, the pension plans were given to the Teamsters, in a

[30] Ruben Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, December 5, 1983, Center for Sacramento History, 6-10.

[31] Ruben Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, December 5, 1983, Center for Sacramento History, 28.

[32] Ruben Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, December 5, 1983, Center for Sacramento History, 28.

[33] Ruben Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, December 5, 1983, Center for Sacramento History, 28.

> tradeoff. And in return, the Teamsters would allow the canneries to do whatever they wanted to do, in violation of the agreement. And that is basically what happened when I came in, by the time I came in by 1949, the Teamsters were all ready [sic] in. It didn't take me long to find out that we didn't have a union when I came to work there.[34]

In the eyes of Reyes, the Teamsters Union represented nothing but a betrayal of unionism. It is not simply that the union officials abandoned the interests of rank-and-file workers. It was worse. In taking responsibility for the retirement programs, the Teamster bureaucracy snatched hard-earned money from its members. With the union failing to protect workers' rights, the canneries in northern California arbitrarily exploited workers. Among them, those of Mexican descent were most likely to be sacrificed, because discrimination against them was rampant. White workers got promotions while their Mexican counterparts with the same seniority did not. The union, in spite of its egalitarian ideals, failed to fight for the rights of its marginalized members. Rank-and-file workers like Reyes thus saw no difference between the union and the employer. Disappointed, Reyes concluded that there was no union in his workplace. At least, there was no union that truly represented him.

[34] Ruben Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, December 5, 1983, Center for Sacramento History, 27-28.

Reyes's words only reflected one of thousands of workers' experience at California canneries. In fact, he was one of the luckier employees compared with many women and men who did not speak English and thus had trouble with reaching out to the managers and shop stewards. Reyes calls the language barrier "the biggest weapon that the canneries had against the Mexicans" because the tongue-lashing in English discouraged the workers from going to discuss their complaints.[35] Scared of the embarrassment, some workers started to ask Reyes to play the role of interpreter. Although this task caused Reyes to be recognized as "an obvious troublemaker" by the cannery, a series of such communications eventually placed him "in the middle of a lot of squabbles on behalf of a lot of people."[36] However, those individual cases could solve only a fraction of the problems that the Mexican-descended workers faced. In order to tackle employment discrimination on a larger scale, they needed a formal organization.

In late 1968, Reyes started to organize the workers in the cannery warehouse where he worked. They held meetings with the company and the Teamsters Union as well so that they could pressure officials to represent the most marginalized workers.

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[35] Ruben Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, December 5, 1983, Center for Sacramento History, 29.

[36] Ruben Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, December 5, 1983, Center for Sacramento History, 29, 34.

Reyes began learning the systems and procedures to fight the discrimination, such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited employment discrimination. He remembered that throughout this period, people contacted him and suggested that there be larger meetings which would involve workers from other plants even those outside Sacramento. They called Mexican cannery workers from the city and nearby Woodland and Vacaville to discuss the problems at the canneries, including LML and Del Monte.[37] In February 1969, Reyes formally organized the Mexican American Workers Educational Committee, which soon changed its name to the Cannery Workers Committee, in Sacramento. The number of people who showed up at the meetings increased from sixty at the first meeting to a hundred at the second; within two years, the Sacramento Cannery Workers Committee gained over 700 members. They included people who worked at America Home Food, Basic Vegetable Products, Bercut Richards, Del Monte and Hunt-Wesson in Davis, Woodland, Sacramento, and King City.[38]

As Zavella explains, this was part of a larger movement among Mexican-American cannery workers in northern California to organize regional committees.

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[37] Ruben Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, December 5, 1983, Center for Sacramento History, 37-38.

[38] *The Fifth Wheel*, June 1971.

Not only in Sacramento but also in San Jose, Hayward, Modesto and Watsonville, they formed Mexican dissident caucuses within the Teamsters.[39] Nonetheless, each region had slightly different origins. In Hayward, Chicanas initiated the organization of the caucus with black and white women, who they invited to join the movement, while the foundation of the San Jose caucus relied upon a network of friends and relatives that had already existed in the community. On the other hand, in Sacramento, male workers including Reyes dominated leadership positions throughout the early years of the caucus.[40] In fact, Reyes himself admits that the participants of the Sacramento meetings were mostly men; he explains that there was one woman for every fifteen to twenty men.[41] In spite of different origins, men and women of Mexican-descent all felt discriminated against and chose to approach the union as a strategy for change.

In addition, the creation and the activism of the Cannery Workers Committee existed within the larger struggle of Chicanos for their survival in California and the United States. For example, as a chairman of the committee, Reyes participated in the

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[39] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 63.

[40] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 62-69.

[41] Ruben Reyes, interview by Rosana Madrid, Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey, December 5, 1983, Center for Sacramento History, 39.

Sacramento convention of La Raza Unida Party—a prominent Chicano political organization— and delivered a speech in May 1971. He described the condition of discrimination at canneries and criticized government agencies slow to respond to their grievances. Bringing up the Civil Rights Movement as a successful example by which blacks "were head" and emphasizing that "doors are now open for them," Reyes declared that Chicanos must speak up their demands to the "Establishment," which included not only the government but also other institutions such as the union.[42] The Cannery workers' movement against the Teamsters Union was a part of Chicanos' struggle for equality in the U.S. society.

On the other hand, their movement corresponded with a national upsurge of rebellious rank-and-file members within the Teamsters Union—mostly white male truckers—which I discussed in the previous chapter. In the San Francisco Bay Area, a few members of the International Socialists within the Teamsters started to publish a rank-and-file newspaper called *The Fifth Wheel* in 1971. Frequently associated with the national organizations such as TURF, this paper covered the activities of the Cannery Workers Committee in the context of Teamster dissidents' movement throughout the 1970s. *The Fifth Wheel* acknowledged the cannery workers' activity at

[42] "Unity Urged by Raza Unida Party," *Ideal*, May 5, 1971.

least in winter 1971 and introduced the Committee in an article.[43] While their motivation—employment discrimination based on race and gender—made the Cannery Workers Committee distinct from other movements, these dissidents were united in their anger against union officials who did not represent their interests. This shows the capacity of union reform to capture a wide variety of social justice movements within its scope.

While the Cannery Workers Committee repeatedly declared that it was "open to all cannery workers," it was mainly responsible for supporting Spanish-speaking employees at the workplace.[44] As its original name, the Mexican American Workers Educational Committee, suggests, they started out by helping Mexican-descended workers learn the labor contract. Rudolfo Garcia, one of the leaders, explained in a 1973 article of *The Fifth Wheel*, that 90 percent of his Local 679 members were of Mexican descent and did not understand the contract.[45] With so many workers unfamiliar with the means of protecting their rights, it was the Committee's urgent priority to teach them the system of labor relations. As a next step, the Committee also assisted the employees in communicating with the union. As Reyes had

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[43] *The Fifth Wheel*, June 1971.

[44] *The Fifth Wheel*, June 1971.

[45] *The Fifth Wheel*, February 1973.

individually done before the Committee was created, they helped workers file grievances to the union and functioned as an intermediary between the Secretary-Treasurer of the union and employees.[46] Although they continued to struggle with an uninterested union, the Committee's efforts to make the union listen to the workers' demands generated some changes in canneries. *The Fifth Wheel* proudly reported in 1973, "One of the first petitions demanded a steward for the swing shift. It was signed by Mexican-American, White, Black and Chinese workers."[47] Here, the self-appointed rank-and-file newspaper attempted to depict the Committee as a successful organization which helped unite diverse employees to stand up against union officials. For the Teamster reformers in San Francisco, the Cannery Workers Committee, which started out with the fight against discrimination as its central purpose, composed the crucial factor that would incorporate an emphasis on racial equality into their movement.

The Cannery Workers Committee strove to pressure the Teamsters Union to effectively respond to the workers' demands. The Committee frequently directed their criticism toward both the union and employers. The Committee's newsletter quoted in *The Fifth Wheel* said, "A lot of us little people got tired of being pushed aside, looked

[46] *The Fifth Wheel*, February 1973.

[47] *The Fifth Wheel*, February 1973.

over and denied our basic constitutional rights to be heard and treated with dignity and respect, by both the Company and the Union."[48] Rank-and-file cannery workers recognized that the union functioned against the workers' interest and in collusion with the companies. Along with other Teamster dissidents, the Cannery Workers Committee clearly blamed the organization's business unionism for its failure to represent worker interests. One organizer explained that "We formed the committee to pressure the union to defend the rights of workers, so they [the bosses] would give more weight to the union. We were not against the union, but against the union officials."[49] Those leaders of the Cannery Workers Committee recognized that in order to protect their rights, it was an indispensable part of their effort to make the Teamsters Union effectively function in order to meet their demands for better treatment. This inevitably involved a direct confrontation with the union officials, but the Committee leaders emphasized their goal of strengthening the union instead of destroying it.[50] Indeed, just as other Teamster dissidents recognized their struggle as an effort to make the union represent rank-and-filers' interests, so too did Mexican-descended cannery workers. Through dissident activities such as independently taking

[48] *The Fifth Wheel*, June 1971.

[49] Cited in Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 62.

[50] *The Fifth Wheel*, June 1971.

grievances from workers and petitioning to the union, the Cannery Workers Committee suggested an alternative to the Teamsters' business unionism, through which the union would lead to the end of discrimination.

The Cannery Workers Committee prioritized the participation of the Mexican-descended cannery workers in union affairs. To promote this goal, the Committee appealed to the union to translate the contract into Spanish so that Mexican-descended employees could understand it. This was important considering language had long been the major barrier which prevented Mexican-descended workers from being informed about the union issues. The Committee organized people to participate in union meetings and to pressure the officials to translate the contract, notices, bylaws and ballots into Spanish. By 1975, they had successfully pushed for copies of the contract and important notices to be in Spanish, but bylaws and ballots were still available only in English, leaving the translating job to the Committee. They had also failed to persuade officials to have union meetings both in English and Spanish at this point.[51]

Union democracy was another arena where the Cannery Workers Committee concentrated their efforts. With the significant number of seasonal workers, the

[51] *The Fifth Wheel*, September 1975.

Committee insisted that the union should conduct the election during the peak season. In what *The Fifth Wheel* called the disenfranchisement of seasonal workers, the union did not hold elections during the summer, nor did they approve the workers' vote while they were not employed. As a result, the elected officials only reflected the vote of regular workers, who accounted for less than half of the maximum employment of canneries. In 1975, the Committee pushed three proposals to solve this problem: first, the meetings would not be suspended during peak season; second, union members would retain full voting rights while paying dues only in the months they worked; and third, elections and important votes would be held in peak season. In the summer of 1974, the Committee successfully mobilized its members and won the vote for these issues. Nonetheless, in September, after the first election held during peak season, another bylaw change invalidated the new policies and they had to start fighting all over again. *The Fifth Wheel* reported their battles as a framework of the "fight for a democratic union" in which rank-and-file cannery workers could have a voice in union affairs.[52] Indeed, other contemporary Teamster rank-and-file movements shared the fight for union election and bylaw changes. While the Committee's

[52] *The Fifth Wheel*, September 1975.

motivation was specific to California canneries, these activists shared the same goal of union democracy with other Teamster dissidents in other regions and industries.

When the Teamsters Union failed to immediately react to the demands of rank-and-file workers, the Cannery Workers Committee did not hesitate to file lawsuits. For this legal battle, cannery workers followed the pattern of struggles for equal employment practices established during the late 1960s and 1970s. Armed with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination, non-white and women workers confronted both their employers and their unions in court with evidence of the discrimination embedded in collective bargaining agreements.[53] In 1971, the regional caucuses of the Cannery Workers Committee filed complaints with the State Fair Employment Practices Commission. After hearings, the commission certified their grievances as proof of discrimination.[54]

In December 1973, twelve members of Local 748 filed another complaint that nine canneries in the greater Modesto, California area engaged in unlawful employment practices. In addition to the original defendants, the amended complaint named as defendant more than sixty canneries operating in northern California, as

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[53] See Nancy MacLean, Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[54] Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 63-69.

well as the Teamsters Union and California Processors Inc., an association of state canning companies. The plaintiffs pointed out that the seniority system blocked the promotion of women and non-white workers to higher-paying occupations. As I have discussed, originally, there had existed two different seniority lists for regular workers and seasonal workers, many of whom were women and non-whites. When the 1973 collective bargaining agreement abolished this dual seniority system and merged them into a single seniority list, regular workers were placed above seasonal workers. As a result, white men, who had dominated year-round, better-paid jobs, continued to do so while seasonal workers remained in the lower-paid occupations.[55]

Moreover, the plaintiffs focused on the union's culpability in discrimination at the canneries. The plaintiffs blamed the union for failing to take action when female and nonwhite workers filed grievances to them, abandoning their obligation to protect its members. The lawsuit used severe language; by ignoring the grievances, the union "ratified, aided, and abetted" discriminatory practices against those employees by the canners. A direct attack on the local union leaders who tried to represent women and non-white workers supported this harsh criticism against the Teamsters. Accordingly, the Teamsters fired three union officials after they assisted

[55] Alaniz v. California Processors, Inc., 73 F.R.D. 269 (N.D. Cal. 1976).

union members to file discrimination complaints with the EEOC against the employers.[56] Thus, in order to end discrimination at workplace, demanding the union to reform itself was necessary.

After negotiations with the EEOC, the workers, the canners, and the union entered into an agreement that included multiple remedies for discrimination. Among those remedies, the affirmative action plan and a revised seniority system had significant effects on the shop floor. The affirmative action plan would provide women and non-white workers with access to high-bracket job vacancies. A new three-week off-season training would support this goal. The agreement determined the affirmative-action "parity" of hiring the victims of previous discrimination; women would make up 30 percent of the high-paying positions and the percentage of non-white employees in each occupation would equal their proportion of the country population. Furthermore, the canneries would introduce a plant seniority system, by which a worker could move up the list based on the earliest date of hiring, whether it was as a regular or a seasonal employee. Lastly, the agreement also required the Teamsters to provide Spanish language copies of bylaws and the collective bargaining agreement, as well as to hire women and non-whites in union staff positions.

[56] "MALDFE To Sue Canning Industry," *El Chicano*, January 17, 1974.

Approved as a fair solution by the District Court in May 1976, this marked a major victory for the women and non-white cannery workers in northern California.[57]

In spite of the progress that these legal decisions brought to the canneries, a group of Mexican workers pointed out that there were still major shortfalls. First, they criticized that the negotiators did not recognize differences between discrimination against male and female Mexican-American workers. As the statistics show, women of Mexican descent were much less likely to hold high bracket jobs than men, but the agreement did not acknowledge that disparity. Critics then argued that the projected 30 percent was too low for the proportion of women in higher paying occupations since women accounted for approximately half of the cannery labor force in northern California. Another point of criticism was the lack of fines placed on the Teamsters. As compensation for past discrimination, the agreement proposed to create a trust fund and provide one-year's back pay. While workers pointed out this remedy itself was inadequate, they believed that the union, in addition to the companies, should also take responsibility for their discriminatory practices.[58]

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[57] Alaniz v. California Processors, Inc., 73 F.R.D. 269 (N.D. Cal. 1976).

[58] "Trial Brief of Intervenors," February 9, 1976, cited in Patricia Zavella, Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1987), 65-66.

Although they stood opposite to the union in this legal battle, the goal of those cannery workers was not simply to attack the union, but to make them effectively work on behalf of rank-and-filers. Therefore, Teamster dissidents in other industries understood their struggle in the context of union reform. In its report on the f the 1973 law suit filing, *The Fifth Wheel* lamented that "It's great that minorities and women are organizing to defend their rights. But we wish the union were in the forefront of that fight instead of being the defendant." In their mind, the problem was that the union did not serve the workers' interests and thus the reformers had to fight against their own representatives to better attune the organization to rank-and-file workers' interests. However, in the end, the court denied these intervenors' demand for a reversal of the agreement. Despite the legal progress, therefore, a celebratory mood did not permeate the cannery workers' movement in early 1976. There was still unfinished business.

On July 21, 1976, fruit growers parked dozens of trucks around the California Capitol Building and gave away thousands of fresh peaches. State office workers carrying bags and boxes crowded into the Capitol Mall for free fruit. Banners clung to

the growers' trucks: "Want Lower Food Prices—End the Strike."[59] Two weeks earlier, at Rickey's Hyatt House in Palo Alto, California, the negotiations came to a halt. Nothing had come from the two-month-long talks between the California canners and the representatives of thirteen Teamsters Union locals. Six days had already passed since the last contract had expired on June 30, extending the deadline for agreement. Teamsters threatened the employers with a walkout of 65,000 workers at seventy-six plants if they could not reach a settlement by 6 a.m. on July 7. Such a strike would stop the operations of 95 percent of the state's fruit canneries.[60] The apricot harvest had already begun, soon to be followed by peaches, pears, and tomatoes. If they could not reach an agreement by the peak of the season, the canners would lose more than one billion dollars.

As it turned out, the negotiations continued beyond the new deadline. Both parties consented to give a twenty-four-hour-notice in the event of strike or walkout, which removed a specific deadline for an agreement, for all practical purposes.[61] More than ten days passed with virtually no progress. The average wage of cannery workers was $4.93 per hour, and in the face of high inflation, the Teamsters Union

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[59] "Cannery Strike Puts Squeee on Growers," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 22, 1976.

[60] "Last-Minute Talks in Cannery Dispute," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 6, 1976.

[61] "Cannery Strike Averted," *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 1976; "Cannery Workers Agree to Delay Walkout Today," *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 1976.

demanded a $3.50 per hour wage increase over the next three years. California Processors Inc. responded by offering an increase of only 93 cents to $1.43.[62] On Sunday, July 18, Freddy Sanchez, the president of the Teamsters California Council of Cannery and Food Processing Unions, finally announced that they once again set a deadline two days away.[63]

Then at 10 a.m. on July 20, 30,000 cannery workers struck. Seventy canneries mostly in the Santa Clara, Sacramento, and San Joaquin valleys stopped their operations. Governor Jerry Brown invited the representatives of the canners and the union to meet. But before the meeting could take place, James F. Scearce, director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, sent both sides telegrams to summon them to a meeting on Thursday in Washington, D.C.[64] Scearce feared that a continued strike would result in a huge loss in food crops. As the negotiations moved to the East, Agriculture Secretary Earl L. Butz, under orders from President Gerald Ford, dispatched a team of three specialists to the West to assess the economic impact of the strike. Butz's men reported that the strike had already caused a "substantial loss" of the apricot crop, and the tomato crop, which was almost coming to harvest,

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[62] "U.S. Reports Gains in Ending Cannery Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1976.

[63] "Deadline Set for Cannery Workers Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1976.

[64] "Halt Cannery Strike, Brown Urges Ford," *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 1976.

had been "sharply affected."[65] Meanwhile, the peak period for peaches, pears, and grapes was nealy at hand.

On July 22, the negotiation resumed in Washington, D.C. through the mediation of Scearce.[66] In the meantime, tons of fresh fruits and vegetables were rotting in California's fields. Five days later, the negotiators reached a tentative settlement without deciding the specifics of the overall cost of the contract. As negotiations continued, the union leaders brought the proposed contract back to California where Teamsters were still on picket lines.[67] The union set a two-day voting period beginning on Thursday, July 29, with a ratification meeting on Friday night, July 30. However, the vote would not be counted until 2 a.m. Saturday, aggravating the growers and state agriculture officials. Impatient to minimize the loss and restart operations, Del Monte already readied its ten canneries for reopening on Thursday.[68]

While union members continued to vote, Teamster officials showed an optimistic yet less than confident attitude. The details of the contract that the union revealed at the meetings included improved health and welfare benefits covering spouses and

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[65] "U.S. Reports Gains in Ending Cannery Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1976.

[66] "Pressure Mounts on Ford to Halt Cannery Walkout," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1976.

[67] "Cannery Strike Accord Reached," *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1976.

[68] "Growers Await Workers' OK on Cannery Pact," *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1976; Teamsters Begin 2-Day Vote on Cannery Strike, *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1976.

children of employees in the medical checkup program. The wage increase, however, would disappoint union members. Despite the original $3.50 demand, the union won only a $1.60 per hour increase over the three years.[69] Alex Luscutoff, secretary-treasurer of Local 857 in Sacramento, said to the *Los Angeles Times*, "There was some unhappiness because there wasn't enough money." He predicted the wage increase would be accepted. But, he added, "I'm not positive."[70] No major disputes arose at the meetings in Sacramento, Modesto, or Merced.[71] As the union leadership expected, cannery workers did vote for the contract. After Sanchez announced the ratification by a two-and-a-half-to-one margin on early Saturday morning, some canneries began operations immediately.[72]

In fact, Luscutoff correctly recognized the smoldering embers of dissatisfaction among the workers. The Cannery Workers Committees and *The Fifth Wheel* viewed the strike as a defeat, proving the union officials' incompetence. While they acknowledged the aggression of the management, they still criticized the Teamsters Union for not using its power to pressure the canners.[73] Their anger turned to the lack

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[69] "Fruit pickers, canners get back to work," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 1, 1976.

[70] "Contract OK Predicted as Cannery Vote Continues," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1976.

[71] "Contract OK Predicted as Cannery Vote Continues," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1976.

[72] "Fruit pickers, canners get back to work," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 1, 1976.

[73] *The Fifth Wheel*, August 1976.

of communication between the union officials and the rank-and-file cannery workers. First, the reformers suspected that the union did not represent the workers' voice in front of the canners. As *The Fifth Wheel* resentfully reported, in the months before the previous contract expired in the end of June, the Committees held meetings to discuss their demands and submitted them to the officials. Although the union leadership accepted the wage increase of $3.50, they rejected other demands such as strengthening the grievance procedure and the founding of an elected safety committee which would have the authority to shut down unsafe machinery.[74] Therefore, the negotiation did not reflect the rank-and-filers' original demands. To make it worse, even the one proposal that Teamster officials accepted—the wage increase—could not survive the contested dispute, deepening their disappointment. Moreover, the union did not provide any report for the workers about how the negotiation was going. As a result, the strikers lined up on the picket without any specific insights into what their union was demanding. The estrangement between

[74] For example, *The Fifth Wheel* reported in June 1971 that a worker named Benito Ramirez had the end of his thumb cut off while operating a lifting crane in March 1970 as an example of work injury. Skin from his arms was grafted to his thumb but the graft area had not healed by November of that year while Ramirez received no time off and compensation for the injury. With the assistance of the Cannery Workers Committee Ramirez testified before the Sacramento City-County Human Relations Commission about the incident. *The Fifth Wheel*, June 1971.

officials and rank-and-file members solidified suspicion toward the union leadership.[75]

A mixed feeling settled over the northern California cannery workers in summer of 1976. On the one hand, they were starting to see the fruit of their labor organizing; a series of efforts legally put an end to overt discrimination at the workplace and the number of women and Mexican-descended employees in higher-paying positions gradually increased. They also mobilized the workers for bylaw changes to achieve democracy within the union. However, their movement was not powerful enough to retain the militancy of the union in the face of employers' aggression and the economic crisis. The victories and defeats came together, and the cannery workers knew that there remained much more to be done. And they were not alone in keeping such sentiment. In fact, dissident Teamsters all over the nation shared the mixed feeling in the summer of 1976.

Originally motivated by the experience of discrimination, cannery workers in northern California initiated the formation of the Cannery Workers Committee. They recognized the Teamsters Union as the source of their problems and aimed for its reform as a solution. In other words, they chose union reform as a means of fighting

[75] *The Fifth Wheel*, August 1976.

racial and gender discrimination and economic inequality. Through legal battles the cannery workers ended discrimination, but the strike failed amidst an economic downturn and they blamed the Teamsters Union for the strike's weakness. For Mexican cannery workers, the problems of discrimination and its solutions existed within the framework of unionism. The discussion of the Teamster reform movements in the 1970s oftentimes focuses on freight workers, many of whom were white males, but Mexican cannery workers—including many women—shared the same battle for union reform in northern California.

CHAPTER IV

CLASH OF UNIONISMS

In summer 1976, Las Vegas bristled with gorgeous hotels and extravagant casinos. This resort city perhaps offered a perfect location for the national convention of the Teamsters Union, which had held the event in Miami Beach, Florida before. Between July 14 and 17, Sin City hosted 2254 union officials as well as government top officials such as Secretary of Labor William Usery Jr. Such a large event, held every five year, signified the substantial power and the influence of the Teamsters Union on the nation's politics. This time, however, something was different. While two dozen rank-and-file Teamsters were on the picket outside the Convention Center, an "infiltrator" disturbed the grand gathering of union bureaucrats inside. His name was Pete Camarata, a 30-year old loader from Detroit. Rank-and-file members of the home local of Jimmy Hoffa and Frank Fitzsimmons sent Camarata to this event. Having noticed that the convention agenda did not include the amendments that Camarata had submitted to union headquarters, he rose to his feet against the 2,254 union officials and started reading his proposals. Still, Camarata, a 240-pound former football tackle, looked powerless in front of the union

bureaucracy. “I wish he would stop wasting the convention’s time!” a delegate screamed. Before he could finish his second proposal, a shower of hooting and jeering washed over the dissident.[1]

As we have seen in the previous chapters, rank-and-file Teamsters attributed the issues of bad working conditions, lack of protection in the contract, and job discrimination to the deficits of union officials in the early half of the 1970s. Each burst of activism produced notable immediate outcomes for a short period, but previous attempts to organize a larger, united national movement had failed. However, in 1976, freight workers scattered around the nation initiated contact with each other and created a plan to pressure union leaders negotiating with business interests. This was the beginning of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), which, unlike most other union dissident movements of the 1970s, continues to exist today in 2019 as a rank-and-file slate within the Teamsters Union.

At the Teamster convention floor, two different styles of unionism clashed; one relying on the rank-and-file power on the shop floor represented by Camarata and the other controlled by well-paid union officials enjoying lavish lifestyles away from the shop floor. Just like any other dissident movement, rebellious rank-and-file Teamsters

[1] Lester Velie, *Desperate Bargain: Why Jimmy Hoffa had to Die* (New York: The Readers’ Digest Press, 1976)

strove to achieve the opposite of what the Teamsters Union was doing, and in this sense, the reform movement was a product of the Teamster culture. To establish legitimacy, dissidents developed the critique that while the union might be able to bring higher wages to the members, Teamster unionism did not help maintain worker control on the shop floor. As a counter to the bureaucratized unionism of Teamsters, which had failed to protect workers, TDU presented rank-and-file unionism. Taking the union back from bureaucrats became the workers' goal, and union democracy gave them a conceptual foundation for that ambition. In the late 1970s, the bureaucratic Teamsters Union had overlooked deteriorating working conditions, job insecurity, and dysfunctional grievance procedures, leading to the birth of rank-and-file unionism. These two styles of unionism clashed within this nation's largest labor organization and such strife elaborated the TDU's discourse of union democracy, defending its legitimacy as a reform movement.

As historian Aaron Brenner has shown, the institutions of labor relations created within the New Deal order, such as unions, grievance procedures, and collective bargaining, failed to protect workers in the late 1960s and 1970s. New Left critics, including the International Socialists (IS), pointed out that those New Deal systems promoted the bureaucratization of unions and functioned to take away

workers' power on the shop floor.[2] Indeed, Steve Fraser argues that after the workers' independent uprising on the shop floor in the early years of the New Deal, the Wagner Act promoted the centralization of labor unions by institutionalizing the system of labor relation. The Act reconciled between the business circle (which accepted unions as a basic constituent of the modern management) and unions (which sought institutional stability.)[3] In the post war period, the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 amended the Wagner Act of 1935, undermining union power and strengthening managerial prerogatives. However, the "labor-management accord" also brought higher wage and welfare benefits to the unionized sector of the U.S. labor force. Under pressure from rising inflation and intensified international competition with high productivity countries, the situation had shifted in the late 1960s. In response, radicals suggested workers' direct collective action including wildcat strikes and self-organization as an alternative of the established bureaucracy. A segment of workers, who had witnessed the civil rights movement and antiwar movement during the 1960s, responded to that appeal with militant direct actions in the 1970s.[4]

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[2] Aaron Brenner, *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below during the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010), xiv-xvii.

[3] Steve Fraser, "The 'Labor Question'" in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle ed., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 77-78.

[4] Aaron Brenner, *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from below during the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010), xiv-xvii.

Historians have pointed out that TDU emerged within the context of Teamster tradition of rank-and-file militant activism at the local level vis-à-vis bureaucratic, corrupt business unionism of the leadership. Based upon the high degree of independence in trucking occupations, rank-and-file Teamster drivers enjoyed job control in truck barns across the nation while developing informal local work groups. Additionally, the decentralized nature of the Teamsters Union encouraged autonomous local operations.[5] On the other hand, Teamster leaders such as Dave Beck and Jimmy Hoffa aggressively devoted themselves to stabilize their organization. Pragmatism, instead of ideological commitment to the labor movement, often swayed their strategies. As a result, the Teamsters did bring the membership a range of material benefits, shorter hours, better wages, as well as job security and protection from the employers' abuse, but at the same time, such methods fueled charges of corruption against the union leaders. Throughout Teamster history, rank-and-file members were concerned about issues of corruption, which occasionally spurred grassroots reform efforts.[6] When the union became unable to bring material gains to its membership in the 1970s, this pattern of corruption and reform came into

[5] Aaron Brenner, "Rank-and-File Teamster Movements in Comparative Perspective," in Glenn W. Perusek and Kent Worcester ed., *Trade Union Politics: American Unions and Economic Change, 1960s-1990s* (NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), 116-21; Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union*. (New York: Verso, 1990), 83-140.

[6] David Witwer, *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2003),2-4, 132.

effect on a large scale. In the clash between the Teamster leadership and the TDU activism, these "two Teamster traditions" were evidently expressed.

As I will illustrate, such confrontations sharpened the TDU's critique of the Teamster leaders, revealing the limits of postwar liberalism. Indeed, analyzing early TDU activism and discourse exposes the various defects of the New Deal order from the rank-and-file perspective. As the so-called postwar "labor-management accord" had taken workers' power away on the shop floor, and the union leadership yielded the management's "visibly right to manage," TDU activists presented rank-and-file unionism as a countersuggestion.[7] Likewise, TDU also tried to establish legitimacy by pointing out the union leaders' noncommittal attitudes toward racial and gender equality within the union and workplace. Dissident activists then attempted to present an alternative vision of labor movement in the United States which would strengthen the workers' power at the shop floor while leaving an inclusive space for non-white and women workers to join by overcoming discrimination.

The rank-and-file anger at union leadership fundamentally came from the fact that their lifestyles did not reflect that of workers and thus they did not represent the

[7] Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 122-25.

rank-and-file Teamsters' interest. First off, the Teamster officials led lives of luxury which could easily rival those of the business elite. For example, William Presser—one of the International vice presidents—received $145,541 in salaries, expenses, and other allowances in 1976 for his union jobs and bought a new Rolls-Royce for his wife's birthday. Meanwhile, his son Jackie—head of the Ohio Teamsters—collected $222,000 in salary in the same year.[8] Such wealth was a result of Teamsters leaders' effort to profit though union operations. Jimmy Hoffa's management of the Central States Pension Fund is exemplary of this problem: instead of leaving the pension fund's operation to a bank or an insurance company, Hoffa ordered that investments be made directly by his union subordinates and employers, and so the fund's reserves were not invested in securities but lent to finance businesses like land development, loans, and hotels.[9] The profit-seeking attitude of union leaders indicated their uncritical embrace of business values, compromising their ability to understand and represent the shop floor needs of rank-and-file Teamsters.

Teamster leadership also engaged with a variety of corrupt operations that caused rank-and-file members to distrust them. Such misconduct included the undemocratic appointment of union officials, union connections with mafia, and financial

[8] "Rebel Teamsters push democracy," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 24, 1978.

[9] Lester Velie, *Desperate Bargain: Why Jimmy Hoffa Had to Die* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1977), 88-89.

dishonesty. In the 1960s, Jimmy Hoffa codified this undemocratic, dictational character of the union by recasting the Teamster constitution to limit his accountability toward rebellious rank-and-filers and intriguing colleagues. After Hoffa's dismissal, Frank Fitzsimmons, who would later betray Hoffa, also used such power to keep Hoffa loyalists out of key positions.[10] The Professional Drivers Council (PROD)—a dissident organization of truck drivers—observed this lack of democratic process in the upper ranges of union politics in 1976. General President Frank Fitzsimmons appointed his allies as Executive Board members and many organizers, and then they might attend national conventions as delegates, who could elect the union officials, including the General President.[11] Cut out of the election process, rank-and-file members could not participate in the appointment process of top union officials.

To make matters worse, financial misconduct among Teamster leaders had been a problem since the 1950s. As the McClellan Committee had revealed to the American public in the late 1950s, General Presidents such as Dave Beck and Jimmy Hoffa used union money to accumulate their private wealth. While such problems remained

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[10] Lester Velie, *Desperate Bargain: Why Jimmy Hoffa Had to Die* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1977), 69, 135-36.

[11] Arthur L. Fox, II, and John Sikorski, *A PROD Report: Teamster Democracy and Financial Responsibility: A Factual and Structural Analysis,* (Washington D.C.: PROD, 1976).

unsolved up until the 1970s, mob influence had also become synonymous with the Teamsters Union. The McClellan Committee also presented the evidence of close connections between the Teamster leadership and criminal groups, who received loans from the union's pension funds. Even after the leaders responsible for these loans went to jail, corruption continued. In the 1970s, the scandalous disappearance of hundreds of millions of dollars from the Central States Pension Fund again marked the misconduct of union officials.[12] PROD called such corruption "punk unionism" as "a disease which has infected a significant segment of the Teamster leadership and its followers."[13] Since Teamster members around the nation had shared distrust in their officials in the 1970s, the rank-and-file rebellion was their answer to the "punk unionism" of Teamster leaders.

The formation of the national dissident movement became possible on the grounds of small-scale local movements from the early 1970s. The 1973 National Master Freight Agreement, the industry-wide three-year labor contract between the Teamsters Union and trucking employers, would be expired in March 1976, and its

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[12] Much of the money in the Fund, which was for the pensions of 385,000 Teamster members, was loaned to a Teamster attorney, who built a golf course in California and eventually failed to repay most of it. As the fund was controlled by Teamster officials who had ties to mafia, the money was also used by mobsters to build casinos in Las Vegas. As a result, many Teamsters had to retire without having the union's pension. David Witwer, *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 177-79.

[13] *PROD DISPATCH*, April-May 1977.

renewal gave local activists an opportunity to meet each other and form a larger campaign. The movement first started as a petition drive with only a few dozen activists at the center. On August 16, 1975, eight months before the current contract was expired, thirty-five freight Teamsters met in Chicago to discuss the 1976 freight contract demands and their grassroots campaign to pressure the union officials at the negotiation table. They were mostly the creators of local rank-and-file newspapers such as Los Angeles's *Grapevine* and Cleveland's *Speak Out*.[14] This means that those organizers included the members of the International Socialists and the veterans of TURF. Calling themselves "Teamsters for a Decent Contract (TDC)," these thirty-five participants planned to petition Teamster leadership and to distribute brochures among freight workers.

Among the participants of the TDC founding meeting was Kenneth Paff, who would continue to work on the reform movement as a national organizer for four decades. Paff's presence in the organization was one of the examples of the marriage between union reform and the radical movements of the 1960s. Originally born in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, Paff, a son of a steel worker, moved to California with his mother at the age of ten after his parents' divorce. In 1964, he entered University of

[14] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-file Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 52.

California, Berkley, where he became a part of the civil rights movement and the free speech movement on campus while majoring in physics. Leaving Berkley, Paff started to work as a computer programmer and later a school teacher before finally getting a job as a truck driver. Although Dan LaBotz never mentioned this in his celebratory narrative of TDU, Paff identified himself as an International Socialist along with "a number of Socialists in the TDU" in a 1977 interview by *the Nation*.[15] Indeed, he and his wife Carole soon moved to Cleveland, where he became a driver at Shipper's Dispatch and worked for the local rank-and-file newspaper called *Membership Voice*, in which the radicals were involved. In this Midwestern Teamster stronghold and home to William and Jackie Pressers, who enjoyed an extravagant lifestyle, Paff also met veterans of TURF. Soon, in summer 1975, Paff was elected as a secretary at the TDC founding meeting.[16]

The TDC's demands reveal their belief that the union was responsible for issues beyond the wage package. Five principles made up the TDC demands: wage increase in accordance with the rising cost of living; protections such as health and pension coverage as well as voluntary overtime, seniority protection and the elimination of casual status; fair grievance procedure; job safety; and extension of the

[15] Robert H. Holden, "The Teamster Dissidents Mobilize," *The Nation*, November 5, 1977: 461-63.

[16] Dan LaBotz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 52-53.

best conditions (such as paid sick leave) to all.[17] Here, wage accounted for merely a part of their entire program, which had an even larger stress on an extensive system to protect workers' control on the shop floor.

Threatened by employers' offenses, not a few Teamster rank-and-file workers agreed with the TDC's demands and by the end of 1975, their movement had spread from coast to coast with the petition drive as its center. As the International Socialists had reported in 1975, the 1976 Master Freight Agreement stirred rebellious sentiments among rank-and-file Teamsters around the nation and TDC increasingly won enthusiastic support from locals around the nation.[18] This shows that the TDC's emphasis both on wage and shop floor issues tapped into rank-and-file discontent of the period. For instance, the Teamsters Union brought significant wage increases in the 1970 National Master Freight Agreement, but such advances took place when employers pushed for cost-cutting and productivity increases with new technological improvements, and taking job-control from rank-and-file drivers. Workers recognized that they were losing control at the shop floor even though the union delivered some economic gains. United Parcel Service (UPS) —the single largest employer of

[17] Teamsters for a Decent Contract: Stand Together in '76, Teamsters for a Democratic Union Records, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[18] *Grapevine*, no.6.

Teamster members in the nation—led a vigorous productivity drive.[19] In response, Teamsters at UPS started a rank-and-file organization called UPSurge in parallel with TDC.

Pete Camarata was one of such Teamsters who responded to the TDC's campaign in 1975. Born in 1946 to an active member of the United Automobile Workers and a cook, he grew up on Detroit's East Side. Camarata started college at Wayne State while working part-time on a dock to pay for tuition and board. Eventually, he dropped out to work full-time, and developed a sense of pride not as a worker but as a Teamster in Local 299, the home of Jimmy Hoffa. Admiring this controversial union leader, who was viewed as a Depression-era militant in the eyes of many rank-and-file Teamsters, Camarata was elected as a union steward in 1970.[20] When his hero came out of prison with the ambition to take back the local leadership, Camarata joined a rank-and-file organization to support Hoffa in the local election. Although their fight failed in front of another candidate who Frank Fitzsimmons sent to prevent Hoffa from returning to the power, this rank-and-file group soon

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[19] Aaron Brenner, "Rank-and-File Teamster Movements in Comparative Perspective," in Glenn W. Perusek and Kent Worcester ed., *Trade Union Politics: American Unions and Economic Change, 1960s-1990s* (NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), 122-23.

[20] In spite of all the scandalous, Hoffa remained popular among many Teamster members and officials for his charismatic character. Even after he became the national leader, unlike Frank Fitzsimmons, he still maintained close relations with rank-and-file workers, spent time with them, and listened to their words. Lester Velie, *Desperate Bargain: Why Jimmy Hoffa Had to Die* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1977), 220; Thaddeus Russel, *Out of the Jungle: Jimmy Hoffa and the Remaking of the American Working Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 150.

developed into a broader movement beyond Hoffa support and the participants started regular meetings to discuss job grievances. When TDC called on their support in the fall 1975 campaign, old Hoffa supporters in Local 299 reacted positively and sent Camarata to a TDC meeting in Cleveland. Shortly after, Camarata became one of the central TDC activists in both Detroit and the nation at large.[21]

During the early stages of the 1976 contract negotiation, it is unclear how much influence the TDC movement extended over the draft of the union's initial demands. The Teamsters Union took a tough stand on the wage package, which was a

Figure 1. Pete Camarata. He was pictured in 1978 under a portrait of Jimmy Hoffa. *New York Times*, February 15, 2014.

[21] Amidst this battle in Local 299, Hoffa suddenly disappeared in July 1975. Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 53-57; Douglas Martin, "Pete Camarata, Who Fought Fellow Teamsters for Reforms, Dies at 67," *New York Times*, February 15, 2014.

part of the TDC demands, but non-economic issues hardly came up as a focus of the negotiation despite the TDC's pressure. On December 11, 1975, Teamster General President Frank Fitzsimmons and his negotiating committee presented the union's demands to the trucking industry in a joint meeting in Washington D.C. One of the major points of their demands was the removal of the cap on the cost-of-living clause in addition to the $2.5 hourly wage increase for the next three years, in other words, 35 percent compared with the current scale. They also demanded a $12 per member per week increase in employer contributions to health and welfare, to be guaranteed alongside pensions each of the contract years in order to bring the pension funds into compliance with the new Employee Retirement Income Security Act.[22] In the face of high inflation, union officials did not hesitate to appear bold. Jackie Presser, vice president of Teamsters Joint Council 41, and later General President said the next month, "We are asking a lot." Nonetheless, both sides of the bargaining proved to be optimistic at this point. Although Presser mentioned the threat of strike by saying "No

[22] This act enabled the federal government to search records and question managers by giving them broad subpoena powers. The act was known at the time as the "Jimmy Hoffa Law" as the McClelland Committee's publicizing of the Teamsters' misconduct of the pension fund resulted in this act. "Fitzsimmons Presents Trucking Industry with Teamster Freight Contract Demand," *International Teamster*, vol.73 No.1 January 1976; Lester Velie, *Desperate Bargain: Why Jimmy Hoffa Had to Die* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1977), 204.

contract, no work," they were confident that they could reach an agreement by the deadline of March 31, and thus they anticipated there would not be a strike in April.[23]

While the Teamsters Union appeared to be tough, they were mostly stressing the wage package and thus, they did not fully grasp rank-and-file discontent. Teamsters who responded to the TDC's call tied the officials' neglect of shop floor issues with their critique of union leaders who exhibited too much coziness with the management. The rank-and-file clearly opposed the contemporary state of the labor relation where high-paid union officials negotiate with other well-paid business officials mostly over the economic package. Such objections belied deeper criticisms against labor unions that had grown too big, becoming mere cogs in the bureaucratic machine of postwar American society. A participant of a TDC rally on January 10 in Washington D.C. exemplified this view. On that day, 130 Teamsters from thirty-six cities brought 15,000 signatures to Teamster officials, who refused to meet them. Frank Brewer from Indianapolis lamented at this event. "You get your big business, you get your big government officials, you get your big, high-paid union officials and they get together and they go out on the golf course and they conspire to make us live the way they think we should live."[24] Since New Deal labor laws established the

[23] "No Work without Contract, Teamsters' Presser Warns," *Cleveland Press*, December 19, 1975.

[24] *Convoy: Voice of Teamsters for a Decent Contract*, no.1.

state-sponsored collective bargaining system, full-time salaried officers in the union took the negotiations away from the shop floor. In his view, unions disciplined workers in collusion with the government and the management. Even though unions grew more powerful during the postwar period, such institutional "maturity" left the rank-and-file workers behind, and many Teamsters visibly expressed their dissatisfaction through the TDC movement.[25]

While TDC committees around the nation organized a series of small rallies throughout the winter toward the end of March, a storm was on horizon at the negotiation table and the TDC's pressure further complicated the situation. The trucking officials continued to criticize Teamster proposals as President of Trucking Employers Inc. (TEI) William McIntyre said that their demands ignored economic conditions and would boost labor costs as much as 50 percent over three years. Those economic issues seemed enough for the employers to fiercely resist Teamster demands, but journalists reported with curiosity the presence of rebel Teamsters who were asking for even more: "A noisy minority of union dissidents is pushing for exotic demands like voluntary overtime at double-time rates and escalator clauses of fringe benefits."[26] Contemporary observers started to notice that it was not a simple

[25] Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 142-48

[26] "Storm Signals Wave over Teamsters Talks," *Cleveland Press*, March 7, 1976.

dichotomy between the union and the employers and newspapers continued to acknowledge the influence of TDC on the tough position of Fitzsimmons although they simply discussed it within the framework of union politics for the upcoming reelection of General President in June.[27] Nonetheless, it is still clear, as outside observers recorded, that TDC made inroads into that politics as a non-negligible party within the union.

Despite a few attempts of concession by both sides, the union and the employer did not reach an agreement by March 31 at midnight. The next day on April 1, Teamster truckers, who hauled 60 percent of the nation's manufactured goods, officially went on national strike. While negotiations continued in Arlington Heights, Chicago, a series of interim agreements between the union and individual companies--which temporarily agreed to an $1.75-an-hour increase and $17 a week in pension and health welfare benefits—eventually resulted in a third of 440,000 Teamster truckers returning to work.[28] Those interim agreements offered by the union were based on the Teamsters' "final" compromise contract proposal and would remain effective until a national agreement was reached.[29] On April 2, two major trucking groups, the

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[27] "Teamster Talks at a 'Critical' Point," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 30, 1976.

[28] "20 Truck Firms Here OK Teamsters Pact," *Cleveland Press*, April 1, 1976; "Teamsters Leave Jobs," *Cleveland Press*, April 1, 1976; "Teamster Strike Ends; Trucks Roll Tomorrow," April 4, 1976.

[29] "2 Trucking Groups OK Teamster Pact," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 3, 1976.

Motor Carriers Labor Advisor Council and Irregular Route Carriers, and 140,000 Teamsters had reached agreement on a new contract, leaving only about 160,000 members on strike.[30] The proposed new agreement would offer a raise of $1.65 over the next three years, an unlimited cost-of-living allowance, and $17 a week in health and pension benefits. In addition, one of the biggest victories for the Teamsters was paid sick leave and the removal of the cap on the cost-of-living clause.[31] The labor dispute could have caused a large-scale paralysis of circulation of commodities, and thus national emergency, but under the pressure of Labor Secretary William Usery Jr., Trucking Employers Inc. and the rest of the strikers soon followed the agreement.

This three-day trucking strike provided a first stage of direct confrontation between two different unionisms in the Teamsters Union. On the one hand, the union leadership showed "tough" stand at the negotiations, but their focus was mostly on the wage package. No matter how militant they appeared through the negotiations and strike, they emphasized economic demands. Thus, in their view, the settlement was a victory for the union.[32] Although he did not have specific information about the agreement until he went to Chicago to hear the details of the contract, Thomas Eddie

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[30] "2 Trucking Groups OK Teamster Pact," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 3, 1976; "Truckers Here Join Return," *Cleveland Press*, April 3, 1976.

[31] "Outlook is Good for Teamsters to Ratify Contract Peacefully," *Cleveland Press*, April 3, 1976.

[32] "Outlook is Good for Teamsters to Ratify Contract Peacefully," *Cleveland Press*, April 3, 1976.

Lee, secretary-treasurer of Local 407 in Cleveland, said, "If the agreement is the one I think it is, it will be the biggest money package in the history of the Teamsters."[33] Frank Fitzsimmons called the new contract "a landmark agreement that will put Teamster members back into the mainstream of American life."[34] Here, we can see that the TDC's critique was correct in that Teamster officials would be content so long as they brought higher wages to members.

This was not the case for the TDC. Their initial dissatisfaction with the union's demands came from the lack of emphasis on non-wage issues, which did not draw much attention from the bargaining teams during the negotiation. Indeed, Ken Paff criticized the new contract as "inadequate" during the strike and strongly urged the members to reject the contract.[35] His sentiment directly clashed with the union leadership as a spokesman for Teamsters Joint Council 41, which covered Local 407, said, "The irresponsible, self-appointed leadership of the TDC would oppose any settlement since their goal is not economic progress and stability, but chaos."[36] TDC would oppose any settlement as long as the union leadership did not understand their

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[33] "Teamster Fraction here to Fight Pact Approval," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 4, 1976; "Outlook is Good for Teamsters to Ratify Contract Peacefully," *Cleveland Press,* April 3, 1976.

[34] "Members Vote on New National Master Freight Agreement," *International Teamster*, vol.73 No.5, May 1976.

[35] "Outlook is Good for Teamsters to Ratify Contract Peacefully," *Cleveland Press,* April 3, 1976.

[36] "Teamster Faction Here to Fight Pact Approval," *Cleveland Plain Dealer,* April 4, 1976.

focus on non-economic clauses. For TDC, non-economic demands were important because these were what the rank-and-file struggled with at the shop floor, and pressuring the leadership was necessary because the union never listened to them. TDC believed that higher wages alone could not achieve "economic progress and stability," and that workers needed better grievance procedure, job security, and job control as well as better wages to improve their lives. However, the majority of the rank-and-file Teamsters outside the TDC movement may have shared the leadership's focus on the increased wages. In spite of TDC's resentment, the agreement was ratified.

Rank-and-file militancy rippled through the industries covered by the Teamster contracts. The trucking settlement would pave the way for other industries that were negotiating new contracts in 1976 including autoworkers, construction workers, electrical workers, and rubber workers. The 1976 contract also had an influence on smaller contracts within the transportation industry. While truckers were on strike in early April, rank-and-file UPS workers were also ready to strike to pressure the union. On May 1, 1976, the expiration date of the UPS contract, workers walked off the job without any call from union officials in Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North and South Dakotas, Ohio, Wisconsin and Wyoming. *Convoy* harshly criticized UPSers who kept working

as "SCAB."[37] Calling UPS "one of the nastiest freight companies in the business," TDC attacked the Teamsters' seemingly unwillingness to "fight for every scrap."[38] At the center of this wildcat strike were the UPSurge activists. They pushed through resolutions demanding a secret ballot at the union hall and a ratified contract before going back to work.[39] Although union leadership called off the strike after a few days, UPSurge led a wildcat strike for two weeks. Along with the TDC's pressure during the freight contract, such rebellious actions forced union officials to notice that dissident movements were on the rise.

After those direct confrontations with the union and employers, Teamster dissidents developed the idea of union "reform." The TDC and UPSurge recognized both contracts as "sellouts," and realized that the current leadership as well as the bureaucracy prevented their voices from reaching the negotiation table. Having started with the 1976 contracts as targets, they now aimed at the long-term goal of union democracy as a means of achieving rank-and-file control. On June 5, thirty-five[40] TDC and UPSurge members met in Cleveland and decided to change the name

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[37] *Convoy*, no.9.

[38] *Convoy*, no.9.

[39] *Convoy*, no.9.

[40] *Grapevine*, a rank-and-file newspaper of Los Angeles Teamsters reported that there were "some 55 people from about 20 areas across the US," but TDU's official histories written in later years reported that "35 TDC and UPSurge members from various cities met in Cleveland." Dan La Botz, although he does not make it clear what source he used, also states that "thirty-five TDC and UPSurge members from various cities met," too. *Grapevine*, August 1976; The History of TDU: Lessons for Teamster

of their group to Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). Here, they officially merged into the current of union reform established in the early 1970s within the Teamsters. It should be noted that they did not aim for anything more than reform and did not see establishing another union as an effective strategy. Doug Allan, a driver for All Trans., and one of the delegates from Los Angeles, reported this gathering in their local rank-and-file newspaper. Accordingly, at the meeting, participants discussed the issue of dual unionism. "We are and will continue to be Teamsters and will fight to get the union back to where it belongs, with the rank and file."[41] The publicizing of corruption among leaders did not eliminate their pride as Teamsters. Rather, because of their identity as Teamster truckers, who had enjoyed higher wage and more job control than nonunionized workers, they stood up against the leadership. They embraced the Teamsters as a concept that embodied workers' militancy.

In the economic crisis of the 1970s, those workers noticed that the Teamsters' focus on bread-and-butter issues could not protect them anymore. However, they still believed in the structure by which the union, not government nor management, should protect the rights of workers. In this view, reform was necessary only to replace

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Members Today, 2008 NY/NJ Working Teamster Educational Conference, courtesy of Teamsters for a Democratic Union; Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 69.

[41] *Grapevine,* August 1976.

business unionism with rank-and-file based unionism. Indeed, TDU evolved a discourse to refuse political and legal means to reform the union. "We, the rank and file, cannot count on anyone but ourselves," the San Francisco dissident newspaper declared, "we will have no one but ourselves to blame for deteriorating conditions if we do not act now."[42] Strictly focusing on the Teamsters Union, the reformers could complete their project within the framework of internal union politics. Their view did not go as far as the IS's fundamental critique of the entire New Deal order.

On June 14, nine days after the birth of TDU, a four-day national Teamsters Convention, held every five year, began in Las Vegas. This provided another opportunity for the two different unionisms represented by TDU and the national bureaucracy to clash. In May, members of Local 299 in Detroit elected fifteen delegates to the convention, and the biggest vote-getter was Pete Camarata. He had submitted amendments to the union constitution for the direct election of international officers and business agents in locals.[43] Based on PROD's recommendations, these proposals suggested a strategy to bite into the rigid bureaucracy by democratizing union elections.[44] On the same day, about two dozen TDU members, organized by

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[42] *The Fifth Wheel*, September 1979.

[43] *Convoy*, no.9.

[44] Lee Dembart, "Teamster Dissidents Picket Convention," *New York Times*, June 14, 1976.

Doug Allan of LA TDU, picketed outside the Las Vegas Convention Center. Fitzsimmons denounced them at a news conference. "Do you want to listen to a handful of dissidents or do you want to listen to more than two million members represented by 2,300 delegates?"[45] Indeed, TDU members acknowledged that they had little hope: Ken Paff anticipated in a telephone interview from Cleveland that "none of our problems—job elimination, a grievance procedure which does not work, bad working conditions—will be dealt with at the convention."[46] Pete Camarata told a newspaper that "I don't know what they will do here in Las Vegas. Most people don't give us a chance of getting out proposals passed, but we have to make our voices heard."[47] Their words represented the type of unionism that TDU idealized as a counter to the Teamster culture: because the union leaders neglected the rank-and-file voice and focused only on wage demands, TDU developed the discourse that a union should pay attention to non-wage issues which concerned the rank-and-file workers on the shop floor.

The union magazine reported the decisions made in Las Vegas with a celebratory tone. The 2,254 convention delegates, representing two million members,

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[45] Lee Dembart, "Teamster Dissidents Picket Convention," *New York Times*, June 14, 1976.

[46] Lee Dembart, "Teamsters Union Meets Tomorrow: Fitzsimmons is Expected to Continue Control Despite Efforts of Dissidents," *New York Times*, June 13, 1976.

[47] "Teamster Dissidents Picket Convention," *New York Times*, June 14, 1976.

ratified the "unanimous reelection" of General President Fitzsimmons, General Secretary-Treasurer Ray Schoessling and fifteen incumbent vice presidents.[48] The official magazine ignored the fact that Pete Camarata voted against Fitzsimmons's re-election.[49] In addition, the convention delegates approved approximately a hundred amendments to the union constitution, while they had refused to consider the amendments brought by Camarata.[50] The approved amendments included an increased per capita payment from local unions to the national office, and gave the principal officer of a local union supervisory authority over all local officers and personnel. The delegates also ratified "a new due system," by which all dues whould be increased by two dollars. Another amendment approved the 25 percent pay raise for members of the general executive board, including Fitzsimmons and Schoessling.[51] The approved amendments clearly represented the parts of Teamster culture that dissidents were fighting against. These decisions would deliver more money to union bureaucrats from rank-and-file members while strengthening national control over the locals. Pete Camarata had proposed a $100,000 a year limit on the

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[48] *International Teamster*, vol.73 no.7, July 1976.

[49] *Grapevine,* August 1976; A Cause Worth Truckin' For!: Teamsters for a Democratic Union Organize for Rank and File Power, Teamsters for a Democratic Union Records, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[50] *International Teamster*, vol.73 no.7, July 1976.

[51] Official Magazine did not note that this pay hike would give Fitzsimmons $156,250 a year and extant fringe benefits such as private planes and chauffeur-driven cars. *International Teamster*, vol.73 no.7, July 1976.

General President's income only to be booed.[52] The convention made it apparent to reformers that the voice of rank-and-filers were powerless in front of the established Teamster bureaucracy.

Moreover, union leadership and dissidents directly confronted each other over the "reform." The union magazine highlighted the words of the national leadership in response to "pre-convention critics" without clearly identifying them. Accordingly, Fitzsimmons stated in his keynote speech that he "would never allow outsiders to destroy the Teamsters Union" unless "by your majority you allow them to do so."[53] The General President stressed the majority rule under which they conducted the convention, and by doing so, he implicitly refuted the TDU's criticism about the lack of union democracy. Although muted in the official magazine, the leadership's clearer statement against the dissidents were recorded by outside observers. A New York Times article reported that Fitzsimmons declared, "To those who say it is time to reform this organization and it's time the officers stopped selling out the members of this organization, I say to them, 'Go to hell.'"[54] Backed by

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[52] Harry Bernstein, "Union Hikes Fitzsimmons' Pay $31,250: Teamsters Shout Approval at Conclave, Also OK Dues Boost," *New York Times*, June 16, 1976; Lester Velie, "Can the Rank and File Clean up the Teamsters?" condensed from "Desperate Bargain: Why Jimmy Hoffa had to Die," (New York: The Readers' Digest Press, 1976).

[53] *International Teamster*, vol.73 no.7, July 1976.

[54] Lee Dembart, "Teamsters Chief Scores Dissidents: Fitzsimmons Says They Try to Destroy Union," *New York Times*, June 15, 1976.

unwavering commitment to union bureaucracy, Fitzsimmons depicted dissidents as "destroyers" of the organization. Doug Allan responded, "We'll go to hell and back to reform this union."[55] Allan's words represented the determination of the rank-and-file that they would put effort in winning at local elections and democratically sending more delegates next time. The wall of union bureaucracy did not discourage the reformers; instead, they moved forward a new strategy to take the fight to national leaders.

It was not only the cruel attitudes of delegates that TDU members endured at the Convention but also direct violence. When the Convention was over, the re-elected General President hosted a "victory cocktail party," at which Camarata and two other dissidents dropped in. However, as delegates stared at those "infiltrators", they felt insecure and left immediately. Fearing the possibility of violence, based on the numerous records of Teamster officials' connections with the mafia, they asked a security guard to escort them. Instead of accepting their request, the guard called several union sergeants-at-arms, who in turn had two Teamsters accompany the three dissidents to the street. Then one of the escorts punched Camarata in the face and knocked him down while the other tied the other activist, dislocating his shoulders. A

[55] *TDU: 10 Years and Going Strong*, Courtesy of Teamsters for a Democratic Union.

local policeman showed up and told the TDU representatives to get out of town immediately. Recognizing the risk of using the local airport, they ended up driving down to Los Angeles. This incident clearly showed the physical danger of directly defying the Teamster officials in addition to the possible risk of job loss.[56]

The 1976 Teamster Convention showcased the clash of two different styles of unionism. On the one hand, the Teamsters Union had established enough authority to influence the trucking industry and national policymakers. The huge number of 2000 delegates representing two million members was symbolic. By refusing to unload trucks at nonunionized terminals, Jimmy Hoffa expanded union membership in the postwar period. This means that membership increased not by active participation of rank-and-file workers but forcing the truck operators to sign their employees into the Teamsters.[57] Such superficial growth along with its business-like operations caused the union to lose a close link between workers and officials. The leaders seemed more like profit-seeking managers, and they lost legitimacy as workers' representatives on the shop floor.

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[56] Lester Velie, *Desperate Bargain: Why Jimmy Hoffa had to Die* (New York: The Readers' Digest Press, 1976).

[57] Lester Velie, *Desperate Bargain: Why Jimmy Hoffa had to Die* (New York: The Readers' Digest Press, 1976), 68; Thaddeus Russel, *Out of the Jungle: Jimmy Hoffa and the Remaking of the American Working Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 211.

On the other hand, rank-and-file Teamsters, who had been victimized by the misconduct of union leaders, presented an alternative by means of democracy. As Ken Paff lamented, the lack of attention from the union officials to non-economic issues took workers' control away from the shop floor. At the convention floor, Camarata, who was democratically elected as a delegate, proposed measures to prevent the officials' abuse of power. By doing so, dissident rank-and-file Teamsters suggested a counter to this Teamsters' wage-focused, bureaucratic, abusive and corrupt culture which had left workers behind. The answer was rank-and-file unionism in which the decisions at the top would democratically reflect the voice from the bottom.

In the face of corrupt union bureaucracy, the reform movement must have seemed preposterously outmatched in terms of size and power. In spite of letting it baffle their efforts, however, the reformers simply realized that they had to choose the strategy of forming rank-and-file slate and winning the local elections. Three months later, TDU held a convention of "OURS" instead of "THEIRS" as they called the Las Vegas convention. On September 18 and 19, 250 delegates from forty-two locals in fourteen states came to Kent State University, Ohio for their first Rank-and-File Convention. Their priority was "to try and win a voice at the next national Teamster

convention," which naturally made it their first goal to elect local officers.[58] Also in attendance were ten lawyers who helped the TDUers formulate policy resolutions and to pen TDU's constitution. Their eleven resolutions addressed the problems of temporary workforce; working conditions and the grievance procedure; women Teamsters and Teamster wives; racial discrimination; union democracy; union election; bylaw reform; formation of local TDU groups; legal rights and victimization; decent contracts; and jurisdictions. The variety of issues addressed here indicated that the dissident workers believed the union to be responsible for all the aspects of their work life.[59] Outside the rank-and-file Convention was a picket by busloads of Teamster officials.[60]

After the convention, delegates went back to their homes around the nation to organize at the local level and democratize their locals. They focused on union election and bylaw amendments. Because of the large bureaucratic structure of the Teamsters, winning local election was an indispensable part of the reforming process. In November 1977, Bob Janadia of Detroit Local 337 ran for local office. Although he

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[58] Lester Velie, *Desperate Bargain: Why Jimmy Hoffa had to Die* (New York: The Readers' Digest Press, 1976).

[59] A Cause Worth Truckin' For!: Teamsters for a Democratic Union Organize for RANK and FILE POWER. Teamsters for a Democratic Union Records, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[60] *TDU: 10 Years and Going Strong*, courtesy of Teamsters for a Democratic Union.

lost against the incumbent Bobby Holmes, an old friend of Jimmy Hoffa, a TDU publication reported his campaign in an optimistic tone and celebrated that he still won 42 percent of the vote in spite of obstruction by Holmes's side.[61] Also in Detroit, the Rank-and-File Slate won two positions on the Executive Board in Local 299.[62]

In December 1978, *Convoy* announced the TDU's successes in elections in key locals in four cities. On November 15, 1978, the Rank and File Slate took all seven offices in Local 332 in Flint, Michigan. In Boston, TDU leader Frank Salemme won the presidency of the 3,000 members of Local 42. One of the TDU founders of Western Pennsylvania won the second place of three Trustees elected in the 6,000-member Local 249 in Pittsburgh. TDU activist Floyd Atchison was elected to the primary position in Local 604 in St. Louis, members of which were mostly carhaulers, although incumbents took most of the other positions.[63] These victories indicate that at least in some locals, TDU successfully organized a rank-and-file slate and immediately sent its members to local offices. Rank-and-file Teamsters in these locals responded to the TDU's calls and supported those candidates.

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[61] *TDU Builders News*, November 1977.

[62] *Convoy*, no.23.

[63] *Convoy*, December 1978.

Although truckers occupied the major supporters of TDU, dissidents engaged in bylaw fights in locals where the majority were non-freight workers, representing the TDU's potential to expand outside trucking industry. In northern California, the Cannery Workers Committee was fighting for the local bylaw amendment. The proposed amendments called for the democratization of the union by various means: they suggested lowering officials' salaries to that of a high-paid cannery worker; at least one steward per shop per shift; no special assessments without a 2/3 membership vote; elimination of the 50% attendance requirement for candidates for union office; and for all union meetings to be held in Spanish and English. Although the Committee brought more than 200 people to the union meeting in December 1976, the union refused to translate them into Spanish so that all could understand. A leader of the Cannery Workers Committee in San Jose recollected that the officials said, "if people didn't speak English, they shouldn't be there," and their proposals eventually lost.[64] On the other hand, they succeeded in stopping the due increase and pushing for the election to occur during peak seasons, an idea originally advanced in 1974.[65] Those cannery activists recognized their struggle as a part of the larger union reform movement, and emphasized in the interview by *Convoy* the importance of

[64] *Convoy*, February 1977, no.15.

[65] *The Fifth Wheel*, January 1977.

"communication with other groups" as "the only way you can progress."[66] Because the Teamsters Union had aggressively expanded during the post-war period, activism easily emerged and spread in multiple regions of the nation and thus workers from various workplaces could develop solidarity under the same umbrella of the Teamsters.

TDU envisioned a type of unionism that would promote racial and gender equity as one of the major goals, and this helped develop their critique of the Teamsters Union. The failure of the Teamster leadership to support contemporary social movement appeared on *Convoy* in the late 1970s. For example, TDU criticized the Teamster leaders' noncommittal support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). When women's rights organizations had a rally in Virginia in January 1980, the Teamsters was the only union that did not send any contingent to it among all the labor organizations which endorsed the march itself. Instead, *Convoy* reported, TDU members from Western Pennsylvania and Cleveland chapters participated in the event on behalf of the dissident organization.[67] In the same year, major women's organizations such as Coalition of Labor Union Women and National Organization for Women along with AFL-CIO called for a boycott of conventions in the non-ERA-

[66] *Convoy*, February 1977, no.15.

[67] *Convoy*, February 1980.

ratified states. However, the Teamsters ignored the call and decided to hold their national Convention in Nevada, where ERA was not ratified.[68] TDU blamed their leadership for this perfunctory attitude toward the women's movement while emphasizing their own commitment to the gender justice. However, TDU's activism outside the union was limited, and as I will discuss in the next chapter, labor and women's movement did not marry in the reform movement.

The dissident movement had a space, at least in the discourse, to encourage the participation of people who felt excluded from the mainstream labor movement, and thus incorporate other social justice movements within it. Some civil rights activists joined the movement. Bilal Chaka, a black dockworker working at Yellow Freight, had been a dissident leader in Los Angeles. A supporter of Black Power and Black nationalism, Chaka was involved in the TDC from its first meeting and served on the Editorial Committee of the *Grapevine*.[69] The TDU's discourses also involved the fight against discrimination. One provision of TDU's "Bill of Rights," which they ratified in the 1977 Rank-and-File Convention, states that employers historically took advantage of the differences of age, race, sex among workers to weaken the workers'

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[68] *Convoy*, June-July 1980.

[69] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 156.

power, and thus the fight against discrimination should be one of TDU's priorities.[70] Doug Allan also noted in 1976 that their movement would rebuild the Teamsters into "a fighting organization" that "organizes and unites our members, not divides them along racial and sexual lines."[71] TDU assumed the union to be an institution to fight back against the employers' attempts to divide workers.[72]

For the purpose of pressuring the union officials at the 1976 National Master Freight Contract, dissident Teamsters, with truckers at their center, formed a national movement and successfully became visible in spite of their numerical weakness. TDU's visibility did have an effect on the union's leadership more or less, but they still looked frail in the face of the firm union bureaucracy. The only options left to them were to democratize the institution from the bottom up by means of local

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[70] TDU Teamsters for a Democratic Union 1977 Convention Program, Teamsters for a Democratic Union Records, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[71] *Convoy*, no.10.

[72] Historian David Witwer discusses that the Teamsters Union's support for the civil rights struggle of African Americans during the 1960s was not ideologically motivated, and that it was a part of their attempt to gain more members based on opportunism. Thus, they were not committed to end the discriminatory practices at workplace such as the separate seniority lists. Some changes had begun to happen since the early 1970s within the union and they employed non-white people (and women) as officials in some locals, and at the 1971 Teamster Convention, black delegates formed the Teamsters National Black Caucus to represent the specific voice of black workers. Moreover, at the 1976 convention, John H. Cleveland was elected as a first black vice president of the union. Nonetheless, the union was hardly engaged in the effort to compensate the past discrimination against African Americans especially in the trucking industry. David Witwer, *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 146-48; Joy M. Copeland, *John H. Cleveland: A Teamster's Life*, (Peake Delancey Publishing, 2006); International Brotherhood of Teamsters v. U.S., 431 U.S. 324 (1977).

elections and bylaw changes. Such campaigns not only generated actual changes in the union locals but also helped form local movements. In addition, their criticism against the Teamster officials also created a space where they could discuss contemporary social justice movements while maintaining class-based solidarity in an era when historians argue that race and gender replaced class as a keyword of progressive politics.[73] However, as I will examine in the next chapter, such attempts did not bring any significant presence of non-white, and women workers to the movement, and TDU could not go beyond the masculine nature of the trucking industry and the Teamsters Union.

[73] Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2002), 178-81, 191-211; Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal and the Limits of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 27.

CHAPTER V

HARD TIMES

"The union's like everything else," one Teamster muttered on April 3, 1979. It was a chilly day in Motor City. Springtime warmth was still a long way off. "The haves get more and the have-nots get by."[1] He had been on national strike with 300,000 fellow Teamster truckers for three days. The negotiation of the renewal of the National Master Freight Agreement had ended in a stalemate. Bargainers from all sides witnessed different interests and demands of various groups collide during the negotiation, and no one knew how to satisfy all the parties. Present were not only the Teamsters Union and the trucking employers, but also the government, pushing for President Jimmy Carter's anti-inflation program. Rank-and-file Teamsters found little space for themselves in a bargaining process monopolized by high officials. The Teamsters Union did not function as a platform where workers could effectively express their class consciousness. Not anymore.

In response to the strike, truck employers locked out terminals, leaving workers without strike benefits. But truckers did not despair. It was better than being

[1] "Hoffa's Teamster Local Isn't Angry—Yet," *New York Times*, April 4, 1979.

blamed for disruption by the public. “People always think we're the bad guys,” another striker said. “They say, ‘Aw, those blanky-blank teamsters, they’re all speeders and road hogs and rednecks.’ And you read in the news how we all make thirty thousand year. Well, if it’s true I make that much, I figure somebody owes me some money because I ain’t seen it.”[2] Their pride as truckers was on the verge of collapse. They were losing job control and the fear of unemployment haunted them. Some might have found relief in movements such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and tried to pressure union leadership at the negotiation table. Thus, TDU might have attracted truckers whose hard-won benefits and Teamster pride were fading away. But, as this chapter will show, their “union reform” proved ineffective amidst the political, economic, and industrial transformations of the period.

Truckers’ pride was indeed in crisis due to the economic changes of the 1970s. Even though the work environment in the freight industry was distinct from manufacturing, the pattern was similar. New technologies such as forklifts and pallets threatened to replace hand-loaded cargo while giant containers on ships and rail cars rendered trucks obsolete. The introduction of expensive but efficient machines propelled monopolization of big companies. The managements seeking higher

[2] “Hoffa’s Teamster Local Isn’t Angry—Yet,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1979.

efficiency and productivity took job control away from workers, who had previously enjoyed autonomy under smaller, regional employers. As a result, Teamster drivers were losing control, job security, and stable high wages.[3] The continuous scandals among union officials added to the sense of wounded pride. Seeing Teamster leaders sent to prison, union democracy replaced by dictatorship, and pension funds stolen, a trucker in Detroit Local 247 lamented, "The pride I once had is gone."[4]

As he found "the only salvation" in TDU, many Teamsters joined the dissident movement, whose strategy focused on direct action and rank-and-file militancy based on their romanticized view of Depression-era unionism. They did not include political action and broader coalitions with other labor organizations or community groups in their scope. Workers had lost a vehicle to express their rage through collective militant action and TDU attributed this solely to the union's failure in mobilizing its members. Instead of blaming the management and the government whose attitude toward labor was becoming more offensive than before, TDU put effort in the reforming the union from inside. Their militant campaigns focusing on the Teamsters Union perhaps helped truckers maintain their pride as Teamsters, but

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[3] Dan La Botz, "Tumultuous Teamsters of the 1970s," in Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow ed., *Revel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from below During the Long 1970s* (New York: Verso, 2010),207-8.

[4] Fighting for Rank and File Power!, Teamsters for a Democratic Union Records, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

they could not effectively fight racial discrimination in the freight industry nor mobilize many women members of the union. In fact, although TDU delivered many small gains to the rank-and-file in some locals, which probably accounted for their longevity, their pressure and strike outside the freight industry rarely produced positive outcomes on a large scale. Worse, by the end of the 1970s, the union itself lost presence in the trucking industry.

Historians who have written about TDU often focus on the freight industry as an arena of their activism.[5] It is important to understand TDU as a truckers' militant response to deteriorating working conditions and the deregulation of the industry of the 1970s. However, I want to emphasize that the TDU's discourse frequently stressed the inclusion of non-freight workers, many of whom were women and non-whites in their movement. Many union reforms of this era were greatly influenced by the advancement of women and non-white workers in union movement. Indeed, some reform organizations were a direct product of civil rights and feminist movements.[6]

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[5] Although Dan LaBotz includes a variety of TDU activists in multiple occupations in his monograph, his study remains celebratory and does not present a larger picture of the TDU movement in terms of racial and gender discrimination. I will argue that in spite of the presence of women and non-white leaders in multiple TDU chapters, they could not reach as many women Teamsters as they wished. Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990); Aaron Brenner, "Rank-and-File Teamster Movements in Comparative Perspective," in Glenn W. Perusek and Kent Worcester ed., *Trade Union Politics: American Unions and Economic Change, 1960s-1990s* (NJ: Humanities Press, 1995).

[6] Trish Kahle, "'A Woman's Place is in the UMWA': Women Miners and the Struggle for a Democratic Union in Western Pennsylvania, 1973-1979," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 13, no. 1 (2016): 41-63; Kieran Taylor, "American Petrograd: Detroit and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers," and Dorothy Sue Cobble, "'A Spontaneous Loss of Enthusiasm':

By considering this, I will place the TDU's activism in the larger social context of the 1970s when with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, women and non-white workers finally participated in the workforce that had been traditionally closed to them, actively joining unions.[7]

As I will show, although the TDU's ideology always left space for inclusive mobilization of various workers in terms of race, gender, and occupation, the organization could not overcome its reliance on the truckers in the 1970s. The Teamsters Union aggressively organized a variety of workers in the 1970s from nurses to teachers. During this period, the ratio of freight workers within the union actually fell, so that only about 30 percent of all Teamsters drove trucks.[8] However, the importance of the National Master Freight Contract still made the truckers s major group within the union and TDU. They organized an impressive campaign in other industries such as grocery warehouses, but as I will illustrate, the union's bureaucratic

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Workplace Feminism and the Transformation of Women's Service Jobs in the 1970s," in Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner and Calvin Winslow ed., *Rebel Rank and File : Labor Militancy and Revolt from below in the Long 1970s*, (New York: Verso, 2010), 281-308.

[7] Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Work Place* (New York : Harvard University Press, 2006); Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door : Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

[8] Lester Velie, *Desperate Bargain: Why Jimmy Hoffa Had to Die* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1977), 231.

structure made it difficult to pressure the leadership and influence employers outside the freight industry.

As a result, the national TDU movement turned out to be more about restoring the hard-won privileges that those unionized workers had enjoyed in the postwar years than expanding the protection of workers' rights beyond skilled and semi-skilled white men. However, as this chapter will show, even such efforts in the freight industry could not succeed in the face of structural changes in the industry and the withdrawal of the state as a regulating force. TDU, believing in rank-and-file unionism, suggested workers' mobilization as a means of fighting against the deregulation threat based upon their romantic admiration for Depression-era unionism in a moment when the government was much less supportive than the 1930s. The TDU's belief in unionism as a source of economic and social betterment led them to specifically focus on the Teamsters Union in terms of their critique and reform activism, but such efforts appeared futile in the changing economic and political landscape of the United States in the 1970s.

In Chapter 4, I argued that the TDU movement provided a space to include workers who had been excluded from the center of the Teamsters Union. Nonetheless,

the core of the TDU movement disproportionately remained in trucking, the backbone of the Teamsters. By pointing out that the fifteen members of the first TDU Steering Committee included two women and two African Americans, and that they included carhaulers, UPSers and beer and beverage workers, the historian Dan La Botz sought to highlight TDU's diversity. However, the majority of the union's two million Teamsters were NOT freight workers, and could possibly be non-white and women workers, and thus the fact is that TDU was more concentrated in freight than the total Teamster membership. TDU publications also tended to have trucking references such as their national newspaper *Convoy* and their first resolution book, *A Cause Worth Truckin' For!.* While emphasizing the importance of occupational diversity in the resolution, truckers remained at the center of TDU.[9]

In fact, although cannery workers in northern California viewed union reform as an effective solution to the problems of discrimination, the national center of TDU could not successfully establish a steady connection with the Cannery Workers Committee between the period from its foundation in 1976 to the end of the decade. Even though TDU passionately reported their fights such as bylaw changes and the implementation of affirmative action plans in the newspaper, cannery workers'

[9] A Cause Worth Truckin' For!, Teamsters for a Democratic Union Records, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

perception of TDU varied.[10] It is critical to note that some cannery workers *did* get positions as TDU leaders and shared their movement with fellow TDUers. For instance, Delfina Lozoya of the Cannery Workers Committee gave one of the opening addresses at the national TDU Convention in 1977.[11] Yet, this does not mean their struggles were located at the core of TDU. Michael Johnston, a cannery worker and San Jose activist, admired TDU and participated in the rank-and-file convention in 1979 only to find that of the over three hundred delegates only three were Latinos. In the end, TDU failed to effectively incorporate the cannery workers' fight against discrimination into their larger union reform movement. Cannery workers found TDU's campaigns seldom related to their needs and interests, and TDU leadership did not understand the cannery workers' causes in depth.[12]

TDU strove to restore the union protections that truckers enjoyed in the postwar years, but expanding such privileges to their membership outside the trucking sector never became a priority, although it remained on their agenda. The Cannery Workers Committee described those Teamsters who worked in factories and shops as "second class" members of the union, many of whom were predominantly non-whites

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[10] *Convoy*, no 21, 1977.

[11] 1977 Convention Program, Teamsters for a Democratic Union Records, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[12] Peter Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand: The Watsonville Canning Strike, 1985-87*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016),36-37.

and women.[13] While TDU created a national center to unify the different struggles of diverse workers under the title of union democracy, I do not find any evidence that TDU ever prioritized the elevation of those "second class" union members to parity with the truckers. A focus on the freight industry was apparent even when TDU discussed the problems of discrimination.

In the 1970s, rampant discrimination marked the trucking industry. A report created by Jack E. Nelson and sponsored by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1971 concluded that white male workers dominated the best paid, most prestigious positions in the trucking industry while Latino and African-American men concentrated in lower-paid, less skilled jobs, and women in office and clerical occupations.[14] Nelson and Richard Leone, who studied African-American employment in the trucking industry of 1968, both agreed that the hiring process, which depended on referrals, partly accounted for the industry's inaccessibility while and white workers' racist sentiments accelerated the discrimination.[15] Neither unions nor companies, who were responsible for final employment decisions attempted to

[13] *Convoy*, November-December 1979.

[14] Jack E. Nelson, *Equal Employment Opportunity in Trucking: An Industry at the Crossroads* (1971), 11-16.

[15] Richard D. Leone, *The Negro in the Trucking Industry* (Industrial Research Unit, Department of Industry Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania, 1970), 38-39, 133-40.

fight against racist sentiments. With widespread racial prejudice and institutional apathy, this hiring pattern blocked the employment of non-white drivers in the most prestigious, highest paying occupations, such as over-the-road drivers, in the trucking industry. Moreover, the system of progression also reinforced the discriminatory structure against non-white drivers. The traditional discrimination had generated a disproportion in that black and Latino people were hired mainly as city drivers, which were lower paid than road drivers, the position dominated by white men. The seniority system in the collective bargaining agreement between the union and the trucking firms perpetuated this unequal situation because there existed two separate seniority lists, one for the city drivers and the other for the road drivers. In 1971, the U.S. government had filed a system-wide lawsuit against the Teamsters Union and the Trucking Employers, Inc. for discriminating against nonwhite workers, and they started negotiating a consent decree which aimed to open higher-paying jobs to blacks and Mexican-Americans in 1974.[16]

TDU acknowledged the problems of discrimination in the trucking industry and criticized the union for their neglect while minimizing their attack on racism among white drivers. In the middle of the contemporary discussion over affirmative

[16] International Brotherhood of Teamsters v. U.S., 431 U.S. 324 (1977).

action, TDU emphasized the responsibilities of employers as well as the union and tried to avoid drawing a race line among rank-and-file workers. *Convoy* supported the criticism against the consent decree presented by William Gould, a black lawyer who intervened in the negotiation representing ten nonwhite drivers. Gould suggested schemes that would open up higher-paid positions to nonwhite employees and make companies pay for past discrimination while allowing white workers to keep their jobs. Arguing that "the government, the Teamsters, and the truckers" forced "the white union members" to pay for past discrimination in years of scarce employment possibilities, the national TDU newspaper and local TDU papers supported Gould's proposals.[17] While stressing the necessity of compensation for past discrimination, TDU tried to prevent the color line from dividing the workers and to defend their class solidarity.

In the same article, TDU blamed the Teamsters Union, along with employers, for the lack of leadership in confronting discrimination in trucking industry. Admitting that hostile racist sentiments existed among white drivers, TDU nonetheless attacked the union which they believed was responsible for educating its members. In addition, TDU pointed out that the current contract allowed the union to

[17] *Convoy*, no.17, 1977; *The Fifth Wheel*, vol.6 no.7, March 1977.

submit the names of workers to employers for consideration in the hiring process. According to their criticism, the Teamsters should have aggressively used this power to recommend the hiring of nonwhite employees, but they did not, proving their uninterested attitude toward the problem. "For no matter what attitudes white drivers have about blacks, it is not working Teamsters who kept them out of jobs. It was the companies who refused to hire them. It is the union's job to fight such company policies and protect its members."[18] With the freight industry, in which white workers made up the majority, as a center of the movement, TDU recognized that the current government's affirmative action plan could cause a breakup among rank-and-file members across the color line. By downplaying the importance of racism among white drivers, TDU emphasized the responsibility of the union for fixing structural discrimination issues. Rank-and-file reformers recognized that the labor union, more than government, was responsible for eliminating discrimination in workplace.[19]

TDU's focus on truckers, who were most exclusively men, made it difficult for them to encourage women's participation, too. As *Convoy* admitted for itself, women tended to feel "uneasy about becoming involved" since they recognized TDU

[18] *Convoy*, no.17, 1977.

[19] Just as the struggles against racial discrimination developed as a union reform movement in California canneries, not a few reformers around the nation mentioned the fight for racial equality as their motivations to join the TDU movement. *Grapevine*, February 1979.

as "only for truck drivers and men Teamsters."[20] Therefore, instead of women workers, wives of male union members initially led women's involvement in the movement. In Detroit, those wives first organized a women's group and became elected members of the local TDU Steering Committee and an editor of the local TDU newspaper. They participated in TDU activities by initiating demonstrations for fired carhaulers and joining picket lines for their husbands.[21] Meanwhile, in Local 229 of Scranton, Pennsylvania, thirty wives and children of Teamster truckers held a demonstration to protest the local officers in September 1977.[22] By advocating that the union problems were a family issue, TDU encouraged the participation of wives in the movement.

However, such active involvement did not go beyond wives. TDU's concept of union as a place to unify diverse workers could have created a room for women's active participation, and TDU publications frequently discussed the problems that women workers face at work, but women never became a major audience and supporter of the TDU's movement. A *Convoy* article from 1977 reports that "there has been no significant presence on the part of women Teamsters in the TDU."[23] There

[20] *Convoy*, no.18, 1977.

[21] *The Rank & File Speaks*, February 1977.

[22] *Convoy*, no.21, 1977.

[23] *Convoy*, no.18, 1977.

were a few notable exceptions, however. Sharon Cotrell, a woman dockworker, had been leading the local TDU movement in Los Angeles. As one of the founders of the *Grapevine*, an LA rank-and-file newspaper, Cotrell became a TDU leader and actively ran for the local election, though she lost.[24] Another example was Anne Mackie, a Cleveland UPS worker, and the national UPSurge leader. She became a member of the national TDU Steering Committee at the end of the decade.

Although there exists some evidence that TDU paid attention to the problems that women Teamsters faced, and that those Teamster wives hoped to bring women workers into the movement, such attempts did not generate any visible presence of women workers in TDU at the national level.[25] However, some locals still witnessed militant activism among women Teamsters. For example, Women UPS workers in Local 278 had formed a women's caucus to discuss their problems in 1974 and created connections with TDU. When UPS fired Evie Thomas, a female driver, for not complying with the hair standard, the local rank-and-file newspaper reported that Thomas and other women at UPS who felt harassed filed a complaint with the EEOC. They wrote a letter to federal agencies, and TDU, along with the shop stewards of the

[24] *The Grapevine*, December 1976; May 1976; December 1977.

[25] *Convoy*, no.18, 1977.

local, endorsed it.[26] TDU also showed support when female nurses in Amityville, New York went on strike in summer 1980 and the officials of Local 803 abandoned them.[27] Nonetheless, in the end, TDU in the 1970s depended on the freight contract for mass-organizing opportunities, and thus the involvement of women, who accounted for only a tiny portion of truckers, was limited except for some local activism.

Thus, TDU's activism catered mainly to the dissatisfied truckers who found their high wages and job protections that the union had won in a predicament in the midst of economic crisis. While TDU could provide a relief for truckers whose pride and dignity as drivers were on the verge of crisis, the TDU's call for class solidarity did not reach workers who felt excluded from the mainstream labor movement. In the 1970s, when the Teamster membership became increasingly diverse due to the union's aggressive organizing efforts, TDU failed to prioritize the dismantling of inequality within the union. After all, a Latino cannery worker in San Jose described TDU as "an organization of white truck drivers."[28] And in spite of TDU's organizing efforts in the trucking industry, the union's power would have been dramatically

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[26] *The Fifth Wheel*, vol.6 no.7, March 1977.

[27] *Teamsters for Teamsters: Voice of NY-NJ TDU*, Spring 1981.

[28] Peter Shapiro, *Song of the Stubborn One Thousand: The Watsonville Canning Strike, 1985-87* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 72.

weakened by the late 1970s and the privileges that at least a certain group of workers in the union—truckers—were enjoying in the postwar years would be lost.

It should be stressed that TDU still emphasized mobilizing campaigns, particularly at strikes, to pressure union officials outside of the trucking industry. Indeed, the economic crisis affected many of the non-freight industries covered by the Teamster contracts. The protections of job security and a living wage became precarious while the managements' fixation on productivity dramatically deprived workers of control over work pace on the shop floor. The employers' production-centered priorities were especially apparent in industries like grocery warehouses. TDU engaged in the mobilization of workers at the supermarket, but unlike freight, they struggled to exert influence over contracts due to the union's bureaucratic structure. Indeed, the experience of warehouse workers in northern California, particularly Safeway employees, showcases such challenges.

Grocery Teamsters faced the loss of workers' control on the shop floor in the 1970s. Since 1976, Safeway had started to introduce new productivity measures to distribution centers such as a "point system" for attendance and quality control and a "minute system." Under this point system, for example, a sick employee who was absent from work on a Monday or a Friday would get three points; Tuesday through Thursday would be two; and leaving before the shift was over would be one. An

employee who received twenty-one points over the course of their career would be fired. On the other hand, the "minute system," or MTM replaced the "unit" per hour standard which employers had adopted. This standard computed a minute standard for the "average worker," who would work 200-250 units per hour, but this was a significant increase compared with the former 176 units per hour. Warning letters and suspensions were issued for employees who failed to meet the MTM standards. While rank-and-file activists recognized these programs as a threat, the Teamsters Union did not organize any meeting to discuss them and the official Union magazine did not have any article which focused on the introduction of such systems. In response, Safeway workers in TDU had created a TDU Safeway warehouse committee.[29]

On July 18, 1978, seven days after the expiration of the contract between the Teamsters Union and Safeway, workers of Local 315 in Richmond, California, went on a wildcat strike to protest the introduction of the minute system to the grocery chain's Richmond distribution center. The strike soon spread to other supermarket chains including Ralphs, Alpha Beta, and Lucky Food Stores in the San Francisco Bay Area, and 1,600 drivers and warehousemen had joined the walkout by early August. Teamsters Joint Council 7, an umbrella organization of affiliated Teamster

[29] *Grapevine*, May 1978.

locals in northern California, sanctioned the strike while the Western Conference of Teamsters, the upper body of the joint councils in the Western states, engaged in the negotiation with the Food Employers Council.[30] In response to the union's decision to picket 536 retail stores, the employers responded by hiring police and armed guards to intimidate picketers.[31]

During the strike, union officials and the rank-and-file strikers were at odds with one another. Dissidents tried to pressure the leadership, but the union bureaucracy slowed them down. The national leadership did not show any support for the strikers initially and refused to pay strike benefits for the first two weeks of the strike while pressuring the Joint Council to withdraw the strike sanction.[32] Under such pressure, the union officers in northern California listened to dissidents and attempted to meet the national leadership to receive sanction for a nationwide strike against Safeway.[33] However, rank-and-file pressure only reached local officers. The strike officially ended in late November, when the national leaders of the Teamsters accepted a settlement which provided for binding arbitration of the disputed issues within ninety days of the ratification vote. TDU thought that the settlement was a

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[30] "Strike Against Food Chains Continues," *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 1978.

[31] *Grapevine*, October 1978.

[32] *Grapevine*, October 1978.

[33] "3 Union Locals Reject Pact in Food Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1978.

"stinging defeat." They believed that union leadership "did its best to weaken the strike" by initially refusing to sanction the strike, taking away the sanction to picket warehouses in other cities, and by directly intervening in the strike and settling it over the heads of local officers.[34] The strike and its outcome indicated the difficulty of taming the union bureaucracy.[35] Unlike freight workers, the grocery strikers did not have a large national contract which would help them organize at a larger scale, and thus they could not challenge the national bureaucracy. TDU in the late 1970s had to confront the fact that even though they made themselves heard, the union's multilayered structure of power blocked their efforts to pressure union leadership at the negotiation table outside the freight industry.

With the mechanization and monopolization of the trucking industry, the constituents of the Teamsters Union also had to pay attention to important political movements on Capitol Hill. A debate that would hugely influence the fate of the union and its hundreds of thousands of truckers had started. President Jimmy Carter had revealed his inclination for deregulation of the trucking industry soon after his inauguration in 1977, despite his relatively vague position during the presidential

[34] *Grapevine*, February 1979.

[35] *Grapevine*, February 1979.

campaign against Gerald Ford. As a matter of fact, Carter was not the first president to attempt the reduction of trucking regulations which the Interstate Commerce Committee (ICC) conducted. Since 1948, when Harry Truman failed to kill by his veto the Reed-Bulwinkle Bill, which strengthened government regulation, presidents such as Richard Nixon and Ford also fought unsuccessful battles for regulation reform. Each proposal varied in its details but generally, these changes would loosen the regulation of entry into the industry and the price setting. Fearing cutthroat competition, the Teamsters had long fiercely resisted such plans alongside middle-sized trucking companies (with a collective $3 to 4 billion investment).[36]

In 1977, A. Daniel O'Neal, the chairman of the ICC appointed by Jimmy Carter, issued thirty-nine recommendations for reforming the ICC regulation, and began public hearings on it. These suggestions would moderate federal regulation by measures such as simplifying the application process and including more commodities as exempt from regulation. Three months later in October, Senator Kennedy also started a similar inspection with hearings.[37] Meanwhile, the ICC started to use its administrative discretion to reduce its own control in 1977. As a result, their entry

[36] Dorothy Robyn, *Braking the Special Interests*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 26-29; *International Teamster*, April 1977; Michael H. Belzer, *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57-59.

[37] Robyn, *Braking the Special Interests*, 29.

approval rates as well as carriers exempted from the regulation increased while the power of rate bureaus decreased, propelling competition.[38] It was this threatening motion in Capitol Hill that laid out the tension between the union, truckers, and the government in the upcoming negotiation of the National Master Freight Contract of 1979.

After the movement for the 1976 National Master Freight Contract paved the way for the foundation of TDU, its expiration and the renewal in spring 1979 soon became the major focus of TDU at the national level and they emphasized issues beyond the wage package again. The campaign included in its scope other contracts that would follow the pattern set by the freight such as carhauling and UPS. On July 29 and 30, 115 representatives from various TDU chapters, PROD, FASH, and UPSurge gathered at Cleveland State University to build the campaign and discuss their demands and strategies for the contract. They suggested motions that TDU members could propose at each Teamster local's union meeting. Those motions included the improved grievance procedures, the protection of working conditions, job security, pension benefit, the right to vote on separate supplements to the National Master Freight Agreement, and greater rank-and-file involvement in the contract

[38] Michael H. Belzer, *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 62-65.

negotiations.[39] Their leaflets targeting freight, carhaul, and UPS workers all discussed both economic and non-economic clauses, too. Non-economic demands included various issues such as decent work schedules and prohibition of the use of production standards.[40] Here, taking back and maintaining workers' control on the shop-floor made up a central part of their demands along with securing employment and living wages.

While TDU focused their efforts on pressuring the union for both economic and non-economic demands, the focal point of the official negotiations remained on wage increase, especially under government pressure. When Teamster General President Frank Fitzsimmons and his negotiating committee presented their demands to the employer groups representing 14,000 companies on December 14, 1978, the union did not include specific wage demands in the list. This was because they needed to consult with the governmental "wage-price standards" that the Carter Administration first issued in October and then revised on December 13 as a part of its anti-inflation program. This standard would limit the yearly real wage increases to 7 percent, including cost of living adjustments and all fringe benefits.[41]

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[39] *TDU Builders News*, August, 1978.

[40] This would possibly encourage employers to fire and discriminate against the currently-employed workers.

[41] *International Teamster*, January 1979.

We should discuss this wage-standard within the larger political economic landscape of the period. As high inflation, rising imports, and budget deficits troubled the nation's economy, President Carter had attributed these problems to labor. Carter believed that the domestic industry was uncompetitive with foreign items because of high prices and high wages, causing inflation. Thus, with major unions as targets, Carter asked labor for wage restraint. George Meany, head of AFL-CIO, criticized the government harshly as they filed a lawsuit calling the measure unconstitutional. Even pro-Carter unions such as United Auto Workers and International Machinists did not support the wage-standard. Under this condition, as the first national contract negotiated with the wage-standard, the National Master Freight Agreement of 1979 would determine the future of the core of Carter's anti-inflation program.[42]

Under this economic and political condition, the TDU's pressure for the non-wage clauses slipped from the negotiators' attentions. As the union's initial wage and benefit demands, including the cost of living clause, would increase the total compensation by 35 percent over three years, the application of Carter's wage guideline (7 percent per year) became the crucial point of debate between the union and the employer. The government even took the trucking deregulation as a hostage.

[42] Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2011), 206, 219-20.

In late March, Alfred E. Kahn, the chairman of the Council on Wage and Price Stability, said that if the union broke the guidelines by a substantial amount, the Administration would push for immediate trucking deregulation.[43] Here, the Teamsters Union was besieged by both the employers and the government who pushed the responsibility for inflation off onto labor. Indeed, Fitzsimmons blamed the government for this anti-inflation strategy. "It is clear that workers are being asked to bear an unreasonable and unfair share of the burden in the inflation fight," he stated.[44] His criticism was in accordance with TDU and other major unions.

In this difficult situation for the Teamsters, TDU continued to press the union for tough stands. They criticized the union's final demands that Frank Fitzsimmons presented on March 19 as "inadequate."[45] Among these demands were $16 increase in weekly pension contribution, hourly wage increase of $1.75 for the next three years, and cost of living clause of 1¢ an hour for each 0.2 increase of Consumer Price Index, paid quarterly. TDU refused the proposals because the increases were less than what the union demanded in 1976 and they did not reflect the TDU's proposals. *Convoy* called its members to vote for the strike and suggested several actions which

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[43] "Pay Rules Eased for Union," *New York Times*, March 30, 1979; Dorothy Robyn, *Breaking the Special Interests* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 39.

[44] *International Teamster*, February 1979.

[45] *Convoy*, March 21, 1979.

rank-and-file Teamsters could make at the strike-authorization meetings to make their voices heard.[46] Pete Camarata told a newspaper that rank-and-file Teamsters' voice barely influenced the current negotiations, and thus they were organizing to pressure the union and prevent a sellout agreement. He specifically demanded the rejection of the Carter's wage guideline.[47] In the face of the employers' and the government's offenses, TDU continued to pressure the union to fight against both and kept focusing their effort on the union.

Perhaps, Fitzsimmons's strike strategy also reflected the politically difficult conditions for the union whose power had been weakened in the post-World War II years. Namely, the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 limited their room to manuver. Although rank-and-file truckers and warehousemen voted for authorization of the strike, Fitzsimmons did not straightforwardly carry out their decision but he suggested "selective" strikes against specific trucking companies.[48] Behind this idea was a hope to avoid an injunction under the Act which would order strikers back to work and stop the dispute for eighty days when the walkout created a "national emergency." TDU blamed Fitzsimmons for this decision because they believed that the union President

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[46] *Convoy*, March 21, 1979.

[47] "Dissident Teamsters Call for National Strike April 1," *New York Times*, March 25, 1979.

[48] *Convoy,* March 21, 1979. According to a New York Times, a Union spokesman said on March 25 that no decision had been made regarding the selective strike. "Dissident Teamsters Call for National Strike April 1," *New York Times*, March 25, 1979.

was trying to protect the employers, instead of the union members, from the potential damages of the nation-wide strike at the cost of rank-and-filers.[49] TDU centered their criticism on the union more than anything else.

Different interests and demands of the employers, the government, the union and the dissidents were stirring in the negotiation but in the end, the government wage guideline represented the decisive factor of the national strike. The union demanded a cost of living adjustment to be paid semiannually, instead of the current annual assessment, but an economic package that included such a payment system would not satisfy Carter's wage standard, which the government had already modified for the Teamsters.[50] Fitzsimmons criticized the government's pressure by referring to the "high-level government bureaucrats" who were "making a mockery" of the negotiation and caused the breakup of the negotiation.[51] At a press conference on April 2, he specified two members of the Council on Wage and Price Stability as "certain bureaucrats who have publicly and privately attempted to dictate the terms of our collective bargaining agreement."[52] He called a selective strike against specific

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[49] "Teamster Strike Not Yet Decided," *New York Times*, March 26, 1979.

[50] "Trucking Firms Shut Down in Reply to Strike," *Los Angeles Times,* April 2, 1979.

[51] "A 'Selective' Strike Is Called By Teamsters as Talks Fail," *New York Times*, April 1; "Talks Fail, Teamsters Strike Selected Firms," *Los Angeles Times,* April 1; "Truck Industry And Teamsters Agree on a Pact," *New York Times*, April 11, 1979.

[52] *International Teamster*, April 1979.

trucking companies on April 1 and an estimated 300,000 Teamsters struck against selected 73 out of 2,700 trucking firms covered by the National Master Freight Agreement.[53] In response, 500 trucking companies (responsible for 80 to 85 percent of the nation's transportation) called on what they called a "defensive shutdown" in the afternoon, leaving union members without strike benefits.

While the strike was a form of resistance against the federal government for the Teamsters Union, this strike revealed the already-weakened power of the Teamsters Union in the trucking industry. Although the strike involved 300,000 truckers, observers did not see any significant impact on the nation's economy. Foods still filled up shelves at supermarkets, and American consumers did not experience any notable shortage of commodities. This is mainly because the government and the industry had extensively planned their countermeasures to minimize the striker's influence, and many non-union trucks were still on the road. With gradual deregulation by ICC going on, the number of non-unionized truckers were indeed increasing. Some independent owner-operators also carried items and kept the distribution system going. Consequently, few industries reported any damages caused

[53] A newspaper reported that firms that were not selected by the union officials. "Trucking Leaders Call for Lockout Of 300,000 in Strike by Teamsters," *New York Times*, April 2, 1979; "Both Sides OK New Trucking Strike Talks," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1979; "A 'Selective' Strike Is Called By Teamsters as Talks Fail," *New York Times*, April 1; "Talks Fail, Teamsters Strike Selected Firms," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1; "Truck Industry And Teamsters Agree on a Pact," *New York Times*, April 11, 1979.

by the Teamster strike.[54] While TDU was mobilizing workers to pressure the Teamster officials, the union's presence itself was declining.

If the government pressure mainly caused the strike and lockout, it was government conciliation that ended them. On April 10, the new Master Freight Contract was agreed and the Teamsters won the semiannual payment of the cost of living adjustment, which was the critical point of debate. In order to make it fit within Carter's wage standard, they had agreed to make the final payment for the cost of living adjustment (which should happen in spring 1982) after the expiration of the contract, so that it would be counted as a part of the 1982 contract.[55] The Teamsters also won the already agreed-upon raise in employer payments for pension and health benefits of $30 for the next three years as well as the $1.50 wage increase. Fitzsimmons called it "the finest national freight agreement ever negotiated," which would provide Teamster workers with adequate economic benefits.[56] However, TDU did not find it satisfactory and called for the rejection of the ratification.[57] The economic gain was much higher than the employers' original proposal, but much

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[54] "Teamster Strike Impact Muted," *New York Times*, April 8, 1979; "Economic Effect Rises Each Day of Trucking Strike," *New York Times*, April 10, 1979.

[55] "Truck Industry And Teamster Agree on a Pact," *New York Times*, April 11, 1979.

[56] *International Teamster*, May 1979.

[57] *Traffic World*, April 23, 1979.

lower than the Teamsters' original demand, which TDU had criticized as "too low." TDU also noticed that the contract contained nothing to improve the grievance procedure, or to defend the working conditions, and they were also disappointed at the cost of living clause.[58] As in the past strikes of 1973 and 1976, rank-and-file dissidents resented that the union only focused on the economic package while ignoring non-economic issues that they viewed important on the shop-floor.[59]

With frustrations against the government among union officials and dissidents still in the air, another battleground had been set. Relieved by the end of the labor dispute, legislators now prepared for the long-awaited project of trucking deregulation. In June, Congress started another series of hearings while Senator Kennedy drafted a drastic trucking deregulation bill which would entirely abolish the ICC's authority over regulation. Carter also circulated his own trucking deregulation proposal to Congress, and eventually these two deregulators created a joint reform bill. Throughout summer and fall of 1979, representatives of a variety of parties testified in the hearings including the Teamster Union, large and small trucking firms,

[58] Dan La Botz, *Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union* (New York: Verso, 1990), 174.

[59] While 127.872 members voted for the new contract and the union ratified the agreement, 45,577 rank and filers were against the ratification. It is hard to calculate how much impact TDU had on the decisions of those forty-thousand truckers to vote against it, but it is important to note that opponents did not share the victory that the union officials stressed. *International Teamster*, June 1979.

and other industries dependent on the truckers.[60] Having supported the strengthening of regulation, the Teamsters Union opposed deregulation. They urged that the bill would undermine safety on road and bring cutthroat competitions to the trucking industry. The Union invested in lobbying and strove to encourage its members to write letters to their Congressional representatives.

TDU's attitude toward deregulation represented their own narrow focus on the union without political campaign and coalition building outside the labor organization. TDU opposed deregulation on the same ground as their union officials, but their criticism pointed toward the Union instead of the government. First off, they argued that Teamster officials were responsible for the loosening of regulations in recent years. Calling the national contract "the most reliable regulator we have," TDU blamed union officials who failed to use their power to negotiate a strong contract with members' approval and to enforce such a contract. TDU argued that the weak stance of the Teamster officials allowed for an increase of items listed as exempted from the regulation, and thus caused the growth of non-Union traffic. TDU concluded that "it is our officials who down through the years, in deal after deal, have paved the way for the hard times ahead."[61] Ignoring the rise of neo-liberal politics in the capital,

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[60] Dorothy Robyn, *Breaking the Special Interests* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 36-37.

[61] *Convoy*, April 1980.

TDU solely blamed the Union officials who should have been able to stop the current. TDU believed in the power of collective bargaining and a contract to protect workers, a principle laid out by the New Deal order. For them, the current system of labor relation itself should work well if only the Union correctly played their role as an implementor of the workers' decision.

Second, TDU also attacked the Teamsters' strategy to fight against deregulation with a focus on lobbying and letter-writing. They insisted on rallies as a means of showing "Labor power" and called on mobilization from the bottom up. In May 1980, TDU members in Local 229 of Detroit made a motion at a Union meeting to call for a mass rally in Washington D.C., and TDUers in Locals 407 of Cleveland, 557 of Baltimore, and 371 of Iowa-Illinois Quad Cities area followed it in June and July by presenting resolutions to call for national and regional demonstrations against deregulation.[62] Union leadership showed no support for this activism, as, according to Fitzsimmons's assistant, the General President said the rally by Local 557 was "embarrassing."[63] Along with the Union officials' "fear and confusion," the lack of

[62] *Convoy*, May 1980; June-July 1980.

[63] *Convoy*, June-July 1980.

mobilization, TDU believed, resulted in the Teamsters' failure in stopping the trucking deregulation.[64]

TDU's critique dramatizes their romantic trust in Depression-era unionism, which they strove to realize throughout their movement in its early years. TDU believed that the mass mobilization of rank-and-file workers had the power to fight against the employer and affect the government policies. *Convoy* lamented the deregulation by stating, "Times are hard" and then suggested to model their movement after the 1930s, or "the hardest of times," when "our union was built."[65] The Teamsters Union was not built in the 1930s but in 1903, yet TDU believed that the ideal unionism was born in the New Deal labor upsurge. This might include the Minneapolis Teamster Strike in 1934 by led Trotskyist leaders, or even Jimmy Hoffa. However, as they believed, although the Union had indeed become politically powerful in the post-World War II period, it had stopped being dependent on workers power on the shop floor. Its leadership now enjoyed lavish life styles and the collective bargaining did not reflect workers' interest anymore. Unlike New Left critics, TDU did not attribute this to the original nature of the New Deal structure itself, but rather they solely blamed the Teamsters Union. Without mass mobilization

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[64] *Convoy*, August-September 1980.

[65] *Convoy*, April 1980.

of rank-and-file members, the Teamsters lost the battle and the trucking industry was now being deregulated. Thus, TDU continued to criticize the union's condition as a failure to achieve the ideal unionism of the Depression era, even in a period austerity brought on by the economic crisis.

In July 1980, Carter signed the Motor Carrier Act of 1980. Deregulating trucking, this act brought cutthroat competition to the industry. The entrance of small non-Unionized companies caused jobs loss among Teamster members, and the union reported that 19-24 percent of its freight workers were unemployed in early 1981.[66] The average real annual income also dropped by 30 percent between 1977 and 1995. Remarkably, the truckers' earnings declined much more than manufacturing workers: the decrease of truckers' income was almost four times the average annual income decline among all production workers.[67] The regulation also allowed longer, wider, heavier trucks, which increased demands for drivers, too.[68] In addition, while 80 to 100 percent of intercity trucking was organized at the beginning of the 1970s, in 1995,

[66] Charles R. Perry, *Deregulation and the Decline of the Unionized Trucking Industry*, (Philadelphia: Industrial Research Unit, the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 1986), 89.

[67] Michael H. Belzer, *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7, 21, 107

[68] Michael H. Belzer, *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 92.

the union represented 65 percent of all truck drivers.[69] The total union membership also declined by 27 percent between 1974 and 2000. In other words, the Teamsters Union plunged into a dark period after the 1970s.

In conclusion, the TDU movement was a response to deteriorating conditions at work caused by the industrial and economic transformations of the time. While their egalitarian discourse could make a little room for the inclusion of workers who had been unable to enjoy strong Teamster protection, TDU never prioritized equalizing the diverse membership of the union. As a result, their movement appeared to be an attempt to preserve the privileges that freight workers—mostly white men—had embraced. However, TDU could not even win the battles to protect truckers in the changing politics of inflation and regulation. In the face of challenges posed by employers and the government, TDU kept their belief in the union, that had helped to maintain their pride and dignity at work. In this moment of losing the battle, admiring Depression-era rank-and-file unionism, TDU trusted the power of the union as a survival strategy for hard times.

[69] Michael H. Belzer, *Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7, 21, 107.

CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE

It took TDU a long time to achieve the goals of democratization in the Teamsters Union. During the 1980s, TDU struggled to have an impact on contracts and union politics. Union leadership constantly harassed them. After Roy Williams, who had replaced Frank Fitzsimmons in 1981 as General President, was convicted and sentenced to fifty-five years in prison for bribery, Jackie Presser, the Ohio Teamster leader, took the seat in 1983. Presser formed an organization called Brotherhood of Loyal Americans and Strong Teamsters (BLAST) and redbaited TDU members severely by distributing pamphlets and disrupting TDU conventions.[1]

However, in the late 1980s, the rank-and-file movement within the Teamsters Union started to generate positive outcomes by adopting strategies that seem distinct from the ones that they chose in the 1970s. First, a federal litigation successfully got rid of mob influence in the union bureaucracy. The filing and settlement of *U.S. v. International Brotherhood of Teamsters* between 1988 and 1989 under the Racketeer

[1] The Presser Appointment: Green Light for Organized Crime?, December 1980 Folder 3, Box1, Teamsters for a Democratic Union Records, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio; Correspondence, Brotherhood of Loyal Americans and Strong Teamsters, March 1983, Folder 6, Box 1, Teamsters for a Democratic Union Records, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act (RICO) represented an effort by the U.S. Department of Justice to eradicate organized crime from the nation's biggest union. While TDU was careful about the possibility that the government might take a total control of the union, the dissidents were enthusiastic about the case. It should be especially noted that TDU played a role in the inclusion of the election stipulation in the consent decree. Indeed, accepting TDU's assertion that free and fair elections would help Teamsters elect candidates who were anti-corruption and anti-racketeer, U.S. Attorney Giuliani and his staff included the mandate of democratic election procedures in the consent decree. As a result, the rank-and-file won the right to directly vote for the election of national officers. The first election conducted under this new rule marked a victory of the rank-and-file reform: Ron Carey, UPS driver and Local 804 President endorsed by TDU, won the office of General President in 1991.[2] The power of reformers looked established in the union. Five years later, Carey was reelected, defeating Jimmy Hoffa Jr. by a small margin.

Second, the TDU's mobilization efforts expanded outside the Teamsters Union. Under Carey's leadership, the Teamsters successfully fought a battle in 1997 against the United Parcel Service, who proposed an increase of part-time workers at the cost

[2] See James B. Jacobs and Kerry T. Cooperman, *Breaking the Devil's Pact: The Battle to Free the Teamsters from the Mob* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

of full-time employees.[3] Compared with the reformers' focus in the 1970s on pressuring the leadership against the employers, TDU's strategies appeared significantly different in this event. TDU's influence on the campaign led the union to put emphasis on workers' involvement, building broad community support, and obtaining positive media coverage, both in and outside the U.S. For this nine-month contract campaign, Carey hired a few TDU members, too. Because of these efforts, various groups supported the Teamster struggle; fellow Teamsters outside UPS, workers outside the union, as well as UPS employees in at least nine European countries. It was a departure from the TDU's strategy in the 1970s which exclusively focused on the union's internal politics.[4]

The UPS strike marked a very rare labor victory in the United States since 1981. In August 1997, 184,000 UPS workers took part in the strike and won significant gains including pension raise and creation of 10,000 new full-time jobs. It was the moment in which the rank-and-file rebellion which had started out in the decade of the decline of labor, bore its fruits for working-class Americans. However, three days

[3] It was Jimmy Hoffa, who first agreed with the company on the use of part-timers in 1962 and then twenty years later General President Jackie Presser agreed to freeze the starting wage for part-timers at $8 an hour.

[4] John Russo and Andy Banks, "How Teamsters Took the UPS Strike Overseas," *Working USA* January/February 1999: 75-87; Matt Witt and Rand Wilson, "The Teamsters' UPS Strike of 1997: Building a New Labor Movement," *Labor Studies Journal*, March 1999, Vol.24(1), pp.58-72; Deepa Kumar, *Outside the Box: Corporate Media, Globalization, and the UPS Strike* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007),129-51.

after the end of the strike, a piece of scandalous news cast the union into chaos again. On August 21, federal overseers issued their decision not to certify the 1996 Carey's reelection because of his suspect campaign finance violations. Three month later a federal judge disqualified him from running for re-election, and Carey took leave of absence. Next year, after a four-day hearing, government overseers expelled Carey from the Teamsters Union. It was Jimmy Hoffa Jr. who won the rerun election in 1998, and he has retained the seat ever since.[5]

Both the RICO case and UPS strike represented a departure from the original TDU strategy of focusing their movement exclusively within the Teamsters Union. In the RICO case, it was essentially the federal government that was responsible for the eradication of corruption within the Teamsters Union. This is an interesting contrast with the 1970s when TDU did not seem concerned with the state action as an effective means of reforming the union leadership. Back then, they aimed at reform from the bottom up, favoring local union elections and bylaw changes to remove the influence of organized crime from the labor organization, reflecting their idea of rank-and-file unionism in the 1970s. During the UPS strike, TDU similarly put effort in

[5] Deepa Kumar, *Outside the Box: Corporate Media, Globalization, and the UPS Strike* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007),129-151; James B. Jacobs and Kerry T. Cooperman, *Breaking the Devil's Pact: The Battle to Free the Teamsters from the Mob* (New York: New York University Press, 2011) 130-51.

organizing the community and workers outside the Teamsters Union. Instead of focusing their attention on the union leadership, TDU looked for outside supports as well as the internal mobilization of rank-and-file workers. Such a broad scope in the strike campaign was what TDU lacked at the end of the 1970s.

Indeed, during the 1970s, TDU's activism concentrated almost exclusively on the Teamsters Union. While this strategy did not work in the middle of larger economic and political changes that were taking place in the global context of deindustrialization and stagnation, it still reflected their strong belief in the concept of union as a means of improving their life. Radical movements of the time also influenced the reform efforts and helped crystalize the dispersed sentiments against the union leadership. Agreeing on the idea that union reform was the way to empower themselves, rank-and-file Teamsters and radicals came together despite the differences in where they came from. It should be emphasized that although the radicals played a role in developing the movements into a national one, they did not initiate nor lead the movement. Workers who had been excluded from the center of the Teamsters Union also viewed union reform as an effective strategy to fight discrimination and economic inequality. Influenced by the contemporary social movements and armed with the recent legal gains, those workers fought not outside but within the Teamsters Union to strengthen the organization.

Nonetheless, after these various attempts to reform the Teamsters Union finally came together, the core of the movement stuck in the freight industry, and TDU did not attract many rank-and-file workers outside it. It is true that TDU's ideology of class-solidarity could encourage women and nonwhite Teamsters even outside the trucking to join the movement and find a cause in the framework of unionism. But it was a road not taken. TDU's actual operation could not effectively recruit these groups of workers into the movement. The core of the Teamsters Union remained in the trucking industry, and so did TDU's. The dissidents failed to overcome inequalities within a union dominated by white male truckers. In spite of the TDU's possibility of unifying these various social justice movements among the rank-and-file Teamsters, it never became reality. It was indeed a tricky task in the era of economic crisis to find a balance between the labor movement and "rights movements" with the structural inequality that had existed for so long.[6] Rank-and-file Teamsters showed a significant potential, but they never realized it.

The 1970s was a difficult time for workers. They paralleled the decade with the 1930s and tried to replay the labor upsurge using the structures of union reform. Dissident truckers did not find salvation in cultural conservatism, as one historian has

[6] See Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

argued.[7] Mexican cannery workers did not look only at litigation to fight against discrimination at work. Truck drivers, cannery workers, grocery workers among others viewed the union as a means of achieving social and economic betterment. They detected a vestige of hope in their corrupt yet powerful union. Striving to get rid of the ills that infested the union, they tried to suggest the expansion of New Deal liberalism. Based upon this belief in rank-and-file unionism, they chose the union, whose power however had already been weakened, to fight in these difficult times.

[7] Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Day of the Working-Class* (New York: New Press, 2007).

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