

Ron Carey, Who Led Teamsters Reforms, Dies at 72

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[Ron Carey](#), a parcel truck driver from Queens who became president of the [Teamsters](#) union and led a successful strike by 185,000 workers against United Parcel Service, but was then ousted in a campaign finance scandal, died on Thursday in Queens. He was 72.

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He died of lung cancer at New York Hospital Queens, said Ken Paff, a longtime friend and supporter.

Mr. Carey, one of the most prominent labor leader of the 1990s, having run on an anti-corruption platform to capture the presidency of a union long notorious for Mafia connections.

A wiry man with a smoldering intensity and a strident voice, Mr. Carey initially developed a reputation as Mr. Clean by vowing to root out corruption from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, which was the nation's largest private-sector union, with 1.4 million members, when he took its helm in 1992.



Robert Giroux/Reuters

Ron Carey.

After having faced death threats during the election campaign, Mr. Carey vowed to restore honesty and eliminate the union leadership's luxurious trappings. He sold the union's two private jets, cut the president's salary by one-third and removed from union locals more than 70 leaders who were found to be corrupt.

In 1997, in the biggest strike in more than a decade, he led a 15-day walkout against U.P.S., generating huge public support for the union. When the Teamsters emerged victorious, many union leaders hailed Mr. Carey as having turned around labor's sagging fortunes; he got U.P.S. to back off demands for pension concessions, to convert thousands of part-time jobs to full time and increase part-timers' wages for the first time in 15 years.

Just days after the strike ended, a federal union overseer moved to overturn Mr. Carey's 1996 re-election victory over [James P. Hoffa](#), son of the famous Teamsters leader. The overseer asserted that Mr. Carey and his aides had arranged to contribute more than \$750,000 in union money to several liberal organizations, while donors to those groups contributed more than \$100,000 to Mr. Carey's re-election campaign in exchange. Federal law prohibits using union money on behalf of a union candidate.

In 1998, a court-appointed review board expelled Mr. Carey from the union. It did not find that he had participated in the scheme, instead finding that he had breached his fiduciary duties by not detecting the scheme and stopping it.

Ronald Robert Carey was born in Manhattan on March 22, 1936, the second of five sons of Joseph and Loretta Carey. His father was a United Parcel driver for 40 years.

He graduated from Haaren High School in Manhattan and was offered a swimming scholarship to [St. John's University](#). After turning it down, he joined the [Marines](#) and served from 1953 to 1955. At 18, he married the girl who lived upstairs, Barbara Murphy. He is survived by his wife, along with their five children, Ronald, of Babylon, N.Y., Sandra Perrone of Smithtown, N.Y., and Daniel, Pamela Casabarro and Barbara Marchese, all of Queens. He is also survived by 13 grandchildren.

Concerned that he could not support a family on Marine wages, Mr. Carey became a U.P.S. driver in Queens in 1956. Two years later, he became a shop steward with Teamsters Local 804, becoming its secretary in 1965 and president in 1967.

In his 24 years as head of that 7,000-member local, he developed a reputation as being clean as he sought to disassociate himself from the parent union's mob-influenced leadership. Moreover, he barred the local's officers from putting relatives on the payroll and insisted that they visit the truck yard daily.

He also won a reputation for delivering at the bargaining table, becoming one of the first local leaders to win his members a pension after 25 years of employment, regardless of their retirement age. With a reputation as a fighter; he led walkouts of 9 to 13 weeks in 1968, 1971 and 1974.

Steven Brill's 1978 book, "The Teamsters," catapulted him to national attention, devoting a chapter to him and describing him as an honest, exemplary leader.

He ran for the union's presidency in 1991 against two longtime insiders, winning with 48.5 percent of the vote, a narrow victory that encouraged what he called the old guard to challenge him at every turn. Asserting that union dues were to help union members, not union leaders, he angered many officials by barring them from drawing multiple salaries.

The court-appointed review board expelled Mr. Carey from the Teamsters in 1998. Mr. Carey insisted that decision was wrong. Then in January 2001, federal prosecutors indicted him, not on charges of participating in the campaign financing scheme, but of lying to investigators that he knew nothing about it. In October 2001, after a four-week trial, a jury found him not guilty.

Throughout that trial and the years afterward, Mr. Carey insisted that he was not corrupt and that he had known nothing about the campaign scheme conducted by his aides.

He said that if aides had informed him of the scheme, "I would have stopped that dead in its tracks."