

Consenting to be Governed: Union Transformation and Teamster Democracy

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INTRODUCTION

In their efforts to define and assess union democracy, researchers have principally relied on a “legalistic” perspective (Taft 1948; Edelstein and Warner 1976; Stephan-Norris 1998), which focuses on formal constitutional measures and a “behavioral” perspective (Lipset, Trow and Coleman 1956; McConnell 1958; Martin 1968; Nyden 1985; Stephan-Norris and Zeitlin 1992; Needleman 1998), which addresses the effects of internal parties competing for the support of the rank-and-file by projecting differing political-economic ideologies.

While these two frameworks contribute substantially to conceptualizing union democracy, neither of them measures the quality of internal governance by assessing what rank-and-file members actually think about how they are governed. The empirical literature on union democracy typically addresses constitutional structures and leadership behavior, but rarely addresses or valorizes the views of the membership. In other words, the variables typically used to measure the level of union democracy do not include directly asking the member for his or her opinion on how the union is performing. It is the intent of this article then to bring workers’ opinions into the study of union democracy.

In order to assess rank-and-file support for democratic practices, the following work presents as a case study, an opinion survey of Chicago International Brotherhood of Teamsters’ (IBT) Local 705. The local consists principally of package delivery workers, freight, cartage and tanker drivers and commercial movers. For most of the post-war

years the local's dominant employers were large freight and cartage haulers, but since the early 1980s United Parcel Service (UPS) has employed a wide majority of 705 members.¹ Once recognized as a poster child for corruption and elite rule Chicago area Local 705 has been lauded as a model of democratic reform (*Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 1998). Since an Internationally imposed trusteeship in 1993 the union has painstakingly worked to wipe off years of scandal, sweetheart-contracts and abuse of the rights of the rank-and-file.²

The following analysis will be presented in three sections. After a brief explanation of the conceptual rationale for utilizing a survey approach to measuring union democracy, findings from the rank-and-file survey including a description of the participants will be discussed and reported in frequency tables. In addition, the responses will be subjected to bivariate analysis to determine the impact of various independent democratization variables on union performance. Finally, the conclusion offers a note of caution in interpreting the survey results.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A membership survey approach to measuring the character of union governance accepts the widely held contention that democracy is by definition a collective expression of the will of the people (Pateman 1970). Simply put, the most authoritative way to know whether a union democracy is in classical terms "by the people" is to ask the people (i.e., union members). To be sure, ignoring rank-and-file opinion could produce something called a constitutional or pluralistic democratic union. However, it would be intellectually dishonest to define a union as democratic in any sense when a majority of its members believed that it was not.

Failing to acknowledge what members think can also create an overly formalistic, and truncated assessment of union governance. As argued persuasively by Parker and Gruelle (2000), without direct input and feedback from the membership on the union's governing behavior, the leadership can become disconnected from the ranks. The result is that union leaders begin to equate their judgments with what is best for the membership. Elections may still be held, meetings conducted and laws abided by, but instead of democratic ideas emerging out of an on-going member-leader relationship, they tend, as Robert Michaels (1949) has argued, to be unilaterally imposed from above. In this scenario, what passes for democratic behavior at the procedural level of analysis is actually an imposed leadership agenda.

While open, honest leadership is vital to union representation, without membership feedback, it produces what George Strauss has called a "democracy for the people" and not "by the people."³ In the end, union members must be able to pass judgment on more than contract issues or strategic planning goals. They must be able to grant their "consent" to be governed in programmatic and ideological ways. Importantly, consent is provided both before the leadership acts and post hoc as a form of feedback and approval. Consent is best measured by providing members with the opportunity to express an opinion on how they are being governed. In this sense, the work presented here offers a direct member-level diagnostic tool for measuring union democracy.

To address whether union members have consented to the form of governance that has characterized Local 705 since the 1993 trusteeship, the survey attempted to answer some fundamental questions about three critical and related areas of union behavior: membership communication, membership input, and membership

representation. These areas were selected in order to determine the level of membership consent to the most important changes implemented by the local in response to the International's administrative intervention.⁴

Membership Communication. Workers were first asked whether they were aware of the many structural and behavioral changes made at the local since the trusteeship was imposed and additionally, whether the leadership communicated openly with the rank-and-file. Prior to 1993 the local was infamous for treating the union's business like confidential state secrets. Members had little access to their stewards or business agents, and they were unwelcome at the local's offices (Bruno 2000). But because consent can only be offered when workers have sufficient knowledge of what the leadership is doing or planning to do, it is critically important to find out how information has been distributed since the trusteeship.

Membership Input. Second, members were also asked about opportunities to contribute to local decision-making and whether they were supportive of the decisions reached since the trusteeship was imposed. The International's findings revealed scant evidence that the previous leadership had ever bothered to take serious the views of the rank-and-file either before or after acting (Bruno 2000). The pre-trustee leadership had in effect insulated itself from the membership and consequently the approval or disapproval of the ranks was irrelevant to the local's behavior. But because membership consent must not be falsely manufactured but earned, it is vital to first know if the members now have input into their own governance, and secondly, do they approve or disapprove of how the local leadership has governed since the trusteeship.

Membership Representation. Finally, members were queried about the impact of the trustee and post-trustee changes on union representational behavior and on the relationship between the members and leaders. In the two decades leading up to 1993, elections at Local 705 were a fraudulent exercise, most worker grievances were lost or dropped, arbitrations were rarely filed, sweetheart contracts regularly negotiated, and external organizing all but ignored (Bruno 2000). In most situations, members were denied an opportunity to provide their leaders with informative signals about how the governing regime was representing worker interests. In order then to determine the effects of post-trustee political change on the level of rank-and-file support for democratic reform, it is essential that membership feedback be provided to the leadership.

In order to answer each of the fundamental questions workers were presented with a number of additional questions addressing various related elements of democratic unionism (Fletcher 1998). Lending greater weight to the IBT 705 survey is the realization that it represents the first and only independent analysis of Teamster rank-and-file opinions concerning union democracy. Given the difficulty in gaining access to union members, it is nearly unprecedented to construct an independent, direct rank-and-file assessment of any union's democratic temper. Additionally, in light of Local 705's undemocratic past attaining such a measurement here is particularly fortunate because it provides observers with the opportunity to assess the impact of Local 705's transformation.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

In the fall of 1999 a 57-question survey was mailed to 3,000 rank-and-file members of IBT Local 705. Respondents were chosen from a stratified random sample of non-

officers, stewards and staff designed to reach members employed in UPS and non-UPS divisions represented by the local. The number of surveys sent to workers in each division was proportional to their overall representation within the union.⁵ After excluding incorrectly or incompletely filled out surveys, and those returned in an untimely fashion a total of 241 cases (8.4 percent) were assessed. While the small number of cases is disappointing it was not unexpected and a brief discussion about the possible reasons for the response rate will be addressed below.

A respondent averaged approximately 44 years of age and the median term of membership was an even dozen years. It is important to note that with three quarter of the survey participants paying union dues for at least five years or more the survey captured members that had experienced to some degree the union's dramatic transition. This composition permits a more informative assessment of how the local has changed its charter and mode of representation.

Nearly three quarters of the respondents (72.6 percent) were working full time and 41.5 percent had earned at least a high school or general equivalency diploma. Survey participants were overwhelmingly male (88.5 percent) and white (76.7 percent). Median income for 1999 was between \$40,000 and \$49,000, with 18.5 percent earning less than \$20,000 and 2.6 percent grossing between \$70,000 and \$79,000.

Now before going further there are two representational problems with the sample that need to be addressed. First, the returned surveys included a predominance (64.3 percent) of non-UPS members and consequently under represented the local's largest unit, the UPS division. In doing so the survey responses are likely biased towards drivers of local cartage and freight companies. The effect of this pool is to slightly increase the

average age of respondents, but not the average years of union membership. The education level of the overall sample was also reduced by a minor degree with a higher percentage of UPS members than non-UPS workers holding some college credit. In addition, the median income was nudged downward with a higher percentage of non-UPS drivers earning within and below the survey median range.

The second problem with the sample is that by under representing UPS workers, responses also failed to reflect the very large pool of part-time workers in the local (only 5.1 percent of useable part-time surveys were returned compared to a much higher if still a very modest 14 percent of full-timers). While UPS consists of nearly 60 percent part-time workers, full-time package car drivers made up the majority (52 percent) of the UPS respondents. As a result of this breakdown the demographics of the participants were overly influenced by full-timers. For instance, part-time respondents were on average considerably younger, less experienced with unions, considerably less well compensated, and much more likely to be female and minority. Unfortunately, due to a series of internal union debates and governance matters that transpired after the initial survey was processed, it was impossible to send a second targeted mailing to part-time members. Under an ideal situation, a follow up mailing to part-time workers with at least seven years of experience would have improved the representativeness of the sample.

But occupational status alone likely explains only a part of the low response rate. In addition to the standard problems of a one-time mail survey, a less verifiable but probable cause for the modest cartage/freight response is the union itself. Rightly or wrongly the IBT has for most of its history been synonymous in the public's mind with corruption. While the International union was once a powerful source for dramatically

improving the working lives of truck drivers from coast to coast it is also true that it was once intricately connected to organized crime. From the sensational McClellan Congressional Committee Hearings in 1959 to the 1989 Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organization (RICO) civil lawsuit and consent order the IBT has been portrayed as organized labor's "number one enemy."⁶

After the 1991 historic referendum election for International officers the union membership has withstood 40 local and one joint council trusteeships, 217 permanent member expulsions, charges against nine International officers or appointees, the criminal conviction of an International Director of Governmental Affairs, the expenditure of \$20 million dollars in taxpayer funds trying to get the union to act democratically, had an international election overturned and saw its reform president banned from the union for misusing the membership's dues money (*Daily Labor Report* 1997 and 1999; Conboy 1997; *Union Labor Report* 2000). Under these wrenching and highly uncertain conditions it would be unreasonable to expect any rank-and-file Teamsters to easily offer their opinions about a union that "inspired the institutional equivalent of a foreign invasion" to begin respecting worker rights (Kannar 1993).

Of course Local 705 is not just any group of Teamsters working in anyplace USA. This is after all the Chicago Teamsters. At the beginning of the 20th Century Chicago was the operative birthplace of the union and it has always been a "big, brawling play-for-keeps world" for Teamsters (Dine 2000, A12). Local 705-business agent Sam Canino found out just how brawling it was when in the late 1960's he nonchalantly lifted his garage door and was greeted with a gun shot blast that blew away part of his face. Where in 1983 crime syndicate connected and union bagman Allen Dorffman was gunned

downed in a suburban parking lot. It was also where in the early morning hours of August 21, 1991 ex-Local 705 secretary-treasurer Danny Liquoroutis shot his adopted son with a .38 caliber pistol in the basement of Teamster City. And that bizarre act of self-defense or murder was preceded five months earlier by the beating of 705 Teamster for a Democratic Union (TDU) member Leroy Ellis at a local delegate-nominating meeting (Modea 1978; Crowe 1993). These violent incidents and other unflattering affairs of course happened prior to the trusteeship, which was later imposed for a plethora of different improper and nefarious acts. It should come then as no surprise to any observer, that rank-and-file members of a Chicago Teamster local still in its democratic infancy would be reluctant to express even an anonymous opinion about the union's behavior.

SURVEY FINDINGS

The following section includes a presentation of survey findings, grouped according to the three areas of study mentioned above. In nearly all cases where statistical data is reported a corresponding table is also provided. However, in those few cases where tables are not shown it is because the information was collected in a dichotomous (i.e., yes or no) fashion, or all the findings related to the survey items were fully described in the narrative.

Membership Communication

In order to determine how well informed workers were about Local 705's political transformation, they were first asked directly whether significant changes have occurred in the union since the 1993 trusteeship. A robust 63.9 percent "agreed" that significant changes had in fact been made (see Table 1). Additionally, nearly 70 percent of the respondents agreed that they were aware of the reasons given for imposing the trusteeship

and for making changes in how the union functions (see Table 2). Importantly, by a smaller proportion, about one-half of the respondents agreed that the reform leadership made them “aware” of their rights as union members (see Table 3). While this figure appears less than optimal, it is nearly twice as large as those respondents who disagreed and certainly a significant improvement over the pre-trustee days.⁷

Table 1. There have been significant changes made over the past five years.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	72	29.9
Agree	82	34.0
Neutral	38	15.8
Disagree	17	7.1
Strongly Disagree	17	7.1
NA	15	6.2
Total	241	100.0

Table 2. The trusteeship was imposed to restore integrity to the local and to protect members’ interests.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	84	35.0
Agree	83	34.6
Neutral	38	15.8
Disagree	16	6.7
Strongly Disagree	12	5.0
NA	7	2.9
Total	241	100.0

Table 3. The post-trustee leadership keeps me aware of my rights as union members.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	39	16.1
Agree	80	33.1
Neutral	49	20.3
Disagree	38	15.7
Strongly Disagree	31	12.8
NA	4	2.1
Total	241	100.0

Workers were also asked about two principal union vehicles for communicating information to members and for members to provide feedback on the leadership's performance. Prior to the trusteeship the local did not have a newspaper or newsletter. But shortly after the trusteeship was imposed the *Local 705 Update* was published. The local paper is mailed monthly to every active member and covers topics ranging from grievance panel decisions and arbitrations to political issues. Like other in-house communication devices it serves primarily to inform the membership about the accomplishments of the local leadership. While it is not (nor should it be) the equivalent of a community paper it does offer its readers an opportunity to become aware of what the local is doing as a bargaining agent. The *705 Update* has also been central to the local's reform efforts. For the first time in the local's history, the names and phone numbers of all business agents were made publicly available to the membership through the pages of the paper. An important question then for continued democratic advancement is whether or not members are bothering to read the local paper.

When asked how often they read the *705 Update*, a sizeable 60.6 percent of the respondents said "always," and another 20 percent looked at it "most of the time" (see Table 4). In addition, nearly 70 percent agreed that since 1993, "union materials have kept me informed about union matters" (see Table 5). This degree of rank-and-file faith in the top-down transmission of information would be impressive for any local union. It is even more so when you keep in mind that before 1995 union material directed at the membership was hard to find. Reading of course does not necessarily mean understanding or even becoming better educated, but it does strongly establish a showing of interest in the institution's behavior. As any classic democrat would note, paying

attention to what the government (i.e., union leadership) does is more than an important check against an abuse of power; it is a sign of political engagement.

Table 4. How often do you read the Local 705 Update?		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Never	5	2.1
Rarely	6	2.5
Sometimes	28	11.9
Most of the time	49	20.8
Always	143	60.6
NA	5	2.1
Total	241	100.0

Table 5. Since 1995 union materials have kept me informed about union matters.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	46	19.1
Agree	114	47.3
Neutral	44	18.3
Disagree	23	9.5
Strongly Disagree	9	3.7
NA	5	2.1
Total	241	100.0

A second source of reciprocal information and communication are the local’s stewards and union representatives. In a democratic union the nexus points that connect workers with their leadership are numerous. Along with reading the local paper members attend meetings, vote and campaign for officers, and run for office. In order for members to participate in the union and subsequently to consent to the union’s politics, they need to be well informed by their stewards and representatives. And in fact, most 705 respondents feel that they are. Slightly less than half of the respondents agreed that they were “kept informed” by their stewards and representatives compared to nearly 35

percent of those who disagreed. In addition, a majority also believed that their stewards and representatives are accessible “most of the time” or “always” (see Table 6 and 7).

Table 6. Since 1995 business agents and stewards have kept me informed about union matters.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	31	13.1
Agree	76	32.2
Neutral	47	19.9
Disagree	53	22.5
Strongly Disagree	29	12.3
NA	0	0
Total	236 (5 missing)	100.0

Table 7. How often do you have access to your business agent and steward (percent only)?		
Item	Business Agent	Steward
Never	7.7	8.8
Rarely	16.6	11.3
Sometimes	19.1	13.8
Most of the time	25.5	27.9
Always	20.9	36.7
No opinion	10.6	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0

While a larger number felt informed than did not the difference was not exceptionally wide. There apparently remains some dissatisfaction with the union’s outreach to its members. The survey of course does not provide a mechanism to explain the difference in respondent’s answers but one interpretation can be proffered. Worker attention to and subsequent evaluation of their union’s communication efforts is typically “event” driven. When members have a problem or deep concern they establish a closer relationship with the union leadership. Consequently, they then have a baseline to evaluate how well the union has kept them informed. It is possible that all of the respondents had equal access to information but that more of the “agrees” had more cause

to call on the union then their counterparts. The question does not of course assess whether the members were pleased with the information; only whether or not they were kept in the dark about the union’s behavior. In this sense the respondents’ answers may have tapped into a union involvement matter.

Membership Input

One indication of the local’s interest in membership input is the degree in which the ranks feel that they are encouraged to participate in union affairs. In stark difference to the pre-trustee days, a very robust 64 percent of members agree that they are “encouraged to participate” (see Table 8). Of similar contrast to the previous governing regimes, over half of the respondents concurred that they now have “opportunities to attend union meetings and programs” (see Table 9).

Table 8. Members are encouraged to participate.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	45	18.7
Agree	106	44.0
Neutral	38	15.8
Disagree	27	11.2
Strongly Disagree	20	8.3
NA	5	2.1
Total	241	100.0

Table 9. Members have opportunities to attend union meetings and programs.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	45	18.7
Agree	81	33.6
Neutral	73	30.3
Disagree	21	8.7
Strongly Disagree	16	6.6
NA	5	2.1
Total	241	100.0

Members were also asked to indicate their overall approval or disapproval of the changes that have occurred since the trusteeship was imposed. While one-quarter of the respondents remain uncertain about the changes, 45.2 percent either “strongly agree” or “agree.” Most importantly, less than a quarter of participants either “strongly disagree” or “disagree” with the changes that have occurred (see Table 10). This level of support was however, considerably less than the near 70 percent of respondents who agreed that the trusteeship was “needed to protect the members.” Apparently the members’ approval of particular retail changes has been less than their support for a wholesale change in union leadership and internal governance.

Table 10. I approve of a majority of the changes.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	35	14.5
Agree	74	30.7
Neutral	59	24.5
Disagree	32	13.3
Strongly Disagree	25	10.4
NA	16	6.6
Total	241	100.0

A final measure of approval was taken by asking workers whether the post-trustee elected local leadership conducted affairs consistent with the “best interest of the members?” While a not immaterial 30 percent “disagreed,” a much heftier 47 percent agreed that their interests were being protected (see Table 11). The nearly identical percent of respondents who both approved of the changes and believed that they were made in the members best interest, suggests that consent may be related to a rank-and-filer’s belief in whether workers as a group, and not the leadership or management are the intended beneficiaries of the changes.

Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	47	19.5
Agree	65	27.0
Neutral	46	19.1
Disagree	44	18.3
Strongly Disagree	27	11.2
NA	12	5.0
Total	241	100.0

The disapproval, however, of approximately one-fifth of the respondents to how the local has transformed, suggests to the reader the complexities involved in popular reaction to organizational change under any circumstances. But in Local 705's case change was mandated, dramatic and highly adversarial. Rank-and-file members did not get a democratic vote on whether they wanted to transform their union. If they had, it is likely that a significant number of them would not have voted for change. For a number of decades the local was ruled with an iron fist and members were treated like "dependents" of the leadership. In the "old days" a member had literally nothing to do but go to work. But since the trusteeship, opportunities for involvement have expanded and the union's business is no longer a secret.

Despite the observable governing differences, there may be a "developmental lag" between institutional change and membership attitudes. In other words, while there is undisputable evidence that the union is procedurally more democratic today than it was pre-trusteeship, members' perceptions of the union's character may not have caught up with reality. If this is the case, then the phenomena playing out here may not be unlike what occurs in emerging democratic states. Autocratic governing bodies undergo democratic reform while popular consciousness remains captured by disbelief and

suspicion of all things new. In Local 705 the old ways of acting have been dying, but perhaps the new ways of thinking have yet to be completely born.

Membership Representation

As a post hoc assessment of the local’s performance, membership feedback provides a valuable way for the membership and the leadership to build a democratic relationship. In two of the most significant and mixed findings of the survey, a plurality (44 percent) of respondents both agreed that since the trusteeship, “workers have more influence over how the union acts” and consequently, that the “union acts for the membership” (see Table 12 and 13). In both cases, however, between one-quarter and one-third of the members answered negatively. The mixed nature of the responses here, is relevant to understanding how Local 705 members evaluated the consequences of the last seven years of union representation.

Table 12. An important change is that workers have more influence over how the union acts.

Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	44	18.3
Agree	62	25.7
Neutral	50	20.7
Disagree	38	15.8
Strongly Disagree	37	15.4
NA	10	4.1
Total	241	100.0

Table 13. Since the trusteeship the union acts for the membership.

Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	31	13.0
Agree	76	31.8
Neutral	56	23.4
Disagree	34	14.2
Strongly Disagree	29	12.1
NA	13	5.4
Total	239 (2 missing)	100.0

On one hand, considering Local 705's not too distant checkered past, it is a positive sign that better than two out of five members feels that they now have more influence over what the union does and that what gets done is on behalf of the dues-payers. On the other hand, it is troubling that a third of the surveyed workers did not believe that their local had become more responsive to the views of the membership. Two related and plausible explanations may provide some insight into the nature of these responses.

First, perhaps the negative respondents are individuals who because of mistreatment or misunderstanding continue to feel disenfranchised despite the formal introduction of democratic procedures. Conversely, the positive respondents may have had good experiences with the union leadership. In the end, individual workers may well have evaluated the union's responsiveness to the membership based on their own self-interest, instead of on what was best for the collective body.

It is also possible that since the trusteeship a more open space for political disagreement has created a partisan mentality among competing groups of workers. In a classic study, Leonard Sayles and George Strauss (1953) pointed out that conflicts among interest groups within local unions are not uncommon and that efforts to deliberately increase democratic participation tend to create divisive internal battles that may leave some factions feeling marginalized (Terry 1996). But despite the messy political disagreements made possible because of a democratic openness, the leadership is still charged with the responsibility of acting *for the union* and therefore, individual member interests and institutional fortunes are not likely to perfectly align.

Feeling like you have no greater input into how things get done is not necessarily a condemnation of the system of union governance. An additional measure of democratic

reform, which helps to parse out the meaning of rank-and-file attitudes, is whether or not the trusteeship helped to rid the local of corrupt leaders. When asked if “corrupt officers had been removed from the local” about one-quarter of survey participants disagreed (see Table 14); that is slightly fewer than responded negatively to the question of workers’ influence over the union. One interpretation of this variance is that, while some workers feel that since the trusteeship their leaders are not more responsive to them, these same leaders are judged for the most part to be honest. In other words, they may not be democrats in a New England-town hall sense, but neither are they “mob-upped,” “thugs,” or “criminals.” While the pre-trustee membership was rarely given an opportunity to express their opinion about anything, what is known from a sample of written union documents is that local leaders were often charged by the membership with at best indifferent behavior and at worst with out-and-out evilness (Bruno 2000).

Table 14. The trusteeship helped to remove corrupt union leaders.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	52	21.8
Agree	74	31.1
Neutral	47	19.7
Disagree	26	10.9
Strongly Disagree	20	8.4
NA	19	8.0
Total	238 (3 missing)	100.0

In the pre-trustee days workers were treated like children; seen but not heard. A fear of reprisal for speaking out against the leadership was well founded. So what happened when the local submitted to independently monitored elections and other trappings of democratic practice? Do members now have the freedom to speak out? Does the fear of job loss or the cold sting from the back of a metal chair still represses a worker’s voice? Apparently for a small minority of workers the rights of free expression

are no greater today than they were five years ago. But for nearly 60 percent of workers, there is greater freedom to speak out now than before the International filed abuse of power charges against the Local 705 “Old Guard” (see Table 15).

Table 15. Members have the freedom to speak out without fear.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	38	16.1
Agree	97	41.1
Neutral	43	18.2
Disagree	29	12.3
Strongly Disagree	29	12.3
NA	0	0
Total	236 (5 missing)	100.0

Being encouraged to get involved in your union does not mean however, that members are taking up the charge. Union democracy should not only make possible membership participation; it needs to inspire use of the franchise. During the pre-trustee period IBT 705 rank-and-file members paid dues, went to work and rarely voted in union elections or on labor agreements and fewer still spoke out at or attended membership meetings. Thus, an important question about the behavioral consequences of 705’s democratic transformation is whether, since the trusteeship was lifted, rank-and-file participation in union activities has picked up. Voting in union elections is an obvious measure of democratic health and a good place to begin an analysis of political participation.

There have been two local officers’ elections since the trusteeship was imposed (the first one in 1995) and in the 1997 race 88 percent of the survey respondents cast a ballot. While this indicates that the survey may be over-represented by politically involved union members, it is very illuminating that nearly a third of this group “never”

voted in local elections before 1993 and approximately 42 percent either never cast a ballot or voted only “sometimes” (table not shown).⁸

Democratic leaders should be freely chosen in meaningful and honest elections, and represent their constituencies in both form and substance. Consequently, voting has become a more valued institutional good because 43.7 percent of workers believe that “elections are honestly run.” While there is a troubling 33.2 percent that remains uncertain about the validity of elections, there is a decidedly smaller number (23.1 percent), which views the contests as illegitimate (table not shown). Recall that prior to 1993 there were very few contested races for union office and where they occurred workers were rarely offered a full airing of issue positions. But here again change seems substantial. When asked if “elections provide members opportunities to address important issues,” 54.2 percent of participants agreed (see Table 16a) and nearly 60 percent concurred, “elections offer real choices among candidates” (see Table 16b).

Table 16a. Elections provide members opportunities to address important issues.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	30	13.2
Agree	93	41.0
Neutral	54	23.8
Disagree	41	18.1
Strongly Disagree	9	4.0
NA	0	0
Total	227 (14 missing)	100.0

Table 16b. Elections offer members real choices among candidates.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	32	14.0
Agree	102	44.5
Neutral	53	23.1
Disagree	37	16.2
Strongly Disagree	5	2.2
NA	0	0
Total	229 (12 missing)	100.0

More importantly, those union choices appear to be better than twiddle-lee-dee and twiddle-lee-dom. Nearly 40 percent of survey participants agreed that, “elections provide the membership with qualified officers,” while less the one-quarter disagreed (see Table 16c). Respondents also agreed that, “elections are important to how the members are represented” (see Table 16d), and that in fact, third party monitored and contested elections have improved the quality of “membership representation” (see Table 16e).

Table 16c. Elections have produced qualified officers.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	18	7.8
Agree	73	31.6
Neutral	85	36.8
Disagree	35	15.2
Strongly Disagree	20	8.7
NA	0	0
Total	231 (10 missing)	100.0

Table 16d. Elections are important to how the members are represented.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	61	26.5
Agree	115	50.0
Neutral	31	13.5
Disagree	15	6.5
Strongly Disagree	8	3.5
NA	0	0
Total	230 (11 missing)	100.0

Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	30	13.1
Agree	86	37.6
Neutral	68	29.7
Disagree	34	14.8
Strongly Disagree	11	4.8
NA	0	0
Total	229 (12 missing)	100.0

Voting is vital to democratic choice, but it’s not a very timely or particularly precise instrument to effect policy. To act immediately and with individual precision the monthly membership meetings better serve the members. One of the initial decisions made by the first post-trustee elected executive board was to move the date of the membership meetings from a mid-week evening to a Sunday morning. The new date was chosen in order to maximize meeting turnout. It may have worked. The rank-and-file survey revealed that 63.6 percent of respondents agreed that “union meetings since 1995 have been open to all the members” (see Table 17).

Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	50	20.7
Agree	100	41.5
Neutral	49	20.3
Disagree	24	10.0
Strongly Disagree	13	5.4
NA	5	2.1
Total	229 (12 missing)	100.0

Good as that figure is, it tell us little of the individual member’s actual use of the meetings as a way of being involved in the union. A better measure would be a comparison of how many annual meetings a worker attended pre and post-trusteeship. On this score the differences could not be starker. While an equal number of members

annually attended nine or more meetings both prior to and after 1995, nearly ten percent more of them had attended one or more meetings since that year. In addition, 41 percent of the respondents had never attended a single meeting before the trusteeship. That number had dropped to 32 percent following the return to a locally elected executive board (see Table 18).

Item	Before 1995	Since 1995
Nine or more	10.3	9.2
Eight to seven	6.4	6.3
Six	5.9	7.5
Five to four	6.4	9.6
Three	6.9	12.9
Two	9.3	14.2
One	14.2	8.8
Zero	40.7	31.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Going to membership meetings is an act of participation; so is walking up to the floor microphone and speaking your peace. Under the previous regimes it was a brave dissenting soul, true believer or sycophant who addressed the multitude of assembled union members. Accordingly, only 15.6 percent of respondents said they ever “spoke at any membership meeting” prior to 1995. But since the trusteeship members no longer need to supplicate themselves before the leadership in order to be recognized at a meeting and consequently, the number of workers speaking at meetings has dramatically increased (Bruno 2000). However, while speaking out is no longer a hazardous act only 18.6 percent of the survey participants have chosen to take advantage of this more protective environment (table not shown).

Nor are contemporary rank-and-filers better utilizing union educational opportunities. Roughly 9 percent of pre and post trustee respondents admitted that they

“attended union educational program” (table not shown). Now this equivalency of use hides the fact that before the election in 1995 there was little evidence that rank-and-file members had many educational opportunities available to them. On the other hand, since a reform movement slate was first elected, educational opportunities have expanded (Bruno 2000). While low membership utilization rates typically reflect individual workers’ work schedules, family commitments and career choices there is a qualitative difference in leadership between one that makes resources available for education purposes and one that does not. The former would certainly better serve union democracy.

But the low number of workers choosing to speak at membership meetings or attending educational sessions does reflect a puzzling condition about union and civic democracy. Commentators from different disciplines have noted that democratic structures and opportunities do not in themselves generate widespread democratic behavior. Having the right and the means to vote does not bring someone to the polls. Likewise, access to union meetings and the space to be recognized does not draw someone to the floor microphone. While different theories abound as to why even under ostensibly democratic conditions citizens (Dahl, 1961; Parenti 1980; Barber 1984) and union members (Cochran 1977; Parker 1998; Sciacchitano 2000; Parker and Gruelle 2000) remain silent, most theorists (Kuklinski et al, 2001) have argued that either a salient issue or a pressing need, along with a belief in the efficacy of acting is required to stimulate democratic participation.

Importantly however, scholars (Dahl 1961; Luskin 1987) also warn that the lack of democratic activity does not necessarily signal dissatisfaction with the governing

structure. If, for example, eighteen percent of the members speaking out is a sign that all is well with the union then the lack of participation here may not be troubling. But if eighteen percent means that most members do not believe it matters whether they speak out or not then Local 705 may still have a credibility problem with its ranks.

Along with rank-and-file opportunities to attend union meetings and educational programs, the effectiveness of the local’s transformation can be measured by how well the leadership has responded to workers’ grievances about management. Unlike the pre-trustee years when members’ grievances were largely disappeared, exactly half the respondents revealed that problems with management are “always” or “most of the time” investigated (see Table 19). Additionally, with union representatives on duty it comes as no surprise to find that 45 percent of respondents think that their “steward and business agent are qualified,” and the same proportion believe that they have done a “good job” (see Table 20). Significantly on both measures less than one-third of workers disagreed.

Table 19. How often are members’ grievances investigated?		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Never	9	3.8
Rarely	24	10.3
Sometimes	46	19.7
Most of the time	66	28.2
Always	52	22.2
No opinion	37	15.8
Total	234 (7 missing)	100.0

Table 20. Qualifications and Performance of business agents and stewards since 1995 (percent only).		
Item	Agents and Stewards Are Qualified	Agents and Stewards Have Done A Good Job
Strongly Agree	9.6	14.2
Agree	35.6	30.5
Neutral	27.2	29.7
Disagree	20.1	15.5
Strongly Disagree	7.5	10.0
NA	0	0
Total	100.0	100.0

It is also expected that in a democratic union the leadership will not only act on behalf of the people, but also do so with respect. For Local 705’s reform agenda it was critical that respect of the membership be shown at all times. If members did not feel that self-proclaimed reformers treated them respectfully there would be little likelihood of changing the local’s dismal trajectory. On this score considerable improvement has been made; slightly more than half of the respondents (51.3 percent) believe that they are “treated with respect,” roughly doubling the number (26.8 percent) that still feels disrespected (see Table 21).

Table 21. Members are treated with respect.		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	39	16.2
Agree	82	34.0
Neutral	54	22.4
Disagree	38	15.8
Strongly Disagree	23	9.5
NA	5	2.1
Total	241	100.0

Respecting the membership at IBT Local 705 has likely contributed to more successful grievance panel decisions, arbitrations and better contracts. But has it narrowed the status gap between officers and the membership? Sociologist Robert

Michels (1949) predicted that the “iron law” of organizations would slowly but assuredly separate the leadership from the membership and place additional restraints on union democracy. To measure whether workers have begun to bridge the “vertical social distance” (Mannheim 1956, p. 180) that would certainly separate them from their leadership in a undemocratic union, respondents were asked to identify how well they understood the actions and decisions of their officers. A remarkable 72 percent of respondents said that they have an excellent to good “level of understanding” of what Local 705 is doing (see Table 22).

Table 22. What level of understanding do you have for the policies and actions of Local 705?		
Item	Frequency	Percent
Excellent	19	7.9
Very Good	55	22.8
Good	95	39.4
Fair	20	8.9
Poor	38	15.8
Very Poor	15	6.2
Total	241	100.0

While such a response does not indicate approval or disapproval, it does signify that the institution is not an alien concept to the membership. Democracies, unlike dictatorships, are not a mystery. Democratic processes may be messy, combative, time consuming and demanding of compromise, coalition building and public relation skills, but they are understandable by anyone concerned enough to pay attention. However, one party states, elite rule or family control are built on the whims, prejudices, and self-interest of power holders. Governance of the local during much of the pre-trustee period was personal, private, irrational and thus, not subject to rank-and-file understanding.⁹

But since 1995, inclusive of all blemishes, the membership has indicated a high level of understanding for the behavior of the local.

Scholars of union democracy have noted that unions often begin to fray at the edges of a worker's sense of institutional ownership. A union "by the people" should generate a reasonably high level of confidence that the workers have ownership over their local. What sense of ownership should union members have about their organization? In the case of Local 705 the results appear ambiguous. On one hand, despite large pluralities of workers supporting numerous improvements in the local, approximately only 37 percent of respondents agreed that they now had a sense of "union ownership." Adding the one-third of respondents who remain uncertain to the nearly 34 percent who disagreed, means that two-thirds of the members are not feeling a sense of ownership (table not shown). Admittedly the finding here is negative. But seen from another perspective the results may be more encouraging. In just five years two-thirds of the membership have either developed a sense of ownership or remain open about the matter. While no pre-trusteeship rank-and-file survey exists it is not unreasonable in light of Local 705's past to interpret a slightly higher number of workers who claim a sense of union ownership than those who do not as an achievement.

One final question bearing on the union's representational function was posed to Local 705 members. Members were asked to provide an umbrella definition of Local 705. The answer in broad terms for all but a small minority is that IBT 705 is a union that "effectively represents the membership." But differences emerge when the nature of that representation is qualified. For instance, one-fifth of respondents describe the local as being effective and involving "the membership in all union matters." Another 31

percent acknowledges the local’s effectiveness but holds that it “most often acts without membership involvement,” and more often than not just “informs the membership about decisions made” by the leadership. That leaves only 17.5 percent of respondents who describe Local 705 as a “union that fails to represent the membership and denies the membership an opportunity to participate in union matters” (see Table 23). Results here would seem to support George Strauss’s important distinction between a union leadership that is democratically governing “for the people” but that has not yet found a way to allow rank-and-file workers to govern themselves.

Table 23. Which of the following statements best describes the present Local 705?		
Item	Frequency	Percent
A union that effectively represents the membership and involves the membership in all union matters	47	20.5
A union that effectively represents the membership but most often acts without membership involvement	71	31.0
A union that effectively represents the membership but basically just informs the membership about decisions made.	71	31.0
A union that fails to effectively represent the membership and denies the membership an opportunity to participate in union matters	40	17.5
Total	229 (12 missing)	100.0

A final assessment of how workers judged the dramatic post-trustee developments at Local 705 is a measurement of what particular changes workers have most closely associated with the democratization movement. To accomplish this Pearson correlations were drawn between levels of agreement that significant changes have been made and the nature of those changes. The independent variable is the imposition of the trusteeship and the reforms implemented since 1995, and the dependent variables were the following changes: (1) members have the freedom to speak out (2), members are encouraged to

participate in union activities (3), members have the opportunity to attend union programs (4), the leadership values input from the members (5), workers are protected against abuse by union officials (6), corrupt leaders were removed from the union (7), members are more aware of their union rights and (8) members have a sense of union ownership. On each of the items the correlation was positive and in all but two cases was significantly strong (see Table 24). Two findings are of particular interest. The first is the very substantial positive relationship between democratization and the value the leadership now places on rank-and-file input. Secondly, surveyed members have strongly signaled the importance of having a sense of ownership over their union.

Table 24. Relationship between agreement that significant changes have been made since the trusteeship and particular changes.	
Item	Pearson Correlation
Members have the freedom to speak out	.503**
Members are encouraged to participate in union activities	.464**
Members have the opportunity to attend union programs	.440**
The leadership values input from the members	.653**
Corrupt leaders were removed from the union	.134**
Members are more aware of their union rights	.567**
Members have a sense of union ownership	.630**
** Sig. @ .01 (2-tailed)	

As positive as the overall survey findings are, what is perhaps more encouraging is that the respondents drawn from over-the-road truckers covered under the local's Master Freight Agreement, traditionally supportive in Chicago of the conventional elite leadership, were equally or more supportive of the way that the local had transformed itself over the past seven years. When UPS workers were compared to non-UPS members there were no meaningful statistical differences in the positive direction of the responses. By modest to large margins UPS and non-UPS workers showed majority support for the changes that have occurred since the trusteeship. With few exceptions the

percentage of agreed and disagreed responses of both groups was within a few points. Overall, however, non-UPS members displayed a slightly higher-level support for democratic reforms on more of the items than did UPS workers.

The support given for democratization by members within the local's primary divisions is bolstered by the knowledge that the units displayed contrasting political loyalties. During the 1998 rerun election of the Teamsters' International contest for general president, it was commonly interpreted (perhaps mistakenly) that a vote for either James Hoffa Jr. or Tom Leedham signified a worker or local's support for continuing the reforms of the Carey administration. Voting for general president then became a proxy for furthering or restricting the government enforced changes in the behavior of the Teamsters.

In the city of Chicago vote support for James Hoffa Jr. was nearly unanimous. In fact, every local in the state of Illinois gave a majority of its votes to Hoffa and the son of the legendary Teamster leader won dominant control over the Midwest region and Chicago Joint Council. The only Chicago and Illinois exception to Hoffa's sweeping success was Local 705. Led by 705 Secretary-Treasurer Gerald Zero and President, John McCormick who was also running for the secretary-treasurer post on the Leedham slate, the local cast 58 percent of its votes for the decided underdog ¹⁰

While no figures were available to verify the vote breakdown it was a common assumption within the local that Leedham's strongest support came from UPS workers. Survey findings confirm that assumption. Leedham won nearly three-quarters of the votes cast by UPS members, but just 32 percent of non-UPS workers. The sizeable and contrasting margins should have revealed a serious fault line in the local. The campaign

for the International presidency was framed over the controversial and emotional ideas of either returning to an ugly past of mob connected union bosses or continued subservience at the feet of an oppressive federal government. In Chicago little middle ground was carved out.

To be sure, individual Teamster voting reflected more complex ideas about the union's identity than popular belief permitted. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the election was waged in near apocalyptic terms. But despite the often acrimonious and ideological nature of the race, Hoffa and Leedham supporters endorsed in near equal proportions the democratic transformation of Local 705.

CONCLUSION

The internal governance of Local 705 has apparently passed a membership consent test. After experiencing seven years of dramatic personnel, structural and procedural changes, Local 705 members gave an encouraging if cautious endorsement to the post-trustee period. On every measured item more workers than not approved of what their local leadership was doing. Support however was not overwhelming. The roughly one-quarter to one-third of respondents, who responded negatively to many questions, along with the 20 percent who were commonly uncertain of their feelings suggests a possible tipping stage in membership opinions. The local cannot ignore the one out of five "swing voters" who have yet to make up their minds about the post-trustee changes. There is potentially a near majority of rank-and-file opponents who are not supportive of the local's behavior. Some of these members may feel disaffected by the actions already taken, while others are holding back their approval until the local goes even further with its reform agenda.

Thus it would be in the local's best democratic interest to interpret the survey findings cautiously. Such an interpretation however, should not distract from the positive assessment members have rendered. In the final analysis, when asked for the first time in the local's history to evaluate the character of the union's internal governance, the membership has given an endorsement to the democratic changes it has experienced. The membership will of course have other opportunities to express its approval and to grant its consent through officer elections and contract votes.

As workers and their leaders go about the business of building a real democratic union it is important for interested observers to recognize how terribly difficult it is to go from a condition of tyranny to one of self-sovereignty. Union democracy, like political democracy is not any easier to first realize and then sustain just because it is the morally right way for people to govern their public affairs. As researchers continue to identify and test a range of democratic measures, a future challenge is to explore the relationship between union transformation and members' opinions. Union members are rarely directly asked to evaluate how they are being governed; yet locals like IBT 705 have undergone major overhauls. While membership surveys can never definitively assess a union's governing character, they can make a significant contribution to revealing whether workers have consented to being governed in particular ideological and pragmatic ways.

NOTES

¹ . The membership breaks down in the following approximate way: UPS - 11,500, Cartage - 1,200, Air Freight – 1,000, Freight - 1,000, Tankers - 600, Liquor Division – 300, Movers – 200, Municipalities – 150 and Grocery Houses - 100.

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2. The trusteeship was based on the findings of an Independent Review Board (IRB) set up by a 1989 consent decree negotiated between the IBT and the federal government to monitor the union's internal governance. In addition to the IRB the union's Ethical Practices Committee also charged the local leadership with various violations (See, Letter and report from the Independent Review Board to Ron Carey dated May 25, 1993).
 3. George Strauss' comment was made during a panel presentation titled "Union Governance in a Changing Labor Movement," at the 53rd Industrial Relations Research Association Annual Meeting, January 6, 2001, New Orleans, Louisiana.
 4. The Independent Review Board had investigated the local and filed a seventeen page report with the International union which "evidences financial wrongdoing, constitutional violations and a deteriorating condition that warrants the imposition of Trusteeship and the filing of charges against officers of Local 705." The IRB findings determined that the local leadership had "brought reproach upon the IBT" for both financial and non-financial violations of the IBT Constitution" (See IRB Report to Ron Carey, May 25, 1993).
 5. The breakdown was as follows: 1885 surveys were mailed to UPS members (63 percent) and 1,115 sent to non-UPS members (37 percent).
 6. The quote was from George Meany, ex-president of the AFL-CIO about Teamster president Jimmy Hoffa in Robert F. Kennedy's, *The Enemy Within: The McClellan Committee's Crusade Against Jimmy Hoffa and Corrupt Labor Unions* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990 [1960]), p. 161.
 7. One of the first actions taken by the post-trustee leadership was to distribute

thousands of copies of the union's constitution and bylaws. The local also printed a summary of the Landrum-Griffin Act in their local newspaper.

⁸. In the 1997 election a little less than 40 percent of the membership voted.

⁹. Louis Pike ran the local from 1964 to 1987 and Danny Ligurotis from 1987-1992.

¹⁰. Vote totals taken from "1998 IBT Election Vote" at

<http://members.aol.com/ibtvote/index.htm>

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