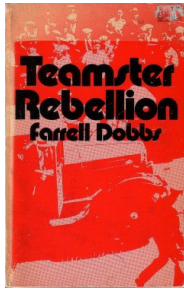


Teamster Rebellion

A study guide

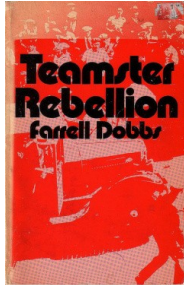


These notes are designed to help new comrades understand some of the basic ideas of Marxism and how they relate to the politics of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL).

February 2014

Teamster Rebellion

By Farrell Dobbs (1973)



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The text

Farrell Dobbs' *Teamster Rebellion* is a brilliant account of one of the great labour battles of the 1930s. The strikes took place in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the United States in 1934. The workers, who drove trucks for a living, were members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) union. Their trade union branch, known then as General Drivers **Local 574**, had organised thousands of transport workers in the trucking industry into an industrial union.

The book explains how the dispute escalated from a strike about union recognition into a major battle with the employers, the police and the local state. In response, workers received solidarity from building workers, women and others. Hundreds of strikers were arrested. The workers were led by Trotskyists, members of the **Communist League of America (CLA)**, then led by James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman, and their role was decisive in shaping the course of the struggle. The strikes ended when the union was recognised and workers' demands settled.

Why read it?

The Minneapolis strikes of 1934 demonstrated the ability of a small Trotskyist organisation to make a breakthrough into the wider labour movement and lead a struggle of to victory. The conduct of the dispute is regarded as a model by Trotskyist organisations.

The Minneapolis strikes, along with the Toledo Auto-Lite struggle and the San Francisco general strike, helped spark the revival of the industrial militancy of the working class of the United States from the depths of the Great Depression. **The strikes show how it possible for working class action to win**, even in difficult circumstances of economic downturn, anti-union employers and a hostile authorities.

The author

Farrell Dobbs (25 July 1907 – 31 October 1983) was a leading participant in the Minneapolis strikes. He became a Trotskyist at the beginning of the dispute, joining the CLA in February 1934 after the conclusion of the first strike. He remained a member of the US Socialist Workers Party (US-SWP) until his death. After the 1934 Minneapolis strikes, Dobbs helped recruit thousands of workers to the Teamsters and briefly became a full time organiser for the union. This is explained in three subsequent books, *Teamster Power* (1973), *Teamster Politics* (1975) and *Teamster Bureaucracy* (1977). Dobbs, along with other Trotskyist and Minneapolis Teamster leaders were jailed for a year in 1944-45 for opposing World War II.

Dobbs became the editor of the US-SWP's newspaper, *The Militant*, after his release from prison. He was the US-SWP's candidate for President of the United States in the four elections between 1948 and 1960. He succeeded Cannon as national secretary of the party in 1953, serving until 1972. He was part of the US-SWP leadership that became uncritical supporters of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution.

The text

The book was first published in 1972 by Monad Press. A new edition, with enlarged text and additional photographs, was published in 2004 by Pathfinder Press. **This guide refers to pages in the both editions.**

The context

Sources: Minneapolis Truckers Make History: Vocabulary; Art Preis, 1964. *Labor's Giant Step*. <http://www.minneapolis1934.org/key-vocabulary.html>

American Federation of Labor (AFL): Federation of craft unions founded in 1886. Few women and minorities achieved membership. AFL membership, which stood at four million in 1920, declining to less than three million in 1929. It fell by 1933 to a low of 2,127,000.

Citizens' Alliance: Groups of pro-employer individuals, associations and corporations who combined forces at the turn of the twentieth century to defeat organised labour by establishing anti-union policies and legislation at the city, state, and federal levels.

Committee of 100: The 100 strike leaders, elected democratically by their peers that coordinated the union's strategy, tactics, plans and decisions.

Cruising Pickets: The name for the novel tactic in which strikers, in their own vehicles, followed "scab" trucks interested in breaking the strike, and stopped them from operating.

Farmer-Labor Party: A Minnesota-based populist third party formed by workers and farmers in 1918. It merged with the Democratic Party in 1944. Governor Olson, in office at the time of the 1934 Teamster strikes, was a member of the Farmer-Labor party.

Great Depression: A severe worldwide economic depression that began in 1929. Between 1929 and 1933 industrial production dropped by 49%. By 1932 there was an estimated 18m to 21m unemployed in the US.

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW): The IWW or "Wobblies", founded in 1905, believed in organising all workers into one big union and combining this with revolutionary political activity.

Local 574: The Teamsters local union in Minneapolis that organised the strikes of 1934.

National Recovery Act: Legislation passed in 1933 that encouraged industrial recovery fair competition, and the construction of public works. It was designed to ease the economic pain of the Great Depression.

National Guard: A reserve military force comprised of state national guard militia members or active/inactive members of the US armed forces. On 26 July 1934, Governor Olson declared martial law and mobilised four thousand National Guardsmen, who began issuing operating permits to "scab" truck drivers.

New Deal: The name that President Roosevelt gave to a package of federal programmes created between 1933 and 1935. The goals of the New Deal centred around "the 3 Rs": relief to the unemployed and badly hurt farmers, reform of business and financial practices, and recovery of the economy. The New Deal included the National Labor Relations Act, the Social Security Act, The Unemployment Compensation Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act (which established the right to overtime pay based on a standard 40 hour work week).

Teamster: The International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) is a trade union. Established in 1903, the organisation took its name from the word used to describe people who drove teams of animals (horses, oxen).

Overview: The Minneapolis Teamster strikes 1934

Source: Historical Overview of the Strikes by Dave Riehle

http://www.minneapolis1934.org/uploads/3/6/4/3/3643229/riehle_essay.pdf

Three successive strikes by **Minneapolis truck drivers** in 1934 resulted in the defeat of the Citizen's Alliance, the dominant employer organisation that had broken nearly every major strike in that city since 1916. The strikes also established the **industrial form of union organisation** through the medium of an American Federation of Labor (AFL) craft union and set the stage for the organisation of over-the-road drivers throughout an 11-state area, transforming the Teamsters into a million-plus member union. The strikes were notable for their almost unequalled advance preparation, military tactics, and the degree to which they drew the active participation of union, non-union, and unemployed workers in Minneapolis alike into their struggle. Veteran union militants expelled from the American Communist Party in 1928 as **Trotskyists** led the strikes.

Carl Skoglund and **V R. (Ray) Dunne**, the central leaders, had also been expelled from the AFL Trades and Labor Assembly in Minneapolis in 1925 for their political views, along with 20 other Communists. In 1931 Skoglund obtained membership in Teamsters Local 574, a small general drivers' local. The president, William Brown, was supportive of their perspective for organising drivers, helpers, and inside workers into an industrial union formation that could break the hold of the Citizen's Alliance.

By late 1933, working in Minneapolis coal yards, they had consolidated a volunteer organizing committee, including **Grant and Miles Dunne** (V.R.'s brothers), **Harry DeBoer**, and **Farrell Dobbs**. Dobbs, DeBoer, and **Shaun (Jack) Maloney** became key leaders of the over-the-road drivers' organising campaign from 1935 to 1940.

On 7 February 1934, a strike was called in the coal yards, shutting down sixty-five of sixty-seven yards in three hours. Under the leadership of DeBoer, an innovative strike tactic was introduced for the first time, **cruising picket squads** patrolling the streets by automobile. Cold winter demand for coal brought a quick end to the strike two days later, resulting in a limited victory for the union. Local 574's membership rose to three thousand by April, as the organisation drive continued.

In preparation for a general drivers' strike, Local 574 got agreement for active support from Minneapolis unemployed organisations and the Farm Holiday Association, allied with the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party. On 15 May, Local 574, now 6,000 members strong, voted to strike all trucking employers, demanding union recognition, the right to represent inside workers, and wage increases.

The union deployed cruising picket squads from **strike headquarters**, a big garage where they also installed a hospital and commissary. A **strike committee of one hundred** was elected, with broad representation from struck firms. A **women's auxiliary** was established at the suggestion of Carl Skoglund.

On Monday 21 May, a major battle between strikers and police and special deputies took place in the central market area. At a crucial point, 600 pickets, concealed the previous evening in nearby AFL headquarters, emerged and routed the police and deputies in hand-to-hand combat. Over thirty cops went to the hospital. No pickets were arrested.

On Tuesday 22 May, the battle began again. About 20,000 strikers, sympathisers, and spectators assembled in the central market area, and a local radio station broadcast live from the site. Again, no trucks were moved.

Two special deputies were killed, including C. Arthur Lyman, a leader of the Citizen's Alliance. No pickets were arrested. On 25 May a settlement was reached that met the union's major objectives, including representation of inside workers.

In the following weeks, it became clear the employers were not carrying out the agreement. Over 700 cases of discrimination were recorded between May and July. Another strike was called on 16 July. The union's **newspaper, *The Organizer***, became the first daily ever published by a striking union. Trucking was again effectively closed down until Friday 20 July, when police opened fire on unarmed pickets, wounding 67, two of whom, John Belor and Henry Ness, died.

The *Minneapolis Labor Review* reported attendance of 100,000 at Ness's funeral on 24 July. A public commission, set up later by the governor, reported: "Police took direct aim at the pickets and fired to kill. Physical safety of the police was at no time endangered. No weapons were in possession of the pickets." On 26 July, Farmer-Labor Governor Floyd B. Olson declared martial law and mobilised four thousand National Guardsmen, who began issuing operating permits to truck drivers.

On 1 August, National Guard troops seized strike headquarters and placed arrested union leaders in a stockade at the state fairgrounds in Saint Paul. The next day, the headquarters were restored to the union and the leaders released from the stockade, as the National Guard carried out a token raid on the Citizen's Alliance headquarters. The union appealed to the Central Labor Union for a general strike and the governor issued an ultimatum that he would stop all trucks by midnight, 5 August, if there was no settlement. Nevertheless, by 14 August there were thousands of trucks operating under military permits.

Although the strike was gravely weakened by martial law and economic pressure, union leaders made it clear that it would continue. On 21 August, a federal mediator got acceptance of a settlement proposal from A. W. Strong, head of the Citizen's Alliance, incorporating the union's major demands. The settlement was ratified and the back of employer resistance to unionisation in Minneapolis was broken. In March 1935 International president Daniel Tobin expelled Local 574 from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT). However, in August 1936 Tobin was forced to relent and re-charter the **local as 544**. The leaders of 544 went on to develop the area and conference bargaining that exists today in the IBT.

Local 544 remained under socialist leadership until 1941, when eighteen leaders of the union and the Socialist Workers Party were sentenced to **federal prison**, the first victims of the anti-radical Smith Act, a law eventually found by the Supreme Court to be unconstitutional.

Timeline

Philip Korth, Strike Chronology, from *Minneapolis Teamsters Strike of 1934*
<http://www.minneapolis1934.org/strike-timeline.html>

- November 1933 Local 574 launches an organising drive in the Minneapolis coal yards.
- 5 January 1934 Meeting sponsored by the Minneapolis-St Paul Regional Labor Board between Local 574 and coal yard dealers.
- 2 February Local 574 votes to strike on 7 February unless employers recognise the union.
- 7 February Strike begins.
- 9 February Local 574 drops all demands except recognition.
- 10 February Strikers return to work believing they have won recognition.
- 14-15 February Elections in the coal yards.
- Early March Citizens Alliance calls meeting of Minneapolis employers to warn of impending union drive.
- 30 April Local 574 presents demands to eleven trucking firms. Employers forms a committee that grows to 166 firms who designate Joseph R. Cochran as spokesman.
- 1 May Meeting sponsored by Regional Labor Board between Local 574 and employer representatives.
- 14 May Local 574 votes to strike on 16 May.
- 16 May Strike Begins
- 18 May Governor Olson attempts to mediate the dispute and end the strike.
- 19 May Clash between police and strikers in the Market district. Strikers dispersed. Committee of 25 recruits special deputies.
- 21 May Clash between police and strikers with inconclusive result. Thirty seven injured.
- 22 May "Battle of Deputies Run" between strikers and police and special deputies. Police and deputies driven from Market district. Two special deputies killed.
- 23 May Governor Olson secures a 48 hour truce and attempts to mediate the dispute.
- 25 May Agreement reached between Local 574 and the 166 employers.
- 31 May Agreement signed.
- 14 June Local 574 informs Minneapolis-St Paul Regional Labor Board that employers are not living up to the 31 May agreement.
- 16 June Employers deny the charges.

- 6 July Local 574 rallies support for a strike through a mass meeting at the Parade Grounds. Workers set a deadline of 11 July for a strike.
E.H. Dunnigan, US Conciliator arrives at the request of Minnesota Senator Henrik Shipstead.
- 7 July Regional Labor Board issues interpretation of 31 May agreement concerning “employees”.
- 11 July Workers vote for strike to commence midnight Monday 16 July.
- 15 July Meeting at Wesley Church of workers opposed to a strike.
- 16 July Workers confirm strike and endorse leadership at evening meeting.
- 17 July Strike begins.
Rev Francis J. Haas, representing the National Labor Relations Board, arrives in Minneapolis.
- 19 July Police escort truck with “Hospital Supplies” without incident.
Governor Olson and Father Haas believe they have secured a 48 hour truce with Chief Johannes.
- 20 July “Bloody Friday”. Police open fire on strikers wounding 67 and killing two.
- 21 July Chief Johannes announces temporary halt to convoying trucks.
- 25 July Rev. Francis J. Haas and E.H. Dunnigan issue their plan for a settlement which becomes known as the Haas-Dunnigan plan.
- 26 July Governor Olson declares martial law and institutes a permit system for delivery trucks.
- 1 August National Guard raids strike headquarters.
- 3 August National Guard raids Citizen Alliance headquarters.
- 5 August Gov. Olson orders General Walsh to revoke all permits and to institute a new permit system based on agreement to sign the Haas-Dunnigan plan.
- 6 August Olson successfully defends his declaration of martial law against an employer-requested injunction.
- 8 August Franklin Roosevelt visits Rochester, Minnesota and union delegation submits its account of the strike to him through Louis Howe.
Jesse Jones, head of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation puts Father Haas in touch with C.T. Jaffray who represents the RFC in Minneapolis.
- 13 August Haas and Dunnigan take a revised proposal to the Committee of 100, which supports the union’s bargaining team and rejects it.
- 17 August P.A. Donoghue from NLRB arrives in Minneapolis to conduct representation elections.
- 18 August Jesse Jones calls Barton, who contacts A.W. Strong, president of the Citizens Alliance.
- 21 August Union ratifies modified proposal in mass meeting that night.
- 22 August Strike ends.

Educationals

Aims

The main aims of these educationals are:

- To understand the story of the Teamster strikes
- To discuss the strategy and tactics employed by the workers
- To analyse what the Trotskyists brought to the dispute
- To evaluate the lessons for today's struggles

Methods

Comrades should do the reading before the session. One comrade can do a lead off, but there should be discussion around the questions and any other issues raised by participants.

Two sessions

Session 1:	0) Introduction/Acknowledgements 1) The Making of a Revolutionary 2) Seeds of Revolt 3) Plan of Battle 4) The Opening Wedge 5) General Mobilisations 6) Organising the Strike 7) Warfare Begins 8) Trickery in Negotiations	
Session 2:	9) The Strike Resumes 10) Bloody Friday 11) Military Strikebreaking 12) War of Attrition 13) Local 574 Wins	

Six sessions

Session 1:	0) Introduction/Acknowledgements 1) The Making of a Revolutionary 2) Seeds of Revolt	
Session 2:	3) Plan of Battle 4) The Opening Wedge 5) General Mobilisations	
Session 3:	6) Organising the Strike 7) Warfare Begins 8) Trickery in Negotiations	
Session 4:	9) The Strike Resumes 10) Bloody Friday	
Session 5:	11) Military Strikebreaking 12) War of Attrition	
Session 6:	13) Local 574 Wins	

Questions

1) The Making of a Revolutionary

- a) What events radicalised Dobbs?
- b) Why was it important to be in the AFL-affiliated local union branch (Local 574)?
- c) Why were the coal drivers in a good strategic position?
- d) What picketing techniques were developed in the February 1934 strike?

2) Seeds of Revolt

- a) What were the peculiarities of Minneapolis and its labour movement?
- b) What did Ray Dunne and Carl Skoglund bring to the struggle?

3) Plan of Battle

- a) What was business unionism?
- b) How did Cliff Hall and other union bureaucrats try to undermine the strike movement?
- c) What were the pitfalls and hidden opportunities of deciding to organise coal yard workers and drivers in Minneapolis in 1933?
- d) Why didn't the Trotskyists form an independent union?
- e) What were the advantages and disadvantages of having a Farmer-Labor Party governor of Minnesota?

4) The Opening Wedge

- a) What developments, locally and nationally, provided the "opening wedge" for a union organising drive in Minneapolis?
- b) Was the "beer bust" opportunist or tactically astute?
- c) Why didn't the Trotskyists organise a walkout when Ray Dunne was sacked?
- d) What role did Bill Brown and George Frosig play?
- e) Why did the February strike succeed?

5) General Mobilisations

- a) How did the Trotskyists promote rank-and-file democracy?
- b) What is the difference between craft and industrial forms of organisation?
- c) How were new union members recruited?
- d) Why was the alliance with the unemployed so important?
- e) What role did women play in the struggle?

6) Organising the Strike

- a) Why was mass cooking necessary?
- b) Why was a union medical centre necessary?
- c) How did the general assembly function?
- d) How did the union placate local farmers?

7) Warfare Begins

- a) How did Jack Maloney's experience illustrate the problem with hospitals?
- b) How did strikers equip themselves for picket duty?
- c) What solidarity was provided by other trade unionists?

8) Trickery in Negotiations

- a) What are the "really revolutionary attributes"?
- b) What role did the Communist Party play in the Teamster struggle?
- c) Why is a degree of compromise involved in all contract settlements with the bosses? What necessitates such compromises?
- d) Were the Trotskyists right to become full-time union organisers?

9) The Strike Resumes

- a) What pitfalls do union negotiators face?
- b) Why were some trucks exempted from the July strike?
- c) What was the importance of *The Organizer*?

10) Bloody Friday

- a) What is the main police function under capitalism?
- b) Why didn't the Local 574 leaders call a general strike after Bloody Friday?
- c) How did the Local 574 leaders disarm the workers?

11) Military Strikebreaking

- a) What role did the National Guard play?
- b) Why did the Trotskyists argue to accept the Haas-Dunnigan proposal "with reservations"?

12) War of Attrition

- a) What did the Stalinists do towards the end of the dispute?
- b) Should the striker leaders have conceded defeat after Bloody Friday?

13) Local 574 Wins

- a) What was the key issue in the settlement?
- b) Why aren't arbitrators neutral?
- c) How were union structures strengthened by the dispute?
- d) Why was the CLA irreplaceable?

Notes on the text

1) The Making of a Revolutionary

Two events that affected [Dobbs] deeply:

Japanese invasion of China

General layoff including John Staley

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 18; 2004: 28-29

At the start I worked **sixty hours a week**, bringing home about eighteen dollars... We were just squeaking by when I was cut to forty-eight hours a week. It was a welcome physical relief since coal heavers had to work like mules, but there was also a two-dollar cut in weekly pay... **The thin flesh of mere subsistence was being scraped down to the bare bones of outright poverty...** On top of all that, I could expect to be laid off in the spring... And I could be fired at any time without recourse merely at the employer's whim.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 19-20; 2004: 30-31

It was important to be in the American Federation of Labor, and Local 574 had the AFL jurisdiction in our industry. Volunteer committee of coal workers had been formed to fight for admission into the union. Important help was at hand from the Local 574 president, William S. Brown and the vice president, George Frosig...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 20; 2004: 31

The industry was struck on Wednesday 7 February 1934. The coal business was based mainly on the delivery of fuel to heat homes and buildings... to top it off, the thermometer fell way below zero as the walkout started. **Since people couldn't do without fuel in such weather, the union was in a good strategic position.**

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 21; 2004:

About 600 workers were available as pickets... This battle reflected a new picketing technique developed through rank-and-file initiative during the heat of action. A number of strikers had second-hand cars... These cars gave the pickets a high degree of mobility that had several tactical advantages. My first knowledge of the development came when I heard some strikers talking excitedly about **cruising pickets**... "A guy named Harry DeBoer is leading them", one said, "and they sure are hell on wheels."

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 23; 2004:

In March 1934 I joined the **revolutionary socialist party**, then known as the Communist League of America, which later evolved into the present-day Socialist Workers Party. Considering that I had voted for the Republican presidential candidate, Herbert Hoover, in the 1932 elections, I had come a long way politically in a little over a year...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 25; 2004:

The main difference lay in the presence locally of revolutionary socialist cadres who proved highly capable of fusing with the mass of rebellious workers and adding vital know-how in the struggle... Another special factor was the peculiar development of the region.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 25; 2004:

2) Seeds of Revolt

Minneapolis and its labour movement

Combination of native-born and immigrant workers.

Strong IWW tradition.

Immigrant socialist culture.

Ray Dunne

- B.1889
- Joined IWW and later the Communist Party
- Involved in Minneapolis Central Labor Union
- Expelled from AFL in 1926 for political activities
- Stood for Senator 1928
- Expelled from Communist Party as a Trotskyist in 1928

Carl Skoglund

- B.1884 in Sweden
- Joined Socialist Party 1914. Scandinavian Federation. Fine library of Marxist literature.
- Joined Communist Party
- Involved in Minneapolis Central Labor Union
- Expelled from AFL in 1926 for political activities
- Expelled from Communist Party as a Trotskyist in 1928

3) Plan of Battle

To get started in this promising situation two steps were necessary: first, Local 574 had to be induced to **accept new members** beyond its existing job-trust circle; then a drive could be launched to **organise the mass of unorganised workers** in the industry and open a struggle for union recognition.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 41; 2004: 58-59

The leaders of the Communist League in Minneapolis approached these tasks with a well-thought-out conception of the dynamics of class struggle based on a study of the interrelationship between the situation's positive and negative features. Workers were radicalising under the goad of economic depression. **To mobilise them for action it was necessary to start from their existing level of understanding.** In the course of battle a majority could be convinced of the correctness of the Communist League's trade-union policy. They would come to understand that misleadership within the AFL was largely responsible for the fact that not a single strike had been won by any union in the city during the previous decade. To drive the point home it was imperative to show in the opening clash with the bosses that a strike could be won.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 41; 2004: 58-59

The key to all this was **the infusion of politically class-conscious leadership** into the union through the cadres of the Communist League. Of course, they could not assume immediate leadership of the union. Their role as leaders would have to develop and be certified through the forthcoming struggles against the employers. To facilitate that objective it was necessary that all party members in the city understand and support the projected Teamster campaign. Toward that end the whole concept was thoroughly discussed in the party branch and firm agreement was reached on the steps to be taken. It was also necessary to decide in advance who would speak publicly for the party and lead its members in the union during the campaign.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 41; 2004: 58-59

4) The Opening Wedge

Wiseacres of the day spoke pontifically about the “**passivity**” of the **working class**, never understanding that the seeming docility of the workers at a given time is a relative thing. If workers are more or less holding their own in daily life and expecting that they can get ahead slowly, they won't tend to radicalise. Things are different when they are losing ground and the future looks precarious to them. Then a change begins to occur in their attitude, which is not always immediately apparent. **The tinder of discontent begins to pile up. Any spark can light it, and once lit, the fire can spread rapidly.**

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 50; 2004: ##

As the political vanguard of the class, the revolutionary party constitutes a bridge in historic consciousness for the workers. It absorbs the lessons of the class struggle, victories as well as defeats, preserving them as part of its revolutionary heritage. The party's cadres are the mechanism through which this “**class memory**” is infused into labour struggles on the given contemporary scene. The Communist League cadres could fulfil this role in the trucking industry if they could link themselves with the militant workers through the trade-union movement. In their approach to this problem the comrades made a distinction between formal and actual leadership.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 52-53; 2004: 73

5) General Mobilisations

A correct strategic and tactical course had made these results possible. To transform such a possibility into reality, however, it had been necessary for the Communist League members to conduct themselves in action as a **disciplined combat force**. Within the union the party fraction functioned as a cohesive unit, harmoniously united in carrying out party policy. Intimate contact was maintained between the fraction and the local party branch.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 58; 2004:

The unprecedented appearance of Local 574 buttons on coal drivers after the strike...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 59; 2004:

The indicated device for this was to upgrade the informal organising committee developed in the coal actions to the status of an official union body... The **Voluntary Organising Committee**... a new stage of dual leadership control was being developed... to bypass the executive board on some matters and to force it into line on others... Through this specific form of rank-and-file democracy, bureaucratic obstacles to the organising drive were overcome.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 59-60; 2004:

For the first time a Teamster local was about to move toward the **industrial form of organisation**, taking all the workers in a given enterprise into a single union.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 61; 2004:

In the union work, organising teams like ours went to garages, docks, warehouses, market areas, everywhere in the trucking industry. Wherever we went we found the workers waiting for us, and **union recruitment proceeded with accelerating momentum**. A class was organised to train volunteer speakers...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 62; 2004:

A leadership with a firm class-struggle programme was gradually gaining command within the union. It was pressing vigorously for rank-and-file control over all union affairs...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 63; 2004:

Local 574's strength climbed to over 3,000, as compared to about seventy-five a year earlier.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 65; 2004:

At the time some **30,000 workers were jobless in Minneapolis**. Together with their families they comprised almost a third of the city's population.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 67; 2004:

A **women's auxiliary** be formed. The aim would be to draw in wives, girlfriends, sisters and mothers of union members... they should be drawn into the thick of battle where they could learn unionism through first hand participation... launching of the auxiliary project was undertaken by Marvel Scholl... and Clara Dunne...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 68-69; 2004:

6) Organising the Strike

When the sun rose on May 16 1934, the headquarters of Chicago Avenue was a beehive of activity. Union carpenters and plumbers were installing gas stoves, sinks, and serving counters. The Cooks and Waiters union sent experts on **mass cooking**... Working in two twelve-hour shifts, over 100 volunteers served 4,000 to 5,000 people daily... Committees were set up to promote material aid. They solicited friendly grocers for staples to be served in the commissary and to help out the needy families of strikers...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 71-72; 2004:

The **union's medical staff** included Dr McCrimmon and two interns from the University of Minnesota hospital who volunteered their services during off hours. Three trained nurses headed up a larger volunteer staff that provided efficient care... About a score of skilled auto mechanics had turned to, bringing their tools with them, to keep the strikers cars in working order...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 72; 2004:

Each evening a **general assembly** was held at the headquarters for this purpose [keeping workers informed... and helping them answer the lies peddled by the bosses]... There were also regular meetings of the strike committee of seventy-five, which had been elected by the union membership.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 72; 2004:

Ray [Dunne] tried to find some role for everyone who wanted to help. "Don't write people off lightly," he often said. "It's not the mark of an organiser."

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 73; 2004:

Teenage volunteers with motorcycles were organised as an efficient courier service.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 74; 2004:

As soon as the [May] strike was called, new members poured into Local 574 from all sections of the trucking industry... reaching a figure of nearly 6,000... Hundreds upon hundreds of jobless poured into the strike headquarters...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 74; 2004:

With the help of the Farmers Holiday Association the union worked out a policy agreeable to [the farmers]

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 75; 2004:

Nothing moved on wheels without the union's permission.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 75; 2004:

7) Warfare Begins

Jack [Maloney's] experience shows how **hospitals are used against strikers**. When an injured picket is brought in they notify the police and cooperate in holding the victim for arrest.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 79; 2004:

Agent provocateur from Burns Detective Agency...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 79-80; 2004:

All day Sunday the **strikers equipped themselves for battle**. Baseball bats appeared, garden hoses were cut into short lengths, lead washers... to make an improvised sap... club lengths... bannister posts... to make improvised helmets, heavy cardboard was stuffed inside the sweatband of hats.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 81; 2004:

The Building Trades Council recommended a **sympathy strike**... This action had been inspired by two members of the union, Oscar Coover and Chester Johnson, both of whom also belonged to the Communist League.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 86; 2004:

A local condition approximating dual power had temporarily arisen.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 90; 2004:

8) Trickery in Negotiations

Up to then a lot of wisecracks had sneered at the Trotskyist movement and dismissed its role because it was small and weak. Now, the Communist League members were leading a tremendous union struggle, proving in action that size is not the basic criterion of a revolutionary party's worth. Events were showing that the Trotskyists possessed the **really fundamental revolutionary attributes: programme, strategy, tactics, and the fighting capacity** to lead workers in battle against the capitalist class.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 93; 2004:

After the trucking settlement, Yellow Cab began serious negotiations with the union and on 4 June a one-year agreement was signed.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 97; 2004:

The **Communist Party**, which had played no part in the struggle, attacked the striker settlement as a "Trotskyist sell out".

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 98; 2004:

Jim Cannon: [the central objective was recognition of the union]

"the union is the instrument of the fight..

"Every strike settlement is a **compromise** in the sense that it leaves the bosses in control of the industry and free to exploit the workers. The best settlement only limits and checks this exploitation to a certain extent.."

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 99-100; 2004:

Before long Local 574 had over 7,000 members... the size of the union and the scope of its activities now required a staff of **full-time organisers**... On 1 June, the executive board... [assigned] this function to Ray, Miles, and Grant Dunne, Carl Skoglund, and myself at salaries of twenty-five dollars a week, the average wage of truck drivers.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 100; 2004:

On 25 June the local launched its own newspaper, The Organizer... with a press run of 5,000. It came out weekly...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 105; 2004:

9) The Strike Resumes

Local 574 moved to establish closer organisational coordination with the unemployed in the next strike through the medium of the Minneapolis Central Council of Workers (MCCW).

Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, 1972: 109; 2004:

Local 574's leadership was thus enabled to push through an official AFL call for a **joint conference** of all unions in town.

Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, 1972: 109; 2004:

By the time the rally began, over 12,000 were packed into the auditorium and thousands more stood outside listening to the loudspeakers.

Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, 1972: 110; 2004:

"Make Minneapolis a Union Town"

Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, 1972: 111; 2004:

Tobin hurled a poisoned dart at Local 574.

Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, 1972: 111; 2004:

Then this bosses' outfit [the Citizens Alliance] impudently attacked the local for making the 11 July strike decision by standing vote, instead of taking a **secret ballot** "as provided for in the union's bylaws".

Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, 1972: 114-15; 2004:

It is a mistake under any circumstances for **union negotiators** to deal with bosses or government mediators on the basis that they have authority to make a compromise.

Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, 1972: 118; 2004:

It was decided to **exempt** ice, milk, bakery, brewery, and city-owned trucks, if operated by union drivers. Taxis were allowed to operate since the union now had a direct contract with the owners. For tactical reasons, oil trucks and filling stations were exempted...

Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, 1972: 120; 2004:

On Monday 16 July, the day before the strike began, **The Organizer** had been converted to a daily... It was the first strike daily ever published by a union in the United States... The paper's circulation quickly leaped to 10,000 and it soon became self-financing. No price was set for single copies. People were simply asked to donate what they could.

Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, 1972: 121; 2004:

10) Bloody Friday

Suddenly, without any warning whatever, the cops opened fire on the picket truck, and they shot to kill.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 127; 2004:

A total of **sixty-seven people were wounded**, over fifty of them pickets and the rest bystanders who got caught in the police fire... Those most gravely injured were Henry Ness, John Belor, and Otis Shugren. Of the three, only Shugren survived.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 129; 2004:

By this time, it had been made plain that Minneapolis was witnessing a naked class battle between workers and capitalists.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 130; 2004:

Local 574 asked for a **one-day strike** by all transportation unions on Monday 23 July, as a protest against police violence. We explained we weren't asking for a **city-wide general strike** because the situation was "not ripe for such a strike".

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 131; 2004:

Under capitalism the **main police function** is to break strikes and to repress other forms of protest against the policies of the ruling class. Any civic usefulness other forms of police activity may have, like controlling traffic and summoning ambulances, is strictly incidental to the primary repressive function.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 135; 2004:

In the meantime Local 574's pickets were reacting to the police assault in full keeping with their magnificent fighting spirit... They now had shotguns, deer rifles, revolvers, hunting knives, and various types of souvenirs from World War I... Although their cause was just and their courage admirable, it would have been a grave **tactical mistake** to attempt to go through with such an undertaking.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 136; 2004:

Ray Dunne and I pitched in to help Kelly Postal **confiscate the weapons** from each cruising squad as it was sent out on a picketing mission.

It wasn't easy, nor was it pleasant. For my part, I still consider it the hardest thing I ever did in my life.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 137; 2004:

11) Military Strikebreaking

Announcement of the Haas-Dunnigan proposal for settlement of the strike was immediately followed by Olson's public endorsement of its terms.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 147; 2004:

Then at exactly twelve o'clock Bill Brown notified Governor Olson that Local 574 had accepted the Haas-Dunnigan proposal... "**accepted with reservations**".

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 148; 2004:

Olson had now come to the final stage of the ploy he had cooked up in collaboration with Haas and Dunnigan; namely, the forcing of a strike settlement through **martial law**.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 149; 2004:

12) War of Attrition

Sam Davis of the **Communist Party** tried to muscle his way onto the strike committee. He had no credentials...

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 165; 2004:

Later their [Stalinist] articles were put together in a pamphlet under the title, "Permanent Counter-Revolution - The role of the Trotzkyites in the Minneapolis Strike".

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 166; 2004:

At about this juncture one picketing incident got out of hand... Uncontrolled fighting of that kind, aimed at random scab operations, would not serve as helpful tactic.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 168; 2004:

Like the union, individual strikers were finding the going rougher and rougher. Children were being poorly fed. Lights, gas and water were in numerous instances shut off for non-payment of bills. Rent problems became increasingly acute... the real estate interests launched a drive to evict strikers from their homes for delinquencies in rent.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 175; 2004:

Al Goldman pointed this out [difficult situation]... Al argued that we were beaten and had to throw in the towel. When a strike is being defeated there is no percentage in keeping every militant on the picket line to the very last... he began to argue that the strike should be called off at once. I felt he went too far in pressing for such a decision.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 176; 2004:

13) Local 574 Wins

Although the settlement provided much less than the workers deserved, it was as much as we could get at the time.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 179; 2004:

The **election returns** made Local 574 the bargaining representative for 61 percent of the employees in the general trucking industry.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 181; 2004:

The key issues were **union recognition** and the right to represent all union members.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 182; 2004:

We fully understood that there is no such animal as an **“impartial” arbitrator** in worker-capitalist disputes.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 183; 2004:

The former strike **committee of 100** was now transformed into an instrument for union control on the job.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 185; 2004:

By the fall [autumn] of 1934 the party's [CLA] Minneapolis branch had grown to about 100 members and close sympathisers, more than double the membership a year earlier.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 186; 2004:

The Communist League fraction within Local 574 functioned as a single unit. Equal voice and vote was accorded to all comrades, whether they were leaders or rank-and-file members of the union. Party members in other spheres of activity were similarly organised into separate fractions in each case. These fractions were in turn part of a general branch of the party which in the given instance embraced all comrades in the city. The structure enabled those in a particular field of activity to concentrate in an organised way on their specific work. At the same time it provided a corrective for any tendency to become **too narrowly engrossed in specialised activity** at the expense of one's broader political education and outlook.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 188-89; 244-245

In the case of Local 574, for example, the union problems were so pressing and so complex that comrades could easily get so **one-sidedly preoccupied** with them that they slighted other political and organisational matters. Being part of a general membership branch helped them to offset this danger. They were drawn into broader patterns of political thinking and into the party's multifaceted educational processes. As a result, trade-union comrades became more proficient in their own special assignments and the party was better able to help them do their job.

Farrell Dobbs, Teamster Rebellion, 1972: 189; 244-245

Further reading

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<http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/date/1934/1934-mpls/index.htm>

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James P. Cannon, 1958. *Notebook of an Agitator*. New York: Pioneer, 75-94.

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<http://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/index.htm#1941>

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<http://libcom.org/history/minneapolis-teamsters-strike-1934-jeremy-brecher>