



# \$100 Plus Club News

Number 118 - Univ. of Illinois Forum Reprint Edition

Association for Union Democracy

## Special Report: U. of Illinois Forum on Union Democracy & Effective Union Leadership

### UNION DEMOCRACY=UNION POWER

by Barbara Harvey, Esq.

*Barbara Harvey, an AUD Director, is an attorney based in Detroit. Her comments at the one-day event focused on how union democracy can make unions stronger and more successful on behalf of their rank and file. As an example, she discusses the development of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) within the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT).*

Incumbent union officers tend to think of union democracy as a threat to incumbent power. This is a basic misconception. Union democracy is about union member power, and union member power is union power. Because union democracy activism usually focuses on deposing corrupt, ineffectual, or uncaring union officers, it is not widely understood that an effective union is one that cultivates its members' power.

This key to realizing the true potential of union power was understood by Ron Carey, whose full slate won control of the Teamsters Union in the 1990 campaign organized by the rank-and-file caucus, Teamsters for a Democratic Union. During his years in office, from 1991-1998, Carey used the power of union members to

### Unionists gather to discuss union democracy, meet LMRDA experts

by Helena Worthen & Joe Berry

*Helena Worthen and Joe Berry were coordinators of an event on Nov 14, 2009 designed especially for elected officers of labor unions. It was sponsored by the University of Illinois School of Labor and Employment Relations Labor Education Program. Worthen and Berry are holding a similar event on March 13, 2010. Here is their perspective on the November forum.*

Thirty to thirty-five participants came from Chicago, Danville, Evanston, Chatham, Niles, Allerton, Harvey, Park Forest, Dixon, Gerard, Mt. Zion, Sidney, Champaign and Urbana to an all-day program at the U of IL School of Labor and Employment Relations building, sponsored by the Labor Education Program. The session was put together in response to local leaders' requests. We organized the session to focus on how union democracy makes possible strong leadership and strong campaigns.

There was an hour set aside at the beginning to let people with long drives get there, during which we had reading materials, including AUD and Labor Notes literature, available. Barbara Harvey, AUD Board member and Detroit attorney specializing in the LMRDA, began the session with the story of the 1997 UPS strike, its roots in the IBT internal

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## Harvey: UNION DEMOCRACY= UNION POWER

*continued from page one*

transform the Teamsters Union, the AFL-CIO, and the U.S. labor movement.

To illustrate the point, look at the greatest strike in recent U.S. labor history: the 1997 national UPS strike. The big issue was the company's insidious ongoing transfer of work from full-timers - who were entitled to health and pension benefits - to part-timers, entitled to no benefits. If not reversed in that contract negotiation, the UPS workforce would have become a part-time workforce. But the fears of a strike were many: Wouldn't the public and regular UPS customers be angry about losing their UPS service? What if the huge workforce of part-timers became an army of scabs? Did anyone remember the last successful strike?

Carey started strike preparations two years before the contract expired. His goals included these: (1) to educate the UPS membership about why all of them, including the part-timers, needed to win this battle; (2) to make sure that all members would be familiar with strike tactics and comfortable about using them; and (3) to transform the UPS workforce into the Union's ambassadors into the community and to the media. In other words, he set out to empower the UPS membership. All UPS Teamsters were encouraged to become

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## Worthen & Berry: Union democracy forum

*continued from page one*

democracy effort, and its impact. We structured discussion around exercises drafted by Carl Biers, former Executive Director of AUD. We made this choice at the time because we didn't know what kinds of situations people would be bringing to the session and we didn't want to focus too much on individual cases - we wanted the overall content of the session to be a lesson in the connection between democracy and power, but also an honest picture of the kind of dedication and long-term internal organizing, caucusing and strategizing that it takes to sustain substantive democracy in a union, much less introduce it when it has been lacking. (Next time, we'd probably try to interview people ahead of time and develop a couple of good case studies out of what people would be bringing.)

After lunch, Mark Grba (from the Chicago Office of Labor Management Standards, US Department of Labor) represented the government's interest in enforcing the law and managed to do it with a sense of humor and general openness to questions and interaction with participants. He, or someone in his position, would be an important resource to have at a workshop like this. Grba's other great qualification was having been the lead investigator on an important LMRDA union reform case in Chicago.

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**The \$100 Plus Club News** is published by the Association for Union Democracy, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the principles and practice of internal union democracy in the North American labor movement. Kurt Richwerger, editor.

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**Note:** Opinions expressed in the *\$100 Plus Club News* are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Association for Union Democracy.

**Harvey: UNION DEMOCRACY=  
UNION POWER** *continued from page two*

engaged in the process.

When it came time to strike, the Union was ready - meaning that the members were ready. The UPS members were part of the team. They knew the issues and were ready to explain them in a few clear sentences. UPS package car drivers fanned out across the country to explain the strike issues to their customers. Local television camera crews followed them and broadcast their live interviews on the local evening news, where, smiling calmly, they compellingly explained that all Americans needed the part-timers to become full-timers, to protect full-time jobs, with health and pension benefits. They were so clearly proud to be Teamsters. UPS customers, news reporters, and the public all "got it." The strike received overwhelming support. All the workers were on board; there was no scabbing problem. In short order, the strike was over, with a new contractual formula for the automatic conversion of part-time jobs to full-time jobs - a huge victory. That strike became a textbook illustration of how union member power can become union power.

**Worthen & Berry: Union democracy  
conference** *continued from page two*

Participants, of course, asked a lot of questions and the two experts engaged actively. At one point, Barbara Harvey told how she had taken a case in a state where there was no "little LRMDA" - no public sector state law that protected members like the LMRDA - and she was able to make a convincing case in the courtroom that the fundamentals of LMRDA were actually derived from common law, so you didn't have to have a separate law under which to argue them.

There were also activists from a number of very significant local union democracy struggles in the public and private sectors in Illinois who contributed a lot to the discussion. We charged \$35 for the event, out of which we paid for a sandwich lunch and Barbara Harvey's travel expenses. She is willing to come again (if we cover her expenses) if we have another event like this one. She's a friendly, open, high-energy person and people liked her participation.

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 the Labor Movement

**by Herman Benson**

Following the passage of federal legislation protecting civil liberties and fair elections in unions, a wave of insurgency swept the labor movement. Reformers fought for union democracy. This is their story.

