

IBT Fraction Bulletin

Evaluation of the Freight Strike

Beyond the Contract

Central States UPS Contract Fight

## Evaluation of the Freight Strike

There is no doubt that the forces for a decent contract came out of this contract fight stronger than they went into it. The reputation of TDC has increased significantly among Teamsters. Some feel it was only TDC which forced an official national strike at all; some felt that it was only TDC which spoke to the important issues; some thought that only TDC was willing to fight for those issues. A very common response has been the winning over of those who doubted--"You TDC guys were right all along" or "You TDC people were the only people who did anything about this contract." Our credibility has increased and more people are ready to listen to us. Indeed, the most positive thing most people say about the TDC was that it told people what was happening and gave solid information in many situations where the union was totally silent.

There is also a strong feeling among TDC militants that we must continue. Even through the inevitable post-strike let down, people have been very clear that the TDC did more than most expected, really began to build a national presence, and that this first step must not be allowed to go nowhere. It must be followed through.

The immediate next step, however, the contract rejection campaign also reveals some of the major weaknesses of the TDC. There is tremendous sentiment against the settlement in almost all areas we are in contact with--Billings, Montana is the only one to report a satisfied response among the general membership--but also tremendous cynicism about successfully voting the contract down. People's response was often to either give up or want to go back out on strike again--a schizophrenic reaction that revealed that many felt there was no real handle, no effective method for rejecting the contract. The Los Angeles area was very angry about the contract, particularly the Western Conference Pick Up and Delivery Supplement which has vague wording about the 7 day flexible work week plan to eliminate premium pay for weekend work (the same language is in the Central States Local Cartage Supplement), and urged the TDC national office to organize a nationwide series of VOTE NO rallies for the weekend of April 24/25.

We called and evaluated the TDC situation in many cities and did a test sampling of cities and found that in most places the level of local organization was not such that people felt they could undertake the project. Union locals were having meetings on the contract both the weekends of April 10/11 and April 17/18 and most did not feel the tank and file would turn out again for a meeting on the contract. One response was typical--"Everyone is against the contract. What's the point of meeting on it?"

What this indicates specifically is that although TDC has become a widespread force in the Teamsters and has a great deal of respect in the areas its literature has reached, it lacks a solid organizational base. In many cities where the TDC is known, we work with an individual and his contacts or groups of individuals who get the literature out and talk up the aims and program of TDC, but who do not have any kind of organization or solid base. TDC has been more as a network and a movement than an organization and that has hurt. It meant that although we were able to create enough pressure to force a national strike, we were unable to enforce our program on it or direct it in any clear manner.

Fitzsimmons has been very aware of the TDC and spoke about it in Chicago, March 24, before an assembly of local officials, he wrote about us in his column in the April issue of the Teamster magazine, and he spoke about us again in Chicago before a similar group after the strike. In the magazine he didn't mention us by name, the two times he spoke, he did. The drift of his remarks was that

nothing he did was because of TDC and that TDC was basically subversive to his goals( he's rightabout the last part). All of which means he was worried about TDC and was greatly affected by us.

In fact, it might be argued that the strikewas organized by the union against the rank and file, rather than against the companies. The union began the strike without informing or actively organizing the members. In many areas there was no direction from the union until very late the night of March 31 and often not until later than that. But the union immediately came out with the red sticker interim agreements whic h confused everybody. More confusing was Chicago, which never struck at all, but simply ran out of freight by the second day of the strike. After the interim agreements, came the settlements with the Motor Carriers Labor Advisory Council and the Irregular Route Carriers. These were not interim agreements, but final agreements and pressured the Trucking Employers Inc.--the main employer bargaining group--into signing by lessening the possibility of a Taft-Hartley being called due to the "partial nature" of the strike. Finally, came the settlement and a strong "back to work" movement by union officials even without formal notification. The pact was "signed" late S Saturday afternoon, April 3, and some companies were running by Saturday night.

The pace of these decisions meant that the rank and file had little time to prepare a response before the situation had changed again. The daily CONVOY strike bulletins proved useless because they were reporting about day old news which had become "dated" by the rapidly changing situation.

This and the official nature of the strike left little room for rank and file initiative. In many areas people felt little responsibility or active involvement. Where TDC had developed some semblance of organization--Detroit, Pittsburgh, New Castle, Harrisburg, Springfield, Ohio, Los Angeles--there was more chance for this and more activity within the strike itself. But even in these situations, the union maintained a lot of initiative and direction. People were glad the union had called the strike and looked to it for leadership. ~~The strike didn't last long enough for the rank and file to take over the leadership of the union and show that overness~~ Much hostility against the union focuses itself on the I<sub>n</sub>ternational and Fitz. There were still, sometimes incredibly, illusions about and trust in local officials and the official local machinery. Only in Detroit, where the local leadership had been thouroughly discredited long before the strike, was TDC able to successfully challenge the local's direction of the strike. In other areas, the union's behavior served to discredit and undermine it, but that awareness will be part of the post-contract struggles and could not become operative during this contract fight.

The difficulties of building a contract rejection movement in any but a rhetorical sense nationwide (it will be more real in specific areas) also points out another weakness of TDC--we were unable to focus on one or two key issues that really grabbed people in the gut. Our whole program was good and spoke to the diverse needs of road, dock, and city, but to really get a rejection movement going there needed to be an issue that everyone wanted. People had to feel if that issue wasn't there, BOOM, it wasn't an acceptabæ contract. Without a clear issue focus, the strike inevitably became one over wages and with a higher than expected dollar settlement and a hokey "unlimited COL" clause, the union felt it could sell it. They may be right. A clear issue focus would have been a peg to hang out all the anger. Without it, the anger may dissipate away ineffectively.

These two things--organizational weakness and lack of focus on a key issue--are the major problems which beset the TDC. It is these which must be corrected in any movement which goes beyond the contract.

## Beyond the Contract

Despite the organizational problems of TDC, we have emerged from the strike greatly strengthened. The credibility of our efforts is much higher in all the areas we have been working with and we are finding new areas getting in touch with us we haven't heard from before. We found that many of the individuals we worked with grew enormously during the strike and developed organizational capabilities which will be important for moving beyond the contract itself. We also found that many people we were in touch with were not able to very effectively carry the ball.

The Cleveland center was in active touch with about 53 centers immediately before and during the strike. We have gone back and evaluated the situation in almost all of them. Some have not yet been contacted. We have a whole lot to work with and were not crippled by either the inadequacy of the contract, the weakness of our organization, or the red-baiting of the IBT (although this latter did take its toll in specific areas). Most Teamsters do not blame TDC for not "winning" everything we asked for. They are thoroughly disgusted with the behavior of the Teamster leadership and felt we were the only sensible opposition, the only force that tried to fight on this contract. Our efforts to get information to the membership were most highly appreciated.

But we must develop what we have reasonably quickly or it will disappear. This involves developing a clear sense of the kind of organization that needs to be built within the Teamsters. That process is underway and the directions are these:

h The key will be the strategy of a rank and file movement. Teamster activists harbor many illusions about the importance of local candidates, the courts, or constitutional issues as levers to forcing change in the union. Our starting point is not simply changing the union, but changing it to do what? The general economic crisis is not resolved, simply delayed, and that not in any convincing way. The trucking employers response to this is to weaken the union in a number of areas--casuals, start times, change of operations, weekend work, use of brokers, changes in job classifications, etc.--which add up to permanent insecurity for the members. Along with this, the trend to consolidation in the industry continues unabated. The continuation of these objective trends will put pressure on the union and open it up to major reform currents. These currents will be susceptible to all the above illusions about how to change the unions. We must be able to ride with these currents, but to distinguish our strategy of building the rank and file movement as the only way to effectively change the union because it is only this strategy which effectively builds a response that can defend the Teamsters from the continuing attacks against their wages and work standards.

The group will be marked by its activist orientation. It will intervene in and struggle around all the issues--contracts, elected BA's, local elections, all the elements of the employer's offensive, pensions, etc. All of the issues deeply felt by Teamsters will be part of the action focus of the organization. This means activity on the job as well as within the union, and one thing we will certainly want to do will be to link together activists within any one company to help each other out in fighting their employer.

The program of the group will be somewhat obvious: a continued struggle around all the contract demands not fully won this round; a major series of items around union democracy and an end to corruption in the union--elected officials, no bloated salaries, open financial records, no second class ~~etc~~ locals, etc.;

open opposition to Fitzsimmons and Co. and their policies of accomodating to the industry at the expense of the membership; unity of all Teamsters--end to sweetheart agreements, full equality of women and black Teamsters, rank and file contraol of locals, support for the UFWU, etc. The specific items on the program have not been finally settled, nor is the programmatic list the most important defining factor for this new organization. There will be some issue or so that is dear to a group of Teamsters that may not be listed in the program. But the focus will be around the issues that can be actively struggled around by the rank and file, through which they can develope a sense of confidence, unity, and power. The stress on rank and file power will be the key element of what we are trying to build.

In order to get this new movement going, we are doing the following:

A document outlining the need, strategy, direction, and program of the new organization will be produced shortly. It will also include an outline of the proposed organizational structure. This will then be taken to a number of key TDC activists in cities throughout the country. This will involve weekedd trips by some people with enough time to spend to really argue the perspective, solicit ideas, make changes, etc. It is an effort to develop out of TDC activists a core of developed leaders who share and can argue for the perspective. What we will project with these people is a meeting of around 50 folks towards the end of May or early June which can get together, finalize a document and perspective, and issue a call for a rank and file convention which would be held later in the summer, late July or early August.

We understand that many people are impatient for an organization sooner, but we want to ground this more solidly than TDC was. We want to be able to speak to people at some length, convince them of our perspective, and train them as responsible leaders. We will want to make clear from the first some organizational structure which will involve real responsibility at the local level. We will also need to insure a solid financial base for any ongoing organization. The point is that although the actual founding of the organization may be a few months away, the process of establishing the group is starting NOW. TDC activists must be involved in these discussions as soon as possible and they must be used to talk to others. There will be many activities which local TDC groupings will have to undertake in order to make the founding convention a success. As soon as the document is completed, an organizational outline done, and a time-table and travel priorities set, fractions will be notified about what concretely they should be doing.

A Footnote on CONVOY--Without a doubt, one of the major successes of TDC was CONVOY. People were most appreciative of the information and folowed our lead in large part because we were the only outlet for solid, accurate info about the contract. We will build on CONVOY's present reputation. We will publish a national newspaper for this ongoing organization to continue reaching the audience CONVOY created. We will also encourage local publications and seek to co-ordinate the national and local papers so as to make both effective and not overburden localities with double financial, distribution, and writing responsibilities. Local papers can be detailed and agitational in a way a national paper can't. A national paper can give depth and perspective to issues and create a sense of a national movement that a local paper can't. The technical details of how this will be worked out haven't been settled, but will be very much a part of the organizational perspective we will be talking about.

## Central States UPS Contract Fight

The Central States UPS Contract expires on April 30. The union has responded to the strength of UPSurge with a set of demands that incorporated a good number of the UPSurge contract proposals. But we have learned from the freight strike that the union's initial demands mean very little. They were probably put forward in an effort to deflate the rank and file initiative developed by UPSurge. They failed to do that.

But it is very unclear what the union is actually negotiating around. Reports from the negotiations are very vague. "No progress" is the clearest message any union official is willing to give. Dan Darrow, head of the Central States Negotiating Team and Paul Steinberg, assistant to Roy Williams, met with 6 persons from the UPSurge rally in Chicago April 10. They reported that only 4 areas had been discussed at length: seniority, part-timers, feeders, and the grievance procedure. Little progress had been made on any. Local officials are to be called to Chicago on April 21 and strike authorization meetings are projected for the week-end of April 24/25.

From all indications we have, it looks like the union will call an official strike. Roy Williams said as much unofficially to a TDC/UPSurge delegation he met with in Kansas City on March 13. But how willing the union will be to really organize a strike that can win is very much in doubt. And if they choose to run the strike as clearly against the rank and file as they did in freight, it is unclear what their strategy will be.

UPSurge is organizing for the strike authorization meetings. It is proposing that four resolutions be raised in every local meeting and endorsed:

- 1) Motion: that this local recommend that the International union issue an order to refuse to handle struck goods. This would be any package with a Central States return address in the entire UPS system in the event of a strike. A mailgram to this effect should be sent immediately to the International.
- 2) Motion: that this local union call regular strike meetings twice a week in the event of a strike to keep the membership informed on the progress of the negotiations and other strike related information.
- 3) Motion: that a special union meeting be held to ratify any new contract proposal by secret ballot, and that we do no work unless there is a vote taken and a contract is ratified by the membership.
- 4) Motion: that a strike committee be elected at this meeting consisting of two members from each center in the local's jurisdiction for the purpose of co-ordinating strike activity at UPS.

UPSurge will also be organizing a pre-strike campaign to involve part-timers in the contract fight. Not only are the contract demands relating to part-timers key to a decent contract at UPS, but the support of the part-timers for the strike is key to victory. UPS has been hiring tons of part-timers to have a more pliable work force at strike and ratification time. UPSurge is making an active effort right in these few weeks before the contract to reach, involve, and organize these people.

The UPSurge leadership has also committed itself to be in Cleveland on a rotating basis to direct strike activity throughout the central states. This indicates organizational strength and commitment and should be crucial in

keeping a solid, united rank and file effort throughout the strike.

All of these efforts indicate that UPSurge is taking the lessons of the freight strike to heart and will be well positioned to organize rank and file initiative in the face of an official strike and the manipulative manner it is likely to be carried out by IBT leaders. Much of ~~it~~ this information was carried in the last (#8) issue of UPSurge newspaper and if fraction members aren't receiving this important publication regularly THEY SHOULD SUBSCRIBE!

At this stage it is unclear what the strategy of the company will be. UPS is a lot tougher and nastier, in many ways, than the unweildy coalition of freight employers headed by the TEU. There are rumors that the company is already hiring and training an active strike breaking force. How seriously they will try to run freight through or around the central states is not certain, but it is not unlikely that they will try something. Also, the record of the IBT officials on this score is abysmal. It is here that UPSurge organizations outside of the central states are crucial. The resolutions about struck goods must also become an issue in every UPS local outside of the central states. UPSers in other areas cannot sit back idly and watch the central states contract if they ever hope to win anything for themselves when their turn comes. If UPS can get what it wants in the central states, where UPSurge is strongest, that will be the green light for it to go full steam ahead against the union and the rank and file in every other area. In many ways the national UPS contract is being negotiated right now and the deadline for everyone is April 30.

This means an active awareness and, to whatever extent possible, participation in the dynamics of the central states contract fight. On both coasts, the union is reorganizing many regional contracts into one area contract with a common expiration date. This has generated some confusion and although it might be considered a step forward towards a unified contract, the IBT did it in a typically heavy handed and arbitrary way. The contract deadlines for the Western Conference and Eastern Conference are still not settled, but it looks like the Western Conference contracts are all being extended to June 30 and the Eastern Conference contracts until July 31.

UPSurge is moving ahead with a full organizing effort in the Eastern Conference. A major organizing meeting to kick off the campaign is being held on April 24 in Baltimore, Maryland. UPSers from Baltimore/Washington, Pittsburgh, York, and NY/NJ have been involved in the planning and organization of the session and it will include UPSers from Maine to South Carolina along the east coast plus West Virginia. This conference is key to establishing the organization necessary for a strong contract fight in the east and also to respond to any company initiatives to circumvent the central states fight. There are also plans for a conference around the Southern Conference contract, but there are no details as of yet.

It is important for everyone to realize that the center will be working out the timing and initiatives for building beyond the contract with a sharp awareness of the needs of the central states strike fight. We are seeking to build a Teamster wide organization and see the unity of freight and UPS as an absolute necessary first step in launching any ongoing organization. We want to insure that many of the UPSurge leaders will be involved in the preliminary discussions, planning meeting, and founding convention of the new rank and file organization being projected. But we also realize that waging the contract fight is the absolute necessary top priority for many of them for the next few weeks (or longer). This may mean some adjustments of scheduling and timing of initiatives. We need to move forward as fast as possible to capture the initiatives we have in freight, but we must also move in such a way as to utilize and include the UPSurge leadership.