

Local 743 New Leadership Slate

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Teamster Reformers Ousted in Power Grab

Local 743 Members Unite to Say "We Won't Go Back"

Chicago Teamster bosses ousted reformers Richard Berg and Gina Alvarez from union office today in a power struggle between grassroots reformers and old guard Teamster officials over one of the largest Teamster local unions in Chicago and the country.

Joint Council 25 officials suspended Richard Berg from union membership and removed him as president of Teamsters Local 743 on false charges that he violated Teamster procedures. Alvarez was also suspended from membership and removed as secretary-treasurer.

[The 11,000 members of Local 743 voted Berg and his New Leadership Slate into office in 2007](#) on a reform platform. His election was bitterly opposed—for years—by Chicago's top Teamster officials, who used every means at their disposal to prevent a reform victory in Local 743.

Berg opponent's were [convicted of stealing a union vote to block his election](#). One of the vote-riggers is also serving jail time for using Local 743 as a front for [drug trafficking](#). When Berg was nominated in June 2006 for International Vice President on the reform slate, while Chicago's top Teamster official John Coli ran on the old guard slate, Berg was [assaulted](#) at the Teamster Convention by former Local 743 president Richard Lopez. Joint Council 25 and International Union officials [upheld](#) the Local 743 election results that were stolen and overturned—but today voted to suspend Berg and Alvarez's union membership—a move that could disqualify them from running for re-election in Local 743.

Local 743 members plan to fight Berg and Alvarez's removal in federal court, where they were able to win a supervised election.

"They couldn't steal our election and they couldn't defeat us at the polls, so they used trumped up charges to oust Richard and Gina and hijack Local 743," said Joe Sexauer, Local 743 union representative who helped organize Berg's successful election. "But the union is about more than any one leader—it's about the members. We've defeated corrupt officials before, and we'll do it again."

Berg and his New Leadership Slate were elected to lead Local 743 in October 2007 in an election supervised by the Department of Labor—and Berg followed through on his reform platform. He cut his salary by \$70,000 and shaved the union payroll by eliminating do-nothing jobs.

Not everyone was happy with Local 743's new direction—including some of the newly-elected officers. They agreed to run with Berg on a reform platform that included reducing the salaries of overpaid union officials. But they demanded higher salaries once they were in office. When members complained that some union representatives weren't doing their job, Berg investigated the complaints, took the cases to the union's Executive Board, and those union representatives were terminated.

Unhappy at the financial reforms—and the demands for accountability of union staff—some Local 743 officers teamed up with Berg’s opponents in the Teamster hierarchy. They filed internal union charges falsely claiming that Berg had failed to present the terminations and other union matters to the Executive Board. Not a single one of the charges alleges that Berg or any other Local 743 reformer took a penny for personal gain.

Local 743 represents 11,000 members at the University of Chicago and U of C Hospital, Rush Presbyterian Hospital, Blue Cross, and numerous shops, factories, offices and nursing homes.

“We elected him, and it's our choice, the membership to keep him or take him out in an election, not like this,” said UC Medical Center worker Jean Moore.

Under Berg’s leadership, Local 743 cut officer salaries, including his own, and put the union’s dues money to work for the membership. Berg hired professional contract negotiators and led a successful strike to protect members’ healthcare. The local has taken stands to promote civil rights and racial equality: Local 743 sponsored Martin Luther King Day events and participated in marches for immigrants rights.

“For years officials treated Local 743 like a piggy-bank,” said Melanie Cloghessy, a member of Local 743 at the University of Chicago. “We won’t go back to those dark days of corruption. The New Leadership team will keep fighting for a union that fights for us.

“The officials who are making this power grab are going to learn that we’ll fight back against their double-dealing just like we stood up to the criminal activities of the past.”

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