

Labor Must Clean its Own House **Hands off the Teamsters!**

On 10 June the U.S. Justice Department announced that it is preparing a lawsuit against the 1.7 million member International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) under the infamous Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO). The suit is aimed at taking over the union and, if successful, will cost IBT president Jackie Presser his job. This is somewhat ironic, as Presser was head of one of two major unions which openly supported Ronald Reagan's election to the White House. (The other was PATCO—smashed by Reagan in 1981.) In Presser's case, the irony is compounded by last year's revelation that he had been on the government payroll for years as an FBI informant.

The suit is the latest move in an ongoing campaign by the U.S. government to establish tame, housebroken unions that police the workers in the interests of the ruling class. Beginning with the Wagner Act in 1935, continuing with the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 and the Landrum-Griffin Act in 1959 and backed by an endless number of court injunctions and criminal prosecutions, the U.S. government has continually sought to extend the control of the capitalist state over the organized workers movement.

Last March, in what was clearly a dress rehearsal for the RICO attack, the government got a court-ordered takeover of Teamster Local 560 in Union City, New Jersey and appointed Joel Jacobson, a Democratic Party politician and former union bureaucrat, as virtual dictator. The local's leaders, like Anthony (Tony Pro) Provenzano, were widely known to have mob connections. Tony Pro's daughter Josephine "earned" \$71,000 a year as the local's nominal Secretary-Treasurer. This kind of thing made it easy for the Reagan administration's top cop, Ed Meese, and his underlings in the Justice Department, to masquerade as reformers and "friends" of the Teamster rank-and-file, who only wish to "clean up" the union.

For years the reformist left has advocated the tactic of "using" the bosses' government to battle corrupt union bureaucrats. A classic case, widely debated in the left press at the time, was when court-ordered elections

supervised by Richard Nixon's Labor Department put Arnold Miller into the presidency of the United Mine Workers in 1972. Virtually every centrist and reformist outfit in the U.S. left lined up to "critically support" Miller in his campaign to replace the corrupt and murderous regime of Tony Boyle. Miller was eventually driven from office in 1977, but not before he demonstrated the logic of his Labor Department candidacy by negotiating two sell-out contracts, and siding continually with the courts and the coal bosses against wildcat strikes by rank-and-file miners.

A witless article in the 22 June *San Francisco Examiner* by Ken Paff, National Organizer of the social-democratic Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), shows that the reformists learned nothing from the UMW experience. Paff cites Miller's election as a positive example and says:

"If the Justice Department is going to sue the top IBT officials, using the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, let it be to give the members a chance. The Press has reported a court-ordered trusteeship in which the 18 members of the union's general executive board will be removed and replaced....But it's difficult to see how a trusteeship over the...IBT could be workable....What would inspire Teamsters members is providing them with the right to elect their top officers, a right Teamsters do not now have...."

The first principle of socialist trade unionism is unconditional opposition to *all* government intervention in the workers movement. The government is no neutral mediator standing above the class struggle, it is the instrument of the bosses—their "executive committee." Each time a union leadership knuckles under to a court injunction, each time a government agency runs a union election, the labor movement gives up a bit more of its independence from the capitalists—and therefore its ability to act in the interests of the working class.

- ***Hands off the Teamsters!***
- ***Labor must clean its own house!***
- ***Down with the Presser Bureaucracy!***
- ***For a class-struggle leadership in the IBT!***