

# IN THE NATION

## TEAMSTERS

# TDU sweeps Flint, Mich., election

By Tom Young

**T**HE TEAMSTERS FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION (TDU) have won an important victory in Flint, Mich. In late November the insurgent slate carried all seven elected offices of local 332, defeating the incumbents by approximately two to one. The election was fought primarily over local issues that are common throughout the Teamsters union.

Between one-quarter and one-third of all Teamster locals hold local elections this year, many in November and December. In October, a TDU candidate, Jack Farrell, was elected president of an Oklahoma City local, and earlier this year TDU supporters won elections in several other cities, including Green Bay, Wisc. Still to come are election challenges in several Pennsylvania locals, a Detroit construction drivers local and a St. Louis car-haulers local.

Ken Paff, TDU national organizer, sees the elections as reflecting TDU's activities in opposition to the 1976 nationwide Master Freight Agreement and for democratic local by-laws. "It takes a while for us to build credibility," he said. "Over a period of time, people see who are the ones standing up for democracy, and on the contracts, too."

TDU has campaigned strenuously for reform of local by-laws. They have worked for greater membership participation in running locals' affairs through the election of stewards and business agents and the reform of local election procedure. They have also demanded rank-and-file ratification of agreements.

Under the International's constitution, a two-thirds vote is required to adopt local by-laws. As a result, incumbents need only round up a third to block changes that threaten them. "We tell these local officers, 'Hey, you can beat us on these local by-laws, but the members will remember next election, and it only takes a



This is the leaflet put out by the administration of Teamster local 332. It didn't work. The Teamsters for a Democratic Union won all offices up for election.

majority to win an election," said Paff. Paff charges that many election dates were moved forward in an attempt to catch opponents off-guard. "It requires the permission of [International General President Frank Fitzsimmons to do so, but needless to say, Fitzsimmons did so."

With a membership of approximately 4,100, local 332 in Flint primarily represents car haulers and freight drivers, but it is also a general local with beverage workers, small factories and 250 registered

nurses at a local hospital.

The TDU chapter in local 332 was formed in July 1976 when 21 car haulers were fired for job action. Car haulers were not represented on the local's executive board, although they make up one-third of the local's membership. (In the 1978 election, the incumbents dropped two members from their slate to create slots for car haulers.)

Richard Sebastian, a freight driver for 14 years and TDU's winning candidate

for secretary-treasurer, became involved in the organization early in 1977. TDU proposed changes in the local's by-laws to allow the election of business agents and other reforms. "A lot of people were having a lot of problems, and representation was very poor," said Sebastian. "We felt that if the business agents were elected they would get out and do their job more."

In December 1977, TDU succeeded in winning the election of stewards, but the situation is still vague. "The barns themselves have to put the pressure on. Otherwise, they'll appoint someone and he'll stay there for X-number of years," Sebastian said.

TDU's other main goal, election of business agents, was frustrated by the incumbent officers in 1978. By-law changes must be read twice to the membership meeting and then voted on. Local 332's officers delayed the completion of this process until February, then in March produced a letter from Fitzsimmons approving a number of changes adopted in January. One of these changes barred any future by-law revision except once a year in January, nullifying TDU's February efforts.

Under the IBT constitution, by-law changes affecting officers may not go into effect during the term in which they are adopted. TDU hopes to have election of business agents approved in January, but even if they do, the elections won't be held until fall 1981.

TDU's local 332 election slate was headed by Sebastian for secretary-treasurer and Fred Pilinyi, a car hauler for 35 years, for president. The election was conducted by the incumbents, although challengers were represented on the election committee. Sebastian had no complaints of irregularities. "They knew that we knew the laws, and they couldn't put it to us," he said.

The incumbents' campaign featured a flyer sent to every member showing a bright red octopus with a tentacle embracing each member of the TDU slate. Additionally, Flint's police force, which is represented by another Teamster local, and Joe Petrella, chief steward of the

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## "Let's do it," insurgent unionists cry

By Tom Johnson

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men and women do nothing.

—TRT motto

**J**AY GROTENHUIS HAULS FUEL for a living. The 30-year Teamster constantly worries about the safety of his rig and its volatile payload. But he does not lack courage. You know that when he talks of fear:

"The workers in this union are scared," he says. They are afraid of speaking up in meetings, afraid of the leadership. If I have to be scared when I belong to a union, I may as well just go and get a withdrawal card. Either that or try to change the damn thing."

In an effort to "change the damn thing" Grotenhuis ran as secretary-treasurer on the Teamster Reform Team slate, which challenged the incumbent leadership of the 8600-member Grand Rapids Teamster Local #406. The incumbents defeated the TRT two to one on Nov. 18.

Grotenhuis spoke from the TRT headquarters on Chicago Drive before the ballots were counted. Chicago Drive is a truckers' drag that cuts through the southwest side of Grand Rapids and the suburbs of Wyoming, Grandville and Jenison. Trucking companies, warehouses, steel fabrication and concrete plants, gas sta-

tions and the like line much of the Drive.

The pock-marked pavement, wrecked by overloaded semis, stained by spilled diesel, made slippery from oil slicks, features the roar of a 32-wheeler grinding 15 gears forward as background music.

The bright block letters of the words "Let's do it!" roared also from the TRT headquarters. The Drive is not a world of soft-sell or subtlety. So when you enter the storefront, you prepare for straight talk. No bullshit. You are not disappointed.

"This guy is a free-lance writer and construction worker. He wants to write a story about us to make some money," John "Bud" Houghtaling announces. Houghtaling, 28 years a Teamster, runs on the CB handle of "Cowboy." Actually, with his goatee he looks more like a jazzman. A very large, tough jazzman. An active member of the Professional Drivers Council (PROD), he was a TRT candidate for trustee.

He introduces you around. Doug Stroosnyder (21 years), candidate for president, boils coffee while making small talk with veep-hopeful Don Smith. They bandy jokes about Stroosnyder's unsuccessful hunt for the *Big Buck*. Julie Nicloy, (9 years) talks quietly of her stewardship at a small shop with 19 workers. Later, Chet Miles (13 years) and Vic Rekus (32 years), both candidates for trustee, join the group.

Posters cover most of the walls. The largest is a huge red-white-black sheet

that covers half a wall like a grocery-store advertisement. It describes the makeup of the Western Michigan Industrial Board. The WMIB is a creation of union and industry leaders. It is supposed to hear grievances filed by Teamster members or their employers. Each member company must pay \$350 to join and each grievance costs \$35.

Most contracts under Local 406 jurisdiction stipulate that the secretary-treasurer or the executive board can veto any member's grievance. If a charge does get heard, the employer may appeal to arbitration. The worker may not.

The board is a graveyard for grievances. Coincidentally, one of the employer representatives, David Fowler, ran the election campaign of Robert Barnette in 1975. Barnette is secretary-treasurer of Teamster Local #406. No members or officers of 406 sit on the WMIB.

### A say in the union.

"Yeah, so that's what we're about," Bud Houghtaling says with a shake of his head. "Giving dues-paying members a say in their own union."

"Hell, we don't need outsiders telling us what to do."

"We did have some success in our company," Julie Nicloy interjects. "We were able to negotiate language so that the executive board and secretary-treasurer

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## MINNESOTA

## Power line protesters persevere



By Vicki Lofquist

**T**HE COMPLETION OF THE UNDERWOOD, N.D., to Delano, Minn., high voltage power line hasn't meant the end of protests. On Oct. 29, 20 people were arrested after a rally near the Delano conversion station—southern point of an 800 KV dc power line constructed across western Minnesota. Two weeks later, 19 people were found innocent of trespass charges by a jury trial in Buffalo, Minn. (The 20th was a 13-year-old boy whose case goes to juvenile court.) The defense put the power line on trial.

The crowd of 300 had walked down a road towards the massive hardware of the conversion station where they planned to chain a "condemned" sign and to place a cardboard windmill. The road was blocked by a line of deputy sheriffs that the 20 people walked past and were arrested.

Bail, set at \$500 to \$1000 each was lowered to \$300 after a hunger strike began in protest. Ten who remained in jail fasted until the trial began nine days later.

Dean Reed, a popular singer in South America, Eastern Europe and Russia, was among those in jail. Prior to the arrest, he was in Minneapolis to visit friends and to promote a film on Victor Jara. Reed's arrest solved the problem of how to get international media coverage of a trespass charge.

"Dean Reed is very popular in Russia, especially among young people," said Vladimir Reshetilov, the Tass correspondent who was at the trial in Buffalo. "The first news in Moscow about this trial stirred a lot of agitation among Soviet fans."

While much of the media coverage of the Buffalo trial focused on Dean Reed and his ties with the socialist world, the fight against the power line is not a cold war story.

"We have a petition being passed among the farmers and everyone's signing it," said Alice Tripp, a leader in the fight against the power line. Tripp got 20 percent of the vote for governor in the DFL primary.

"Brian Coyle (a defendant) said it very well. He said they're being arrested because the farmers can't be," Tripp said. "The farmers are busy with their harvest and are deep into legal problems handling the arrests from last winter."

The fight against the power line has also planted the seeds of a surprising alliance between the farmers and the American Indian Movement.

"The farmers today are the Indian people," said AIM leader Clyde Bellecourt at the rally preceding the arrests. "I know the farmers have the same reverence for the land as we native people. That it's our mother and she is sacred and we can't let them dig her or rape her."

The farmers have also shown support for Native American struggles. Dairy farmer Gloria Woida, another leader in the power line fight, recently spoke at a rally for Russell Means at the South Dakota State Penitentiary.

The alliances formed through the fight against the power line have crossed both ideological and geographical boundaries.

## The 800 KV dc line from North Dakota to Delano, Minn., is completed, but farmers and others keep up a guerilla war against it.

twenty-three states were represented at a recent environmental conference in Glenwood hosted by the farmers. There were workshops on power lines, power plants, pipe lines, and strip mining.

Many risks have been taken in the Minnesota struggle for control of energy development. The recent trial in Buffalo brings the number of arrests related to power line activity to 160. Thirty-two felony charges have been brought against people with 30 of these cases still pending. Two people pled guilty to lesser charges and were given a year probation. The power companies have brought eight law suits against different farmers ranging from \$50,000 to \$500,000. Two were dropped and the rest are pending.

There have been five jury trials on misdemeanor charges resulting in 35 acquittals and three convictions. No one has gone to jail as a result of being convicted.

Two factors in the court successes are a legal defense team patterned after that created for the Wounded Knee trials and the services of the National Jury project, which aids in jury selection.

Another factor in the Buffalo trial was

that 11 defendants gave closing statements to the jury in addition to being represented by attorney Ken Tilsen. The prosecution presented a simple case—those arrested were on land marked "Private Property, No Trespassing," they were told to leave and they didn't. The defense presented the case against the power line.

"The utilities are trespassing on our health, land, and pocketbooks," defendant Wanda Moyer told the jury. "The land we were on wasn't private land, but was taken by eminent domain, the divine right of corporations," argued Fluffy Golod. Dean Reed argued that human rights of farmers was the issue of the trial.

Attorney Ken Tilsen argued that power companies don't have the same rights as private citizens over their property and that the defendants had a first amendment right to demonstrate.

The 800 KV dc line is equivalent to the largest line in the U.S. (The other line runs primarily through the deserts of eastern California.) "Comparing most other power lines to this one is like comparing a creek to the Mississippi River," said one farmer who lives under the line.

The main arguments against the high voltage power line are that the farmers and their farms are guinea pigs in determining the health and safety dangers posed by the line; the line isn't needed since electrical demand has fallen; at 1.2 billion dollars the line is too expensive; and the farmer's civil rights were abused during the public hearings and condemnation proceedings.

Cooperative Power Association and United Power Association built the line from Underwood, N.D., to Delano. The conversion station is the starting place for two 345 KV ac lines that carry the electricity into a regional grid whose largest share holder is Northern States Power, a private utility.

In spite of the resistance to the power line, it is now completed. What happens next is speculation.

Some farmers predict direct action against the line will continue. In the last few months, steel for the towers has been bent, insulators shot out, and four towers were unbolted and toppled.

The line has occasionally been energized in the last month for testing experiments. "When you stand under it, it feels like there're spiders all over your body," said farmer Virgil Fuchs. Fuchs thinks opposition to the line will grow as the effects of the line on the farmers, their equipment, and the land become apparent.

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## A defendant in the Delano trespass case had this to say to the jury before it acquitted him:

Two weeks ago Sunday I crossed the police line out at the Delano (Minn.) substation while carrying a banner that read "Stop The Power Line." I was arrested.... Risking arrest that day was an act of civil disobedience. For me it was also an act of conscience and love....

More than 8,500 acres of farm land have been taken by the utilities for this project. Many more lines are planned and thousands of more acres of farm land will be taken. Virtually all of the farm land removed from production for these lines has been taken from small, family farmers. Virtually none of it has been taken from the huge corporate farms.

These projects add to the already powerful pressure on Minnesota farmers to "get big or get out." Every year the number of people living on the land in this state decreases, and centralized power over what we eat and how it's grown fills the vacuum and expands. As a result, towns get smaller, cities get bigger. There are constantly fewer jobs and degenerating social conditions. The quality of food grows worse and its price goes higher. And it constantly takes more and more non-renewable fuel to run the whole show. Only the big corporations profit from the mess.

The Underwood (N.D.) to Delano pow-

erline will be run on coal strip-mined from the so-called "coal fields" of North Dakota. These "coal fields" were once farm and forest land, important natural water ways and drainage systems. They are being destroyed. It takes a thousand years for a single inch of natural humus to develop. The damage will not be repaired in historical time. Natural reclamation will take place only within geological time.

## There's nothing ordinary about Minnesota farmers.

The coal company doing this damage is also the company that stands to profit most from this project.

All these things add up to a massive violation of the carrying capacity of the land, the point beyond which both the land and all that lives on it are depleted. To violate the carrying capacity of the land threatens extinction. The latest theory is that the dinosaurs became extinct because they were so huge and mindless and slow moving. Their enormous appetites defoliated the regions where they

lived, and they were too slow and too stupid to move elsewhere and so began to eat their own eggs and soon were extinct. They had violated the carrying capacity of the land.

I've heard a lot of talk lately about the "ordinary farmers" of Minnesota. I for one don't think there's anything ordinary about them. On the contrary, they work extraordinarily hard at jobs that are absolutely essential to life. They have shown extraordinary strength and imagination in their fight to maintain themselves and their way of life in the face of the threat the power line poses.

The ordinary people are the ones who man the corporations and government agencies that want to see the line go through. They are motivated only by greed for power and money. They are ordinary because they love order for its own sake and because we run the risk of taking them and their motives more and more for granted.

The choice that's before you today is the same as the choice I made at Delano two weeks ago. I hope that you too will act out of conscience and love. If you do, who knows.... It might not be too late for those who run the dinosaur interests to become extraordinary people too.

—Geoffrey Gardner