

LABOR

'Dissidents': the union's side of the

IBT official Lawrence McHenry says Camarata would destroy the union

The following interview with International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 299 member Lawrence McHenry, currently an IBT staff member assigned to the Central Conference of Teamsters, deals with local 299's recent decision to place Teamster "dissident" Pete Camarata on probation for his attacks on the union and its leadership. Local 299, based in Detroit, was the local the late Teamster leader Jimmy Hoffa hailed from.

Camarata is national cochairman of Teamsters for a Democratic Union, one of two highly publicized groups which are seeking to oust the national leadership of the IBT. He was placed on probation following a five and one-half hour hearing March 19, at which McHenry presented charges against the TDU official of violating the obligations of IBT membership, and seeking Camarata's expulsion from the Teamsters. Camarata was found guilty by the Executive Board of local 299 of inciting illegal wildcat strikes. Under the terms of his probation and final warning, Camarata will be expelled from the union following any further violation, according to the five-page decision issued by the board.

For three years, Camarata and his TDU grouping, as well as PROD, another opposition organization, have received heavy publicity for their attacks on the IBT leadership. Here, in Part one of the interview, McHenry tells the union's side of the story. Part two will follow next week.

Q: *Why were the charges brought?*

McHenry: The charges were brought because Camarata, by many methods, in person and public statements of his own and in publications, is connected with and responsible for, as far as distribution and dissemination, material that continually attacks, belittles, libels, and slanders the leaders of this organization. In areas of contracts, as far as obligations that we have to our members to go in and negotiate are concerned, he destroys their confidence in us. He slanders the leaders of the organization, which interferes with their ability to meet their legal and contractual obligations to the members of the union.

Q: *In particular, this contract? (The nationwide master*

freight agreement, which is currently being disputed —ed.)

McHenry: Yes. He has proven and admitted that he openly did this in 1976 through his publications, his meetings, his travels. One of the reasons he does it is to further his own political ambitions and those of others who are involved in TDU with him.

He has openly admitted to being an avowed member of the International Socialist Party at several of his meetings. At one meeting in particular, he invited and introduced a speaker from England, who, again, was with a labor organization there that was completely dominated by the International Socialists. There were witnesses produced at the hearing that said that listening to him speak left them with the impression that he again was calling for a strike unless the demands of TDU were met April 1. He was asked, what if negotiations were still going on April 1, and we are working under an extended contract with the proviso that any monetary gains will be paid back retroactively.

Who is TDU? Who are some of the mainstay people guiding TDU? It's not the Camaratas. It's not some of the poor people that really believe that's the answer, that follow him blindly. It's the Ken Paffs, the people up there on top. The Steve Kendricks that have the history of fanaticism, of emotionalism. It's the Steve Earleys, who was involved with Sadlowski (The United Steelworkers dissident —ed.), tracked back to taking grants from various foundations that have a history of employer related activity to destroy unions and deregulate the trucking industry, and probably succeeded in destroying the United Mine Workers.

That's exactly what they're out to do—that's the TDU. Peter Camarata is a willing tool that is being used on a pretense of democracy to really get out and destroy the Teamsters Union and organized labor as a whole, but the Teamsters Union mainly, because the Teamsters Union is the largest, most progressive labor union in this country.

The Ralph Naders—that on pretense are concerned about the consumers, and are probably more recognized right now by the so-called consumers of this country, the average old working Joe Citizen—are probably costing the poor slob a hell of a lot of money that he wouldn't

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have had to pay if it hadn't been for Ralph Nader's "protection."

Q: *What's the difference between Camarata's view of democracy and "do your own thing"?*

McHenry: Camarata uses the phrase. As a matter of fact, when he was asked to define democracy, he found it very difficult to do. And the reason he found it very difficult to do, I find, is because he doesn't know the meaning of the word, he has nothing but contempt for it. He merely uses it, the phrase, as a part of the organization to which he belongs, because he feels it is impressive to the people, and will bring people to him.

Q: *How much of a following does he have in 299?*

McHenry: I don't think Camarata ever had any following at all in 299.

Q: *But the media leaves the impression that he is the major force outside of the union officers.*

McHenry: Isn't it funny that this guy has no problem getting major network coverage? Why? As far as I am concerned, people in major networks probably can be tracked in some way to the various foundations that he is getting funded by. To me they are just as involved as he is, and they are going to further in every way they can his efforts to destroy organized labor.

Q: *What about the importance of this finding on the ability of the Teamsters to negotiate a contract this next week?*

McHenry: I think it will — if it gets out to the people — show them in its truth and entirety, that they have been led down the primrose path by the Camaratas and that really they are jeopardizing themselves by furthering this type of thing in their contract negotiations. It will weaken this union in the negotiations with employers because it is rebellion from within and it doesn't even fit the word "union." Union means a group of working people banded together in a common cause, and that is what we are all about, really. And I think, if this is properly gotten out, if members learn from this what these people are really up to, and themselves not to be a

part of it, and fight against it as we have with the charges, it will strengthen this international union. We will be in much better shape as far as negotiations with the national master freight agreement or any other negotiations or as far as organizing of other people into our union.

It really bugs me to hear Camarata talk about members' rights. They do have rights—and there is no doubt there has been abuse of them, okay? But these guys prey on that, mislead people as to what their rights are, abuse their own rights and privileges and openly — I mean as far as the obligations and the objects of the organization, and what organized labor was formed for — and these guys turn it around and use it to further their own self-motivated positions or ambitions for positions.

Camarata, what he represents, is not only not to help the members, it is to completely destroy organized labor and to restructure this country. How in the hell can they be involved in furthering democracy? No way! I even asked him at the hearing: "What does it mean to you?" I said, "Perhaps 'democratic' or 'democracy,' these two words have a different meaning to me than they do to you. Just what do you think democracy is?" He said, "Well, uh, uh, the right to, uh, uh, as far as the contract, uh, uh..."

He really didn't understand what the hell I was asking. I don't think he has any idea what a democracy is other than a word for him to use on a pretense of doing something for members of his local union, or his international union.

Q: *It is a code phrase and nobody asks the right kinds of questions behind it.*

McHenry: It is like the next thing he will be using is apple pie, you know? Because he feels that this impresses people and appeals to them. And that is exactly what he is doing. Our rules, bylaws, constitution, our structure are recognized to be by the Labor Department and any other investigative branch, or branch of the United States government, as being the most democratic organization in organized labor. We are recognized. We are required to file our rules, the bylaws, the constitution, the structure—we are required to file it every year with the Labor Department.

In no way does it violate existing law; it parallels existing law, and even goes further than the existing law, permitting our members rights, freedoms, and areas that they can be actively involved in their union. It also sets up a set of rules that govern the people the same as we have laws in this country that govern people. What Camarata is saying is that he can any goddam time he wants to, you know, just tear the thing down.