

**State Coercion and the Rise of U.S. Business Unionism:  
The Counterfactual Case of Minneapolis Teamsters, 1934-1941**

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This paper examines a key shift within the U.S. labor movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whereby the worker upsurge of the 1930s led to the emergence of the conservative “business union” model as the dominant organizational form in the postwar period.

Against deterministic arguments that view this transformation as an unavoidable result of organizational development or of deeply ingrained American ideological beliefs, I show that it was in fact the outcome of a political battle between competing models of working-class organization. I also argue that accounts that emphasize internal anti-communist faction fights or long-term legal processes overlook an important factor: state coercion. I contend that at certain critical junctures, coercive state intervention shaped the labor movement by cutting off other potentially viable trajectories.

I develop this argument through a deviant case analysis of a key local of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), Minneapolis Local 574/544. While the IBT as a whole was an archetypal business union in most respects, the Trotskyist-led Local 574 embodied a potential alternate path, based on a competing social unionist vision.

Using counterfactual analysis, I seek to ascertain whether the Minneapolis model truly did constitute a viable alternate path for the Teamsters, and if so, why that path was not taken. My findings corroborate the hypothesis that Local 574/544 did in fact present a viable alternate path which enjoyed strong support, and that it was business union advocates mobilizing coercive state power that ultimately removed the Minneapolis model as an option.

In posing the questions of “what if Minneapolis had won?” and “why didn’t it?” this case study offers important insights into this critical juncture of U.S. labor history, enriches our theoretical analysis of how this fundamental shift occurred, and enhances our understanding of the ways in which the state enables and constrains processes of social change more broadly.

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**Introduction**

In the course of doing research during the 1948 presidential campaign for what would become his book on *The Future of American Politics* (1952), political scientist Samuel Lubell paid a visit to a Detroit local of the United Auto Workers (UAW).

Historian Robert Zieger describes his impressions:

“He was struck by the sober, businesslike atmosphere. Where during a 1940 visit he found a union hall seething with the spirit of angry confrontation, now signs proclaiming ‘UAW Americanism for Us’ graced the tidy desks of the local’s new officers. ‘In 1940,’ Lubell observed, ‘the flavor of the local was one of street barricades and sit-down strikes; eight years later it was almost like a lodge hall’” (Zieger and Gall 2002, p. 180).

While this is simply one scholar’s observations from one local union, the example is illustrative. Something changed within the U.S. labor movement between the late 1930s and the end of the 1940s. The cataclysmic worker upsurge of the 1930s that brought to life what we know today as modern industrial unionism was brought under control, as “business unionism” emerged as the dominant form of organizational practice in the U.S. labor movement. How and why did this happen?

For some scholars, the answer is obvious: business unionism simply did a better job of “delivering the goods” for union members (Gulick and Bers 1953; Perlman 1966). Others, drawing on Michels’ (1949) famous “iron law of oligarchy,” see it as a natural, almost inevitable consequence of organizational development or maturation (Bell 1960; Lester 1958; Lipset, Trow and Coleman 1956; Piven and Cloward 1979). Still others see

this process as further affirmation of the “exceptionalist” nature of the U.S. labor movement (Lipset 1995; Lipset 1996).

In this paper, I argue that there was in fact nothing natural or inevitable about the bureaucratization of the U.S. labor movement in the postwar period. Rather, I argue that the rise of 1940s business unionism was actually the outcome of a power struggle between two competing models of unionism at a critical turning point in the re-formation of the U.S. working class. Specifically, I see these two competing models, which I call “industrial business unionist” and “social unionist,” struggling to replace the “craft business unionist” model of the pre-1930s period. Craft-business unionism is characterized by the organization of narrow “job trusts” of skilled workers organized in small, dispersed locals. Craft-business unions tended to have autocratic, top-down leadership structures, elitist, exclusionary, and often racist membership policies, and most importantly, a radically voluntarist, anti-statist attitude towards political action. This meant that they thought, as Michael Rogin (1962) puts it, that “workers could best achieve their goals by relying on their own voluntary organizations,” and most certainly not through the state. To the contrary, he contends that “voluntarism defended the autonomy of the craft union against the coercive intervention of the state.”

The massive worker upsurges of the 1930s brought the idea of “industrial unionism” to the fore, meaning the idea of organizing broad layers of skilled and unskilled workers together in one union based on industry, regardless of job classification. However, what I argue in this paper is that there were two competing models of industrial unionism: the “business union” model characterized by top-down, autocratic leadership structures, low member participation, and a narrow, opportunistic

political vision; and a “social union” model characterized by bottom-up, democratic leadership structures, high member participation, and a broad, solidaristic political vision. Both models competed for dominance throughout much of the 1930s and into the 40s.

We know that it was the industrial-business union model that emerged victorious out of the period. But what I show in this paper is that this was not a predetermined outcome. Rather, I show that, faced with a political standoff, supporters of the industrial-business union approach were able to mobilize the coercive power of the state in their favor. This worked to remove social unionism as a viable alternate path of union development, which in turn allowed business unionism to emerge as the dominant organizational form in the postwar period.

I develop this argument using a deviant case study of a key local of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), Minneapolis Local 574/544,<sup>1</sup> at a critical juncture in the union’s history, specifically the late 1930s and early 40s. Although the IBT as a whole made the expected shift in this period from craft-business to craft-industrial unionism, the Trotskyist-led Local 574/544 embodied a potential alternate path for the union, based on a competing social unionist vision.

Although Local 574/544 thrived throughout the 1930s, by 1941 it was virtually unrecognizable, its membership cowed by armies of Teamster officials and its leadership run out of the union and charged with sedition under the federal Smith Act. Using counterfactual analysis, I seek to ascertain whether the social unionist model of the Minneapolis Teamsters did truly constitute a viable alternate path for the Teamsters, and

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<sup>1</sup> The local under investigation switches local numbers during the time period in question. From 1934 to 1935, it is known as Local 574. From 1935 onward, it is known as Local 544. When referring to the union in specific time periods, I will use the appropriate number. When speaking of the local in general, I will refer to it as Local 574/544.

if so, why that path was not taken. In posing the questions of “what if Minneapolis had won?” and “why didn’t it?” this case study offers important insights into this critical juncture of U.S. labor history, enriches our theoretical analysis of how this fundamental shift occurred, and enhances our understanding of the ways in which the state enables and constrains processes of social change more broadly.

In developing this argument, the remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. First, I provide a theoretical motivation for the case study, showing why the observed shift from worker upsurge to business unionism is indeed puzzling, and how existing theories of the shift are either flawed or fail to account for important factors. Next, I discuss my research design and methodological approach. After that, I elaborate the Minneapolis Teamster case in greater detail. Finally, I conclude with a summary of my research findings, and a discussion of their implications for the study of the ways in which state intervention shapes processes of working class formation more broadly.

### **Comparative Explanations of the Rise of U.S. Business Unionism**

On the face of it, the kind of dramatic institutional transformation described at the outset of this paper might seem puzzling: how did the U.S. labor movement change so much, so fast? But is it really that puzzling? Or is this a shift we would expect?

Some scholars, taking an oft-invoked functionalist approach, would say that such a transformation was entirely understandable, in that the business unionists simply did a better job of “delivering the goods” for the union membership in the form of rich labor contracts (Gulick and Bers 1953; Perlman 1966). The problem with this theory is that it doesn’t correspond to the empirical evidence. As several studies have shown, Communists and other radicals were at least as good, if not better, at bargaining rich

contracts for their memberships (Kimeldorf 1988; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). Thus, while the ability to “deliver the goods” at the bargaining table certainly matters in determining the popularity and longevity of union leadership, it can neither explain why different unions would develop different organizational models in the first place, nor why the business unionist model rises to dominance in the postwar period.

Other scholars would go further than the functionalists and argue that the transformation was entirely predictable, in that it conforms precisely to the natural developmental trajectory of formal organizations such as unions. Such approaches draw their primary inspiration from Robert Michels’ (1949) famous “Iron Law of Oligarchy.” Indeed, in their book on “poor people’s movements” Piven and Cloward (1979) explicitly invoke the law in lamenting that the change “was, in part, a *natural result* of the tendency towards oligarchy in formal organizations” (p. 159, emphasis added). Other labor relations scholars echoed Piven and Cloward’s analysis, while viewing the tendency towards oligarchy in a much more sanguine light (Bell 1960; Kerr and Siegel 1964; Lester 1958; Lipset, Trow and Coleman 1956).

Many have attacked such arguments as overly deterministic, in that they overlook the historical contingencies and political struggles that underlie the process of bureaucratization (Goldfield 1989; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003). Offe and Wiesenthal (1980) attempt to counter Michels’ iron law with their “sociological theory of opportunism.” Rather than viewing oligarchy as a natural or inevitable outcome, they reconceptualize it as a “rational and unstable response” to the dilemma of working class organization, namely the tension between the ability to exact concessions and gain legitimacy through the acknowledged *potential* power to engage in disruptive

mobilizations, and the potentially destabilizing effect that *actually* exercising such power can have on the workers' organization.

While Offe and Wiesenenthal's model is far more useful than the Iron Law in that it seeks to situate organizational outcomes within a framework of dynamic material and social relations rather than universal, unchanging laws, its problem is that it implicitly rejects the possibility of a non-oligarchical developmental path for working class organizations. According to the model, organizations either move forward towards oligarchization, or they revert to a de-institutionalized state of existence. However, as my case study will indicate, it can be possible for working class organizations to institutionalize a culture of insurgency, that is, to continue to grow and develop in terms of organizational scope and capacity while also resisting the pressure towards oligarchization.

Another often-heard explanation for the rise of postwar U.S. business unionism invokes the "exceptionalist" nature of the American working class (Lipset 1995; Lipset 1996; Lipset and Marks 2000). Thus, the story goes, U.S. workers rejected the utopian vision put forth by the Communist leaders as fundamentally anathema to their core values and belief systems, embracing instead more pragmatic leaders who focused on "bread and butter" issues and espoused more classically "American" values.

While a fuller treatment of the voluminous and passionate debates surrounding American exceptionalism is well beyond the scope of this paper, it is safe to say that the theory has been widely criticized. Kimeldorf (1988) notes that if one is to accept the logic of American exceptionalism, it is quite difficult to explain how radical left-wing ideas of any kind ever gained a foothold at all in the U.S., let alone achieve the influence they did



in the 1930s. Moreover, a host of scholars examining U.S. working class formation in the nineteenth century have mounted empirical challenges to many of the theory's foundational assumptions about the unchanging conservatism of U.S. workers and the unions they built (Archer 1997; Fink 1985; Hattam 1993; Montgomery 1987; Voss 1993). As such, the idea that U.S. workers, after a brief dalliance with left-wing radicalism in the 1930s, ultimately came to their senses in the postwar years and reverted to their core "American" values of laissez-faire individualism seems dubious at best.

Still, despite their numerous detractors, theories of American exceptionalism have proven to be extremely resilient (Halpern and Morris 1997; Zuckerman 1997). This is no doubt due in part to the fact that, even if we are to grant that the U.S. working class wasn't actually that exceptional in its formative years, it is rather difficult to argue that it doesn't develop certain exceptional traits by the postwar period. Specifically, in sharp contrast to Canada and most European countries, the U.S. stands out in its failure to develop a mass-based social democratic party, a relatively strong public welfare state, and some form of coordinated collective bargaining institutions (Lipset 1996). Moreover, its labor movement remains relatively smaller and weaker than most of its industrialized counterparts, and its union leadership is distinctive in its espousal of pro-free-market, rabidly anti-Communist beliefs (Boyer and Morais 1975; Moody 1988; Preis 1964; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003; Zieger and Gall 2002; Zinn 1980).<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the exceptionalist dilemma persists in the postwar period. But, if explanations invoking long-standing, deep-running cultural/ideological differences won't

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<sup>2</sup> One way in which the U.S. labor movement does not differ from its peers in other industrialized countries is in its level of militancy. Indeed, as Kimeldorf (1999) shows, U.S. unions exhibit a pattern of battling their immediate employer with a level of combativeness, even violence that one seldom finds anywhere else in the world.

suffice, how then can we explain this historical trajectory, diverging not only from the previous period of radical worker insurgency, but also from working classes in other industrialized countries?

To do so, several scholars have turned to more institutional factors such as corporations' attitudes towards unions, economic organization, and state intervention (Brody 1993; Fantasia 1988; Goldfield 1987). In the political/legal realm, many have emphasized the role that anti-labor legislation has played in constricting labor's options, particularly the Taft-Hartley Act (Fantasia 1988; Freeman and Medoff 1984; Wallace, Rubin and Smith 1988). Scholars such as Karl Klare (1978) and Christopher Tomlins (1985) have also shown the deradicalizing effect that even ostensibly "pro-labor" legislation can have over time. Others have stressed the role of anti-communist purges within the labor movement in eliminating an entire layer of left-wing activists and stifling debate and dissent among the union ranks, thus leaving the field open for the rise of more conservative, less accountable business unionist leaders (Moody 1988; Preis 1964; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003).

While not seeking to diminish the importance of such accounts, I argue in this paper that they cannot fully explain the case under examination here, in that they overlook a crucial process that emerged historically prior to the factors they emphasize: coercive state intervention to cut off potentially viable alternative trajectories of union development. I contend that, in the case of the Teamsters, this decisive intervention at a critical juncture in the history of the union's development channeled the union down a path toward greater bureaucratization, which in turn allowed for proponents of the new model of postwar business unionism to consolidate their hold on the union.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **Data Sources**

Data for this project was compiled through a rigorous examination of secondary sources relating to the Minneapolis local, as well as archival research done at the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota. This research yielded thousands of pages of original documents, which included local newspaper clippings, union newspaper clippings, minutes of numerous types of union meetings, official correspondence between officers of the local and the International<sup>3</sup> union, some personal correspondence of key participants, and unpublished notes and manuscripts written by contemporary observers and key participants.<sup>4</sup>

### **Case Selection**

Choosing to undertake an historical study of the Teamsters Union in the 1930s offered several theoretical and methodological advantages. To begin with, this is the period where the Teamsters emerged as one of the largest, most powerful unions in the country, a position they occupy to this day. Between 1933 and 1941, Teamster membership surged from 75,206 to 544,247 members (Leiter 1957, p. 39). But behind that remarkable quantitative change lay an even deeper qualitative shift, as the union transformed itself from a small, decentralized, craft union into a large, more coordinated,

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<sup>3</sup> Most U.S. unions refer to themselves as “International” unions, by virtue of the fact that they also have member locals in Canada. Generally speaking, the main union headquarters, along with the officers and staff associated with the headquarters, are referred to as “the International” and “International officers and staff” respectively.

<sup>4</sup> The careful reader will note that I make little explicit reference to these primary source documents. There are two main reasons for this. First, in the interest of brevity, I have generally tried to avoid including long quotations from primary documents. Second, I often found in the course of my research that the primary materials simply corroborated the accounts given in the secondary literature. As such, I felt it would be fairer to the reader to cite the secondary source, which would be easier for any interested readers to track down.

industrial union. As such, it marks a critical moment of institutional development and innovation in the Teamsters—and the U.S. labor movement as a whole.

Moreover, the Minneapolis local examined in this study plays a key role in this massive shift in the union. Daniel Tobin, Teamster General President at the time, was a staunch craft-business unionist, famous for bragging that his members were “not the rubbish that have lately come into other organizations” (quoted in Preis 1964, p. 41), and dedicated to keeping drivers separated in small locals based on the type of commodity handled (ice, milk, coal, etc.). However, in the 1930s a decisive battle unfolded in the Teamsters between competing industrial-business unionist and social unionist models.

Leading the move towards the ultimately victorious industrial-business union model were future Teamster General Presidents Dave Beck of Seattle and James R. “Jimmy” Hoffa of Detroit. While quite different in organizing style and personal demeanor, both Beck and Hoffa sought to reshape the union to respond to the new challenges of a consolidating, nationalizing, and expanding American industry. In marked contrast to Tobin, they had little aversion to admitting “rubbish” into the union.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, they sought to increase their “market share” of represented workers from a wide array of industries and skill levels, using a variety of innovative organizing methods. They also both assembled loyal, centralized, and professionalized administrative staffs, and they both sought to use their negotiating prowess and business know-how to drive a

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<sup>5</sup> While perhaps not completely changing his mind, Beck and Hoffa (along with the Local 574/544 leadership, would ultimately win Tobin over to the industrial-business unionist perspective, largely by showing the benefits that such an organizational model could offer the union’s treasury (Dobbs 1973; James and James 1965).

hard bargain for their members and obtain the best price possible for their workers' labor from the employers, while recognizing the employers' need to make a profit.<sup>6</sup>

In Minneapolis, Local 574/544 leaders Farrell Dobbs and the Dunne brothers—Ray, Grant, and Miles—also sought to move beyond Tobin's craft-business unionism, but in the direction of a social unionism that differed profoundly from Beck and Hoffa's model. They saw the union as a social movement against a capitalist class they perceived as their mortal opponents. They sought to create an organization that could forge bonds of worker solidarity and build power not only for the union's members, but for the working class as a whole. In so doing, they created a union that succeeded in winning important gains for Teamsters and other workers across the country.

They are perhaps best known for their role in organizing the landmark 1934 Minneapolis Truck Drivers Strike. This strike firmly established a vital union presence in what had previously been a notoriously "open shop" (i.e. non-union) city. Moreover, that strike, along with other major strikes that year among longshore workers in San Francisco, auto workers in Toledo, Ohio, and textile workers throughout the South, is generally viewed as part of an opening shot that set the stage for the more general worker upsurge of the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> However, the Minneapolis Teamsters influence and impact spread far beyond the 1934 strike. Not only did they continue to play a central role in building and strengthening the Twin Cities labor movement throughout the 1930s, but they were also a major transformative force in the Teamsters Union on a national scale.

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<sup>6</sup> For more on Hoffa, see (Hoffa 1975; James and James 1965; Levi 2003; Russell 2001; Sloane 1991; Witwer 2003) For more on Beck, see (Leiter 1957; Witwer 2003) and especially (Garnel 1972).

<sup>7</sup> Space does not permit a full retelling of these strikes, which have already been chronicled in great detail elsewhere. For more information, see (Dobbs 1972; Korth 1995; Schultz 2000; Walker 1937).

Most importantly, they articulated the vision and developed the organizing techniques that led to the unionization of the over-the-road trucking industry, which did more to change the Teamsters than any other single factor (Dobbs 1973; James and James 1965). Their efforts in bringing together a coalition of 175 notoriously independent Teamster locals, to build a campaign that successfully organized over 125,000 road drivers from over 1,700 companies across eleven states under a single master labor agreement, established the Minneapolis Teamsters as a force to be reckoned with within the union more broadly.

In sum, the Minneapolis Teamster case is not simply an example of a radical but marginal aberration within a generally conservative union. Rather, it is a *decisive* case, examining a critical local embodying a powerful competing vision at a critical moment in the history of the organizational development of a union that has a critical impact on the U.S. labor movement as a whole.

### Research Design

I have structured the research as a deviant case analysis centered around exploring the counterfactual question of what would have happened if Minneapolis had won. Simply put, could the Minneapolis model have played a role in reshaping the Teamsters as a whole, or was it merely a brief historical anomaly which at best would have been limited to “social unionism in one local”?

Assuming that the answer is the former, the next step is to explain why Minneapolis didn't win. As I have already stated, my argument is that coercive state intervention struck the decisive blow against the Minneapolis model. But before examining that hypothesis, it is important to consider how well alternate hypotheses can

explain the outcome. Having done that, we can then evaluate the relative importance of state coercion in the downfall of the Minneapolis Teamsters.

With the research design and key empirical questions now clearly stated, we can turn to our examination of Minneapolis Teamsters from 1934 to 1941.

### **What If Minneapolis Had Won? Social Unionism as a Viable Alternate Path for the Teamsters Union**

Is it feasible to think that the Minneapolis social unionist model offered a viable alternate path of organizational development for the Teamsters? Or was it simply an anomaly in a conservative union that never had a chance of moving beyond “social unionism in one local”?

I contend that it did provide a viable alternate path. By this I mean two things. First, I mean that it was an *alternate* path, in the sense that it did constitute a radically different model of organization from other models then practiced in the Teamsters. Second, I mean that it was a *viable* path in that, far from being marginal, it was a model that enjoyed a strong degree of support in the local, the Minneapolis labor community, and important sections of the Teamsters.

The first part of this contention should be relatively uncontroversial. A quick perusal of some of the secondary literature on the Minneapolis Trotskyists (Dobbs 1972; Dobbs 1973; Dobbs 1975; Dobbs 1977; Korth 1995; Millikan 2001; Schultz 2000; Walker 1937), even allowing for rhetorical flourishes due to personal and/or political biases, depicts a radically different organizational culture from that which is then emerging in Detroit under Hoffa’s leadership (Hoffa 1975; James and James 1965; Russell 2001; Sloane 1991), or in Seattle under Beck (Garnel 1972; Leiter 1957).

However, the second part does require some explanation. Was the Minneapolis model really a viable path for the Teamsters? How much support did it really have?

In the section above justifying my selection of the Minneapolis case, I suggested that it in fact had quite a bit. Here I provide further evidence to justify that assertion. Specifically, I look at how the local leadership built on its reputation as both the victor of the landmark 1934 Truck Drivers' Strike and the architect of the over-the-road organizing campaign to build and maintain a network of support in the local, in the Minneapolis labor movement, and within significant portions of the IBT.

#### A Viable Path: Support for the Minneapolis Model

Internal support: Available historical evidence strongly suggests that the Trotskyist leadership of Local 544 enjoyed wide support within the local. Annual contested elections consistently returned to office various slates consisting of members dedicated to continuing “the spirit of '34.” The slates would also always include one or more of the Trotskyist core of the Dunne brothers, Dobbs, and Carl Skoglund (Dobbs 1973; Dobbs 1975; Dobbs 1977). Meeting attendance remained high throughout the period of Trotskyist leadership, even accounting for self-interested exaggeration (Dobbs 1972; Dobbs 1973; Dobbs 1975; Dobbs 1977). The radical prose of the Teamster Joint Council<sup>8</sup> newspaper edited by the 574/544 leadership, *The Northwest Organizer*, claimed a circulation of 27,000 in 1937, fully 10,000 more than the entire Minneapolis Joint Council membership of 17,000 (Dobbs 1975, p. 130). Moreover, the content of the paper showed signs of a vibrant internal life within the union. For example, short sections of each issue with titles such as “Taxi Topics,” “Independent Truck Chatter,” “Local 1849

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<sup>8</sup> A Joint Council is an intermediate-level administrative structure in the Teamsters, consisting of a group of local unions located in the same geographic area.



Knots to You,” and “Bar Notes” would provide both useful information and inside jokes for members of each occupational jurisdiction.<sup>9</sup> Editorials with headlines such as “We Criticize to Improve” and “The War Profiteers” clearly articulated the leadership’s social unionist vision of a labor movement that is internally democratic and outspoken on issues beyond the shop floor. And longer historical pieces would tell the stories of previous “Great American Labor Struggles,” such as the efforts to organize the steel industry in 1919.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of voluntary activities, solidarity pickets organized by the local leadership for other unions regularly mobilized hundreds of workers. Thousands of members rallied in support of WPA workers striking against benefit cuts (Dobbs 1975). The Union Defense Guard, a related organization formed to protect picket lines against attacks, counted 600 volunteers according to Dobbs (1975, p. 143), which even if inflated is an impressive number given the level of commitment involved in such a task. Indeed, Minnesota State Labor Conciliator Alfred P. Blair paid the Guard an unsuspecting compliment when he complained in his unpublished memoir of their tremendous ability to mobilize quickly: “A friendly radio station would send out coded messages at various times and within minutes, three to four hundred men would be assembled on a North Minneapolis parking lot, adjacent to Teamsters Headquarters, armed to the teeth” (Blair unknown, p. 64).

Finally, in addition to working to foster member participation in the political and economic life of the local, the leadership also sought to provide a social and cultural hub

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<sup>9</sup> All examples cited from issues of *The Northwest Organizer*, dated May 8, 1935, June 9, 1938, and April 17, 1941.

<sup>10</sup> All examples cited from issues of *The Northwest Organizer*, dated May 8, 1935, June 9, 1938, and April 17, 1941.

for the membership. The union newspaper shows that the local organized an annual membership picnic, complete with “shoe scramble,” tug of war competition, and a “Miss Organized Labor” beauty pageant.<sup>11</sup> The union also fielded a city championship baseball team, and called for the establishment of a union radio station.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the evidence shows that Local 574/544 members generally supported their leadership, and that a large number of them participated actively in various aspects of the life of the local.

Support in the Minneapolis labor movement: Having emerged victorious out of the 1934 strike, Local 574 was viewed as the unquestioned leader of the Minneapolis labor movement. Inspired by the local’s accomplishments, workers flocked to sign up with it, and emulated its organizing methods (Dobbs 1972; Dobbs 1973; Korth 1995).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in keeping with its commitment to “make Minneapolis a union town,” as its newspaper declared, Local 574 was a leader in organizing solidarity in support of other unions’ struggles. The following remarks from a letter signed by the Executive Board of the International Association of Machinists Local 382 illustrate this well:

“In September [of 1934], when we were locked out at the Arrowhead Company, [Local 574 was] the first union to come to our aid. In January of

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<sup>11</sup> It seems as if the Trotskyists’ efforts to relate to the mainstream of the U.S. working class required certain compromises of their position on “the Woman Question.”

<sup>12</sup> *Northwest Organizer*, September 7, 1939 and June 9, 1938.

<sup>13</sup> While not turning anyone away, it is nevertheless interesting to note that Local 574 was very scrupulous about not claiming workers who they felt did not fit into their jurisdiction. Instead, they would provide the workers with all necessary assistance to sign up with their appropriate local. Take as a case in point the example of workers at the Powell Candy Co., who spontaneously showed up at the Local 574 union hall one night and demanded to be organized. Rather than sign them up on the spot, the Local 574 leaders took a different tack. As Marvel Scholl explains: “we helped them set up a picket line, draft demands, and select a negotiating committee. A Local 574 staff member then went with the committee to meet the boss. At the same time Roy Wier [organizer for the Minneapolis Central Labor Union] was contacted to find out what AFL union had jurisdiction in that sphere. He came over and enrolled them in the Food Workers Union” (Dobbs 1973, pp. 97-98).

this year when we were forced to go out against the Employers in the Garages and faced the guns and clubs of the Citizen's Alliance<sup>14</sup> thugs and police, Local #574 was the first in line with food, collection of funds and, most important of all, real man power [sic] on the picket lines" (IAM Local 382 1935).

Other struggles in support of ornamental ironworkers, hosiery workers, sash, door, and mill workers, grain millers, and more ensued.<sup>15</sup> Thanks to these and other efforts, the Minneapolis Central Labor Union recognized Local 544's key role in helping to more than double the CLU's membership between 1933 and 1938, from 28,000 to nearly 60,000. Robley D. Cramer, editor of the magazine *Labor Review*, referred to Local 544 members as "the shock troops of the Minneapolis labor movement" (Dobbs 1975, p. 134).

As Local 544's power and resources grew, they continued to lend material assistance to other unions. Their local headquarters also served as headquarters for the entire Teamster Joint Council. Furthermore, they also provided office space for several other allied unions, including the Power Workers and Furniture Workers (Dobbs 1973, p. 135).

In sum, we can see that, far from being marginal, Local 574/544 played a key role in building and supporting the broader Minneapolis labor movement. In turn, they received recognition, respect, and appreciation from their peers.

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<sup>14</sup> The Citizen's Alliance was a large and powerful employer organization dedicated to keeping the open shop in Minneapolis. From the moment of its founding in 1903, it successfully fought off every attempted union drive in the city, often through violent means, until the Teamsters bested them in 1934. In December 1936, they changed their name to Associated Industries, and adjusted to the new reality of having to negotiate with unions, instead of simply trying to crush them outright. For a detailed history of the Citizen's Alliance, see (Millikan 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Several of these battles are outlined in (Dobbs 1973; Dobbs 1975)

Support in the Teamsters: In Minneapolis, Local 544 was the acknowledged leader of the Teamster movement. Not only were they the biggest local by far, but they also lent a hand in helping other Teamster locals get off the ground, often loaning staff (Dobbs 1973, p. 143). But beyond the city, Local 544's leaders earned the admiration and respect of their fellow Teamsters with the work that they did in conceptualizing and organizing the campaign to bring over-the-road truck drivers into the union, as mentioned above.<sup>16</sup>

In so doing, Local 544 mobilized its own resources for the collective good. They loaned out experienced local organizers to other local unions in need of help in their areas, such as Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Sioux City, Iowa, Fargo, North Dakota, Omaha, Nebraska, and Kansas City, Missouri. Farrell Dobbs left his post as Secretary-Treasurer of Local 544 to head up the North Central District Drivers Council (NCDDC), the body coordinating the overall campaign. These Trotskyist organizers played a critical leadership role as they spread across the Midwest as part of the quest to organize highway drivers. Indeed, in some of the smaller cities they ended up in charge of the locals. While the campaign involved hundreds of organizers from dozens of locals, Local 544, and particularly Dobbs, enjoyed recognition as the driving force behind it all. Indeed, even decades later, then-Teamster President Jimmy Hoffa acknowledged Dobbs' and the Trotskyists' role as the architects of the over-the-road campaign (Hoffa 1975, ch. 4; James and James 1965, ch. 5).

Of course, it is important here to note that although these other Teamster locals may certainly have appreciated Local 544's organizing efforts, it does not at all

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<sup>16</sup> Detailed accounts of the over-the-road campaign can be found in (Dobbs 1973; James and James 1965; Russell 2001).

necessarily follow that this implied any support for their social unionist model. On the contrary, many of the officials and organizers centrally involved in the over-the-road campaign were unreconstructed business unionists—such as Hoffa—who had little use for grand ideological schemes, and would ultimately turn against the Trotskyists.

However, this was not universally the case. As will be shown in the final section, the member locals of the Minnesota Joint Council actively supported Local 544, even when the tide started to turn against them. Similarly, when Local 544 left the Teamsters and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the more conservative labor federation of which the IBT was a member, in 1941, a few locals outside of Minnesota supported their political vision enough to follow them into the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a rival, more radical federation committed to industrial organizing.

More broadly, we can point to motions and votes at International Conventions as a sign of wider support. Here there is some evidence that other locals supported Local 544 leaders' efforts to put forth democratic reform proposals. For example, at the 1940 Convention, the Minneapolis delegation narrowly missed mobilizing enough delegates to vote down Tobin's proposal to raise his annual salary to \$30,000,<sup>17</sup> and they did

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<sup>17</sup> Union leaders' salaries were then and continue to be a point of contention within unions, both for philosophical as well as more obvious financial reasons. From a business unionist perspective, officers are literally the executives of the union, on a par with the corporate executives and business owners with whom they negotiate contracts. As such, they feel justified in receiving pay packages that compare to those of their counterparts in the business world (Leiter 1957, p. 267; Lens 1959, ch. 4). Social unionists on the other hand argue that officer pay packages that are significantly larger than what union members earn often create divisions between the leadership and the membership, since their salaries allow them to lead a qualitatively different lifestyle (Lens 1959; Moody 1988). As such, although the resolution at hand may have dealt on the surface with a purely financial matter, the debate had implications for the conflict between different visions for the union.

successfully block his attempt to grant himself the power to order compulsory arbitration of contract disputes<sup>18</sup> (Dobbs 1977; James and James 1965).

Nevertheless, this still leaves us with only a handful of actively supportive locals from among hundreds of Teamster locals and a few Convention resolutions, hardly a promising base of support from which to transform the union as a whole. However, viewing their base of support as limited solely to those hard-core locals that stuck with the Trotskyist leadership of Local 544 up until the bitter end runs the risk of projecting our *ex-post* knowledge of the historical outcome back onto events that were anything but foreordained at the time. As with any political battle, support for different camps is rarely set in stone. Indeed, politics as such would not exist if this were the case. Rather, there are almost invariably different degrees of support, with some participants inclined towards one particular camp or the other without being firmly committed, and others truly undecided or torn between competing positions. To say that Local 544's support only extended as far as its handful of hard-core supporters implicitly lumps all the undecideds and weak supporters into the opposing camp.

While the historical evidence is far from conclusive on this point, it is at least plausible to argue that, particularly in light of the respect and goodwill that other locals and union leaders had shown towards Local 544 and their leadership as a result of their efforts on the over-the-road campaign, there existed a layer of locals that were more or

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<sup>18</sup> The alternative here is between having Tobin order compulsory arbitration and allowing local unions to determine if and when they can strike against employers with whom they have not reached a contract settlement. Tobin's proposal embodies a classic business unionist tenet of maintaining as much contract administration authority in the hands of the union executive as possible, while also limiting the possibility of unpredictable and possibly damaging strikes. Although it would be inaccurate to say that those who opposed Tobin's motion were necessarily endorsing a social unionist outlook, it is nevertheless the case that in defeating the motion, they forestalled further formal bureaucratization of the union. More importantly for the purposes of this paper, they also offered explicit political support in this case to the Minneapolis Teamsters.

less supportive of the Trotskyists, but took a “wait and see” attitude when Tobin turned the power of the International on the Minneapolis local. Given a different balance of forces, it is conceivable that these locals could have ended up in the Minneapolis camp. Whether this layer would have been large enough to change the ultimate outcome is difficult to ascertain from the available data. Nevertheless, it remains an open question, one which is useful to keep in mind as we examine the factors behind the Minneapolis Trotskyists’ defeat in the following section.

To sum up, with some caveats, it is possible to see that the social unionist model of the Minneapolis Trotskyists was not only an alternate path for the Teamsters, but a viable one. The Local 544 leadership’s program enjoyed strong, sustained support from the local membership, as well as from fellow unions in the Minneapolis labor movement. While evidence of broader support for the Minneapolis model within the Teamsters outside of Minneapolis is more difficult to establish beyond a small handful of locals, it is clear that the Local 544 leadership had earned respect and goodwill within the union for their role as the architects of the over-the-road campaign. Although this does not imply support for the Minneapolis Teamsters’ broader social unionist model, it does suggest that they had developed a layer of political allies within the union, some more committed than others. While most of these allies had abandoned Local 544 by the end, that they would do so was far from a foregone conclusion, as the next section will indicate.

### **Why Didn’t Minneapolis Win? Explaining of the Decline of Social Unionism in the Teamsters**

Thus far, I have shown that the Minneapolis social unionist model did in fact present a viable alternate path for the organizational development of the Teamsters. In the

following section, I examine why that path was not taken. I first briefly review existing theories that have been used to explain the triumph of business unionism over social unionism in the 1940s, and show that they do a poor job of explaining the outcome of the case in question. Then, through a narrative of the relevant historical events leading to the demise of the Minneapolis model, I examine the evidence for what I have argued is an overlooked and decisive factor in explaining the outcome of the Teamster case: the role of coercive state intervention.

### The Limits of Existing Theories of the Triumph of U.S. Business Unionism

In light of the evidence already presented, we can see that existing theories that have been used to explain the triumph of U.S. business unionism over social unionism in the 1940s are a poor fit for the Teamster case. Functionalist theories would argue that the Minneapolis model lost because its advocates didn't "deliver the goods" for the membership. But we see in the case of Local 574/544 that they not only continually "delivered the goods" for the membership of their own local, but also spearheaded initiatives in Minneapolis and throughout the Midwest that ended up improving the material standard of living of a much broader layer of workers as well.

Adherents to the "iron law of oligarchy" and its variants would argue that social unionist models would fail due to the inevitable tendency toward oligarchic rule in formal organizations. However, in the case of the Minneapolis Teamsters we see the persistence of democratic practice in the form of high member participation in official union meetings and other voluntary union activities, frequent contested elections, and a vibrant and engaging internal culture, among other things.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> As a critique of Offe and Wiesenthal's theory of opportunism, it is worth noting that the Minneapolis Trotskyists were able to maintain this vibrant, highly democratic organizational



Advocates of American exceptionalism would argue that the social unionist vision of the Minneapolis Teamsters failed because it didn't resonate with "classic American laissez-faire, antistatist, market-oriented, meritocratic, individualistic values" (Lipset 1995). Of course, Lipset's argument in this instance ties this "refurbishment of classic American values" to the sustained and rising prosperity of the postwar period. As such, one could argue that the Minneapolis case isn't a good test of this theory, in that it ends prior to the postwar period of rising prosperity. However, this is precisely the point: the Minneapolis model is forcibly yanked off the stage of history before the cycle of rising prosperity and supposed value refurbishment can begin. In a sense then, Lipset's culturalist observations about the postwar refurbishment of American values suffer from a form of selection bias, in that they fail to account for the *political* processes that weeded out certain other sets of values.

Even if we are to take the exceptionalist argument about "American values" at face value, the Minneapolis case provides further evidence, on top of the available 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century labor scholarship discussed above, to challenge the existence of such a notion. Judging by the sustained high levels of member participation in the Minneapolis local, not to mention the strong support the local repeatedly received throughout the city's labor movement, it does not seem that these workers found the collectivist, solidaristic values of Local 544's social unionism to be somehow alien to them. Furthermore, we can point to instances where the vibrant and resilient organizational culture of the Minneapolis local actually transformed avowed business

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culture while also growing and expanding their reach organizationally. It seems somewhat inaccurate or misleading to characterize this process as a continuous stagnation or regression to a de-institutionalized stage of working-class organizational development.

unionists, who presumably found their practice to resonate quite well with their American values, into committed social unionists (Dobbs 1973, pp. 159 & 167).<sup>20</sup>

In sum, none of these classic theoretical approaches can provide an adequate explanation for the defeat of the Minneapolis model. Other more historical/institutional theories, as discussed above, may offer important insights into other elements of the emergence of postwar U.S. business unionism. However, they too cannot explain the demise of the Minneapolis model, in that they emphasize factors that become relevant only after the Minneapolis Trotskyists are defeated in 1941.

How then are we to explain the removal of the social unionist option as a viable alternate path of organizational development for the Teamsters? In this final section, I show that it is only through an analysis that pays attention to the role of coercive state intervention that we can obtain a satisfactory answer to this question.

#### State Coercion and the Demise of the Minneapolis Model

After engaging in heated battles with Local 544 over several years, General President Tobin eventually settled into a period of détente with the local in the late 1930s. Key to this was the work that Local 544 leaders had done in masterminding the over-the-road campaign (Dobbs 1973; Dobbs 1975; Dobbs 1977; James and James 1965; Russell 2001). Similarly, the state and local authorities in Minneapolis, while not exactly leaving the union alone, had reached a standoff. Minnesota State Labor Conciliator Alfred P. Blair recalled that “the Four Musketeers [Dobbs and the three Dunne brothers] enjoyed their free reign in the Twin cities and topped it off by organizing their ‘Union Guard’ [i.e.

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<sup>20</sup> The instances discussed on these pages involve Teamster officials dispatched by Tobin at various times to attempt to break up Local 574/544 and implement a more congenial business unionist practice that would be easier for Tobin to deal with. However, in each case the dispatched envoys “went native,” adopting the social unionist practices of those they were sent to destroy. Of course, the story would be different in the final conflict of 1941.

the 544 Union Defense Guard], a weapon to intimidate the police, who, by then, needed very little more to intimidate them” (Blair unknown, p. 40).

All this would change rapidly in 1940. President Roosevelt was gearing up to go to war, and as such was paying much closer attention to potential sources of political opposition. With their broad support in the city and region and their militant, public, anti-war stance, the Minneapolis Trotskyists were now a prime target. This was all the more so because Tobin was a longtime close ally of the President, and didn’t want to be seen to be doing anything that could undermine Roosevelt’s agenda. The time had come to move against Local 544.

Tobin knew it wouldn’t be easy. The Minneapolis Trotskyists enjoyed broad support in their local and throughout the city, and had allies within the Teamster hierarchy. Dislodging the Trotskyists would take more than the usual tactics. And as it turns out, Tobin was able to rely on some outside help to get the job done this time.

Help came from three directions. First, within Local 544, a group of disaffected members had formed a so-called “Committee of 100.”<sup>21</sup> This small group was primarily made up of opportunists who “simply aspired to get for themselves the offices which the Trotskyites [sic] occupied” (James and James 1965, p. 103). However, they provided Tobin with a useful opening. In response to a request from the Committee urging him to “step into Minneapolis and clear up an intolerable situation” (Dobbs 1977, p. 103), Tobin held hearings in Chicago on April 8, 1941 dealing with the Minneapolis situation, and

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<sup>21</sup> The name was meant to echo that adopted by the committee that led the now-famous 1934 Minneapolis Truck Drivers’ Strikes. However, it is highly unlikely that they ever actually had 100 members (Dobbs 1977, pp. 85-86). The name would soon change to “Committee of 99” when one of the main leaders dropped dead of a heart attack.

then summoned Committee representatives and the Local 544 Executive Board to a meeting of the Teamster General Executive Board on June 3.

There, Tobin took advantage of his second source of help: the FBI. Agents under Director J. Edgar Hoover, with Roosevelt's consent, had been investigating the local for about a year. The Committee of 100 had been working closely with the agents, providing them with information that would form the core of their report, which was forwarded to Washington and to Tobin. Tobin quoted extensively from the report in the June 3 hearing. After the hearing, Tobin asked the Local 544 leaders to sign a form requesting that their local be placed in trusteeship. They refused, citing the need to consult their membership, and agreed to call Tobin with an answer by Saturday the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Meanwhile, seeing that Tobin was trying to break up the local, the Minneapolis leaders had arranged a meeting in Washington with Denny Lewis of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), about joining the CIO. They got word on Monday, June 9<sup>th</sup> that Local 544 would be awarded a CIO charter.

That day both Tobin and the FBI received help from a third crucial source: Minnesota State Labor Conciliator Alfred P. Blair. According to his unpublished memoirs (Blair unknown), the FBI agents had visited him on June 7<sup>th</sup>, report in hand, and "made a request that I contact Washington, D.C. and get something moving so that they could arrange to make the necessary arrests and confiscate the necessary records to get these people [the Minneapolis Trotskyists] out of circulation in the labor movement" (p. 6). On the 9<sup>th</sup>, he arranged a conference call including himself, Tobin, Teamster lawyers, and AFL President William Green. Two things were agreed upon in that meeting: 1) Tobin was to request the services of Seattle Teamster leader Dave Beck to go and place

the Minneapolis local in trusteeship; and 2) Green was to meet with Roosevelt and “get assurance that the proper instructions would be issued through the attorney general’s office to give the FBI authority to move with dispatch” (p. 10).<sup>22</sup>

Before Beck could get to Minneapolis to impose the trusteeship, the Local 544 leadership organized a meeting of over 4,000 members, where they voted to secede from the AFL and become Local 544 of the Motor Transport and Allied Workers Industrial Union, CIO.<sup>23</sup>

With Local 544’s secession, open warfare now erupted in Minneapolis. Hundreds of Teamster officials from across the country descended on the city in an effort to get Local 544 back into the AFL fold, by force if necessary. Particularly notable was the fearsome Michigan contingent, headed by Jimmy Hoffa. As Russell (2001) describes it:

“Hoffa’s men often did more than ‘persuade’ the defectors to rejoin the Teamsters. The Detroit crew...literally knocked hundreds of truck drivers and warehousemen out of the CIO and back into the IBT by beating them until they agreed to sign Teamster membership cards” (p. 81).

The battle raged on for several weeks between 544-AFL and 544-CIO, but appeared to be at a standoff. Speaking with Tobin’s assistant, Tom Flynn, organizer Joe Casey, one of the leaders of the AFL drive in Minneapolis, said:

“This thing, as far as the rank and file is concerned, is not at all stabilized.... These fellows are like a pendulum on a clock which swings back and forth — CIO —AFL —CIO —AFL, depending entirely on who was the last group that

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<sup>22</sup> Dobbs also mentions knowledge of this meeting in his memoir of the events (Dobbs 1977).

<sup>23</sup> Several other Teamster locals in the area also followed Local 544 into the CIO, and even among those who didn’t, their loyalty to the IBT was questionable at best. Joe Padway, Teamsters counsel, told Tobin that “...the officers of the Joint Council are very friendly to the Dunnes and it is my belief that some of them worked with them on this secession.... They may urge their unions to swing over if they think it is to their advantage to do so” (quoted in James and James 1965, p. 107).

talked to them. They say that the boys have two buttons—CIO in one pocket and AFL in the other, and they don't wear any button, but when an AFL [organizer] comes up, they start putting on the AFL button" (quoted in Russell 2001, p. 82)

Ultimately, the IBT was able to mobilize coercive state intervention in three instances to shift the balance of forces decisively in their favor. First, on June 17, District Judge Luther W. Youngdahl awarded possession of 544-CIO's headquarters and all its contents to 544-AFL, after the IBT had filed suit.<sup>24</sup> While 544-CIO was quickly able to find alternate headquarters space, this nevertheless represented a serious financial and material blow to the local.

Second, on July 15, a federal grand jury acting on the FBI report indicted twenty-nine 544-CIO activists and supporters on charges of sedition and conspiracy to overthrow the government under the Smith Act. This came one day after four 544-CIO officers and staff members were indicted for embezzlement and grand larceny. Although the trials wouldn't start until October, and the eighteen who were convicted wouldn't be locked up until 1944, the constant legal harassment and the resources spent defending against the charges took a serious toll on 544-CIO's ability to defend itself.<sup>25</sup>

Third, and finally, on September 19, Minnesota State Labor Conciliator Blair issued his decision regarding who should be recognized as the sole legitimate bargaining agent for all trucking industry employees in Minneapolis. Not surprisingly given his actions in June, he ignored 544-CIO's repeated requests for a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)-sanctioned election to decide the matter, and unilaterally awarded the

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<sup>24</sup> "544-CIO Statement on Seizure by AFL", *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, June 18, 1941, p. 1L.

<sup>25</sup> For at least one of the defendants, the toll was too much. On October 4, 1941, shortly before the group was to go to trial, Grant Dunne killed himself.

bargaining rights to 544-AFL. This decision effectively stripped 544-CIO of its legal standing as a union, and automatically awarded all 544-CIO contracts and members to 544-AFL.

Besieged by armies of union staff, stripped of its material resources, tied up with criminal charges, and denied its legal standing to represent workers, 544-CIO had effectively been reduced to a union in name only. 544-AFL had won, and Tobin had successfully purged the Minneapolis Trotskyists from the Teamsters.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

What is most notable about the story of the defeat of 544-CIO is what it is not. It is not the story of conservative leadership emerging out of the “natural” oligarchic tendencies of organizations. It is not the story of individualistic, pragmatic, paycheck-oriented workers rejecting the Trotskyist leaders and their politics that go against core “American” values. It is not the story of ruthless anti-union employers, with their private armies and legal teams, mentally and physically beating workers into submission. It is not the story of the intended and unintended impacts of labor law on union conservatism or worker activism. It is not even really the story of union bureaucrats using high-handed tactics to expel union militants, even though that is certainly the end result of what happens.

Rather, the story I have sought to highlight in this study is that of the choice that U.S. workers faced at a critical juncture in their history between two potentially viable trajectories of union development as they branched away from the previous craft-business unionist model. Each of these was based on a competing vision of what the labor movement should be: a social unionist vision of a broad based, ideological movement for

democracy and equality, based on principles of solidarity and collective action; or an industrial-business union vision of a more focused, practical set of organizations dedicated to achieving immediate, tangible, material gains for their broad membership through efficient service and professionalized negotiations.

Traditional theories of union development such as American exceptionalism and the iron law of oligarchy have tended to obscure the real conflict that existed between these two paths in the 1930s and 40s. Instead, they see an almost natural progression from the worker upsurge of the 1930s to the bureaucratized business unionism of the 1940s. What I hope to have shown in this paper is that there was nothing natural about industrial business unionism's rise to dominance in this period. Rather, in the case of the Teamsters, as proponents of social and industrial-business unionism literally battled it out in the streets, the industrial-business union innovators ultimately were able to mobilize coercive state power to tip the scales decisively in their favor.

In highlighting the importance of coercive state intervention, I do not mean to discount the importance of other factors that scholars have emphasized in analyzing the rise of U.S. business unionism in the postwar period. Indeed, examining factors such as increased economic prosperity, legislative and judicial attacks (particularly the Taft-Hartley Act), renewed employer aggressiveness, red-baiting, the impact of the war, and the legacy of U.S. racism (particularly the failure to organize the South), among others, greatly enhances our understanding of this critical transformation within the U.S. working class. Rather, what I do mean to argue is that a theoretical analysis of the rise of postwar U.S. business unionism is necessarily incomplete without a consideration of the critical role of coercive state power.



Moreover, in reconceptualizing the emergence of industrial-business unionism as the outcome of a struggle between competing models rather than a natural trajectory, this study of the Minneapolis Teamster case enables us to see the dynamic inter-relationship between state actors and intra-class struggle in shaping this critical moment of U.S. working class reformation. Specifically, the conflict between business and social unionism provoked both a shift in the way in which the state exercised its coercive power against the labor movement, as well as a shift in the organizational practice of business unionism itself.

At the level of the state, the case dramatically illustrates ways in which state actors can enable, constrain, and channel unions' organizational development. State Labor Conciliator Alfred P. Blair was only able to render his decisive decision in 1941 as a result of the power vested in him by the recently-passed Minnesota Labor Relations Act of 1939 (MLRA), which was a state-level analogue to the National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act of 1935 (NLRA). Prior to the enactment of such laws, the idea that the state could arrogate itself the power to determine which entities workers could or could not choose to represent them simply didn't exist. Indeed, prior to these laws state and federal governments showed little interest in allowing workers any choice for workplace representation, preferring instead the much blunter instruments of the legal injunction and the police or National Guard as their means of choice for disciplining labor (Boyer and Morais 1975; Hattam 1993; Zieger and Gall 2002; Zinn 1980).

The worker upsurge of the 1930s changed that. Instead of seeking to destroy labor, state and federal governments now implemented legislation to foster union development. But as the Minneapolis case clearly shows, this was union development of

a *particular* kind. The MLRA, through Blair's decision, provided legal recognition to 544-AFL, allowing it to grow and prosper as a union based on a business unionist model. At the same time, it denied recognition to 544-CIO, thus removing its more radical social unionist model as a viable option. Thus, the case shows how such legislation, conceived of and advanced as a means of supporting labor, had the additional consequence of channeling union development in a more conservative direction in certain key instances.

At the level of the labor movement, the case of the Minneapolis Teamsters points to a shift in the nature and organizational practice of business unionism. Specifically, it shows how the industrial-business unionism that emerged out of the 1940s differed fundamentally from the craft-business unionism that had preceded it. Not only did it look different in terms of the size and composition of its membership, but it acted differently too, particularly with regard to its relationship towards the state. Breaking away from the voluntarist approach of the past, industrial-business unionism emerged from its battles with social unionism recognizing that the state, led by Roosevelt's New Deal administration, offered a valuable new repertoire of actions for achieving internal union political goals. Thus, instead of hewing to a fairly strict anti-state intervention line as with the craft-industrial unionists, the industrial-business unionists developed a more opportunistic attitude towards the state, mobilizing it as a tool inside the union when it would suit their needs.

While the Minneapolis Teamster example is only one early example of this possible shift, if it is in fact indicative of a broader pattern within the U.S. labor movement we would expect to find other industrial-business union innovators deploying similar tactics in other unions to move against political opponents. A potentially fruitful

path for future research would be to examine if and how such a shift occurs more broadly within U.S. unions in this time period.

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