

# What is the Teamsters for a Democratic Union?

Tom Mackaman  
8 September 2018

There is enormous opposition among United Parcel Service workers to the contract agreed to by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), covering 230,000 workers at the giant package delivery corporation. As voting on the deal begins, Teamsters officials are engaged in a conspiracy with management to impose the contract over this opposition. Under these conditions, many workers are attracted to the call for a “No” vote put forward by the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, or TDU. But the TDU has no perspective to organize a struggle and is not even calling for a strike. Instead, the TDU claims a “No” vote will force UPS and the Teamsters “back to the negotiating table” which, it claims, will result in a good contract if workers maintain pressure on Teamsters negotiators.

This position is indistinguishable from Teamsters United (TU), with which TDU collaborates closely. The two organizations share articles on their respective web sites, though they present themselves as independent of each other. [1]

Teamsters United was set up as coalition slate for the 2016 union elections for general president. The slate was headed by longtime TDU supporter Tim Sylvester, the president of Local 804 in Queens, New York, and Fred Zuckerman, the president of Local 89 in Louisville, Kentucky, who was the director of the union’s car haul division under IBT President James P. Hoffa but broke with him to run for vice president with other former Hoffa supporters in the 2011 election. The TU narrowly lost its bid for the presidency but won six international vice president seats.

The TDU urged Zuckerman to run for president in the 2021 elections under the Teamsters United slate. Zuckerman, however, rebuffed them and decided to run as vice president on a TU slate headed by Sean O’Brien, president of Local 25 in Boston, who ran on Hoffa’s slate in 2016 and has long been a bitter and vocal opponent of the TDU. This is the wholly predictable outcome of the unprincipled politics and opportunism that characterizes the TDU.

The shared TDU-TU position that a better contract can be won through a “No” vote—and, going forward, by backing “reform” candidates against Hoffa—is a fraud from beginning to end. The rejection of this sellout deal is entirely justified. However, the Teamsters have a long record of ignoring “No” votes, including when Hoffa unilaterally imposed the master UPS contract and local supplements in 2014.

To fight for a significant wage increase, the abolishing of all tiers, the transformation of part-timers to full-time workers and an end to sweatshop conditions, rank-and-file workers must take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands. This means electing factory and workplace committees, democratically controlled and answerable to the rank and file, to mobilize UPS workers to fight for these demands in opposition to the dictates of the Teamsters and the company.

Preparations must be made now to launch a national strike and to campaign for the broadest support for this struggle throughout the working class. This includes reaching out and mobilizing Amazon workers fighting sweatshop conditions, US Postal Service workers facing

Trump’s threat of privatization, teachers who have conducted a wave of wildcat strikes in defiance of the unions, and other sections of workers and youth.

The TDU is preparing a trap to prevent such a struggle from emerging. It is therefore critical that workers understand the real role and history of the TDU, which is not a genuine rank-and-file movement, but rather a faction of the union bureaucracy closely linked to the federal government and the Democratic Party.

## The origins of the TDU

By the time of the emergence of the TDU in the mid-1970s, the AFL-CIO union officialdom had been nationalist, pro-capitalist, and anticommunist for several decades. This meant that the union leaders explicitly supported the corporations’ “right” to a profit. Under the strong economic growth that prevailed from the 1940s through the early 1970s, this perspective, treacherous to workers as it was, did not exclude improving living standards among truckers, shipping workers, and other sections of the working class. However, simultaneous with the birth of the TDU and similar reform groups, the stage was being set for the degeneration of the unions and, ultimately, their transformation into instruments of the corporations and the government.

In the 1970s the processes that became known as globalization were heightening the interdependence of workers all over the world in the very production and distribution of goods and services, undermining the viability of all nationally based workers’ organizations. The lack of mass working-class organizations with an international, anti-capitalist perspective—that is, the historical weakness of socialism at the time—paved the way for a ruling class counteroffensive that, in the United States, first took the form of the deregulation of key sectors of the economy, including trucking and shipping.

Advances in computer and telecommunication technology had opened up new possibilities in transportation logistics, which could in turn be used for the disaggregation of factory production into far-ranging supply chains—for example, in the auto industry. [2] But America’s capitalists saw in these new efficiencies not an opportunity for improving living standards, but for great new streams of profit.

In the 1970s successive presidential administrations, beginning with Nixon and culminating under Carter with the implementation of the Motor Carrier Act (MCA) of 1980, targeted regulations and controls over trucking overseen by the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), and the National Master Freight Agreement (NMFA) governing wages and conditions of Teamsters drivers. The central aim was to drive down wages. This was a highly conscious assault overseen by both the Republican and Democratic parties, and spearheaded by the liberal Democratic Senator Edward “Ted” Kennedy of Massachusetts. [3]

America’s truckers and parcel workers were under political attack. But the TDU, which by 1979 had drawn together several other Teamster reform groups—including a health and safety-focused organization called PROD, or the Professional Drivers Council, which had been founded with

the backing of consumer rights activist Ralph Nader in 1971 [4]—insisted on separating politics from workplace struggles. Its actual aim was to politically disarm workers.

It, along with similar groups operating in other unions, bitterly opposed the Workers League—forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party—which fought for socialist consciousness among workers, a perspective that hinged on driving the pro-capitalist bureaucrats out of the unions and wresting workers away from the Democratic Party through the formation of a Labor Party based from the unions. The Workers League won militant workers to its banner in a number of industries. The labor reform groups fought to block this, limiting militant workers to supposedly “trade union” issues.

The conception that politics was not for workers had its own history. The initial members of the TDU, which was founded in 1976, were middle-class radical youth sent into the Teamsters union by an organization called the International Socialists (IS), which had emerged in 1962 out of the rightwing Socialist Party of America, led by Max Shachtman, a former American Trotskyist who moved sharply to right after breaking with the Fourth International in 1940.

The IS was centered on college campuses, especially the University of California, Berkeley, where Ken Paff, one of the founders of the TDU and now its national organizer, was a student.

The TDU was only one of several efforts in the 1970s aimed at reforming American trade unions, which coalesced around a publication called *Labor Notes*, founded by IS members Kim Moody, Jane Slaughter and Jim West in 1979. The reform groups included Miners for Democracy in the United Mine Workers of America, Steelworkers Fightback in the United Steelworkers, and later the New Directions movement in the United Auto Workers. [5]

It must be plainly stated that the balance sheet for TDU and other union reform efforts is catastrophic—if success be measured by results for workers. In major industries with these so-called reformers played significant or leading roles—trucking, coal, steel, auto, telecommunications and public transit—millions of jobs have been lost since the 1970s, and wages, benefits, and worker safety have been rolled back decades. Truckers and delivery drivers today haul more and are paid less than in the 1970s. Their crucial importance to the economy, which would grind to a halt without them, is rewarded with constantly increasing exploitation.

As for the unions, they are today far more unaccountable to the rank-and-file than they were in the 1970s, jettisoning in the meantime their most basic historical functions. Everywhere they seek to block strike action. In contract “negotiations,” the unions no longer seek concessions from management for workers, *but from workers for management*—as proven yet again by the union-backed contract for UPS workers. Even the bare concept of the workplace grievance has all but vanished from the industrial landscape. These “unions” nonetheless still exist, diverting dues to the campaign coffers of the Democratic Party and to fat bureaucratic salaries and slush funds that have not diminished in spite of declining membership.

Yet what is evident in hindsight—the abject failure of various union reform efforts—was not always clear. In the mid-1970s, when the TDU emerged, the unions still held the active allegiance of workers, who were seeking to turn them into fighting organizations. The TDU won a following among the rank and file, claiming perhaps 8,000 worker-members at its peak.

At times, TDU members showed physical courage. In one notorious case, Pete Camarata (1946-2014), a Detroit warehouse worker, was beaten nearly to death after criticizing union president Frank Fitzsimmons at the Teamsters national convention in Las Vegas in 1976. [6] A group created specifically to intimidate union dissidents, the Brotherhood of Loyal Americans and Strong Teamsters (BLAST), in 1983 attacked a TDU meeting in Cleveland, taking over the podium, ripping down banners and

running TDU members out of the building. According to government records, the BLAST attackers in Cleveland included “the presidents of two Teamsters locals, a local vice president, two secretary-treasurers, three union trustees, one organizer and at least 10 business agents for the international union.” [7]

The problem was not lack of courage among individuals like Camarata, a worker brought up through Jimmy Hoffa’s old Detroit Local 299. The problem was the perspective of the IS, which dominated the various Teamster reform movements. The orientation of the TDU is now, and has always been, to the bureaucracy, never the working class—all of the rhetoric about rank-and-file power notwithstanding. The IS and the TDU, from the beginning, have sought to discover a “progressive” or “democratic” faction of the bureaucracy—and where none are found they can be invented, as is the case with the Teamsters United of Zuckerman now and the Ron Carey bureaucratic clique in the 1990s.

Even in the 1970s, in the midst of the last great strike wave in US history, the IS equated the anticommunism of the union bureaucrats—which was rooted in the defense of their privileged positions within the capitalist system—with that of the workers, who, whatever their political confusion, were objectively being driven into a struggle against the profit system and the two corporate-controlled parties that defended it.

This superficial impressionism was combined with a nationalist outlook, which insisted that American workers were hopelessly backward, racist and largely incapable of being won to a socialist perspective.

According to Moody, [8] “The fact that the vast majority of working people lack even a consistently class-conscious way of looking at the world makes it difficult for socialism to get a hearing. The gaping lack in the US at this time is the lack of a sea of class-conscious workers for socialist ideas and organizations to swim in. How do we help create that sea? Socialists can build transitional organizations and struggles that help to raise the class consciousness of activist workers.” This “rank and file strategy,” he adds, “starts with the experience, struggles and consciousness of workers as they are today, but offers a bridge to deeper class consciousness and socialist politics.”

In fact, the “bridge” and “transitional politics” Moody referred to was nothing more than trade union politics. Accordingly, the middle-class youth sent into the unions were not to fight for socialism, but allegedly “bread and butter” matters—the only ones they thought workers could understand or would accept. Top of the list was the “democratic reform” of the unions, which might in some distant and uncertain future—a future that 45 years on has yet to arrive!—provide “space” for radical ideas.

In reality, the banishment of politics meant the exclusion of *socialist* politics. Capitalist politics, especially that espoused by the Democratic Party, was left unchallenged. Behind this was not a fear of alienating workers—who were consistently being radicalized by events—but of alienating sections of the anticommunist trade union bureaucracy, with whom the TDU hoped to collaborate.

The TDU and *Labor Notes* always refused analysis of the root causes for the conservative leadership that dominated the AFL-CIO unions in the 1970s. They instead held to what might be called the “bad bureaucrat theory” of trade union decline, which imagines that the unions can be made into fighting organizations if only the “wrong” leaders can be replaced by the “right” ones, supposedly susceptible to pressure from the rank-and-file. In the 1980s *Labor Notes* produced several “how to” manuals for workers and held numerous conferences and workshops in which these supposedly “practical” and “trade union” issues were elaborated. Socialism was excluded from discussion.

All of the manuals and conferences did nothing to change the trajectory of the IBT. This is because the character of the Teamsters and the other unions was, and is, determined not by the personal characteristics of individual bureaucrats, but by the historically conditioned nature of the organizations.

### **The TDU embraces reform... “from the top down”**

The right-wing, pro-capitalist evolution of the IBT only accelerated after the disappearance (and presumed murder) of Jimmy Hoffa in 1975 [9]—the year before the founding of the TDU. Under Hoffa’s successors, Fitzsimmons, Roy Williams, Jackie Presser and Billy McCarthy, organized crime’s influence over the Teamsters, which attracted great media attention, also deepened.

Unprincipled politics makes for strange bedfellows. With the failure of their reform perspective, the TDU turned to the Reagan-Bush administration, which, fearing the total collapse of the IBT, targeted it in 1988 under the antidemocratic Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), in a case filed by then-US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Rudolph Giuliani. In an intervention unprecedented in the history of American labor, hundreds of Teamsters officials were dismissed from their posts by government-appointed trustees.

A legal counsel to the TDU, Michael Goldberg, later acknowledged that the TDU had cooperated intimately with the federal investigation headed by Giuliani “before a settlement was reached.” [10] Before the filing of the suit, Moody said, Ken Paff wrote a long letter to the assistant attorney general in April 1987 saying, “There is only one ‘reorganization’ under RICO that the government can effectively undertake: namely to direct the IBT to hold rank and file elections under government supervision for all International Officers.” [11]

Leaders of the TDU—some of whom secured vacated posts—welcomed state intervention in the Teamsters because, they claimed, the constitutional reforms imposed by the federal administrators mirrored their longtime demands. In the unintentionally ironic words of one Chicago TDU activist, “the story of [Teamster] democratic transformation began with the trusteeship.” [12]

How the “democratization of union institutions and practices”—in the words of another former TDU activist-turned-professor [13]—could be imposed by the federal government has never been explained. Nor has the TDU explained the preposterous notion that the Reagan-Bush administration would act in the name of “union democracy” and on behalf of Teamster workers—the same administration that had “smashed the PATCO air traffic controllers, jailed scores of militant workers and spearheaded the biggest union-busting drive in half a century.” [14]

Even more absurd was the claim that federal prosecutors suddenly “discovered” that the leading Teamsters bureaucrats were in cahoots with organized crime. The power of the racketeers in the union was rooted in the IBT’s historic rejection of socialist politics, and was in fact tacitly accepted—and at times encouraged—by the federal government.

This can be traced as far back as 1941. In that year the young Jimmy Hoffa was dispatched from Detroit with a gang of toughs by longtime union president Daniel Tobin to break up the Trotskyist leadership of Minneapolis Local 544, which under socialists Farrell Dobbs and the Dunne brothers had waged a successful general strike in 1934 that, in turn, had led to the rapid growth of the IBT among long haul truckers throughout the Midwest. Tobin cooperated intimately with the Roosevelt administration, which was about to launch the Smith Act trials against Dobbs along with the rest of the Trotskyist leadership in preparation for US entry into World War II. [15]

In fact, Hoffa had learned how to organize under Dobbs and the Dunnes, and always remembered them as friends. In turning on them, he was charting his future course in the IBT as a ruthless opportunist ready to lean on underworld elements to strengthen his power. Hoffa’s turn to criminal elements—sometimes used to even the odds with capitalists; more often to terrify union dissidents—was part and parcel of his rejection of socialist politics.

“Farrell Dobbs was a crackerjack organizer [and] a brilliant strategist,” Hoffa later recalled in his 1970 autobiography. “Dobbs also saw the

unions as a great potential *political* force. I could not agree with him then, nor do I now.” [16] But Hoffa could not understand that Dobbs’ strategy arose precisely from his revolutionary political perspective of international socialism. It was this that allowed Dobbs to perceive the strategic value of organizing the long haul drivers, on whom Tobin and the rest of the old AFL looked down as “the riff raff.” [17] In fact, what Minneapolis, 1934, demonstrated—a fact lost on the TDU—was that an avowedly socialist leadership could lead workers in struggle and win.

It was not lost on the federal government, however. Beginning with the Smith Act persecution of the Trotskyists inside the Teamsters and continuing for a half-century, Washington tacitly accepted organized crime in the Teamsters, even if it occasionally mounted publicity-stunt hearings and investigations—most notably Robert Kennedy’s decade-long campaign to put Hoffa behind bars. Nonetheless, the racketeer’s place in the IBT was preserved, right through the 1980s, when Teamsters officials ensured that their members crossed the picket lines in strike after strike. [18]

In that decade, Teamsters presidents that were known to have connections to organized crime won the active support of both major parties as well as presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. [19] In 1981, as the Reagan administration prepared to crush the PATCO strike—a watershed defeat in the history of American labor—he sent videotaped condolences to the Teamsters annual convention, praising the recently deceased union president Fitzsimmons, a known racketeer. “As I have said previously, Frank won the respect of both business and political leaders as an affable but hard bargainer,” Reagan said. “He also won friendships, including my own.” [20]

Reagan and Bush maintained that “friendship” with Jackie Presser, who worked simultaneously with Cleveland organized crime and as an informant for the FBI, which protected him while he plundered the Teamsters to the tune of millions. [21]

### **The transformation of the TDU**

Clearly, the move against the IBT was not motivated by concerns over union democracy. It was driven by the fear that what was then the nation’s largest union could collapse and cease its useful role in containing working-class struggle in a key sector of the economy. Whatever else went into the decision, the end result was the consolidation of state and corporate influence over the IBT.

There were grave political consequences for the TDU in this outcome. Its newfound success in the late 1980s and early 1990s was not based on a movement of the rank and file, as it had called for in the 1970s, but on the largesse of the capitalist state. With the government trusteeship as the mechanism, the TDU began to reconstitute itself as a faction of the IBT bureaucracy.

Its big opportunity came in the first government-supervised union IBT election, in 1991, when the TDU joined with powerful interests backing Ron Carey for union president. His victory, which also resulted in the promotion of several TDU members to the union’s Executive Board, and many others to lesser bureaucratic posts, was greeted with rapture by the capitalist media, including the *New York Times*, which saw in Carey “A new legend for the rank and file,” “a triumph of union democracy over organized crime,” “an honest, straightforward leader,” “a firebrand,” “a real outsider,” “a Frank Capra — Mr. Smith Goes to Washington’ figure,” “a gift to his members.” [22]

To this day, the TDU and its historian backers present Carey’s win as the culmination of a democratic groundswell. It was no such thing. Carey won 48 percent of the votes, but only 28 percent of Teamsters bothered to cast a ballot. As a share of overall membership, he took only 15 percent. Internal polls before the vote showed that most Teamsters had no idea who Carey or the other major candidates were. [23]

Nor was Carey any friend of the rank and file. For 23 years he had headed the UPS Teamsters Local 804 in New York City, one of the largest

in the union, where he “was something of a pioneer within the labor bureaucracy in the imposition of concessions and the establishment of corporatist relations with management.” His most notable achievement was his betrayal of an 85-day strike against UPS in 1974, in which he accepted “the contract that opened the floodgates for the destruction of full-time jobs and the spread of lower-paid part-time labor at the trucking company’s operations across the country.” [24]

In office, Carey signed several concessionary contracts with major firms, including UPS. He isolated and betrayed strikes of Teamsters at major Detroit and Pittsburgh newspapers, promoting the use of middle-class consumer protest tactics. [25] While he won praise in the capitalist media for cutting bureaucratic salaries to the “modest” sum of \$150,000, he opened the Teamster spigots to the Democratic Party, providing \$4 million to the Clinton election campaign in 1996. Indeed, his major achievement—aided and abetted by the TDU—was the reorientation of the IBT from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party.

It should come as no surprise then that he had little rank-and-file support in the 1996 Teamsters election against James P. Hoffa, son of late president, who had been put forward as the representative of the Teamsters “Old Guard.” Carey won a narrow election victory, but the next year the results were invalidated when it came to light that his closest advisors—supposedly without his knowledge—had been involved in a complex money laundering scheme that implicated leading figures in the AFL-CIO, including then-Secretary Treasurer Richard Trumka, and the president of the Service Employees International Union, Andrew Stern. Also involved were several liberal activist groups as well as the Clinton-controlled Democratic National Committee.

In a classic kickback scheme, these groups were sent \$885,000 in donations from the Teamsters treasury and in turn made or arranged for reciprocal contributions to the Carey campaign.

In 1998 Carey was expelled from the Teamsters, and his TDU-backed lieutenant, Tom Leedham, lost the election to Hoffa the same year.

The revelations of Carey’s corruption discredited the TDU’s promotion of an allegedly “reform” wing of the IBT. But instead of acknowledging this, the TDU belatedly denounced “government intervention” in the Teamsters, decrying the very structures that had paved the way for Carey’s victory—and its members’ own promotion into the ranks of the union bureaucracy.

As it integrated itself with the Carey faction of the bureaucracy, the TDU adopted increasingly dishonest apologetics. Take, for example, its claims that the 1994 long haul truckers’ strike and the 1997 UPS strike were smashing victories.

The 1994 strike, which lasted for 23 days and involved 70,000 drivers, was in fact waged as a conscious effort to demoralize truckers in order to force a bitter contract on them. Carey’s apologists claim that he “won” by negotiating a reduction in part-time workers. Instead the contract allowed for the hiving off of truck traffic to freight trains and the use of a new category of “casual workers” hired on a per-day basis and paid significantly less than full-time workers. The contract included no amnesty for some 200 Teamsters and supporters arrested on picket lines. But perhaps its most damning feature was a no-strike clause for the life of the four-year contract in favor of settlement by “independent” arbiters—thereby relinquishing the only method workers had to counter the power of the trucking firms. [26]

The TDU has often repeated the claim that the 1997 UPS strike, which involved 185,000 workers, was a total victory [27] for workers. In fact, Carey pulled the plug on the two-week strike with largely symbolic concessions in his pocket, including the supposed creation of 10,000 full-time jobs over the life of the contract. But these new jobs would be paid 24 percent less than others of the same category—the first ever contract to expand the two-tier system to full-time workers. And the additional jobs were more than offset by the union accepting the right of UPS to lay off as

many as 15,000 strikers—to account for business lost to FedEx—including several dozen workers fired for actions during the strike itself. [28]

Both strikes followed a similar pattern. Called to vent worker opposition to the erosion of wages and conditions, strikers were left isolated while business was moved to competitors. Workers were presented with concessionary contracts declared by the IBT and the TDU to be victories.

#### **What is the IBT? What is the TDU?**

The hand of the state is present in the IBT to this day. The Consent Decree [29] the IBT signed with the federal government in 1989 to prevent criminal prosecution established a permanent Independent Review Board (IRB) and an entire investigative office controlled by corporate attorneys and funded by millions of dollars in union dues. The IRB has the authority to promulgate rules for the IBT, supposedly designed to root out corruption. It may kick out any member for “conduct unbecoming to the union,” including for defying IRB edicts. This office stands ready to tip the balance in favor of whichever faction of the bureaucracy it chooses.

Having long since gotten past its anger over the removal of Carey, the TDU leadership still supports this permanent state office in the IBT. In a recent article on its website, it complained that Hoffa, Jr. “has sought for years to hamstring or eliminate the IRB and its corruption investigations [which] has functioned for 24 years to root out corrupt Teamster officials. [30] Such articles are thinly veiled appeals to the government that its faction be brought back into power.

According to liberal theorists, independent trade unions are a hallmark of a functioning democratic society. Perhaps for this reason, legal scholars have worried over the precedent established by the Consent Decree signed by the Teamsters. Was the IBT any longer a genuinely independent union? How was it different from unions openly controlled by the government under authoritarian regimes? [31]

In fact, the state intervention in the IBT is only one transparent example of a tendency in the historical development of the trade unions noted by Leon Trotsky in one of his final writings— “their drawing closely to and growing together with the state power.”

“Monopoly capitalism does not rest on competition and free private initiative but on centralized command,” Trotsky explained in 1940. “The capitalist cliques at the head of mighty trusts, syndicates, banking consortiums, etcetera, view economic life from the very same heights as does state power; and they require at every step the collaboration of the latter... By transforming the trade unions into organs of the state, fascism invents nothing new; it merely draws to their ultimate conclusion the tendencies inherent in imperialism.” [32]

Trotsky concluded this article, which was found on his desk after his murder by a Stalinist assassin, by insisting that genuinely democratic and independent trade unions could “be assured only by a completely revolutionary leadership.” In an analysis that requires no updating, Trotsky predicted that in the epoch of imperialist decay the unions would either serve as the instruments of class exploitation, or as the organs of working-class revolution. There could be no middle ground.

The evolution of the Teamsters proves Trotsky’s point in the negative. It long ago ceased to represent workers. It is an organization that seeks to represent the major corporations and the state, and that survives at their mercy.

The TDU has evolved as well. The bankruptcy of its effort to reform the Teamsters was exposed with its open embrace of state intervention in 1988 and its subsequent integration with the Carey wing of the bureaucracy.

Today, in promoting illusions in the possibility of reforming the Teamsters, the TDU speaks not for the UPS rank and file, but for the privileged upper-middle class terrified that a genuine struggle could be the tipping point for the movement of the entire working class. These layers of the population instinctively gravitate to the trade union apparatus as a defensive bulwark.

This is borne out in the personal evolution of the IS members who entered the Teamsters in the 1970s. Some have themselves become union officials. Others have become academics and writers, where they specialize in creating a heroic story around the government takeover of the Teamsters and the Ron Carey presidency. Today, former TDU members such as Joe Allen, who contributes to *The Jacobin* and *Socialist Worker*, are attempting to do the same with Hoffa's rival Fred Zuckerman, who leads Teamsters United. [33]

Though he may be lionized by the TDU, Zuckerman has absolutely no intention of leading a strike or any kind of serious struggle. A former Hoffa lieutenant, he is the labor overseer of arguably the most strategically important UPS hub in the country, Teamsters Local 89 in Kentucky, which includes the UPS "Worldport" at Louisville International Airport that handles international deliveries to and from every country in the world—and thereby links up workers in the US with their class brothers and sisters all over the planet.

Like the trade union movement as a whole, the TDU's transformation into a faction of the bureaucracy was rooted in its conscious rejection of socialist politics—a position to which it continues to adhere. While posturing as opponents of further concessions, the TDU does not question the prerogative of the big corporations to their profits. Its perspective is a dead end for workers.

Massive opposition to the UPS contract nonetheless remains. The question is, how can it be mobilized so that UPS drivers can overcome both the corporation and the union?

The *UPS Workers Newsletter*, published by the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*, calls for a "no" vote. But that is not all. We insist that workers must take the conduct of negotiations out of the hands of the union, which in reality serves as another layer of management. Workers must form rank-and-file committees independent of the Teamsters. These will link up UPS workers with workers in North America and all over the world at Amazon, US Postal Service, and FedEx, in preparation for a general strike that defies the corporations' insistence that they have a "right" to endlessly profit at the expense of the lives of workers and their families.

The development of a such a struggle would rapidly transform into a direct political struggle against the government, which is not a neutral body, let alone an instrument the working class can rely on to defend its democratic rights. The courts, the police and other state institution, along with both the Democrats and Republicans, are tools of the corporate and financial oligarchy that rules America.

That is why the development of a powerful industrial counteroffensive of the working class must be combined with a political struggle for workers to take power in their own hands, break the dictatorial grip of the banks and big business over economic and political life, and carry out the socialist transformation of society, including the transformation of the giant logistics companies into public enterprises, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class.

#### Notes:

[1] See <http://www.tdu.org/> and <https://www.upsteamstersunited.org/news>. Both sites accessed August 22, 2018.

[2] David Hummels, 2007. "Transportation Costs and International Trade in the Second Era of Globalization." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 21 (3): 131-154.

[3] Thomas Gale Moore, "Trucking Deregulation." *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*. Available on line at <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc1/TruckingDeregulation.html>

[4] Michael J. Goldberg, "Teamster Reformers: Their Union, Their Jobs, Their Movement." *Journal of Transportation Law Logistics and Policy*, Vol. 72, 2005: 13.

[5] For a largely uncritical view of such movements, see *Rebel Rank and*

*File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s*; Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow, eds. Verso, 2010.

[6] Dan La Botz, *Rank and File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union*. Haymarket Series, Verso; 1991.

[7] Ronald J. Ostrow and Robert L. Jackson. "Presser Abetted Violence by Teamsters, Panel Says" *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1985.

[8] Kim Moody, "The Rank and File Strategy," 2000 reposted by *Jacobin* magazine <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/08/unions-socialists-rank-and-file-strategy-kim-moody>

[9] Hoffa was president of the Teamsters from 1958 to 1971, but remained a powerful figure in the union until his disappearance in suburban Detroit in 1975.

[10] Goldberg, "Teamster Reformers," 18

[11] Moody, *US Labor in Trouble and Transition The Failure of Reform from Above, 2007 Verso p. 123* [12] Robert Bruno, *Reforming the Chicago Teamsters: The Story of Local 705*. 2003, Northern Illinois University Press.; 15

[13] Michael H. Belzer, *ILR Review* Vol. 58, No. 1 (Oct., 2004), pp. 160-162

[14] Barry Grey, "The middle class 'left', and the fall of Ron Carey," *International Workers Bulletin*, December 1997.

[15] Ralph C. James and Estelle James, "The Purge of the Trotskyites from the Teamsters." *The Western Political Quarterly* Vol. 19, No. 1 (Mar., 1966), pp. 5-15; "The Smith Act trial and government infiltration of the Trotskyist movement." *World Socialist Web Site*, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/12/09/secu-d09.html>

[16] James R. Hoffa, *The trials of Jimmy Hoffa*. Chicago, H. Regnery Co. 1970.

[17] Jean Brust, ed. *Defending Principles: The Political Legacy of Bill Brust*. Oak Park, Mehring Books, 1993: 158.

[18] There is a great deal of literature on the role of organized crime on the IBT. For a good example, see David Scott Witwer. *Corruption and reform in the Teamsters Union*. Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2003. Also, Steven Brill, *The Teamsters* [1978].) Arthur L. Fox II and John C. Sikorski, *Teamster Democracy and Financial Responsibility* [1976].

[19] *Collision: How the Rank and File Took Back the Teamsters*, Book by Kenneth C. Crowe

[20] Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Digital Library Collections. Collection: President, Office of the: Presidential Briefing Papers: Records, 1981-1989. Folder Title: 05/29/1981 (Case File: 043429) Box 4: <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/digitallibrary/smf/president/presidentialbriefingpapers/box-004/40-439-5730647-004-001-2016.pdf>

[21] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackie\\_Presser](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackie_Presser) [22] Robert D. McFadden, "New Teamster Chief's Motto: Honest Work for Honest Pay." December 15, 1991, *New York Times*.

[23] George Kannar, "Making the Teamsters Safe for Democracy, *The Yale Law Journal* Vol. 102, No. 7 (May, 1993), p 1649-1650.

[24] Grey, "The middle class 'left', and the fall of Ron Carey," *International Workers Bulletin*, December 1997.

[25] Laurent Belsie, "Newspaper Strike In Pittsburgh Seen Coming to an End," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 23, 1992. <https://www.csmonitor.com/1992/1123/23081.html>

[26] Catherine S. Manegold, "Teamsters Reach Accord to End Strike," *New York Times*, April 29, 1994: 14.

[27] See for example Dan Levin's article on Labor Notes, "The 1997 UPS Strike: Beating Big Business & Business Unionism." <http://www.labornotes.org/2017/08/1997-ups-strike-beating-big-business-business-unionism>

[28] TEAMSTERS AND U.P.S. AGREE ON A 5-YEAR CONTRACT PLAN ..

[https://www.nytimes.com/1997/.../teamsters-and-ups-agree-on-a-5-year-contract-plan-to ...](https://www.nytimes.com/1997/.../teamsters-and-ups-agree-on-a-5-year-contract-plan-to-...)

Aug 19, 1997; "No Victory for Workers: The Bitter Truth about the UPS Strike" *International Workers Bulletin*, August 25, 1997.

[29]

<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/teamstersforademocraticunion/pages/8453/attachments/original/1434375421/finalsettlement.pdf?1434375421>

[30] "Changes to the Independent Review Board." Posted February 15, 2016 [http://www.tdu.org/changes\\_to\\_the\\_independent\\_review\\_board](http://www.tdu.org/changes_to_the_independent_review_board)

[31] Andrew B. Dean, "An Offer the Teamsters Couldn't Refuse: The 1989 Consent Decree Establishing Federal Oversight and Ending Mechanisms," *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 100, No. 8 (Dec., 2000), pp. 2157-2194; George Kannar, "Making the Teamsters Safe for Democracy," *The Yale Law Journal* Vol. 102, No. 7 (May, 1993),

[32] Leon Trotsky, "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay," 1940. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/xx/tu.htm>

[33] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/08/teamsters-democratic-union-hoffa-zuckerman>



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**