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## LABOR PERISCOPE

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### Teamsters prepare for national strike

As we go to press, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters is preparing for a national strike when its master freight contract expires March 31. Requests for strike authorizations went out to all master-freight locals early last week. Two leaders from each local were summoned to Washington for a meeting on the negotiations.

The media talks about the Teamsters "backing down" from their wage-benefit package demand of between 50-60 per cent over the three-year life of the contract. But few on the inside expect much movement.

The Carter Administration appears set on forcing a strike rather than allowing the Teamsters to break its 7 per cent wage price guideline.

Teamsters officials are angry over rebukes from Carter people such as inflation czar Alfred Kahn. Kahn, after refusing to budge on the guidelines, last week told business leaders that the Administration would punish both the Teamsters and the trucking industry if they broke the guidelines, by pushing "with due haste" for full deregulation of the industry. The Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) reiterates the threat that it will not allow trucking companies to pass along wage increases through new rate hikes.

Teamsters and industry officials term the threats blackmail.

Union officials fear that the trucking industry has been "gotten to" by Carter people. Industry

negotiators show no willingness to buck the guidelines. They have made a wage offer reportedly below 7 percent.

As the master freight negotiators met in Washington, the Machinists concluded a last minute agreement with United Airlines in excess of 30 percent over three years and with an unlimited cost of living escalator. This puts pressure on Teamster negotiators to hold the line on the union's substantial demands.

The Teamster leaders see themselves being forced into a strike — the first real national strike under the master freight agreement. They see the situation as far more dangerous than in 1976, when they won a hefty boost after a brief strike. The industry gave them a hard time but saner political forces in and around the Ford Administration prevailed. This time Carter is firmly committed to carrying out the austerity program for the U.S. dictated by the International Monetary Fund.

The top Teamster leadership continues to debate strategy. Several Teamsters' leaders press for a political mobilization of the country against austerity. They say that the Teamsters can win a major victory, if they abandon a simple "trade union" strike strategy and press political demands. These leaders continue to explore the idea of using the newly formed European Monetary System and its potential to generate a U.S. economic recovery as a means of explaining contract demands to the American people.

#### From bad to worse

True to his recent promise, AFL-CIO President George Meany filed suit in federal court last week to have the Administration's wage-price guidelines declared illegal. Meany claims that the government use of procurement powers to force compliance to wage standards takes on the character of a mandatory but "unbalanced program" that emphasizes enforcement of wages. Meany's solution, as proposed in an AFL-CIO policy resolution passed last month by the Federation's Executive board, is a system of war-time-like mandatory controls. This, the AFL-CIO maintains, will guarantee "equality of sacrifice."

Not surprisingly, the AFL-CIO court action has received the enthusiastic support of 14 Republican Senators, including Sen. John Heinz III (R-Pa.) a leading force behind the Presidential campaign of Gen. Alexander Haig.

— L. Wolfe and M. Moriarty