
LABOR PERISCOPE

Teamsters declare war on Carter austerity program

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters last week declared war on the Carter Administration's domestic austerity program. According to sources close to the union, the Teamsters handed trucking industry representatives involved in the master freight contract negotiations demands for a wage and benefit package totaling between 50 and 60 percent over the three year life of the contract. The demands are more than double the 7 percent standard established by Carter and caught both industry and Administration officials off guard.

There was little reason for surprise. As this news service had reported, press reports that the Teamsters were going to compromise their members' standard of living and give in to Carter-industry pressure were based on "wishful thinking" and phony leaks.

Teamster President Frank Fitzsimmons is reportedly furious that the confidential contract demands were leaked to the *Chicago Tribune*, which promptly exaggerated the total package figure. Fitzsimmons views the leak as an attempt to sabotage further negotiations.

The industry now appears intent on forcing a strike when the contract expires March 31. Their spokesman leaked to the press that they will take a long strike. Administration officials, including inflation czar Alfred Kahn, are demanding that the industry not give in and hint government back-up in case of a strike. Energy czar James Schlesinger and his scenario planners are discussing how a Teamster strike could be used to trigger "crisis management" controls on the economy.

The Teamster Executive Board is said to be debating the content of a

major advertising-educational campaign to explain their contract demands to the nation.

Several Teamster leaders are reportedly pushing the Executive Board to adopt a broad based political strategy rather than a simple strike tactic. While a strike may become necessary, these leaders want to take on the entire Carter austerity program and rally the population behind them. They are looking to developments in Europe centering around the founding of the European Monetary System as laying the basis for a dramatic turnaround in the U.S. economy.

Industry and administration officials committed to the austerity program are reportedly nervous that the Teamsters may locate their contract demands within an EMS-generated recovery.

History lesson: As the Teamsters prepared for this year's master freight contract battle, they have reminded the members that they are fighting in the tradition of Abraham Lincoln to protect American labor power.

The Central States Conference of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, which ended Feb. 18 on the occasion of the celebration of Abraham Lincoln's birthday, released a late-January officers' report including the following excerpts from a speech by Lincoln under the title "Abraham Lincoln on Labor":

All that serves labor, serves the nation.

All that harms labor is treason to America.

No line can be drawn between these two.

If a man tells you he loves America, yet hates labor, he is a liar.

If a man tells you he trusts

America, yet fears labor, he is a fool.

There is no America without labor, and to fleece the one is to rob the other.

Reliving the past: Cesar Chavez, the head of the United Farmworkers, says that he is thinking about expanding his two-month-old strike against growers in California into a national boycott. Chavez, who was personally trained by the late domestic counterinsurgency expert Saul Alinsky, says that the boycott tactic, employed during the late 1960s and early 1970s could again "rally support" for his union. Chavez's current strike is explicitly directed against high technology agriculture. One of his key demands is that the growers agree to prohibit all new machinery that would displace unskilled farmworkers. Chavez claims that stoop labor is "dignified."

The old boycott provided a labor cover for the deployment of primarily student-terrorist networks into community-based counterinsurgency work. At one point in the 1970s, the boycott organization, then directed against lettuce and grapes, dwarfed the union's own organization. Funds poured in from the same Zionist lobby linked foundations and individuals — like the American Jewish Committee and Detroit-based Max Fisher — that got Chavez started.

But there is more here than meets the eye. The last UFW boycott organization became a "feeder" operation for the Institute for Policy Studies-directed antiwar movement and eventually for the candidacies of Eugene McCarthy and later George McGovern.

Chavez is a supporter of the environmentalist California Governor Gerry Brown and Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass). A UFW boycott organization, which would take several months to get started, could easily be transformed into the organizing corps for either a Brown or Kennedy run for the Presidency in 1980.

Is this what lies behind Chavez's strike strategy?