

Ron Carey, 1936-2008

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Ron Carey, the ex-UPS driver from Queens who fought bosses and mobsters and became the first popularly elected president of the mighty Teamsters union before his own fall from grace, died yesterday at the age of 72.

Friends said the cause was lung cancer.

During his five years in office, Carey helped rid the union of scores of gangsters and corrupt officials amid a government-backed clean-up drive. He also led a national two-week strike in 1997 against his old employer, United Parcel Service, that galvanized the labor movement in a fight against rigid work rules and the use of low-paid, part-time workers in place of full-time employees.

Here in New York, Carey evicted mob bosses of a Teamsters local that had long held sway over the Jacob Javits Convention Center, shaking down members and exhibitors.

In an obituary, Ken Paff, leader of Teamsters for a Democratic Union and a longtime Carey associate, wrote that Carey "set the standard for American union leaders for courage and honesty."

That was the hope, anyway. Much of that reform dream faded when

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Carey was booted from office after he narrowly defeated James P. Hoffa, son of the union's legendary strongman, for reelection. An investigation found that \$850,000 had been improperly routed into Carey's campaign. Two former campaign consultants and Carey's campaign manager, Jere Nash, pled guilty in the scheme. Nash testified in a 2001 trial in Manhattan federal court that Carey had okayed the deal, albeit only in a brief, 15-second telephone conversation. Carey was acquitted, but was banned from participating in Teamsters affairs by the union's court-appointed monitors.

Hoffa was elected president in 1999 and has been reelected twice since then.

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