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Teamster Magazine

June/July 2001

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Aiming High

Teamster Organizing Soars at San Francisco International Airport

Take a few pieces of pro-labor legislation and community leaders eager to avoid troubles at their airport. Throw in a massive group of traditionally low-paid, poorly-treated workers. Add Teamsters organizers to the mix, and you've got the makings of an organizing campaign that adds hundreds of workers to the Teamster family.

It's a recipe that so far has drawn nearly 700 workers in San Francisco into the Teamster fold, with the potential for thousands more in coming weeks and months.

"We've completed one sector, which is the baggage handlers, bag runners and skycaps. We represent 100 percent of the industry, which totals about 550 people," said Paula Macchello, an organizer with the Teamsters Strategic Initiatives department.

Macchello, assisted by Local 85 members, has spent the past several months meeting with workers after hours or between shifts.

Winning ways

Macchello points to three keys to the San Francisco International Airport organizing effort's success:

- A pro-labor environment. The Living Wage Coalition's early work created an atmosphere that allows for organizing without hostile negative campaigns.
- A cooperative relationship among labor unions. The unions that made a beeline to San Francisco were united by a common sense of purpose that helped build cooperation and create an atmosphere of excitement around the campaign. "If the SEIU is successful, the Teamsters are successful, and vice versa," Macchello said.
- The involvement of Local 85 members. "They bring so many resources to help us through their members," Macchello said. "Airborne Express members deliver day-in and day-out to our target companies. At one of my target companies, the rank-and-file have made all the hookups with the people who are becoming the key activists."

Quality standards = better pay, benefits

When the San Francisco International Airport Commission passed a resolution to establish a Quality Standards Program for employers, the initiative addressed hiring practices, training, equipment standards and compensation for workers.

Employers were required to provide:

- Company-paid membership in a group medical plan;
- Vacation days;
- Unpaid leave;
- And a minimum wage of \$9 an hour for benefited employees in the first year, which was bumped to \$10 an hour on Jan. 1, 2001.

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Striking Newspaper Worker Wins \$2.5 Million Verdict

Local 2040 Member's Right to Picket Validated

Ben Solomon, a Detroit News striker who was beaten severely by Sterling Heights, Michigan police while engaged in lawful picketing, has won a \$2.5 million jury verdict against the Detroit Newspapers and the Sterling Heights police department. The Teamster, a member of Local 2040, won \$500,000 in compensation for his injuries and \$2,000,000 in punitive damages. The jury found that the renegade news corporation and the police instituted an illegal policy of strike-breaking and a shabby conspiracy to cover it up.

Solomon was standing with strikers at the Detroit Newspapers' printing plant on Labor Day 1995, on a public right-of-way where picketing was undeniably legal, when he told a strike-breaking officer "You're a disgrace to your badge." Police then singled him out, beat him, handcuffed him, pepper-sprayed and arrested him, allegedly for unlawful assembly.

Rights Violated, Injuries Permanent

Solomon suffered neck and back injuries from the beating. He had a separated shoulder and a torn labrum, which required surgery. The soft tissue in his knee was damaged and muscle damage to his thigh has proven permanent. For a long time after the incident, he wore sunglasses because he couldn't bear the light. He blames the pepper spray.

"It had to be brought out in court," said Solomon. "What was important was that the jury sent a message to Detroit Newspapers and Sterling Heights that there has to be a better way to handle the situation than to violate somebody's rights."

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Solving America's Economic and Energy Needs

Teamsters Support Energy Resource Exploration in Alaska

The Teamsters are leading the national grassroots movement to encourage oil exploration in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).

The Teamsters and other labor groups support the inclusion of oil and gas leasing on the coastal plain of the ANWR in the National Energy Security Act of 2001. More than 735,000 new jobs would be created by the legislation. Teamsters would benefit by the creation of more than 25,000 new jobs in maintenance and support of the project.

"Working families are about to be caught between a recession and a deepening energy crisis," Teamsters General President James P. Hoffa said at a March 28 press conference on Capitol Hill. "By tapping into petroleum resources in Alaska, we can create jobs and stabilize our economy by lessening our dependence on foreign oil."

Creating Good Jobs

Teamsters would work in a variety of positions building, maintaining and supporting the pipeline.

"When we opened the Prudhoe Bay in the 1970's, Teamsters were needed for all sorts of jobs in maintenance and support of the pipeline," said Gerry Hood, Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 959 in Anchorage, Alaska. "Additionally, Teamsters members across the country will benefit as more help is needed in the tankhaul and refining industries."

"ANWR means steady work for at least five to ten years," said James Cross, a three-year Teamster with Houston Contracting in Alaska. "That's work that my family can count on. It's also work that is heavily unionized so Teamster membership will increase."

Big Gains for Little Cost

The field in the ANWR has the potential to be the largest discovery of petroleum in the world since the 1940's. Currently, Alaska contributes 20 percent of America's domestic oil supply. This will increase to 50 percent if the ANWR is opened. At the same time, dependency on foreign oil will decrease. Yet for all the good reasons to explore the ANWR, there are still environmental concerns.

"What people don't realize is the relatively small area that would be explored," Hood said. "The area in question is about 2,000 acres, roughly one-fifth the size of Washington, D.C.'s Dulles Airport." Contrary to what many people think, American jobs and the environment are not mutually exclusive. The technology being used in Alaska is the cleanest, most efficient and most environmentally sensitive technology in the world.

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Flight Attendants Win First Contract

Each year, Champion Air's earnings have improved. And each year, management refused to give Champion Air flight attendants their fair share. So the flight attendants organized as members of Teamsters Local 120 and started bargaining.

Now they have the good-paying Teamsters contract they deserve. In March they voted 128-30 to ratify an agreement with substantial gains in wages, benefits, job security and work rules. They will see a total increase in their wages of between 25 and 50 percent over the life of the contract.

Getting to this point required patience, solidarity and militancy.

Growth and Turbulence

Northwest Airlines owns 40 percent of Champion, a leading charter airline. Ferrying vacationers, tour groups and sporting teams has become a big business. Since organizing, the Champion bargaining unit has doubled in size to 215.

After nearly two years of foot-dragging at the bargaining table, the flight attendants prepared to ask the National Mediation Board for the release from mediation that starts the countdown to a strike. They also increased public pressure on the company. On Valentine's Day, they picketed at airports from Minnesota to Texas, as Champion passengers embarked on holiday junkets.

"Champion Air flight attendants have been negotiating for a contract since early 1999," said Ray Benning, Director of the Teamsters Airline Division. "Champion's offers have been totally inadequate. We're hoping the company will have a heart on Valentine's Day and change its ways."

Success

The logjam broke. Within days, Champion upped its offer and by week's end the parties had reached a tentative agreement.

"We achieved improvements in pay rates, hours of service, working conditions and benefits," said Robin Hintzman, a Champion flight attendant and member of the workers' negotiating committee. "Now, we are seen as full partners in the company's prosperity."

Contract Highlights

The contract features:

- Average annual pay increases ranging from 4.5 to 9 percent, depending on seniority;
- A signing bonus ranging from \$200 to \$1,000;
- A new 401(k) retirement plan;
- Time-and-a-half when called in to work on a day off ; and
- Improvements in work rules regarding accumulated sick leave, moving allowances and travel benefits.

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A Tale of Two Cities

Americans Brace for Unsafe Truck Invasion

The Rio Grande is more than an international border. It is a psychological barrier between two nations that cannot agree on common rules and principles that affect the safety and welfare of their peoples.

Until recently, many Americans didn't give much thought to the problems of their

Mexican neighbors. Then came the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and a flood of unsafe trucks rolled through border communities within free trade zones.

Now, a NAFTA panel has threatened the United States with sanctions for blocking these trucks from gaining full access to its highways, and President Bush has agreed to swing open the gates. Suddenly, it's not a border problem anymore.

"I'm afraid to even go south of Chicago if I travel with my family."
--Ken Bradshaw, Local 705

With the new NAFTA ruling, no region of the country is safe. And Teamsters who spend their entire working lives on the highways are plenty worried.

"Safety standards in Mexico are definitely not up to par with us, and we have problems with unsafe trucks already," said Rick Egeland, a tanker driver and member of Local 705 in Chicago.

Although more than a thousand miles from the southern border, Egeland knows that the new ruling means that northern cities like Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland will soon see a jump in truck traffic from a country notorious for its weak safety regulations and inadequate enforcement.

"What happens if the trailer leaks and chemicals leak onto our streets?" asked Ken Bradshaw, a UPS feeder driver and member of Local 705. "Diesel fuel is like ice on the road, and could cause 30 accidents behind the driver."

"We went through two years' training for hazardous materials," said Mario Arrieta, a member of Local 745 in El Paso. "These guys don't go through anything. It's a joke to them. Sometimes you'll even find brake shoes and lug bolts on the street."

From slipshod maintenance to overworked, underpaid drivers; from overweight loads to hazardous cargoes; U.S. drivers everywhere will share the road with rolling time bombs.

"If you've got a sleeper team, it's a one-day shot from Laredo to here, or they may stay up 24 hours. There's no question in my mind, someone's going to get hurt; some families are going to lose their lives," said Gerald Zero, Secretary-Treasurer of Local 705. "It's clear the Border Patrol won't be able to inspect them all."

**"If they wreck near the border, they run into Mexico.
You're only prosecuted if you're in the vehicle."**
--Jim Barlow, Business Agent, Local 745

The problem may begin in Mexico, but it's compounded in the United States, where border officers are overwhelmed by escalating volumes of narcotics, contraband and unsafe vehicles.

"Truck traffic is steadily increasing, while staffing levels have not increased appreciably," observed Frederick Keyser, Acting Port Director and Assistant Director of Trade Operations in West Texas and New Mexico for the U.S. Customs Service.

In the year ending September 30, 2000, Customs in El Paso presided over 725,064 freight carrier crossings, up from 539,650 in 1996. More than 300,000 pounds of marijuana were seized in the West Texas/New Mexico region, compared to 38,102 in 1990--a nearly 10-fold increase.

Customs focuses on what is in a truck, rather than its condition. That task is left to the various state departments of transportation (DOT), whose funding is subject to the whims of the various legislatures. Barlow estimates that there are only four DOT people on duty in western Texas at any given time.

Yet even if the state force was increased, "there is a finite amount of space where we can accommodate them," Keyser said. "They require space for the trucks and their employees' parking. Like us, they have to be selective as to who to subject to intense inspection."

Meanwhile, the bad guys aren't limited by these kinds of restraints. "Smugglers are a professional organization," Keyser said. "Their goal is to put drugs where we will not check. We have found significant loads inside otherwise legitimate cargo."

**"They said NAFTA was going to create jobs,
but all the jobs are going south."**
--Johnny Diaz, Local 745

Teamsters have a special stake in trade policy with Mexico.

"Just think of how many jobs they'll take from us," said Angelo Nuzzi, a business agent with Local 710 in Chicago. "And they won't want to go back empty. They'll put a lot of people out of business."

"When they return, it's stuff we would be hauling," agreed Jerry Blitstein, a Local 705 member who has driven for Yellow Freight in Chicago for 28 years. "They'll be picking up loads of unionized carriers and taking work away from our Teamsters."

NAFTA was supposed to create jobs on both sides of the border. But Americans have lost manufacturing and transport jobs to northern Mexico, where workers earn less than \$100 per week and live in poverty.

"You've got cheap labor manufacturing goods, and now cheap labor transporting it," said Roger Kelley, a Local 710 business agent.

To Victor Munoz, a retired Teamster in El Paso, this is no surprise. "During the NAFTA talks, there was never any talk about harnessing the exploitation," he said.

"Why isn't everyone being held to the same standards? Why are they being allowed to get away with this?"-- Mike Mahoney, a Local 705 driver for Sweeney Oil Company in Chicago

The dangers posed by cross-border trucking didn't fall from the skies. They are the direct result of free trade policies spawned by the free trade ideology that dominates Capitol Hill and corporate boardrooms.

"It's big business," said Bill Coffey, a Local 705 driver for Osco Oil in Chicago. "GM has plants in Mexico. They can make the cars cheaper, and now they can ship them cheaper. It boils down to the politicians and special interest groups."

The situation is complicated in Mexico. Gordon Ellison, a former FBI agent and retired AFL-CIO Latin American specialist, said that to get a commercial drivers license, Mexicans typically have to travel hundreds of miles, pay hundreds of dollars and undergo written and medical exams, a process that can take a week of lost earnings. This encourages a thriving black market and a nightmare for U.S. inspectors.

"They spend a lot of time trying to verify the licenses because they're lacking the database," Ellison said. "The licenses don't all have computer-friendly numbers. Meanwhile, I can come in with a license that expired in '97 and a tattered letter saying it is being renewed."

"The New Mexico DOT says it'll take four to six years to get a database on line," added Barlow.

"Every vehicle should be inspected."

--Thomas Daly, Business Agent, Local 710, Chicago

For many Teamsters, the key to protecting American drivers starts at the frontier.

"We need to find some way to stop them from unloading in our backyard," said Ben Avidez, a 23-year veteran of Yellow Freight whose backyard is El Paso. As of now, "if I get caught, it's my ass. If they get caught, they go back to Mexico."

"Stop the trucks at the border and let them interline the stuff, or have big bonded warehouses. That will create jobs too," said Blitstein.

"Let's make sure they meet the same requirements we have to, like drug testing and hours of work," added Coffey.

For others, the solution is political.

"NAFTA is just another form of deregulation, and we're not on a level playing field," said Bernie Sherlock, a business agent with Local 710 in Chicago. "I think it has to start in Washington politically."

Angelo Nuzzi agreed. "We need to put it in their lap," he said.

For Frank Wsol, Secretary-Treasurer of Local 710, the solution is simple. "The Mexican drivers have to have the same standards as our drivers; nothing less, nothing more."

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Update on UPS

Fighting Monopolies

While merger mania has reduced competition and raised prices in many economic sectors, it is particularly dangerous in the package express delivery business, where links with government entities give some carriers an unfair advantage.

So when DHL Worldwide Express, Inc., was bought out by the German mail service Deutsche Post AG, the Teamsters Union cried "foul."

"We cannot stand idly by in the face of continued anti-union and predatory moves that threaten the jobs of our members," said Bill Lichtenwald, Director of the Parcel and Small Package Division.

The Teamsters joined the AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department (TTD) in calling on the federal government to revoke DHL's right to operate in the United States as a foreign air freight forwarder.

"Deutsche Post is using its government-derived powers and privileges in Germany to unfairly compete against U.S. transportation companies and their workers," said Sonny Hall, President of the TTD. "U.S. workers who transport and deliver mail, provide domestic and international express service and other package delivery services must be protected from unfair competition."

On the domestic front, the Teamsters also oppose the alliance between Federal Express and the U.S. Postal Service, which provides similar unjust advantages to anti-union FedEx.

Full-Time Effort for Part-Time Workers

One major priority of the Teamsters' 2002 contract campaign at United Parcel Service will be securing workplace justice for part-time workers.

"UPS' success has been built on the backs of its part-time workforce," said James P. Hoffa, Teamsters General President. "Both full-timers and part-timers must reap the benefits of UPS' robust profits."

The Teamsters intend to press for bringing more part-timers into the full-time ranks, while addressing the widening gap between part-time and full-time wages.

The Teamsters have fought aggressively to hold UPS management to the promises it made to create new full-time jobs under the 1997 national agreement.

UPS China Service Takes Off

When United Parcel Service (UPS) started running its new cargo flights to and from China in early April, it was a new beginning for the package delivery giant. But for the Teamsters, it was the culmination of a long battle to expand opportunities for members and their families.

"Both the company and the union can be proud of achieving a success that represents a win-win situation for both of us," said James P. Hoffa, Teamsters General President. "Our efforts to help UPS win this route demonstrated that the Teamsters are not opposed to fair trade policies that provide opportunities for the American workforce to grow, and for U.S. companies to take advantage of the China market."

U.S. trade with China is growing rapidly, and it is estimated that one Teamster job is created for every 40 UPS packages sent overseas. More than 1,000 Teamster jobs will initially be created by UPS serving the China routes.

The Best One for the Job

In addition to UPS, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines and Polar Air Cargo had sought the new slot, which was created out of a 1999 bilateral agreement adding a fourth U.S. carrier in the market that already included FedEx, Northwest Airlines and United Airlines. The Teamsters worked tirelessly last year building political support on Capitol Hill, while stressing to the Clinton Administration that with the U.S.-China market shifting from all-cargo to express packages, UPS is best positioned to meet current and future needs.

Hoffa noted that UPS' direct service to China provides competition in what was previously a monopoly-controlled market, a move that is good for the American consumer.

"With our government awarding the China route to UPS, a company which is contractually committed to sharing the benefits it receives from the expanded international economy with its workforce, I am hopeful that an example has been set and that other companies will be encouraged to pursue a similar path," he said.

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Meeting with Meaning

UPS Leaders Prepare for Upcoming Contract

More than 120 UPS Teamster leaders recently gathered for the 8th Annual Parcel and Small Package Trade Division Workshop.

"We represent working people in a time when the employer is aggressively anti-worker. We must continue to develop tools to help us win our fights," said Bill Lichtenwald, Parcel and Small Package Division Director. "Our members have a voice. Workers at other companies don't have that right. We must continue to amplify that voice."

The leaders and agents discussed problems with the 1997 contract and solutions in 2002. Members of the division's staff led discussions on grievance procedures and decisions and Articles 22.3, 40 and 43. Attendees also heard from the International's:

- Legal department on the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Department of Labor (DOL) opinion letter regarding FedEx and a monocular vision summary.
- Government Affairs department on recent activities with DRIVE, postal reform and continued anti-union and predatory moves by FedEx and Germany's DHL.
- Communications department on the division's presence in International publications, a campaign to sign up part-time employees and the department's role in the upcoming national contract negotiations.
- Safety and Health department on ergonomics and other issues.
- Research and Education departments on their programs.

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Teamsters/Airborne Agreement Takes Off

Members Approve Ground Delivery Service Agreement

Workers at Local 107 in Philadelphia had dozens of questions about their role in Airborne's new ground delivery service - queries about job security and worries about the amount of work they'd be guaranteed.

When the questions were answered, though, said air freight driver Bill Gervasi, his local -- and the other 20 Airborne Express locals covered by the National Master Freight Agreement (NMFA) -- overwhelmingly approved the agreement that puts Airborne into the ground delivery service with Teamsters at the wheel.

Jobs by the Thousands

The agreement, approved by a vote of 21 local unions, is expected to add between 2,000 and 4,000 Teamsters jobs over the next two years, said Phil Young, Teamsters Freight Division Director.

"This new ground agreement is excellent," he said. "There are no part-time jobs. And there is full health and welfare and pension."

Airborne was organized decades ago, said Bill Hamilton, Local 107 Business Agent, by entering an agreement with the Teamsters that put the company under the umbrella of the NMFA.

Adding Work

At Local 100 in Cincinnati, Business Agent Don Willis said members were pleased that the company would operate from one seniority list -- a move that gave some workers had been on second shift the hope of moving to days.

Also, Willis said, the agreement ended some of Airborne's subcontracting in Mt. Orb, Ohio, and Aurora, Indiana.

"We got some new work from it, which could lead to three more permanent jobs," Willis said.

Bundling

The agreement "builds up Airborne's reputation," said Gervasi, who said workers had been very concerned about Airborne's financial stability in the face of competition. "Like FedEx and UPS, now they can give you air, they can give you ground."

And that's the key to survival.

"The bundling of freight is the wave of the future," said Nick Fiorantino, an Airborne employee since 1965 and Local 107 shop steward. "It gives us a chance to stay in business and compete."

Highlights

Airborne, Inc., employees 9,000 Teamsters throughout the United States, and is the only integrator that owns its own airport. Airborne's regional hubs are located in Allentown, Pennsylvania; Atlanta, Georgia; Columbia, Missouri; Fresno, California; Orlando, Florida; Providence, Rhode Island; Roanoke, Virginia; South Bend, Indiana; and Waco, Texas.

Here are some of the key elements in the Airborne Express ground service addendum to the National Master Freight Agreement:

- Wages -- Begin at \$13.41 per hour and progress to the top NMFA rate
- Health/welfare/pension benefits -- More than \$8 per hour
- Grievances -- Burden of proof falls on company
- Job security -- Number of drivers is red-circled as of Jan. 1, 2001

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