Chapter 4

Pork and Not So Simple Unionism: International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)\(^1\)

I run this office just like—just like an oil company or a railroad. Our business is selling labor. We use businesslike methods. Business people have confidence in us.

Dave Beck, 1938 (Neuberger 1938, 167)

Running a union is just like running a business. We’re in the business of selling labor. We’re going to get the best price we can.

Jimmy Hoffa, 1959 (Martin 1959, 27)

The Teamsters exemplify a union that serves the material interests of its members well. Between 1939 and the early 1950s, the period dominated by the organizational innovations of Dave Beck and Jimmy Hoffa, wages for drivers and helpers more than doubled and hours somewhat decreased (BLS 1979, 283-5).\(^2\) Fringe benefits became generous, and levels of safety and security improved significantly (Witwer 2003, 153-155; Gillingham 1956). Beck’s methods proved to be especially effective. By 1950 Oakland, San Francisco, and Seattle had the highest wage rates in the country; Spokane and Phoenix had the highest rates for smaller cities (Witwer 2003, 152). The union also experienced remarkable growth: From an estimate of 32-50,000 members at its commencement in 1903 (Moldea 1978, 18-19; Garnel 1972, 47) to over 1,000,000 by 1950, 1.7 million by 1961, and over 2 million by 1969.\(^3\)
Ahlquist and Levi, p. 2

The leadership of the union has always committed to providing its members not just bread but pork chops (Time Magazine 1948), and they have been willing to do almost anything to achieve that goal. This mindset, with modifications, was firmly in place from 1907 through the early 1970s, the period we are using for comparison with the ILA, ILWU and WWF. After that it began to undergo serious changes as a consequence of member pressures, governmental requirements, and leadership reforms.

Organizations of horse-and-wagon drivers have existed in the United States since the 1850s, when driver-owners began coming together to negotiate rates. With drivers becoming employees rather than owners, the Team Drivers’ International Local (TDIL) formed in 1899 and registered with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). After a major schism in the union and with the encouragement of AFL president Samuel Gompers, the union reemerged as the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) in 1903.

Cornelius P. Shea was elected the first president. Shea retained office after a corruption scandal in 1906, but a secession movement in the union led to his defeat in 1907 by Daniel Tobin. Tobin won by twelve votes in that first contest, but he went on to win many more elections, serving until 1952. Tobin’s immediate successors were Dave Beck (1952-57) and James R. Hoffa (1957-71). In this period the organizational culture went through several major revisions. Technological changes transformed an industry composed of horse-drawn carriages into an industry that was a lynchpin of US commerce and transport. The regulatory demands of the industry produced an altered view of government’s role; the traditional AFL aversion to state intervention gave way to a demand for legislation and its enforcement. Organizational strategies evolved in
response. What changed hardly at all were leadership’s expectations of members. The leadership asked them to be economistic, which leaders of both business and social unions considered reflective of the baseline preferences of members. The occasional effort, most notably in Minneapolis in the 1930s and 40s, to raise other goals or to democratize the union were stifled. The leadership’s belief about the state of the world was one in which strong unions, working cooperatively with business, could make everyone better off. Leadership beliefs were reinforced, even confirmed, by the improvements in the material well-being of the dues-paying members.

The early Teamsters drove hacks and taxis, delivery wagons for products such as milk and laundry, and “trucks”, large draft horse-drawn vehicles, to transport larger freight. Most worked for localized businesses, but some were employees of inter-city and national express companies, e.g. Wells Fargo or American Express (Witwer 2003, 8-13). Changes in technology, particularly from horse-drawn wagons to motorized trucks, led to a shift from a craft to an industrial orientation—although the leadership’s rhetoric of a craft union lagged behind the reality. With the inclusion of over-the-road truckers, who use the interstate system to haul goods over long distances, the IBT gained the ability to disrupt the flow of goods nationally and enhanced the threat of a strike.

The union early on established an organizational culture that, while labeled as a business union in the tradition of Gomper’s AFL model, is far more complex than that. It does have a principal that it run itself as a business a la the opening quotes from Beck and Hoffa, and, perhaps more importantly, it fosters a symbiotic and positive partnership with business. It rejects the idea of class war and any demands, let alone desire, for the destruction of capitalism. While encouraging donations to charity—by members and by
the union as a whole—until fairly recently it has eschewed any political actions or social justice commitments that fail to serve the direct interests of members. In may have, in its earliest days, adhered fairly closely to Gomper’s principal of “voluntarism,” which privileged economic over political action (Eidlin 2009, 251). Until the 1930s, it had opposed all state intervention in the relations between employers and unions. President Tobin and other officers of the IBT supported—with reservations—the New Deal legislation, including the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), but they insisted that there be no interference in the internal affairs of the union (Eidlin 2009, 253). Subsequently Tobin and, most certainly his successors, Dave Beck and then Jimmy Hoffa, used the power of the state to their advantage, and they definitely engaged in partisan politics. The union’s primary goal is to represent the workers in the sale of their labor in order to obtain for them both the highest possible material return from the employer and dignity and pride in being a member of the IBT. In return, the union demands dues, loyalty, and a willingness to engage in actions the union deems necessary.

The Teamsters have a tradition of strong local autonomy (Dembo 1986; Romer 1962, 86, 92, 95; Garnel 1972; Witwer 2003). Increasingly, however, the union was centralized, and management was top down. The Joint Councils of unions in cities and states and then the conference system coordinated organizing and contract negotiation under the control of the International. The locals retained the powerful tool of secession, and its threat often evoked concessions—or repression—from the center. The International officers, for their part, strategically used the process of charter granting and the threats of trusteeship and charter revocation to keep recalcitrant locals in line. The General President even had the power to disapprove of local union bylaws. The rules in
the Constitution, largely dictated by the powerful executive committee, steadily enhanced International control over the locals (Romer 1962, chapter 7).

The occasional local encouraged rank and file democracy, but this was not the norm. The general membership has little voice in policy-making at any level. Until 1991, when federal trusteeship introduced the direct vote of officers, the IBT chose its international leaders through indirect elections by the delegates who attend conventions where nominations are made. The selection and seating of delegates is the subject of extensive discussion in the Teamster constitutions and conventions. International officers and organizers were automatically delegates. In 1940, an appropriately eligible local (chartered for at least three months, in good standing, and up-to-date with its dues) would get one delegate for every 300 members; by 1961 it was one delegate for the first 1000 members and an incremental delegate for every 750 members or majority fraction after that. This process largely remained unchanged through 1971.5

Bargaining is relatively secret and closed, but since 19xx the contract does require ratification by a majority of the membership as a whole.

What principally distinguishes the organizational culture of the IBT from the Gompers’ model of business unionism is the combination of its expansionist approach to organizing, its celebration of strong-arm tactics, and its links with organized crime. To some extent, these are intertwined. The leadership has a commitment to enriching its members and doing anything necessary in pursuit of that goal. Enlarging the union brings in more dues and more clout with employers and government. The now past willingness to use violence when necessary and acceptance of alliances with organized crime proved effective strategies for warding off competitors, gaining union recognition,
and keeping both employers and resistant workers in line. Witwer (2000; 2003 passim, summarized on 237-8) argues that endemic Teamster corruption has two sources, its locus in economic sectors where employer collusion the norm, and the anti-union sentiment that defined strong and successful unions as extortionists.

The original base of the Teamsters was in the transport sector, but since the 1940s its organizers have attempted to attract all kinds of workers, be they in the government, service, or industrial sectors. This tendency became even more pronounced after WWII. An expansionist policy is largely responsible for the size of the union, approximately 1.4 million members today and over 2,000,000 at its peak (IBT 2010), its maintenance as one of the largest and most diversified unions in the United States, and its relative wealth. Expansionism led to savage jurisdictional fights, most notably in the late 1930s with the West Coast longshore workers over who controlled the warehouses that served the docks (Neuberger 1938; Schwartz 1978) and in the 1970s with the United Farm Workers. Another consequence was the recruitment of women although integration and equity in pay and treatment were slow and incremental (Vosko and Witwer 2001). Interestingly, since its early days, the Teamsters had accepted and actively recruited African-Americans, despite the exclusionary practices of other AFL unions. Several factors contributed to the willingness of “…leadership to move against the current of the times to build an interracial organization” (Witwer 2002). Teamsters were largely unskilled workers, and the union therefore had no apprentice program, the major means of exclusion in craft unions. The union also recognized the increased difficulties of achieving recognition if it had tried to alter the power of employers to retain workers they already had and to restrict the pool of labor for the future.
Historically, the Teamsters were renowned for violence directed internally to encourage reluctant recruits to join or to discipline the rebellious and violence directed externally against those with whom they were battling, e.g. employers or unionists who violated Teamster perceptions of jurisdictional boundaries. They had a reputation, seemingly well deserved, for busting arms, heads, and buildings. This was unofficial policy condoned and encouraged by leadership.

The Teamsters have stood accused of at least three kinds of corruption. First was the accusation of labor racketeering in which the Teamsters enforced restraint of trade and intimidated employers. In many instances, this involved legal practices, and the charge was laid by those opposed to the growing power of the IBT (Witwer 2000, 2003). In other cases, it became a second kind of corruption, in which the Teamsters paid off the police and local officials or allied themselves with mobsters. The Teamsters and, in particular Jimmy Hoffa, have a documented past connection with organized crime. The relationship may have enabled the union to increase the pie for all and to ensure relative labor piece, but it did involve illegal actions. Finally, there is a third kind of corruption, the larceny that lines the pocket of a union official. There is also documentation of this within the IBT. Dave Beck was the poster boy here. Interestingly, illegal corruption seems to have been largely tolerated by members unless it was at their expense.

As with any large union, factions exist in the Teamsters and have throughout its history. There were radicals not unlike those in the ILWU, and there have always been voices demanding greater rank-and-file democracy and even political commitments. The choice of the Teamster’s particular organizational culture and its continued maintenance of that culture was not and is not a given. In the past, radical locals, notably in
Minneapolis, had a vision of the Teamsters consistent with what that of the ILWU. Yet, this was a path not taken; indeed it was a path blocked and then destroyed by IBT international leadership in collaboration with government in 1941 (Eidlin 2009). In later years, particularly in the aftermath of Hoffa’s 1961 election, a number of reform groups emerged ultimately leading to the election of Ron Carey.

In the last decades, the link with organized crime appears to have been broken. There is a greater openness to rank and file participation, as indicated by the direct vote for officers. Nonetheless, from the 1930s until at least the imprisonment of Jimmy Hoffa, the Teamster organizational culture, as described here, appeared strong and resilient. This was the work of three key figures, Dan Tobin, Dave Beck, and Jimmy Hoffa. It is to the relationship among the key leaders, the institutional arrangements of the union, and the membership that we now turn.

Daniel Tobin

As president of the Teamsters, Tobin became one of the labor leaders C. Wright Mills characterized as “the new men of power” (Mills 1948). When Mills published his book, Tobin and the general secretary of the Teamsters were the highest paid labor leaders in the AFL at $30,000 a year, $10,000 more than the highest paid leader in the CIO (Mills 1948, 100). During Tobin’s long reign, the Teamsters grew from approximately 40,000 to over 1 million members (Garnel 1972, 47).

Under Tobin, the organizational culture of the Teamsters was established. He first tried to maintain a craft union orientation, later tried to resist a governmental role in employer-labor relations, and, as an active supporter of both Woodrow Wilson and Al Smith and then a good friend and confident of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, most certainly
engaged in partisan politics. He even chaired the Democratic Party’s National Labor Committee (Garnel 1972, 43-4; Leiter 1957, 41). His own beliefs about the world changed with technological, economic and political changes that led him to revise his model of how the Teamsters could best serve its members. What did not change was his commitment to top-down management, business unionism, and personal honesty. He had difficulties overcoming local prerogatives, practices and corruption, but he kept himself and, to the extent he could, the international free of taint.

The IBT’s mission was to serve its members; there were to be no other ideological goals. He—and Beck—even opposed sympathy strikes on behalf of other union campaigns. The fact that they became contractually and legally problematic was a large part of the explanation. However, Tobin feared overextending strained central coffers staff (Stier 2002, 66) while Beck believed sympathy strikes were costly relative to the return (Gillingham 1956, 62).

Tobin took over a union whose locals fiercely guarded their autonomy and, in some cases, corrupt practices. They used the threat of secession to maintain control. He faced an executive board composed of men who resisted centralized power, but he ultimately achieved his goal by changing rules and enlarging the professional staff under his authority. He used the Constitutional Conventions to great advantage. He skilfully managed floor debate, proposals, and committees with the aid of his personal assistant. When he first took office the Convention met annually; by 1915 it began to meet every five years.

In his initial decade as president, Tobin faced considerable contention and resistance. But he also had significant victories. By 1908 the Constitution was changed
to permit the General Executive Board to put locals into trusteeship if their leaders were incompetent, corrupt, or not serving members well. This broad writ gave the Executive Board a huge amount of discretion, and Tobin used it to his advantage. He resisted and dealt harshly with those who advocated any alternative to his vision of the Teamsters. In order to enforce the compliance of the locals, Tobin used the threats of trusteeship and, ultimately, charter revocation (Garnel 1972, 61; Witwer 2003, 68), as did Beck and Hoffa after him (Witwer 2003, 142).

The strategy of charter revocation had a notable failure in the 1930s. In the aftermath the “Teamster Rebellion” (Dobbs 1972), the successful 1934 strike in Minneapolis, Tobin tried to purge Local 574 of the Trotskyists, Farrell Dobbs, Carl Skoglund, and the Dunne brothers (Ray, Grant, and Miles), who ran the local and the strike, and he revoked the local’s charter when it resisted the purges. He created a new local, but it floundered and was ultimately merged with the old 574 into a new 544 with Dobbs and the Dunne’s once more in charge.

Dobbs then went on to organize interstate over-the-road truckers, who he recognized—as did Beck at about the same time—as the future of the union. Both he and Beck recognized the importance of multistate organizations and used innovative strategies such as leapfrogging. Unionized truckers and intercity haulers with union contracts would leap frog companies that refused to unionize, bypassing them and refusing to do business with them (Stier 2002, 114; Dobbs 1973, 236-7; Witwer 2003, 137). They also used the secondary boycott to good effect. Nor was Dobbs afraid to use strikes. Their efforts gained considerable momentum in 1937. By 1938 Dobbs had achieved “a master agreement involving 175 locals and signed by 1700 trucking

I wouldn’t agree with Farrell Dobbs’s political philosophy or his economic ideology, but that man had a vision that was enormously beneficial to the labor movement. Beyond any doubt, he was the master architect of the Teamsters’ over-the-road operations.

Dobbs also influenced Beck (Romer 1962, 85). Although there is some debate about who did what first, they undeniably were proceeding along similar paths at essentially the same time.

Dobb’s success enhanced his power within the IBT. After a series of successful organizing drives in 1939 Tobin asked him to be one of the general organizers for the union and given authority in the central states for the over-the-road campaign (Dobbs 1973-4). A year later, however, he left to work for the Socialist Workers Party.

The Minneapolis local continued to pose a threat to the dominant Teamster culture even as it significantly expanded the membership of the IBT. When Local 544 actively opposed United States entry into World War II and succeeded in getting the Minneapolis Central Labor Council to follow suit, Tobin saw his opportunity. In 1941 he used a suit filed by dissident members within Local 544 as the basis for investigating the leadership, and he then relied on an FBI report on the local as a basis for imposing trusteeship. Once again, the Dunne brothers and their allies outmaneuvered Tobin. They obtained a charter to become a CIO affiliate as the Motor Transport and Allied Workers Industrial Union, and they won a clear majority vote for secession.
Tobin ordered Dave Beck to go to Minneapolis to win the members back, but it was Hoffa who masterminded and ran the ensuing campaign and literal battle in the city’s streets (Russell 2001, 79-82; Sloane 1991, 28-31). The conflict ended as a result of a federal action combined with state action under the new Minnesota Labor Relations Act (MLRA), a law that permitted intervention in the internal affairs of the union. A district judge subsequently awarded what was now the CIO local headquarters and its contents to the AFL local, and the Minnesota State Labor Conciliator unilaterally decided that AFL local 544 was the sole and legitimate bargaining agent for all trucking industry employees in the state. Almost simultaneously, a federal grand jury indicted twenty-nine of the 544 activists under the Smith Act on charges of sedition and conspiracy to overthrow the government, and key members of the Minneapolis leadership, including Dobbs were convicted, and jailed. Four of the leaders were also indicted for embezzlement and grand larceny.

And what of the general members in Minneapolis? Had their preferences and beliefs been changed by the radical leadership of CIO Local 544? That remains unclear. There were enough dissidents to cause serious trouble, but, yet, the leadership got the votes it needed for its own elections to office and for the secession to the CIO. A Teamster organizer in Minneapolis argued that “These fellows are like a pendulum on a clock which swings back and forth—CIO—AFL—CIO—AFL” (cited in Eidlin 2009, 257). Dobbs argued that many (but hardly all) had become convinced that class warfare was the way to think about their relationship with employers and that most sincerely sought an organizational culture distinct from that offered by Tobin and the IBT (Dobbs 1977, 76-7, 120; also see Dobbs 1973, 243-4).
With the victory over the left secured, President Tobin and his successors, Dave Beck and Jimmy Hoffa, reasserted their preferred organizational culture, and the majority of the members appeared to come to support it, even in Minneapolis. Beck and Hoffa were Tobin’s henchmen, and his granting to them the control of key districts gave them a degree of autonomous power and considerable influence to help mold the union and its organizational culture. Both were brilliant organizers, who brought large numbers of new members into the IBT. Both were strongly committed to making the workers far better off than before, and both succeeded in doing so. Neither had time nor tolerance for notions of general class solidarity or social justice issues that did not directly serve IBT dues-payers. Both were hugely popular, but both also acted to suppress dissident voices.

**Dave Beck**

David Daniel Beck, born in 1894, lived most of his life in Seattle, Washington. He dropped out of high school to help support his family (Morgan 1982, 216-7) and in 1917, Beck joined IBT Local 566, the Seattle Laundry and Dye Drivers Union. After returning from the war, Beck’s antagonism to the Seattle General Strike of 1919, which he viewed as pointless and idealistic, influenced his perspective about how best to run a successful labor union (Morgan 1982, 218). He resumed work as a laundry truck driver and eventually became business agent of Local 566. In 1927 Tobin appointed Beck as a full-time organizer for the Teamsters. Throughout the 1930s, Beck established himself as an innovative and successful organizer on the West Coast. In the 1940s and 50s, he became a national figure in the union, the American labor movement more generally, and in national politics. He became General President of the IBT in 1952 but only served until
1957, when he was accused of grand larceny and then in 1959 of tax evasion, crimes that sent him to the McNeil Island Penitentiary in 1962.

Dave Beck spoke of an “industrial peace” that labor and capital could achieve if they learned to work together (Beck 1946, 1947). Beck encouraged employer trade associations in order to produce price stabilization and eliminate unfair competition (Garnel 1972, 69-72). Beck prevented employer violation of the rules of the association with the credible threat of the refusal to load and haul their goods. If he thought there were too many firms in an industry, he would restrict further entry by refusing to sign a contract with a new employer, while at the same time squeezing the marginal firms out of the market.

In Beck’s perspective, workers were analogous to customers, albeit of the union. They paid dues and received material benefits in improved wages, hours, and working conditions. To that end, Beck stated, “There is only one thing in Christ’s world that 99% of our people have that’s for sale: their labor…And that’s what I’m representing—the sale of that labor” (Beck 1988). He claimed, “Everything else is incidental to wages, hours and improved working conditions for the Teamsters’ membership. What are the men getting for what the men are paying?” (Time Magazine 1957a).

In the first of two times Beck appeared on the cover of Time, the reporter finds, “He wants his minions to prosper…He not only gets pork chops for his unions but disciplines them with an iron hand” (Time Magazine 1948). Beck assumed that regular union members neither understood nor cared about the complexity of union negotiations. He put important decision-making responsibilities in the hands of professionals who were paid highly enough to sufficient to attract those who could run the union efficiently
In theory, Beck believed that a union should be run much like a representative government (McCallum 1978, 241). “I am a firm believer,” he said, “that the administration of a local union should be responsible to the members, but it should also have responsibility. It should be able to make decisions…Truck drivers can’t do those jobs. But they can decide whether we are getting them what they want and re-elect the officials who do get them what they want” (Morgan 1982, 221). Thus, if high-level IBT leadership was not sufficiently “delivering the goods,” there were mechanisms available to the membership to replace that leadership.

However, Beck gave the rank and file no real opportunities to decide which “goods” they wanted in the first place or otherwise express their opinions. When he assumed new jurisdictions, he integrated them into the union without giving a single thought as to what their unique preferences might be. Beck stated, “Unions are big business. Why should truck drivers and bottle washers be allowed to make big decisions affecting union policy? Would any corporation allow it?” (quoted in Witwer 2003, 139).

He also used trusteeship to advantage. Beck would allow the rank and file to choose their leadership and then personally judge its performance based on the union’s growth and delivery. If the leadership was unsuccessful according to Beck’s standards, he would put the local under trusteeship, effectively giving a position of virtual dictatorship to a trustee (Romer 1962, 105; Witwer 2003, 140-2). This enabled Beck to guarantee competent leadership, keep internal conflict within a local from spreading, make locals finance their leadership, and control the locals through leaders he appointed.
Trusteeships proved an effective tool for suppressing opposition within the locals, according to those representing dissidents (Hass 1955, 7) as well as more objective observers (Romer 1962, 106). He used it to quash wildcat strikes, as in the case of the Seattle Taxi Drivers in 1944, and other unauthorized actions. Through a variety of governance processes and rules, Dave Beck further institutionalized the aspects of Teamster culture that made it virtually impossible for rank and file members to express, let alone develop, other than purely economistic preferences.

Beck may have quieted the voices of his rank and file, but he was not shy about advocating his own views through speeches and writing, using strong and repetitive rhetoric. He voiced opinions about the labor movement, foreign affairs, and politics, often claiming to represent the Teamsters Union as a whole and with no acknowledgement of dissenting perspectives within the union.

In a speech to the Western Conference of Teamsters in 1946, for example, Beck supported the free-enterprise system and the potential harmony between labor and capital, stating, “We are concerned with greater industrial development in the west because we know that our people and our Labor Movement cannot prosper and grow unless we have proportionate business advancement” (Beck 1946, 2). He continued, “We have no time for the various ‘isms, particularly communism, in the conduct of our affairs” (6). He believed that communists “come in to destroy, to breed dissention, to create turmoil and misunderstanding” and did not “constitute a political party in the meaning of that term in America (Beck 1949).” On foreign affairs, he recognized the economic and political power of trade unions to “preserve democracy and advance the cause of social justice,”
and therefore donated Teamster funds to the cause of fighting communism in Europe (Beck 1957, 28-9).

Beck, perhaps more than anyone, was responsible for the ruthless expansionism that came to characterize the Teamsters. During his five years as General President, 1952-57, he reported that average yearly membership increased from 1,118,371 to 1,399,938, and organizing costs increased “tremendously” (Beck 1957, 5).

Beck’s major organizational innovation was the area conference system. Beck formed the Western Conference of Teamsters (WTC) in 1937 to overcome geographical obstacles, the increasingly regional/national nature of business, and, most importantly, a lack of adequate funding for his use and under his control (Garnel 1972, 180-1). The International, leadership initially resisted the idea of the conference system; they were apprehensive about the effects that it would have on the union’s traditionally craft-oriented structure. Beck was tireless and finally succeeded to have the system incorporated into IBT policy in 1947 (Romer 1962, 86). He was vice president by then and ensured that the general board had the power to force locals into an area conference if need be.

Beck also achieved his desired extension in jurisdiction in 1947, when the formal Teamster jurisdiction was increased to include “other workers where the security of the bargaining position above the classification requires the organization of other such workers” (Romer 1962, 9). This validated Teamster organization of whoever they deemed as giving them additional leverage in collective bargaining. One labor leader is quoted as saying that Beck saw Teamster jurisdiction to include “…anybody who sleeps on a bed with movable casters” (Time Magazine 1957b). There is little evidence,
however, that casters were a prerequisite.

Beck’s hunger for jurisdictional expansion was controversial within the larger labor movement. He used the CIO break from the AFL as an opportunity, defining as available for Teamster membership those whose unions now affiliated with the CIO. He faced strenuous opposition on several occasions from unions who believed the Teamsters were poaching, among them the Brewery Workers International Union in the Northwest in the 1930s, the western conference of the ILA (before it broke off to become the ILWU) in 1936, the International Association of Machinists (IAM) at Boeing in 1948.

Beck’s organizing drives involved the development of strong-arm, often illegal tactics (Morgan 1982, 248; Westine 1937, 39; Witwer 2003, 135). He may have sent “spotters” to Produce Row in Seattle to look for non-union workers and illegally investigate truckers to see if they were union members (Westine 1937, 50). He allegedly made it “unhealthy to drive anything for pay if you didn’t wear a Teamster button” (Morgan 1982:248). According to one report, Seattle taxicab drivers were encouraged to organize by being “rammed by automobiles with steel rails for bumpers” (Time Magazine 1948).

Jurisdictional battles often got violent, as in case of the Brewery Workers (Gillingham 1956, 41-45; McCallum 1978, 71) and the conflict over the “March Inland” in which the Teamsters and longshore fought over jurisdiction of the warehouses that served the ports (Schwartz 1978). Time Magazine (1948) claimed Beck sent in “goons” or “beef squads,” trained muscle-men who would fight for Beck and defend his turf.

Beck justified the use of violence by insisting that it was his opponents who “wrote the rulebook” (Magden 1988). If they wanted to negotiate peacefully, he would allow them to lose a fight with dignity, but he refused to take the blame if the fight got violent.
While threatened unions often greeted Beck with resistance, the employers of the industries he was trying to organize were more likely to willingly comply. Although employer preference was probably for no worker organization, many employers perceived Beck as the lesser of various evils. With Beck they avoided destruction of their business, labor unrest, and radicals on the left like Harry Bridges. By showing them that he respected their desire to earn a profit, Beck earned the trust of the employers that was critical in allowing him to pursue his jurisdictional ambitions.

Employer respect also allowed him to pursue his reputational ambitions within his beloved city of Seattle. He did this through a combination of political endorsements in charitable giving as well as glad-handing in the business community.

Under the guidance of Beck, the union made considerable charitable donations to Seattle. According to the IBT Treasurer William Mulleholz, the Teamsters contributed a total of $59,800 in large donations to organizations such as The Good Neighbor Fund, Seattle University, Seattle Rebuilding Fund, Ballard General Hospital, Students’ Association of University of Washington University, Seattle Rotary Club, and March of Dimes (Mullenholz 1958 (estimated)). Mulleholz further notes the investments in Seattle that the Teamsters made under Beck, highlighting the transferal of a total of $7,771,000 dollars in Teamster funds from Indianapolis banks to Seattle banks.

Beck commonly articulated his support for the war effort, but he paid special attention to the soldiers of Northwest. For instance, in 1941, Beck showed his support for servicemen in ways such as using $5,100 in Teamster funds to buy UW football tickets for soldiers or buying them 8,000 free hot dogs (Anonymous 1941b, 1941a). He ran Washington’s third war bond drive and used Teamster resources to buy football uniforms.
for soldiers at Fort Lewis and assist coordination between soldiers and their families (Time Magazine 1948).

Beck also provided significant political support to local officials. In 1936 he formed the Joint Council of Teamsters Promotion League, serving as an “advisory board” for the voting preferences of union members and their families (Westine 1937, 21). Beck used Joint Council 28’s weekly newspaper, the *Washington Teamster*, to announce his endorsement of candidates to the Teamsters and explain why they would be beneficial to the Teamster cause. Beck defended his endorsement of candidates by stating that, because the ballot is secret, “You cannot tell your people how to vote” (Beck 1946, 20).

In 1947 Beck’s efforts were rewarded with the kind of public recognition he appeared to seek and enjoy. He was appointed by Governor Mon Wallgren to the University of Washington Board of Regents, and he was promoted to President of the Board in 1950 (Morgan 1982, 221). He also served on committees such as the state parole board and the Seattle Civil Service Commission (McCallum 1978, 95).

Beck’s world began to fall apart with increasing evidence of illegal actions involving political favors, personal expenditures, and questionable use of Teamster funds. Beck is credited with having misappropriated about $370,000 in Teamster funds between 1949 and 1954 to build a house and pay other expenses (Witwer 2003, 159). In 1957, when the United States Senate’s McClellan Committee began investigating corruption in the labor movement, it found that Beck spent $85,000 in union funds for “personal items.” He would simply bill the union for his personal expenses. Beck also used more creative ways of acquiring union funds, such as directing his members to buy gas from stations he owned, or investing Teamster money in his own company (Morgan 1982,
Beck, of course, denies or rationalizes his misconduct (McCallum 1978, 110, 114), but he was nonetheless convinced in court and sent to McNeil Island Penitentiary in 1962.

Unlike Hoffa, Beck had no known connection to organized crime (Witwer 2003, 181), but he does appear to have bought influence, legally in some instances and perhaps not in others. He helped elect John F. Dore as mayor of Seattle in 1936 and expected favors in return. Consequently, when the IBT engaged in violent activities, the police would, at the least, turn a blind eye (Morgan 1982, 246).

Beck was extremely competent at delivering measurable improvements to his membership, and this may help explain why so many Teamsters appear to have tolerated problematic aspects of Beck’s leadership style. On the other hand, given the governance structure and the tools of dissident suppression available to Beck, it is difficult to know the extent of true disagreement or disapproval among the membership. If we think of member as customers paying for services from a union, the way Beck did, then applying Hirshman’s (1970) concept of exit, voice and loyalty may be useful; Teamster loyalty was in part a reflection of their sparse exit options. Leaving the union could mean considerable economic loss. Members who had achieved seniority with the salary and pension benefits implied were unlikely to as well elsewhere.

The organizational culture and the institutions Beck engendered may actually have reinforced members’ economistic preferences. He elaborated a world view in what he said and did. The Washington Teamster includes many examples of Beck’s (or, at least, the Beck machine’s) attempts to convey his opinions and principles. Hearing his convincing rhetoric so frequently may have convinced his audience to share his views.
and certainly signaled his expectations of them. At the least, it was part of his toolkit in coordinating action, and at the extreme it may have actually created new or upheld existing beliefs about the state of the world. His successful delivery of material benefits would have only further reinforced their acceptance of his credibility and his vision about the relationships of power and the points of leverage for influence.

Beck’s message was not simple economism, however. Beck, via The Washington Teamster and his speeches and interviews, advises members about political issues and emphasizes Teamster opposition to discrimination against minorities. In his 1957 general report to the Teamster convention, he demonstrates considerable concern with the plight of workers overseas. Still, all of these issues were bound up with member material well-being. The advice on politics was opportunistic a means to gain influence and friends who would help the IBT. Beck proclaimed, “When I look at a candidate I ask myself, what would his election do to my relations with the men I do business with?” (Morgan 1982, 263). Beck’s views about discrimination were perhaps more advanced than many of the time, but supporting minorities was also important for his expansionist recruiting (Witwer 2003, 144-6). A closer read of Beck’s report as General President reveals that he was mostly concerned with workers abroad because their welfare determined the welfare of American workers, which directly affected his constituency (Beck 1957).

Despite the efforts to convince members of a certain worldview and repress those who disagreed, there remains evidence of discord within the ranks. Not all agreed with the International’s strict policy against sympathy strikes; locals often wanted to support other unions when they “felt that the dispute [was] bona fide and a strike morally justified” (Gillingham 1956, 81). One important west coast example took place in San
Francisco during the major waterfront strike of 1934. The rank and file refused their leadership’s orders to cross the picket lines of the ILA. Indeed, the Teamster blockade of waterfront freight was of major help to the longshore action and a precipitant to violence when the employers organized alternative trucking arrangements (Dembo 1986, 30-2). In Seattle, Beck may have opposed strikebreakers, but he also opposed a general strike of the sort San Francisco was experiencing (Dembo 1986, 31).

Direct and explicit accounts of whether or not the Teamster rank and file were happy with Beck are hard to find. In the Beck-approved hagiography of Beck, a member reports, “I’ve been a Teamster for 37 years and say what you want about Beck, he did more for the union than anyone we ever had” (McCallum 1978, 18). Even if the membership did not completely agree with Beck’s principles, they are likely to have joined and remained in the Teamsters because of the material benefits and the few demands placed upon them beyond their dues. But there is also little doubt that through a variety of means, Beck made sure that the locals adopted his principles and participated in the his idea of the American Labor Movement. In this way, preference shaping may well have taken place in the Teamsters.

Jimmy Hoffa

As a young warehouseman in the early 1930s, Hoffa had been innovative in his use of strikes and effective as an organizer. He learned from Farrell Dobbs major new strategies for organizing long haul truckers and warehousemen (Moldea 1978, 28-30; Russell 2001, 33-47; Sloane 1991, 18-22). Hoffa used these techniques to great advantage, first in Detroit and then nationally. One of the most important lessons from Dobbs was the importance of overarching, multi-employer, multi-bargaining unit contracts. In 1964, as
president of the IBT, he negotiated the first national Master Contract with the trucking companies.

Hoffa allied himself with organized crime, which helped him get good contracts for the men. Hoffa did not, however, ensure that all the rents of corruption went to his members. He did get a kickback, but many of his members believed—and most probably it is true—that they did better under these arrangements than without Hoffa’s pact between organized labor and organized crime. Hoffa’s strategy was a successful application of one developed by others. Instead of spending his time organizing potential members, he devoted most of his effort to organizing the industries themselves (Russell 2001; Sloane 1991). He did this by leap frogging, refusing to deliver or pick up from businesses that refused to sign union contracts, and he also used threats and protection rackets backed up by the Teamster’s own thugs as well as the Mafia’s.

The fundamental principles of the organizational culture Hoffa helped establish for the Teamsters had three facets: improving the economic well-being and working conditions of the members; protecting and building the union; and doing this by means of a hierarchical, top down structure. This set of principles justified his relationship with the Mafia, and it made him dismiss rank and file democratic participation within the union or political activism by the union as obstructionist or irrelevant. He ran something akin to a patronage machine (as did his predecessors), providing favors to and protecting the loyal and dealing harshly with those he defined as treacherous.

The 1957 Convention (International Brotherhood of Teamsters 1957b), Beck’s last, experienced numerous controversies over the seating of delegates with anti-Hoffa groups challenging the seating of delegates. Fueling the opposition was the combination
of the AFL threat to expel the Teamsters if Hoffa was elected as the General President and the belief that Hoffa would steal the election. Hoffa, who was easily elected, became not only General President but also chairman of the convention and chairman of the constitutional committee. The 1961 convention changed how delegates were selected locally and automatically conferred delegate status on all officers and elected business agents of the local as well as providing for providing each Joint, State, and Area Council with one delegate. If the local was entitled to fewer delegates than the total of its officers, its executive board conferred delegate status. Elections among the members were only to occur if the local was entitled to more delegates.

Under Hoffa, the IBT further centralized authority in the hands of the International at the expense of the rank-and-file delegates. Beginning with Tobin, the International became increasingly intrusive in the affairs of locals as to the form and manner of delegate selection, became more capricious about the exact timing of conventions, and steadily lowered the delegate to member ratio. Hoffa took the most extreme steps by removing the rank-and-file from having any real access to the convention. A perusal of the credentials committee reports from the 1957 and 1961 conventions shows most locals with one or two delegates; few numbered over five (International Brotherhood of Teamsters 1957b, 1961b). Assuming any given local will have, at minimum, a president, VP, Treasurer, business agent, and several trustees, this rule effectively precluded the possibility of any insurgent rank-and-file movement from having access to the convention. By including delegates from Area, State, and Joint councils, the President could effectively counterbalance any insurgent voters who managed to get through the hurdles.
He also further centralized bargaining. This largely benefited union members, but there were some who benefitted more than others. By creating both a floor and a ceiling, Hoffa, according to Russell (2001, 219), created some intra-IBT tension: “Smaller, weaker locals benefited greatly, and more ambitious locals were frustrated with their inability to seek disproportionately higher wage increases. These locals often responded with threats of secession.” The 1964 Master Freight certainly improved the wages and conditions of most drivers, but there were some losers (James 1965, 345).

Hoffa was a strong and tough leader, effectively expanding the union and improving the lot of the entire membership. He got things done, and he exuded confidence. He also was very accessible to his members. His door was open, and his telephone number available. He gave favors and aid often and easily. He agreed to lead the campaign to discredit and destroy his friend and mentor Farrell Dobbs even when it was against his personal preference—albeit arguably in his long-term interest. His role confirmed Hoffa’s reputation as someone committed to upholding the union’s organizational culture. The fact that Jimmy Hoffa worked closely with organized crime when necessary also signaled his commitment—and the Teamster commitment more generally—to do whatever it took to improve the lot of the workers, or at least his workers. He engaged in actions that incurred great personal costs if it served the interests of his members.

Of course, while Hoffa was ensuring that his membership benefited from the relationship with organized crime, he did, too. He was convicted in 1964 of jury tampering and of fraud in handling of union benefits; in 1967 he began serving a thirteen-year prison sentence, which President Richard Nixon commuted in 1971 under the
proviso that he not be active in the union until 1980.

Why would members prefer a leader who acted in such ways? Or, perhaps, the better question is “Did they?” He won reelection in 1957 during the height of the McClellan hearings and with the threat of expulsion of the IBT from the AFL-CIO should Hoffa be returned to office. A Gallup poll from September found that by 3 to 1, the rank and file—at least those who expressed an opinion—opposed Hoffa’s election (Gallup 1957). Even if this survey and other observations of discontent were capturing the extent of disaffection, the fact is that the rank and file had no real voice and certainly no direct vote. There were strong oppositional candidates, however. Hoffa won handily, in large part because of the extent to which members and delegates appreciated Hoffa’s contribution and were suspicious of the motives of both the McClellan Committee and the press (Witwer 2003-7). More tellingly, in 1961, despite mounting government revelations about him, Hoffa insisted the union abide strictly by the Landrum-Griffin election requirements and handily won a very clean election—and was voted a tremendous raise (Russell 2001, 215).

Despite his conviction for raiding their pension funds, the membership allowed Hoffa to retain his union presidency until 1971, when the provisions of the commutation required him to give it up. A. H. Raskin, who covered labor organizations for the New York Times and offered up regular criticism of Hoffa, conducted a non-scientific survey of the membership in 1971 and found that Hoffa, who was in prison at the time, was regarded as a hero and martyr (Raskin 1971b, 1971a; also see Russell 2001, 223-4). One quote seems to sum up the preference ordering, “For what he did for the driver, I’d take a chance on him again. If he robbed a little, what the hell.” (Russell 2001, 224).
Hoffa’s legal trials and convictions, especially those provoked by Robert Kennedy, were interpreted by many as a consequence of Hoffa’s successes in bargaining and in challenging the power of employers and government (Russell 2001; Sloane 1991; Stier 2002, 146-7). Teamster power undoubtedly evoked antagonism from those who feared Big Labor and defined as labor racketeering any success by a union in restricting employer power over workers with threats of a strike, secondary boycotts, or other forms of workplace disruption. This was a major concern of the majority of the McClellan Committee, eager to institute stronger constraints on labor (Witwer 2000; 2003 passim and esp. ch. 9). The Landrum-Griffith Act of 1959 was the result.

In return for what he delivered, Hoffa required from his members their militancy as needed and their loyalty. There is little question that Hoffa, in the tradition of his predecessors, enforced the organizational culture with strong-arm tactics. Nonetheless, the reelections of Hoffa, the homage still associated with the Hoffa name (and skillfully employed by his son in his successful election campaign), and the persistence of the kind of philosophy of unionism that Hoffa embodied are indicators of the extent to which members supported and continue to support the union organizational culture Hoffa represented. Jimmy Hoffa and his coterie would do all that was necessary to provide good contracts and to keep the Teamsters a strong, independent union, wealthy in numbers and money. In return, members reelected them and seem to have accepted their way of doing things.

In the last decade or so, the organizational culture has experienced change. The causes are both external and internal. Federal laws and interventions have required the
union to become more democratic and have ensured that there is less fraud. Internal pressures, particularly from Teamsters for a Democratic Union and the short-haul drivers from UPS, have produced further reforms as well as enforcing federally mandates. Yet, several features of the union remain constant. The Teamsters continue to maintain a commitment to organizing everyone who moves, which enables the IBT to continue to be an energetic and vibrant organization that wields political and economic clout. While it has adapted to the heterogeneous population it serves and to a very different political and economic environment than that of Beck or Hoffa (let alone Tobin), it has not changed its basic organizational principles. It is still a business union that understands its role as providing the staff and leadership to win improvements in on-the-job wages, hours, benefits and security; membership’s job is to pay dues and to acquiesce to leadership.
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1 This chapter draws heavily on memos provided by Morgen Myrdal and by Barry Eidlin.

2 These figures may underestimate the improvements. According to Leiter (1957),

"Beginning in 1936, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has made an annual survey of union wages and hours of local motor truck drivers and helpers in cities with a population of 100,000 or more. The studies deal with minimum wage scales and maximum schedules of hours agreed upon through collective bargaining. They do not take account of rates
in excess of the negotiated minimum which may be paid for special qualifications or for other reasons, nor do they cover over-the-road drivers and local city drivers paid on a mileage or commission basis. The studies do not reveal actual wages received by truck drivers, but the minimum to which they are entitled under the contract...The studies break down the rate per hour and the number of hours per week for truck drivers in each industry in almost all major cities in the United States.”

3 These figures come from the union magazine, *International Teamster*.

4 Some revisionism in Teamster official history appears to be taking place on this question, however. The union web site proudly trumpets the involvement of its members in the Civil Rights movement and their presence at the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom (IBT 2010). While it is true that some Teamsters were Civil Rights activists and that the Teamsters early on recruited black members, the union was and remains split over issues of racial justice.


6 Eidlin argues that Tobin preferred “a go-it-alone” strategy (2009, 252).

7 This account of the events in Minneapolis is based on the original research of Barry Eidlin (2009).

8 Dobbs claims that he and those working with him originated the idea of the area conference and some of the organizing techniques, that Beck “sought to emulate our aggressiveness, using tactics of his own kind” (Dobbs 1973, 238).