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Reforming the Chicago Teamsters: The Story of Local 705

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work, as well as on identifying senility that might lead to dependency. Economic vitality dominated health considerations *per se* as the rationale for the whole process.

To be sure, the author does find and document that there were class and race as well as geographic differences associated with the administration of these entry criteria. But the most startling finding of this comprehensive study is how few immigrants were ever actually excluded despite all of the legal prohibitions. Only 79,000 persons were denied entry for medical reasons over this entire period, and only 11% of these were actually deported. Moreover, at no time was disease the basis for more than a minority of rejections. Most commonly cited, instead, was the prospect of dependency (“likely to become a public charge”).

The study is extraordinarily well-documented (the endnotes alone run to 100 pages) and it is concisely written. It is a thoughtful discussion of a crucial period in the development of the American labor force and the effort of immigration policy to influence its composition when the level of immigration itself was uncontrolled.

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Reforming the Chicago Teamsters: The Story of Local 705. By Robert Bruno. DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003. 213 pp. ISBN 0-87580-596-5, \$24.00 (paper).

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters has long occupied a central place in industrial relations research and in labor history, and the Teamsters have always provided instructive and colorful illustrations of the best and the worst that unions do to represent their members. Generally perceived as aggressive organizers and strong bargainers, their reputation has tended to shadow their role in the labor movement. Because of the Teamsters’ ability to control the supply and distribution process, workers and leaders in other unions often consider Teamster support to be critical to the success of their own labor-management disputes.

Robert Bruno’s study of Chicago’s Local 705 takes its place among books on the Teamsters written by scholars such as Walter Galenson

(*The CIO Challenge to AFL: A History of the American Labor Movement, 1935–1941*; Harvard University Press, 1960), Donald Garnel (*The Rise of Teamster Power in the West*; University of California Press, 1972), and Ralph and Estelle James (*Hoffa and the Teamsters: A Study of Union Power*; D. Van Nostrand, 1965), and by participant-activists such as Farrel Dobbs (*Teamster Rebellion*; Monad, 1972) and Dan LaBotz (*Rank-and-File Rebellion*; Verso, 1990). This book is a bit of a hybrid, however, lying somewhere between the scholarly and the activist—providing an engaging and interesting story that emphasizes the narrative of events with a point of view, but without the rigor used by researchers such as Galenson, Garnel, and the Jameses.

While Bruno briefly discusses the extended period of rank-and-file activism that provided the necessary preconditions for local union reform, the central focus of the book is the period of institutional reform following the U.S. Justice Department’s successful 1988 lawsuit against the Teamsters under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations provision of the Organized Crime Act of 1970. To be fair, it is important to note here that I have a personal interest in this research because during a substantial period of this time preceding the RICO suit and subsequent trusteeship of Local 705, I drove a tank truck over-the-road out of Chicago for Transport Service Company (not Transport Services, as Bruno refers to it) and I was a leader of both PROD (the Professional Drivers Council, a truck driver public interest group for improving job safety in the trucking industry) and Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU, the Teamsters reform caucus), nationally and in Chicago; I ran in 1984 against the Principal Officer of Local 705, Louis Peick. I thus have an insider’s point of view as well as an insider’s interest in the interpretation of this history.

Bruno’s central hypothesis is that democratic unions are more “effective” than undemocratic unions and not only energize workers for activism and organizing, but produce superior collective bargaining outcomes. While he argues that “the case for democratic unions is not a difficult one to make” (p. 8), he concedes that “the concept of union democracy has not been an easy one to authoritatively address” (p. 12). The ultimate test of his hypothesis, therefore, is whether the democratized union is stronger and more able to deliver superior collective bargaining outcomes to union members. Unfortunately, his theoretical exposition is restricted to a few pages in the introduction and

to the book's conclusion. Indeed, while he nicely makes the conventional case that union democracy produces an extraordinarily vibrant polity, it is less clear that collective bargaining outcomes are qualitatively superior as a result of democracy. Indeed, Harold Levinson's important book on industrial relations theory (*Determining Forces in Collective Wage Bargaining*; John Wiley & Sons, 1966) makes a better foundation for this argument. The internal contest for power may best explain collective bargaining outcomes, and it explains both the success of Local 705's 1970 strike and the local union's successes in the late 1990s; power was contested in both eras.

The book begins with a brief history of the Teamsters in Chicago and of reform efforts among Chicago Teamsters and in Local 705. In arguing that "the story of Local 705's democratic transformation began with the trusteeship imposed in 1993" (p. 15), Bruno quickly passes over decades of extraordinarily intense struggle by reformers who were not protected by a Federal trusteeship of the Teamsters and whose efforts received little or no support from prosecutors, police, and the Labor Department, all of whom owed debts to the local Teamsters leadership. The book briefly addresses the RICO suit that led to the trusteeship of the union and the election that installed Ron Carey as General President in 1991. Less than two years later, the International put the local in trusteeship at the behest of the Internal Review Board and the democratization of union institutions and practices began. The remainder of the book is devoted to a blow-by-blow description of the events and personalities involved in the elections of 1997 and 2000.

Much of the source material for the book consists of interviews with current and former union activists (such as me). Unfortunately, I am not certain that the views and opinions of these interviewees were thoroughly corroborated by document-based research. As an early participant (not a participant throughout the post-trusteeship period), I am especially conscious of this weakness in Bruno's examination of the years before 1993, but I worry about his more recent research as well.

These issues become particularly troubling when accompanied by strong views of the author. The author claims, for example, that the Justice Department's RICO suit was "spurred on by nearly two decades of rank-and-file Teamster reform movements doggedly attacking the union's undemocratic leadership" (p. 6). While the sentiment is rosy, I am not convinced that

the presence of TDU had very much to do with the decision to go after the union; Ken Crowe's *Collision: How the Rank and File Took Back the Teamsters* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993) suggests that Justice Department attorneys had their own reasons, many of which had more to do with individual ambition, politics, and opportunism than support for rank-and-file Teamsters.

Bruno also makes some small but important factual errors, such as the statement that "by 1940 the trucking industry was already segmented into separate markets for heavy truck-load carriers (TL) and smaller less-than-truck-load shippers (LTL)" (p. 9). These inaccuracies are particularly troubling because the text inaccurately cites my own work (*Sweatshops on Wheels: Winners and Losers in Trucking Deregulation*; Oxford University Press, 2000). Not only did this industry segmentation not appear in 1940, but it was a direct result of deregulation forty years later. The author not only gets it fundamentally wrong, but he also conflates truckers and shippers; the latter are the customers of the former. He repeats the error again just two paragraphs later.

Some of the errors are odd and perhaps innocuous, but again give the reader some reason to be cautious about cited facts. On page 21 the author claims that International President Dave Beck's 1954 appointment to the Advisory Committee on an International Highway System "facilitated" the Teamsters' endorsement of President Eisenhower in 1956. Since Dave Beck had always been a Republican, I doubt that this appointment was needed to gain the Teamsters' endorsement of Eisenhower. Further, as of 1996 the Interstate Highway System was not a 3,000 mile system (p. 21), but a 44,000 mile system.

Bruno also refers to Local 705's leadership of the 13-week 1970 strike (not a wildcat, given Chicago's traditional independence from the International) as "courageous," but it also can be viewed as an opportunistic effort by Peick and Joint Council 25 president Ray Schloessling to increase their intraorganizational power by demonstrating the weakness of International President Frank Fitzsimmons (who was trying to elbow his former mentor, the imprisoned Jimmy Hoffa, out of power). This seems more likely a demonstration of Levinson's theory that contested political leadership in unions leads to historic collective bargaining advances, since the strike resulted in unusual wage hikes that disrupted the contractual balance between the compensation of road-drivers and that of city

drivers and dock workers; these wage increases also helped stimulate the deregulation backlash.

A similar carelessness with the facts is evident in other somewhat exaggerated statements. While members of BLAST (the Brotherhood of Loyal Americans and Strong Teamsters) did disrupt the TDU Convention in Romulus, they did not chase “the assembled dissidents out into the street” (p. 34); I know because I was chair of the convention. It also is not true that before the trusteeship “no more than a hundred workers joined any of the protest configurations, and the numbers at 705 actually went down with the PROD-TDU merger” (p. 34). The source for this claim appears to be an anti-TDU UPS driver, long allied with future Local 705 President John McCormick, under whose leadership PROD indeed collapsed. Since I retain substantial archives of this period, and since Bruno never examined those records, it seems likely that he accepted this one-sided view at face value and without documentation.

The author similarly portrays Local 705 meetings as uncontested between 1972 and the time of the trusteeship. The citation of union records indicating that only 49 members spoke up during that period (p. 47) leads me to conclude that the records simply do not reflect the contest and the author did not talk with the right people (of the approxi-

mately 45 interviews cited, I think no more than half a dozen were with people who had been involved in the pre-trusteeship period). Before, during, and after my period of involvement, contested meetings occurred regularly, though usually accompanying a political contest over elected stewards, nominations, and union contracts. Tom Geoghegan’s *Which Side Are You On? Trying to Be for Labor When It’s Flat on Its Back* (Penguin Books USA, 1991) ably presents the struggles of this period; most of the post-trusteeship interviewees were non-participants during this time.

Bob Bruno’s book on the reform of Local 705 tells a very interesting, if flawed story of union reform in one of America’s greatest and most interesting unions. It is a step on the road toward understanding the legacy of the movements for union democracy that have sprung up throughout organized labor in recent decades. At its 30th anniversary, TDU (which developed out of Teamsters for a Decent Contract, not Teamsters for a Democratic Contract, as Bruno states) has outlived many of those who predicted its imminent demise.

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