A Teamster in the Making, Part IV:
**Becoming Vice President**



Courtesy photo

Frank Hackett speaks in front of the U.S. Capitol at Union Solidarity Day in 1991.









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Wakefield —

*Note: This is the final installment in a four-part series*

“The ride from Cambridge to Somerville was the longest ride of my life,” Frank said. “My mind wandered in several directions. One of my closest friends was in line for that job and I wondered why Billy offered it to me. There had to be a reason why, but that was not for me to worry about at that time. I remembered Billy’s comments to me if I refused. He said he would have to go outside Local 25 and appoint someone from another local union. I knew the importance of keeping an officer from Local 25 was very, very important at that time for many reasons.

“When I got home, I spoke to my wife, but I couldn’t tell her all of the details and the pros and cons, as she would never understand the politics of the situation. I couldn’t sleep Saturday night, knowing that Billy offered me the position of International Vice President and he wanted an answer the next day.”

Frank Hackett knew he had to consider that in the last Local 25 election, there were eight candidates on McCarthy’s team. The plan was to send their friends and stewards to a campaign phone bank that was set-up for the team. Out of the eight people who were supposed to give their support, only three showed up. That lack of support meant he may no longer hold onto his business agent position. Though if he accepted the vice presidency, he would lose even more support from some of the local officers.

“Politics involve support in numbers,” said Frank. “I could see in the upcoming election of 1988, I would be out of a job,” he concluded. “Knowing I was in danger of losing the next election, I thought I could work hard to overcome that numerical hurdle. Taking the vice president job would take me away from my family and the Local 25 campaign.

“I’d still have to campaign locally to retain my business agent position and I would have to keep myself clear of the politics and infighting within the General Executive Board, which I did effectively.”

Frank won the election and retained his business agent position, which he could keep even if he was the International Vice President.

Frank tried to stay out of union politics in favor of working to change labor law and anti-strike legislation on a national basis. He wanted to help General President McCarthy, who gave him this opportunity and his lifelong dream to change the direction of the Teamsters Union for the better. He had all the right intentions.

“The faces of the people on the picket lines haunted me. I made a commitment to them. In this country we allow strikers to be permanently replaced. The only other country in the world that allowed that action was Africa. What did that say for human rights? No one ever tried to change that law and perhaps I’d have a chance if I were vice president. I also thought of the thousands of contracts throughout the country that could face impasses and eventually replacements.

“With all this in mind, I called Billy the next day and accepted the position of vice president. He thanked me and instructed me to leave that day and check into the hotel across from the Teamsters International Building in Washington, D.C. He wanted me to keep it quiet and he would meet with me the next day.”

**The journey begins with RICO charges**

Early the next morning there was a knock on Frank’s door. A man instructed him to be ready to meet with Billy McCarthy at the International Teamster’s Building at noon. Frank was extremely nervous about the meeting. At 11:30 a.m., he was escorted into a limousine through the basement and driven through an alley to the back of the Teamsters’ Building. Then he was brought into the meeting of the General Executive Board. All of the vice presidents and trustees were present, in addition to McCarthy, who stood at the end of the table.

Frank approached him and he asked Frank to raise his right hand and he swore him in as 16th International Vice President. Everyone shook his hand.

“I was in shock, it was so surreal,” said Frank. “Now that I’m here, what’s next?” he asked himself.

The entire executive board was taken by surprise, most didn’t even know Frank. He was the first-ever local business agent to be appointed a vice president of the International Executive Board. Many thought he wasn’t qualified to do the job. They all perceived he was a close friend of McCarthy’s.

“I must admit that I never dreamed about the experiences I was about to encounter,” although at 23, he told his wife that someday he’d be in that position.

Because of the RICO (racketeer-infested corrupt organization) charges, “I was immediately thrust into the federal lawsuit against the General Executive Board. The depositions were ongoing and time-consuming. The amount of money the Teamsters incurred for internal audits was climbing into the millions.”

Soon after becoming V.P., McCarthy asked Frank to come to his home in Arlington. He told Frank that he had a stroke and it resulted in minor brain damage. He told Frank that he was not sure he could continue on as General President.
Frank said, “That’s your decision to make. I offer you my complete support either way. Should you decide to stay on, I’ll remain supportive of you. I knew at that point he trusted me and I trusted him.”

**Attempt to impeach McCarthy**

Frank later attended the Southern Conference of Teamsters and McCarthy was supposed to be there. He never showed up and the General Executive Board members were quite upset.

“Some members of the General Executive Board were meeting in secret and planning to impeach him. The political plot thickened. Back-stabbing and attention to personal agendas prevailed. It soon became obvious to me that the general membership was not being considered.

“I found out about the meeting and went there to inform them that Billy was lying in a hospital bed in Boston undergoing surgery after a stroke. With that announcement, the room became quiet and the meeting broke up abruptly,” Frank said.
As he was leaving, Joe Morgan, the President of the Southern Conference asked Frank to swear in his newly-elected officers the following day in Billy’s absence. The impeachment attempt failed.

**Employee accountability**

Later in Chicago, Billy had a meeting with several hundred general organizers across the country.

“Their jobs were to organize non-union companies nationally and we needed them. Under the RICO charge, the government alleged the general organizers were ghost employees paid for doing nothing, put in place by previous officers of the General Executive Board. In order to counter the government’s charges, McCarthy required them to file reports of their activities. They went crazy,” said Frank.

Organizing drives would be funded and organizers would now be accountable for the disbursement of union funds. More changes were made requiring accountability. Through it all, Frank stood by Billy McCarthy.
On March 13, 1989, the General Executive Board was forced into a position that they either sign a consent agreement with the Federal Government to settle the RICO charge or they would go to trial with their attorneys the next day. The consent agreement called for the re- election of all executive board members in an historic election by its 1.7 million members by secret ballot to be held in November 1991.

“I didn’t want the federal government to control the union, nor did I want corruption of any kind to control the Teamsters. The only people benefiting from the charges were the lawyers on both sides of the issue.

“I personally was not one of the defendants in the RICO charge; however, I had to agree with whatever the majority decided. The consent agreement brought about historic changes – both good and bad – and set up the first democratic election of officers and terms of ethical practices,” he said.

**Meeting with President George Bush**

“We broke ties with the AFL-CIO who backed Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis for president and we supported George H. W. Bush, mostly because Dukakis was no friend to the Teamsters,” he said.

Frank was invited to attend the 1989 Presidential Inaugural Gala, including the inaugural ball and dinner attended by President and Mrs. Bush and Vice President and Mrs. James Danforth (Dan) Quayle.

“McCarthy and I later privately met with President Bush in late 1990, after he was elected. At the end of the meeting, I asked President Bush, ‘Why do we export jobs and import people?’ I never got an answer and the meeting abruptly ended. I was the only one McCarthy trusted in the room with him.”

At that point Frank had moved up to 10th vice president because six vice presidents dropped off the board because of the federal charges or retirement.

**Unions hold National Solidarity Day**

“While McCarthy remained Honorary Vice President of the AFL-CIO, we set up a national solidarity day for Labor Day 1991 to be held in Washington, D.C. However, the Teamsters’ General Executive Board had taken great pains to suppress this attempt by McCarthy and myself. Local demonstrations were videotaped and sent across the country calling for support of the solidarity day and changes in our labor laws.”

“On that Labor Day, nearly 350,000 members of all the various unions marched before the U.S. Capitol to support our constitutional rights, especially freedom of expression which is supposed to take place in collective bargaining without hiring replacement workers, which was denied in the strikes at International Paper in Jay, Maine, S.S. Pierce in Woburn, Mass. and others throughout the country.”

Speaking on behalf of the Teamsters’ International Union, now Ninth Vice President Frank Hackett told the gathering: “We march to right the wrongs of our time and to insist on justice for the hard-working people and their families. We demand that this government hear us in solidarity. Our single voice rings loud and clear…We are determined to live up to our responsibilities in a democratic society, to stand up for our communities, to confront the critical issues of our day and to get the country moving in the right direction.”

As part of that demonstration, Frank spoke to union leaders and human rights activists from China, Russia, Poland, Viet Nam, South Africa, and elsewhere attended, as well as dignitaries including Lech Walesa, Jesse Jackson, AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland and many others, and the entire Teamsters International Board. Local 25 sent 90 representatives from the Boston area. The number of people attending Solidarity Day in 97-degree weather well exceeded the Teamsters’ expectations. “It was an awesome display of union strength,” reported ABC News.

The next month, the House passed the Strike Replacement Bill (H.R.-5) and that legislation was headed for a Senate vote (S-55). That was a victory for Billy McCarthy and Frank Hackett. Not only did Frank have the opportunity to speak to the union workers that congregated in mass at the Labor Day march, but he also had the privilege of addressing a congressional hearing previously in support of HR-5 and S-55.

“One last hurdle to cross was both pending re-elections for International Vice President and Local 25 Business Agent. My indifferences with the candidates who were running made me a loner,” said Frank. “Back in Boston, I had a decision to make. The Commonwealth of Mass. required all drivers to take written exams.

“I could take the time to become political and campaign like my adversaries or set up a testing system to assist the thousands of drivers in our area. I chose the latter and put politics aside and did my job representing the Teamsters.”

Frank was defeated in both elections as he predicted he would. Today, Frank has no regrets.

“Given the same circumstances, I’d do the very same thing again,” he said. “Looking back over those years, I did the best I could to protect the Teamsters from complete control by the federal government, while working for the members in the areas of benefits and workers’ comp and job protection.

“I had the opportunity to stand beside some great people and defend the freedom of expression in every union hall in this country. I have the greatest respect for my friends and colleagues, and even some enemies. We were able to create the most benevolent society the world has ever known – the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.”

*The International Brotherhood of Teamsters has a proud history since 1903 and has had to overcome a great deal of adversity to emerge as a stronger, more unified organization, to negotiate more than 50,000 collective bargaining agreements for more than two million workers across America, Canada and Puerto Rico. The superior wages, benefits and working conditions, beginning with the fight against child labor to today, happened because of the hard-working people who committed their lives to the cause of freedom of expression and the right to organize.*

*In 2007, the Teamsters claimed 1,423,000 members. Out of the first eight International General Presidents, three were from the Boston area.*

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