

An exchange with a Teamsters official on the end of the Detroit newspaper strike

24 January 2001

On January 7 the World Socialist Web Site received a letter from an official of Teamsters Local 2040, one of the unions involved in the Detroit newspaper strike, criticizing our January 4 article "Unions settle with Detroit News and Free Press ; Lesson of another AFL-CIO debacle."

[<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2001/jan2001/news-j04.shtml>] Below we reprint the letter and a reply by WSWs correspondent Shannon Jones.

Your article written by Shannon Jones contains many inaccurate statements and a stretch of the real truth. I cannot believe that your organization uses the same tactics as the Detroit Newspapers by slanting the truth to mislead its readership. After five and a half years I have found that organizations such as yours produce the same type of propaganda used by the corporations we are fighting.

Thanks,

John Peralta,

Vice-President, Teamsters Local 2040

7 January 2001

Dear Mr. Peralta:

You assert that my January 4 article "Unions settle with *Detroit News* and *Free Press*; Lesson of another AFL-CIO debacle" contains many inaccuracies and "stretches of the real truth." You do not indicate, however, what statements you believe to be false.

The article presented an extensive analysis of the Detroit newspaper strike, including a sharp criticism of the role of the Teamsters and AFL-CIO leadership. Given that you are part of a union leadership that presided over the defeat of a major strike, resulting in the loss of hundreds of jobs and substantial wage cuts, don't you feel any responsibility to your members, not to mention the public at large, to answer a criticism of the policies pursued by your organization? Rather than doing that, all you say is that our article aids the

corporations, without explaining how.

The Socialist Equality Party has written extensively on the Detroit newspaper strike and its aftermath. From the start of the strike in July 1995 we warned that no serious struggle could be conducted outside of drawing the lessons of the defeated strikes of the 1980s and 1990s, and the failed policies of the AFL-CIO. We warned that the Teamsters and AFL-CIO leadership were deliberately deceiving workers by claiming that consumer boycotts and similar tactics had produced "victories" in previous newspaper strikes. In fact, on the basis of these policies the AFL-CIO had led to defeats of strikes at the *Oakland Press*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *New York Daily News*, *Chicago Tribune* and other newspapers.

We told newspaper workers from the outset that they faced a bitter struggle against ruthless corporations backed by the full power of the political establishment, including the Democratic administration of Dennis Archer in Detroit. Under such conditions, we pointed out, workers could prevail only if they widened the struggle and sought to mobilize the full industrial and political strength of the working class in the Detroit area.

Let us be blunt. You and fellow union leaders refused to mount such a struggle against the union-busting by the *Detroit News* and *Free Press* because a mass mobilization of workers would have cut across the unions' alliance with the Democratic Party and the Archer administration. Further, it would have threatened the cushy relationship the Teamsters and other union leaderships enjoys with employers in the Detroit area, including the labor-management "partnership" between the UAW and the Big Three auto companies, a source of not inconsiderable perks and privileges to the union bureaucracy.

Instead, union officials lied to the workers. Officials

like current Teamsters International President James P. Hoffa and others all claimed that a consumer boycott would bring the multibillion-dollar Gannett and Knight Ridder conglomerates to their knees. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, the Teamsters and AFL-CIO leadership worked out a deal to preserve the union apparatus on any terms it could get. In the end you accepted a deal which imposes virtually nonunion conditions on workers, but enables the union apparatus to stay in place and collect membership dues.

The logic of your position seems to be as follows: Those who tell workers the truth and advance an alternative to the failed perspective of the union leadership are spreading pro-company “propaganda.” On the other hand, those who tell the workers lies and cover up for the failed policy of the union leadership are somehow helping the workers.

Tragically, the failure of rank-and-file workers to assimilate the lessons of the previously defeated struggles left them susceptible to the misleading and self-serving claims of the Teamsters and AFL-CIO bureaucracy. They paid a terrible price because of this. Nevertheless, these lessons can and must be drawn for future struggles. Because we take our responsibility to the working class seriously, the *World Socialist Web Site* will continue to explain the strategic experiences of workers, including of the betrayal of the Detroit newspaper strike, and in this way politically strengthen and prepare the working class for the many battles ahead.

Sincerely,

Shannon Jones, for the *World Socialist Web Site*

14 January 2001



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