

## Labor in Focus by Laurence Sherman

### An eyewitness report

*The Teamsters are taking a newly aggressive stand, their national conference showed.*

**T**he International Brotherhood of Teamsters came away from their 27th convention organizationally stronger and more united than at any time in their history. The blatant attempt of the Justice Department and various Senate committees to interfere in the internal affairs of the union totally backfired. Indications of the backlash, created by the government's shabby indictment of Teamster General President Roy Williams, came weeks before the convention opened. After the indictment was announced, the union's executive board dropped all factional differences and united firmly behind Williams's leadership. The barrage of media attacks on Williams leading up to the convention only furthered the resolve of the Teamster leadership to support him.

The general press coverage of the convention would have the public believe that the insignificant dissident group Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) was a force to be reckoned with. Estimates of the TDU membership ranged from 20,000 to 8,000 depending on what paper you read. But at the convention, TDU chief Pete Cameratta sat alone.

When the votes were counted, the TDU candidate for general president received a total of 10 votes. Roy Williams received 2,100. Upon taking the gavel, Williams immediately addressed himself to his recent indictment by calling it

"a damn lie." He went on to say "I have and will continue to fight deregulation with every ounce of energy in my body. . . . No indictment will stop me," to a thundering ovation. "Neither a federal bureaucracy nor headline-grabbing politicians are going to run the largest labor union in the world."

The convention passed resolutions on economic issues, as I reported last week, demanding repeal of trucking and airline deregulation, praising the Space Shuttle program as the transportation industry of the future, demanding an economic program to re-employ American workers, and expressly attacking Paul Volcker's high interest-rate policy as a major contributing factor to the current economic crisis.

More and more delegates were talking of Williams as "the new Jimmy Hoffa." The difference between Hoffa and Williams, observers reported, is that Williams knows more about the workings of the trucking industry than Hoffa ever did, and that he would do more to cooperate with industry leaders to save the industry.

Williams is like Hoffa in the way he is expected to run the union, in a more centralized fashion and with a stronger hand at the helm than recent presidents. Williams's chairing of the convention reflected that assessment. He will need a very strong hand indeed to deal with the Brilab operatives, and with the economic

catastrophes facing many of his members.

Former Teamster President Dave Beck, addressing the convention, made the Hoffa comparison explicit. Beck called Hoffa the greatest trade-union leader America has produced, bringing more members into a union than any other single organizer; Beck said Williams is in the militant tradition of Hoffa.

A show of labor unity was made by Robert Georgine, head of the AFL-CIO Building Trades Department. Georgine praised the Teamsters and Williams, and then took a swipe at UAW leader Doug Fraser by saying, "I believe that a trade-union leader has the same constitutional rights as any other American." Fraser, in a well-publicized press conference, had attacked Williams and the Teamsters, asserting that Williams should step down as president due to his indictment.

In other resolutions, passed by the delegates almost unanimously, the Teamsters took on the mounting press and government attacks on labor. They called for no amendments to the Hobbs Act, some of which would virtually make union organizing a felony, and a resolution was passed calling for an aggressive legal counterattack on media abuses aimed at the Teamsters.

As the convention came to a close, a delegate put forward a motion condemning the International Socialist group, which was behind the dissident TDU organization.

It was ironic that in all the press coverage given to TDU, none used any documentation readily available to reporters that exposed this group as funded by Wall Street foundations and led by Marxist revolutionaries.

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