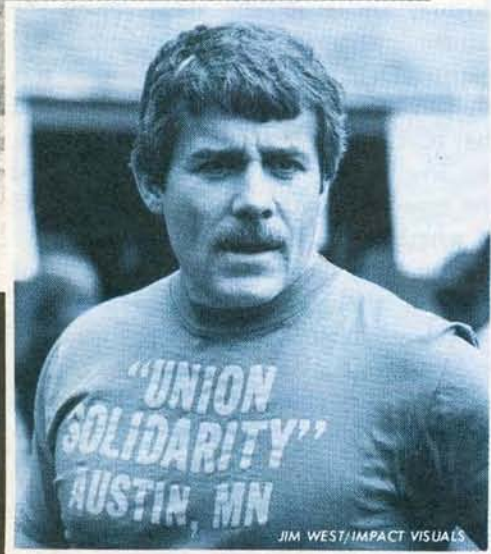




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## Ray Rogers' Strategy for Labor

## d&amp;S INTERVIEW

# RAY ROGERS' STRATEGY FOR LABOR

## *Learning from the Hormel strike*

The 1985-86 Hormel meatpackers strike in Austin, Minnesota, will be remembered for the controversy it sparked within the labor movement. Some 1,500 meatpackers in Local P-9 of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) went on strike against Hormel in August 1985 in response to wage and benefit cuts exacted by the company during the previous year.

Relations between Local P-9 leaders and the international officers of the UFCW became tense as the strike progressed. The UFCW leadership expressed concern that Local P-9 was acting independently from the chain of other locals representing Hormel plants and argued that some wage concessions were necessary in the ailing meatpacking industry to protect the union's overall wage base. International officers refused to endorse a boycott aimed at Hormel products or roving picket lines set up at other Hormel plants. Nor would they agree to sponsor a corporate campaign against Hormel.

Despite the lack of support from the UFCW leadership, Local P-9 went on strike and hired union consultant Ray Rogers to plan and run a corporate campaign against Hormel. Rogers is best known for his efforts to force textile manufacturer J.P. Stevens to sign a union contract. His campaign for P-9 became another element of contention between the local and the international. In May 1986, the UFCW placed P-9 in trusteeship and in September agreed to a new contract with Hormel. The company has not rehired some 800 Austin workers who were on strike for 13 months, or another 500 Hormel workers in Ottumwa, Iowa, who honored a P-9 picket line.

Dollars & Sense interviewed Rogers in October 1986. He began by talking about the general strategy behind a corporate campaign:

There are two key problems to confronting powerful corporate adversaries. The first is an analytical problem. You've got to come up with a detailed campaign plan of strategy and tactics on paper. The plan must be based on in-depth research and a thorough power analysis of corporate financial and political relationships. Then we know that if we can carry out the plan, we will win. It has a beginning point A and an end point Z. Point Z is total defeat or annihilation of the adversary. We're not out to annihilate anybody and we don't want to be annihilated. But we know that if we can go from A towards Z, somewhere between A and Z there's a breaking point or a point of compromise.

Now your analytical problem becomes one of execution or organization. Can you go out and mobilize your forces to maximize pressure on those individuals and institutions that can influence, to the

point of control, the decision-making process of this company?

Do you foresee more P-9 type strikes in which a local union doesn't have the active support of its international? It doesn't seem like the outcome of P-9 necessarily lends a lot of optimism for that kind of strategy. The local can't tie in to an established network of support and resources and has to go through an energy-intensive, money-intensive, grassroots organizing effort.

The internecine politics of the established labor bureaucracy have made its network practically moribund. It's a paper tiger network and I'm not optimistic that it provides a powerful structure to fight for the interests of poor and working people.

There are locals out there, or groups of locals, that have a lot of resources if they decide to fight. I asked the workers at P-9 if they would like to run a multi-million-dollar campaign. There were 4,000 people in the audience. They said, "Yeesss." I said, "Do you have millions of dollars to run one?" "Nooo."

I said, "I'm going to show you how to run a multi-million-dollar campaign without ever having millions of dollars, because the most important resource the local union has is the rank and file. We're going to collectively mobilize your knowledge, your skills, your imagination, and your energies. If there is a strike, instead of having hundreds of you stand out there on a picket line being starved into submission, every one of you is going to do a job. If you're a good speaker, or a good organizer, or a good writer, or good working in the office, or good at chopping wood so that people have something to heat their homes with, that's what you're going to do. If we had

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to pay all of you to do this, it would cost us millions of dollars.”

### What kinds of coalitions were built to support Local P-9?

We felt it was important to forge links, first within the meatpacking industry, and then with workers in other industries. We wanted to break down the communications barriers among the workers in the entire Hormel operation—between Austin and the Hormel plants throughout the Midwest, South, and Southwest. By building real solidarity with workers in these other plants, we could shut Hormel's entire operation down and we wouldn't have workers at one plant pitted against another group of workers at another plant.

The local organized caravans, with as many as 350 people, to go out on the road and into each community where there

was a plant. We slept in tents and on union hall floors for days at a time. We'd be at plant gates at five in the morning greeting workers and later would go door-to-door to canvass every home in the community. We actually brought campaign literature to over 500,000 homes. We also went out to other local unions all around the Midwest. For example, on a caravan to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a group of 50 people covered 169 union offices in a matter of days. Support groups sprang up all over the country and still provide help for the continuing struggle.

Corporate Campaign, Inc. [Rogers' consulting firm] has about 50,000 union representatives on our mailing list. We started sending out fundraising mailings just as the strike began. And we raised financial support from unions in all 50 states of this country, as well as organizations in about another 10 countries outside the United States. We raised in actual cash well over a million

dollars.

We also built coalitions outside the labor movement. People went out to leaflet, came to rallies, and organized food caravans. A dozen lawyers provided volunteer legal help. Tractorcades of family farmers surrounded the Hormel plant. Native American activists, leaders of NOW, and religious leaders all actively supported the P-9 fight. Representatives of the African National Congress came to Austin when we dedicated a mural to Nelson Mandela.

Within Austin, which is a company town, we put out special editions of *The Unionist*, the local's weekly newspaper, to try to answer questions that people felt the community would have. We went door-to-door with the January 1985 issue to about 12,000 homes and you'd never in your wildest imagination guess what the weather was like. That day, a Saturday, there was a minus 90 degree wind chill factor. But over a hundred people went door-to-door in that weather.

An angry P-9 striker tells Mel Moss, president of the Dubuque, Iowa UFCW local, to stand with his workers.



Can you explain why challenging what you term the "financial power structure" is a key element of the corporate campaign strategy?

I have researched I can't tell you how many corporations, studying their corporate-financial power structure to figure out how we could develop an effective fight-back strategy. As I look at corporate structures, the same names keep popping up as major players: Citibank, Bank of America, Chase Manhattan, Manufacturers Hanover—the big national banks. Then there are the big regional banks, whether it's in Boston or Chicago or down in the Southwest. Groupings of insurance companies—Prudential, Metropolitan Life, Equitable, New York Life, John Hancock—always pop up with the banks. These big banks and insurance companies control the credit lines. They control huge blocks of stock. Their directors serve on each others' boards.

I developed the corporate campaign concept to take on the J.P. Stevens company. In 1976, after researching Stevens, I said to the union, "You can never beat this company with a national consumer boycott. The key to breaking J.P. Stevens is the mutual insurance industry that controls about 75 to 80 percent of the company's long-term debt, debt that it needs to survive. What we'll do is develop a program that will aim at placing pressure on the major financial and corporate relationships that make up the support network behind Stevens. And we'll pick them off one at a time."

Near the end, I went to Jack Sheinkman, secretary-treasurer of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, and said, "Jack, if you let me go after Met Life the way I went after New York Life, we'll get a settlement within a week or two." He said to go ahead and sure enough, the settlement came very quickly. It came because of the pressure brought to bear on Stevens by Metropolitan Life. But it was also after we had already busted up the big banking, insurance, and other corporate relationships behind Stevens.

#### How did you apply the corporate campaign strategy in the P-9 strike?

A corporate campaign is multidimensional. We had to build solidarity among Hormel workers to be able to shut down

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the entire Hormel operation. We also had to build broad-based support nationwide to insure that, once on strike, no family could be starved into submission. Through the adopt-a-family fund, we tried to put a floor of at least \$600 a month under the workers so they could always pay their mortgages and car payments.

At the same time, we were putting pressure on the financial power structure behind Hormel. We wanted to prevent any bank from bailing out the company once we shut down production. There was one financial institution that represented the power behind Hormel, that could control Hormel—First Bank System. It's one of the biggest banks in the country, and historically Hormel's primary source of credit.



Ever since the 1920s, Hormel and First Bank's top officials have served on each other's boards. First Bank is the only bank that has ever served on the board of Hormel. When we started going after First Bank, they controlled 16% of Hormel's stock. (It went down to about 12%.) However, when you do a little more investigation, you find out that the bank really had its hold on about 60% of the Hormel stock because six or seven past and present top policy-makers of First Bank serve on the board of the Hormel Foundation, which controls 46% of the stock.

As we went after First Bank, millions of dollars of deposits were pulled out of it. Many months before the strike, starting in March 1985 (the strike began in August 1985), we began to hold weekly demonstrations at various First Bank branches. When the strike started, we bussed well over a thousand people to Minneapolis-St. Paul and held massive demonstrations. We held a big demonstration at the bank's annual stockholders meeting. We had a lot of the top farm leaders and other community leaders going in.

We had the bank under so much pressure that Hormel brought us into court. They had injunctions served against us. The court ruled we couldn't even put out a leaflet drawing the links between First Bank and the company.

#### How did all of this play out?

We laid off of all the bank demonstrations with the court actions against us. But tying in with the court actions was the very cold weather—it was getting too cold to stand out by the bank.

We also wanted to direct more attention to making the move of shutting down the plants totally. In early October 1985, we were at a point where we could shut down the entire Hormel operation,

At a meeting in California, UFCW president William Wynn asked Jim Guyette, local P-9 president, to promise not to send the roving pickets out. Wynn agreed to set up a meeting with the Hormel chain in Chicago and said if the company didn't bargain in good faith, he would get behind the roving pickets.

The three major plants—Fremont, Nebraska, and Ottumwa and Dubuque, Iowa— all voted to support the roving picket lines and shut down. And we'd have shut everything down if it wasn't for the UFCW international leadership.

By December, everyone was asking, "When are we going to send out the roving pickets? The company's not bargaining in good faith." Finally in January, Wynn called Guyette and some of the other executive board into Washington. He refused to support the roving pickets and told Guyette P-9 should accept the company's offer—the same offer the membership had already voted down twice. One of the biggest mistakes made was waiting for Wynn to act and not sending out the roving pickets a lot earlier.

Let's move from the P-9 strike and talk about the labor movement in general. Some unions have begun to devise their own financial strategy, offering services like credit cards and associate memberships in an effort to broaden their appeal to workers.

I've got nothing against seeing workers get a better deal on their credit cards or finance or anything else. But rather than see them get a credit card that they can use with Citibank, I'd like to see unions start talking about how all unions and workers can collectively mobilize their economic resources and build their own banks, their own insurance companies, and say to Citibank, Chase Manhattan, Prudential and Metropolitan, "If you do business with irresponsible corporate executives, you're not going to get any more of our money." Then I could see some real hope on their new financial strategy.

The key is, the ones who wield the real power in our society are the ones who control the flow of money. I've always said that if you're going to create a more equitable society, poor and working people have to gain much greater control

over the flow of the huge concentrations of money. They must force bankers to become more accountable for their investment decisions and ultimately must begin to set up their own democratically controlled financial institutions on a large scale.

But these financial institutions are not impenetrable bastions of power. They survive and prosper so long as they have the support of working men and women and their organizations. It seems to me that even though they are among the most powerful institutions on earth, they are

also the most vulnerable. I can't understand why the fight hasn't been brought to the doorsteps of these financial institutions. There's a lot of union money, a lot of union members' money, and a lot of money of people who support unions in these institutions.

**So you're optimistic about labor's prospects?**

What we say to workers is: think strategically. Take the offensive. Confront power with power. And you can win. ■

## *Labor's family feud*

**D&S: Is the P-9 struggle in Austin, Minnesota over?**

**Ray Rogers:** Absolutely not. Unfortunately it could have been over a long, long time ago. There's really been only one factor that has kept the company in this fight. That's been the multi-million-dollar smear campaign orchestrated by the leadership of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, with the full support of the highest levels of the AFL-CIO.

**What lessons can other unions and other rank-and-file unionists draw from the experience in Austin at this point?**

The press and the public are going to have to stand up and say, "Workers really do have some power. They are a force to be reckoned with when they have some real direction and some real support." We also have torn away the facade that has protected much of the labor bureaucracy—which has no concern to protect the best interests of workers and poor people and the general public. The labor movement is supposed to be a progressive force that stands up and fights for the underdog.

There's no magic to going out and organizing workers. All you've got to do is offer them something that will protect and promote their interests—that will create a better life for them, their families and their communities. And, by God, if the labor unions could present something like that, people would be flocking to join them. What people are fed up with is a labor leadership that offers no vision.

P-9 shows that the support is out there. All you've got to do is go out and do hard nuts-and-bolts organizing and communicate with people and they'll give you their time, they'll give you their money. They'll travel hundreds, even thousands of miles to come and support you. They want this sort of thing. And, damn it, it was all there.

**In the future, will Corporate Campaign, Inc. bypass the labor leadership to work primarily with local unions and the rank and file?**

Whenever we can, we want to work with the leadership at the national level and the local level. In fact, for some time before P-9, the first thing I would ask a local union that called us in was: "Are you working with the international?" And number two, "Are you a member of the central and state AFL-CIO labor councils?" Right now, unless I really knew the council, I would have a hard time saying to somebody, "Has your local joined the AFL-CIO?" Because Local P-9 had joined and look what happened to them.