

Driving Hollywood Outside Hollywood

*Transportation Teamsters, Industrial Relations,
and Distant Locations*

The work of transportation teamsters strongly aligns with the preceding discussions of “just-in-time” or “immediately responsive” logistical labor—perhaps more conventionally so than any other role involved with production. Teamsters organize the storage and shipment of people and things. They drive, deliver, carry, and chauffeur. They ensure the goods they handle—whether human or otherwise—arrive on time and in pristine condition. They are also responsible for coordinating resources, both physical and administrative, including vehicles, fuel, and insurance, as well as safety compliance, which help unlock and sustain a production’s mobility. Many of them remain on call and ready to work with only a moment’s notice, even for a shift that lasts just a few hours on any given day. Yet contrary to the entrepreneurial rise of service producers or the emergent professional dexterity of location managers, the logistical nature of teamsters’ work is a historical formation, a steadfast fixture of the group’s overall occupational identity and unwavering

component of their work routines and rituals. As such, the work teamsters are asked to do in the context of Mobile Hollywood has not transformed so much, but the locations—and the distances between them—have grown far greater and more varied over the past twenty years.

While teamsters remain proudly and at times defiantly unified in their blue-collar roots, it also exposes them to a greater degree of risk in Mobile Hollywood. Like other un- or low-skilled labor in the global economy, transportation teamsters are more easily replaced than other production workers when the movie “factory” relocates to distant locations around the country and the world. Indeed, one of the most recurring battles the union has had with producers is policing the employment of nonunion drivers, especially as those productions have crept further and further away from Hollywood. There’s some irony here, then, in that the individuals who have kept Hollywood mobile since the early 1900s have faced the biggest threat to their livelihoods because of production’s disarticulation from a particularly local geography. Further, as they lack recourse to the more individualized and entrepreneurial discourses that have cohered over time around the “specialized” skill sets of craft workers, teamsters struggle to cultivate the same sense of individual exceptionalism that their colleagues can use to secure employment in project-based work. In the absence of individual, skills-based appeals to producers and other hiring authorities, the teamsters’ struggle is inherently more collective and traditional in scope. The union’s role in the midst of mobile production has been to retain control over the supply of labor and protect jobs for its members. And, by most accounts, they have succeeded: the union has been at or near full employment since 2015, and membership has grown threefold over the past twenty years.

This chapter untangles the protections and entitlements available to teamsters that allow them to participate in Mobile Hollywood. It focuses on the efforts of Local 399, which represents transportation teamsters in Los Angeles, to better understand the tools and tactics it has mobilized in a bid to protect jobs for union members. Specifically, the chapter demonstrates how Local 399 leveraged existing entitlements and bartered for regulatory exemptions to rework the geography of production in ways that allowed teamsters to move more freely across the country and the world. They similarly have maintained pressure on lawmakers in Sacramento to create, then improve, the state's incentive program to reintegrate California into a more mobile mode of production. In so doing, I argue, the union effectively leveraged the spatial logics of mobile production—flexibility, efficiency, rationality, seamlessness—but reconfigured them to accommodate an agenda distinct from producers, a form of collaboration despite difference that found common cause in Mobile Hollywood.

In documenting these strategies, this chapter refuses to frame the dynamic between the union and producers as a simple dialectic of conflict and concession between angry labor activists and greedy studio capitalists. Certainly, there has been conflict and to a lesser extent (at least compared to other entertainment unions) concession, but the more interesting story here is one that makes visible the points of overlap and alignment between management and labor despite different interests and agendas. These alliances are no less awkward or messy (perhaps even more so), but drawing attention to these convergences helps make visible teamsters' own role in reshaping the geography of production to suit their interests.

In the first section, I provide a general overview of the history and work routines of transportation teamsters in Hollywood.

In the subsequent section, I trace the union's evolving strategies in service of their members, a battle that is rife with ambivalence and contradiction but nevertheless proving successful in its attempts to grow the union and secure work for members. Friction remains a key element throughout the discussion, illustrating how a simple binary between management and labor fails to appreciate the muddled and difficult alliances that emerge in the context of Mobile Hollywood.

HOLLYWOOD TEAMSTERS

Teamsters are drivers. The term originally referred to men who corralled a "team" of horse-drawn wagons and hauled goods across the country. By the late 1800s, wagon routes formed a vast transcontinental transportation network, providing a service to the industrial and commercial enterprises unfolding in the country's emerging urban centers and contributing to the broader economic expansion.¹ In this vein, teamsters have always formed a necessary logistical component in the supply chain: carriage, storage, and delivery. The efficient and effective movement of stuff through space has been the defining feature of the work teamsters have done for more than a century, whether at the helm of horse-drawn wagons or motorized transport.

Also central to the experience of their work and (mobile) workplaces has been collective action and advocacy. Issues of fair wages and unsafe working conditions galvanized early organizing efforts, with wagon drivers coordinating their fellow carriers to improve conditions of life on the road: eighteen-hour days, seven-day weeks, low pay, and full liability for the goods they hauled fomented the rank and file into establishing collective representation.² First organized in 1903, the International

Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) has evolved over time to become the country's largest labor organization, with more than 1.4 million members and 1,900 affiliates in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. Following the organization's roots in transport and delivery, the Package Division is the union's largest, and the United Parcel Service (UPS) is its single largest employer, though it now encompasses blue collar and public service workers in a number of different industries, from breweries and bakeries to food processing.

While jobs, wages, and working conditions have remained key concerns for the union over time, its contemporary public profile arguably has been overshadowed by affiliations with corruption and organized crime, including the tenure of past president James (Jimmy) R. Hoffa. Hoffa, who held office from 1957 to 1971, was subject to numerous government investigations before being convicted of jury tampering, attempted bribery, conspiracy, and fraud in 1964. He continued as the union's leader from prison until he relinquished the role as part of a deal to secure an early release. Hoffa disappeared in 1975, presumably the victim of a mob hit. His son, James P. Hoffa, followed his father and served as the union's president from 1998 to 2021, making him the organization's second-longest serving leader.

Like their brothers and sisters in the international organization, Hollywood Teamsters also drive. They have been behind the wheel of studio vehicles for almost as long as the U.S. film industry has existed, though their experiences remain largely marginalized in both scholarly accounts and popular imagination of work in Hollywood. Far more attention has been given to the more traditional craft unions, like the IATSE and the respective talent guilds, than their blue-collar brethren. Teamsters have received some representation in films like *Hoffa* (1992)

and *The Irishman* (2019), but the work they do is overshadowed by the myth-making violence of the international's affiliation with wise guys and mobsters. Despite being the bedrock of a functioning economy, carriage, storage, and delivery are much less cinematic.

Still, like the broader organization to which they belong, Hollywood teamsters were among the earliest groups in the entertainment industry to organize. During the turbulent 1930s, studio prosperity—and the relative harmony between management and employees—came to a chaotic end as executives looked to stave off significant debt from the previous decade and circumvent the financial pressures of the Great Depression.³ The period witnessed actors, writers, and craft workers mount several actions against producers, angling for improved wages, working conditions, and other benefits.⁴ According to the teamsters' own history, studio drivers were similarly beleaguered, forced to wait outside studio gates as day laborers in the hopes that studio management would select them from the crowd of anonymous faces. Income was capped at a flat wage of five dollars per day, regardless of overtime, and employment was insecure: they were readily dismissed for raising concerns or complaints about working conditions and had no recourse against producers.⁵

In response, Joe Tooley, Nate Saber, and Ralph Clare rallied drivers to sign organizing cards. Known as the “founding fathers” of the Hollywood teamsters, the men chartered Local 399 in April 1930 with about 180 studio drivers, following the formation of Local 817 in New York City just a few years earlier. Both Local 399 and 817 remain the only locals within the IBT to represent workers in a singular division—the Motion Pictures and Theatrical Trade Division. Other teamster locals

mirror the structure of the parent organization, wherein workers in the entertainment industries constitute a division alongside other categories, like parcel carriers, warehouse workers, airline attendants, and municipal employees, all under the umbrella of a single local. This disparity reflects how locals outside of traditional entertainment hubs in New York and Los Angeles have worked to accommodate mobile production, drawing on drivers from other divisions and sectors to support the increased but itinerate opportunities for production work.

Despite its focus on a singular industry, Local 399 has extended its jurisdiction to other job categories in film and television. It first organized horse and cattle wranglers in 1939, as production on Westerns accelerated and workers found themselves in shoddy accommodations and dangerous conditions on distant, desert locations. Other divisions include animal trainers and handlers, studio mechanics, location managers, and most recently, casting directors. While extending membership to new and diverse job categories has helped strengthen its negotiating power with producers, transportation drivers—the focus of this chapter—remain the largest division and drivers are core to the local's trade identity; the local's slogan, after all, is "Driving Hollywood." Members of the transportation division—which include camera-car drivers, talent chauffeurs, chef drivers, crane operators, and stunt drivers, among others—make up nearly two-thirds of the local's membership.

Local 399 also negotiates on behalf of all entertainment division teamsters in locals across a confederation of Western states. In addition to California, Local 399 represents entertainment industry drivers in Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. In all, Local 399 negotiates on behalf of

more than 6,500 teamsters when bargaining with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP). While Local 399 negotiates separate agreements for location managers and casting directors, its largest agreement with producers, the so-called Black Book, covers drivers, wranglers, animal trainers, dispatchers, mechanics, and other auto-service workers. When Hollywood producers employ teamsters anywhere within the confederation, they must ensure wages and conditions are no less favorable than those specified in the Black Book agreement.⁶

Contemporary transportation departments in the film and television industry have a hierarchical structure like any other area of production. The transportation coordinator serves as the department head and is the primary liaison with producers and other creative and technical leaders. They determine a production's transportation needs, budget, schedule, and staffing, occupying a somewhat awkward nexus between management and labor. Transportation captains support coordinators by overseeing the day-to-day operations of a production. They serve as the department's eyes and ears on set, working to coordinate any maintenance and fuel needs; provide on-the-ground parking support for location filming; and ensure talent, trailers, and equipment are picked up and delivered on time and where needed. Large productions often include a transportation co-captain or dispatcher to provide additional support, often managing routine transportation needs each day.

Departments also include a Department of Transportation (DOT) administrator, a relatively new position created in the last five to ten years in response to the increased mobility and complexity of film and television productions. DOT administrators are compliance officers who ensure producers do not run afoul of state or federal transportation regulations. As drivers

are one of the few crew positions subject to external oversight, DOT administrators confirm driver qualifications, maintain vehicle safety checks and records, and monitor hours of service, especially critical when drivers are required to cross state lines.

Drivers, of course, drive. Depending on the scale of production, the department can have as few as five or six drivers or as many as fifty individuals ready to move people, equipment, and trailers or helm more specialized vehicles for filming and stunt work. It is not uncommon for the number of drivers to ebb and flow over the course of a production depending on its need on any given shooting day. For instance, when a television production needs to leave the soundstage to shoot on location, the transportation department will recruit additional drivers on a short-term basis (sometimes as little as a few hours) to assist with the greater transport needs.

LOGISTICAL GEOGRAPHIES

As recounted in Chapter 2, the disintegration of the studio system transformed production into a project-based endeavor. As the studios externalized their workforces and centralized corporate power, the employment market expanded and competition for jobs increased. Technological advances and new production practices weakened the industry's traditionally rigid division of labor, collapsing distinctions between management and worker and between different job categories.⁷ Conventional trade unionism struggled for relevancy in a context in which individual craft workers could negotiate personal-service contracts above and beyond the standard package of union protections, and the increase in independent and offshore production facilitated access to employment and skills acquisition beyond

the unions' purview. No longer able to secure for their members a job for life within a precarious and project-based profession, each union and guild adapted differently to preserve their strength and relevance, which ultimately splintered interests and agendas not only between different unions but also among different membership segments within the same union.⁸

In some instances, these transformations prompted a radical shift in occupational identities and organizing strategies. Under the leadership of President Thomas Short, for example, IATSE worked to consolidate its power by merging a number of smaller locals with similar or overlapping jurisdictions and centralizing its approach to producers, reducing the historical autonomy a number of locals enjoyed over their collective bargaining agreements with producers: "It's really about organizing the work force; control the work force, control the industry."⁹ Its most controversial tactic, however, was to ensure the workforce it controlled mirrored the industry's need for a more flexible and agile labor market as a means to accommodate the new logics of production. This strategy entailed loosening membership protocols in established and emerging production hubs; embracing an entrepreneurial, skills-based approach to hiring; and eventually abandoning the more conventional closed-shop values of seniority and employment rosters altogether, mechanisms that historically provided the union's tight control over the supply of labor to studios.

Shifting away from seniority rosters to embrace a more skills-based approach to hiring helped IATSE locals open their doors to more individuals in a greater number of production hubs. It also acknowledged that, in the context of new production routines and technologies, highly specialized skill sets do not always conflate with longevity in the industry. It's a

controversial approach, especially among long-standing and senior union members who may view new entrants as competition for the already limited opportunities for studio work. According to one case study, the shift risks the perception among members that “experience is valued less, and that individualistic and entrepreneurial values (which are required for the self-promotion associated with skill-based hiring) are more important than the amount of skill a worker has gained through years of experience.”¹⁰ In short, individual exceptionalism trumps collective interests, seniority, and equitable pay.

The un- or low-skilled nature of the transportation teamsters’ labor, however, makes this tactic much less available to drivers. It’s much more difficult for individual teamsters to compete with each other for work based on the logic that they are the “best” (i.e., most skilled, talented) person for the job when, in the mind of producers, anyone with a license can drive—a perspective that has always taken the bite out of potential strike threats as well. As such, the seniority roster remains a powerful tool for the teamsters. According to business agent and organizer Ed Duffy, “Protecting jobs is central to everything we do, and the roster not only helps ensure our members are hired fairly, but also helps us track the amount of work taking place in Los Angeles, which we can (and do) leverage in our ongoing push to keep our members working in California.”¹¹ Local 399 remains one of only a few locals in the entertainment industry that retain seniority-based hiring practices.

Here’s how it works: individual teamsters are allocated to one of three tiered groups based on their length of employment in the industry. As they gain work experience and longevity, they advance across the tiers. They must work two years, for instance, to advance from the bottom tier to the second tier, and

then work another eight years before they advance to the most senior ranking. At least 98 percent of the more senior grouping must be employed before producers can engage teamsters from the subsequent tier. Union leaders say the system helps protect employment opportunities for veteran drivers and ensures more experienced workers are less likely to be the first dismissed from a production in response to shifting transport needs. Union leaders also claim it helps protect diversity and limit nepotistic practices, though such logic elides the structural limitations that hinder equitable access to work in the first instance and the claims from women and minority drivers that the reality is worse than the rhetoric.¹²

Nevertheless, only once the full roster is exhausted can the local initiate a practice called “permits,” which allows producers to hire nonunion workers to fill open positions. Permits can last for a few hours or a few days—as soon as a represented employee registers availability on the roster, permits must cease—and thus offer ready-made evidence of production activity. When employment demands exceed (represented) labor supply, the union can champion full employment and open work opportunities to individuals outside of their representation. Once those individuals accrue thirty days of employment on a union production, they are eligible for union membership, something the permit process helps facilitate.¹³

While the seniority roster enables the union to maintain control over a (local) labor supply, it remains a rather blunt instrument to wrangle the agility and adaptiveness of mobile production. While it sutures Local 399 drivers into project-based work when it’s based in Southern California, it struggles to accommodate the logic of project-based work when a creative endeavor expands across a broader swath of geography.

For that, the union needed a more explicit spatial intervention, what union leaders frequently refer to as the teamsters' "sacred right": they follow their equipment. A contractual entitlement enshrined in Paragraph 59 of the Black Book agreement states that any studio equipment sourced from Los Angeles but taken to a distant filming location must be driven by Hollywood-based teamsters no matter how far it travels. Whether they ship studio equipment to Detroit (for *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* [2011]), New Mexico (for *The Avengers* [2012]), Hawaii (for *Jurassic World* [2015]), or Iceland (for *The Fate of the Furious* [2017]), producers are contractually obligated to employ Local 399 drivers to operate said equipment. Further, motion picture teamsters from any of the locals in the confederation of Western states also must operate all non-studio equipment (i.e., sourced from independent providers) if the providers are based in any of those jurisdictions.

By establishing and maintaining a space through which Local 399 teamsters can travel into other union jurisdictions, across state lines, and into international territories, Paragraph 59 enables a form of movement that conventional jurisdictional rights otherwise prohibit. It effectively trumps competing claims from other locals about the rights of their own members to perform certain types of work and to access certain types of equipment. Instead, it helps create a "frictionless" gateway for mobile production to proceed without interruption. In this sense, the entitlement functions as a logistical tool that recalibrates space for the efficient circulation of people and equipment and reconstitutes the traditional rules by which that space is governed. Just as international trade agreements are forms of spatial governance that permit and amplify the logistical coordination of global supply chains, Paragraph 59 works to dismantle or weaken the rules and regulations that otherwise might

hinder the seamless movement of bodies and things across an expanded geography of production.

But it doesn't do this spatial work on its own. Movement is further enabled through a series of exemptions at the state, federal, and international level, all the result of advocacy and lobbying efforts in which the union recognizes common cause with studio representatives. The Motion Picture Association (MPA), with support from Local 399 and the IBT, have secured two key exemptions in recent years from the DOT. Both exemptions focus on hours of service to better accommodate the "unique nature" of film and television work. First is an exemption to how many hours a transportation teamster can work and the second is how transportation teamsters are obligated to keep track of their hours of service. Collectively, these mechanisms help govern both labor and the spaces through which they move in the interests of more seamless and continuous access to employment.

For transportation teamsters in the film and television industry, daily work often mixes short trips in the mornings and evenings with substantial periods of rest during the day. Drivers may remain on duty but not responsible for operating a vehicle. They often spend significant portions of their days at the filming site, for instance, loading and unloading equipment until they need to make a transport haul later in the day. It's also common for them to remain off duty in between trips, simply waiting until it is time for them to transport people or equipment back to the production base. According to the DOT's Hours of Service Regulations, property-carrying drivers can only drive for eleven consecutive hours within a fourteen-hour period and are required to take ten consecutive hours off before driving again.¹⁴ Obviously, the eighteen- and twenty-hour days that commonly characterize production violate these rules, while

the erratic nature of the work drivers do during a single day complicates any easy calculation of consecutive activity. Further, as freelance employees, teamsters commonly work for different employers and productions on any given workday or work week. As they move from studio to studio, they operate different vehicles for different employers, which complicates their ability to track hours of service through federally mandated electronic logging devices that lack interchangeability across vehicles, employers, and worksites.

Accordingly, teamsters most recently received an exemption from using the federally mandated electronic logging devices. Instead, they retain paper logs that they carry with them across job sites (and thus different studios with different vehicles) and are required to submit those paper logs to each new employer. Tracking hours of service is handled as a manual and collaborative process among teamster locals, production companies, on-site DOT administrators, and drivers. Earlier, transportation teamsters secured an exemption to the limitations on hours of service through a 2005 act of Congress. The exemption adjusted the federal caps on workdays and driving time when a driver's movement is contained within a one hundred-mile radius of the production's designated base.

Notably, as a federal exemption to hours of service, it applies to productions regardless of their location, whether they are shooting on the backlots in Hollywood or on the soundstages in Atlanta. The expansion to service hours acknowledges a teamster is likely to drive, for example, six miles from the production base to a filming site, remain on location for sixteen or eighteen hours, which may include some work but also allows for a lot of down time, before making the six-mile trip back to headquarters. The MPA successfully argued that studio drivers do not generate

the same risk of accidents as long-haul truck drivers and thus warranted an exemption to existing rules. Yet as soon as they operate a vehicle beyond the one hundred-mile zone or cross state lines, federal regulations apply to their hours of service. It's not uncommon for teamsters to work under exemptions in one jurisdiction, like Los Angeles, travel across state lines to New Mexico under federal oversight, then set up in Albuquerque where the exemption reapplies.

While contractual entitlements and regulatory exemptions are more permanent deviations from normative governing arrangements, provisions that reconstitute the geography of production also can manifest in response to the peculiar needs of a single film or television show. Transportation coordinator Mark Dometrovich, for example, recounts his experience of filming *The Fate of the Furious* in Cuba: "The most challenging thing is really the lack of resources. We brought all of our supplies but if you run out of toilet paper (for instance) that's all you're going to get. If you run out of bottled water, you're out of luck. There's no place to buy it. If something breaks down, there are no parts to fix it. Even the fuel, for us in Transportation, was a big problem. Their diesel fuel had such high sulfur that it would trip the filters in the vehicles." In response to these limitations, the production shipped, via boat, more than one hundred pieces of equipment, including sixty-five vehicles intended for on-screen needs and behind-the-scenes use. Negotiations with local government authorities secured the port for delivery and created a "sovereign corridor" for the production to import goods otherwise prohibited under existing trade law. Dometrovich explains, "We shipped everything by boat, roll on and roll off type of ship, where you drive everything onto it. We took stake beds, camera trucks, 5 tons, 10 tons, trailers,

porta-potties and generators.” Even local hires needed to be picked up from their homes and driven to base camp every day given Cuba’s ongoing restrictions on automobile sales. In all, the production had to transport more than one thousand people to and from filming locations each day.¹⁵

There are likely infinite examples of regulatory reform and legal maneuvering that help establish a sovereign-like geography for a more mobile regime of accumulation. Indeed, examples from previous chapters—like the national security incident that *World War Z* provoked in Budapest or the lobbying efforts of location managers to preserve production incentives—are calculated efforts, both proactive and reactive, to adjust territorial forms of governance that otherwise might hinder mobile operations. Special work authorizations, like the O-1B Visa in the US for “individuals with an extraordinary ability in the arts or achievement in motion picture or television industry,” also serve as tools to rework the space of border security and migration for a more seamless movement of talent across territory, a privilege that does not extend to everyone equitably, of course. The distinction I am making with respect to teamsters is to acknowledge the role organized labor has played in constituting such a space. The space of mobile production is as much a product of industrial relations and political advocacy as it is constituted by the flight paths of individual workers who cross the globe in the name of work.

Like special economic zones, port terminals, or, in this case, the geography of production, such spaces are engineered to thwart disruption, reduce costs, and strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of movement and circulation, often by reforming existing regulations and legal structures of control.¹⁶ They result from unlikely alliances among various groups, both

public and private, and across local, regional, national, and even international scales, but not always because there are shared logics or motivations that each stakeholder brings to the collaboration. For producers, the need to source specialized equipment and contend with pesky rules and regulations requires too much time and attention, a burden that increases the potential for risk and simply falls outside the totalizing frames through which they approach mobile production. As discussed in previous chapters, such a perspective enables them to imagine the expansion of production as rational and scalable. For transportation teamsters, the complex coordination of geography may overlap with management's desire for (the appearance of) seamlessness but simultaneously appeals to the union's more conventional and collective interests for continuity of work. Mobile Hollywood, in this sense, appears as a common cause despite different motivations and agendas.

As I have argued elsewhere in this book, these developments are neither innocuous nor immune from criticism. Indeed, the challenge these spaces pose to normative forms of governance does not render them completely void of rules, routines, or structures. Rather, they are rife with indeterminacy and contradiction, what Anna Tsing would identify as the “non-scalable elements” that can never be fully expunged from the spaces of capital expansion. Engaging with Tsing's work, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson highlight how logistical geographies “are saturated by competing norms and calculations that overlap and sometimes conflict in unpredictable but also negotiable ways.”¹⁷ Competing labor regimes, governing structures, work routines, and cultural dynamics manifest as part and parcel of these differences, constantly threatening the otherwise coherent and efficient movement of people and things across the geography

of mobile production. For teamsters, different access rights, variable wages, disparate training, and non-studio equipment of uncertain standards make for a somewhat dubious workplace in which heterogenous teams, even within the same department, must collaborate and coordinate within the geography of Mobile Hollywood. Indeed, that the “sacred right” is one the union must always police and protect underscores how mobile production is far from a seamless or definitive operation but a process always teetering on the edge of conflict and disruption, despite appearances otherwise.

Before she was the local’s recording secretary, business agent, and organizer, for example, Lindsay Dougherty was a transportation dispatcher. She first joined the teamster local in her hometown of Detroit, Michigan, to work on films that relocated to the city following the implementation of its production incentive. In 2006 she moved to Los Angeles, where she joined Local 399. “I did not do much work in Los Angeles in my first five or so years in the city. Ironically, I ended up back in Michigan for three movies as a 399 dispatcher. I was working in Georgia, Florida, Illinois, wherever there was an incentive.”²¹⁸ According to union leaders, they see the nomadic existence of transportation teamsters as a sign of success, especially veteran workers in the highest seniority group, though one that comes with the same costs to personal health and well-being discussed elsewhere in this book. Even union organizers are not exempt from travel. In addition to lobbying trips to Sacramento and Washington, DC, Local 399 organizers frequently fly to North American jurisdictions that lack a motion picture division or any collective representation whatsoever. Business agent and Local 399 organizer Josh Steheli adds, “if producers are able to undercut our rates by \$20 in another jurisdiction, it’s not great for our members nor is

it good for local hires. I'm always on a plane trying to organize motion picture workers in other places—what's good for them is ultimately good for us."¹⁹ There's an unquestioned acceptance within the union that an expanded geography of production is a *fait accompli*, so directing some attention at shaping the contours of that geography—or, more specifically, the practices and protocols that govern both labor and mobility within that geography—is not acquiescence as much as it is a political response to shifting conditions.

Dispersed across an expanded terrain of production, then, teamsters end up working alongside—and in the case of organizers, advocating for—local hires in different jurisdictions, many of whom often lack the familiarity with the challenges of large-scale moviemaking. In the past fifteen years, for example, transportation coordinator Craig Fehrman has worked in Texas, Virginia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Georgia, among others: “When I’m out of town I never know what the crew is going to be like and there’s always some good, some bad. When you are in LA there’s not a million questions and there’s not the whole learning experience of telling someone what they need to do.”²⁰ While skills and experience are likely to increase relative to a location’s ability to remain attractive to visiting productions, even in well-developed hubs like Atlanta, Local 399 drivers commonly work alongside teamsters from other locals who do not enjoy the same wages, fringe benefits, or conditions as they do. Considered a “supplementary workforce” outside the confederation of Western states, local hires are subject to different and variable contractual agreements with producers and are only able to drive equipment sourced from their respective jurisdictions. Union leaders acknowledge animosity is common, especially in larger and more developed filmmaking hubs. “We

are showing up with thirty drivers from Los Angeles. We're in their own backyard and telling them their local workers are 'supplemental' labor. It causes some awkwardness. It causes strife."²¹ But, union officials are quick to point out, Local 399 teamsters are just "following their equipment," often to places that lack similar infrastructure.

Like the pastiche of mobile workers and local hires that make up other below-the-line departments, Mobile Hollywood has stretched and expanded the mode of production across space to integrate and leverage different and variable labor regimes that are now always already "inside" the dream factory's extended floor room. Rather than disrupt the operations of capital, this friction remains necessary to sustain the flexibility and nimbleness within a more mobile mode of production. Even organized labor is complicit in helping paper over the cracks that present potential disruptions. Here, the teamster's "sacred right" to follow their equipment is a form of cooperation that enables spatial expansion without sacrificing a principled commitment to employment for Local 399 members—enshrined as a contractual entitlement, the "sacred right" not only enables capital and labor to cross borders that otherwise separate states and national territories, but it also reifies privileges and distinctions as those operations encounter differently situated communities and protocols.

BLUE-COLLAR SPECTACLES

The union's effort to suture future job opportunities to an expanded geography of production was not totally disconnected from more local efforts to keep film and television work in California. Indeed, the teamsters have been one of the earliest

and most persistent groups in the entertainment industry to pressure Sacramento for competitive production incentives. It's easy to see these tactics as localized efforts to counteract mobile production, but the more critical point here is to understand these strategies as part of a multiscalar intervention into the spaces of mobile production in terms most appropriate for their members and their interests. Viewed in isolation, the union's strategy looks bifurcated or contradictory. Focusing on regulatory exemptions and particular entitlements that enable greater mobility among teamsters risks the appearance of acquiescence, while an inward focus on California seems futile in the face of what has become a fully entrenched mobile mode of production. At times it benefits the union, strategically and rhetorically, to draw attention to their fight against runaway production, but the ultimate objective has not been to counteract mobility as much as it has been to integrate California into a broader spatial agenda.

The teamsters' drive for state intervention into mobile production aligns with the phenomenon's contemporary history, with 1999 as a formative year. First, in April, fifteen hundred workers came together for a rally in Burbank's Johnny Carson Park, where they called upon state legislators to support the industry with tax breaks. A few months later, in July, more than two thousand teamsters, driving some one hundred movie vehicles in a caravan from Burbank to Sacramento, made their way to the California State Capitol. Cherry pickers, camera trucks, water trucks, and wardrobe trailers blocked streets and encircled government offices while the teamsters chanted "Bring Hollywood Home." At the time, lawmakers were considering two bills that would have introduced the state's first incentives to keep productions in California. Despite passing in the State Assembly,

they failed in the State Senate. Four years later, the local gathered another one hundred vehicles and four hundred demonstrators, including several state lawmakers, at the St. Regis Hotel in Century City. There the payroll services company Axiom International had intended to hold an event on the benefits of Canadian production incentives, but it was canceled in response to the planned protest.

Such efforts, especially the one in Sacramento, are recounted by union officials and through union publications each time the push for state incentives is addressed; they also attracted press attention as part of the broader activities spearheaded by a new coalition of below-the-line workers called the Film and Television Action Committee.²² The protests aligned with the teamsters' general disposition (across all divisions) toward disruptive tactics, but in the context of the entertainment industries the action was designed to conjure in quite explicit terms an image of the industry that delivered middle-class jobs for blue-collar workers. "At that time, we were losing a significant number of employment opportunities, first to Canada, then New Mexico and Louisiana. We needed to shift the narrative for lawmakers who always ask, 'If Warner Bros. is making hundreds of billions of dollars, why do they need incentives?' We needed them to understand this was about supporting good jobs for hard working teamsters," recalled business agent Ed Duffy, who helped organize the demonstrations.²³ Trucks, trailers, and cherry pickers—large, impressive pieces of equipment—helped visualize the less glamorous side of the business, and they made material (both figuratively and in more literal terms) the scale of local job losses, which were reaching record numbers throughout the 2000s.

While the disruptive spectacles were political flashpoints designed to redirect capital back to the region, they emerged

out of a much longer, more tedious, and largely invisible lobbying campaign that commenced in the late nineties and continues today. Duffy adds: “I was in Sacramento, like, every other week. But it’s a constant, ongoing battle. Every two years, legislators move on. They’re not there anymore, and we have to start re-educating all over again.”²⁴ Duffy, along with his colleague Steve Dayan, have been central figures in the union’s multi-pronged lobbying effort over the past twenty years, alongside former union lawyer turned lobbyist Barry Broad, who retired in 2018. In addition to “countless” meetings with state senators and representatives in Sacramento, the trio also focused attention on more local matters of concern in Los Angeles. Despite the city’s historical relationship to moviemaking, its administrative processes—as in other cities around the world—were perceived as costly and overly bureaucratic, prompting a successful campaign in the late 2000s that made obtaining permits cheaper and more efficient, increased the provision of parking on locations throughout the city, and launched a “Film Works” marketing campaign aimed at educating city residents about the economic value of moviemaking in hopes it would make them more welcoming when a production moves into their neighborhoods. More recent activities have focused on strengthening the state’s incentive program by increasing the funds that are available, expanding the types of productions that are eligible, and ensuring determinations are made according to the potential impact on below-the-line wages.²⁵

Furthermore, both Duffy and Dayan have held influential roles within key governing organizations and advocacy groups. Duffy has served on the board of the city’s permit-granting organization, Film LA, for more than a decade, and is its current chairman. He also been a member of the LA City and

County Film Task Force; the State Film Incentive Alliance of Unions, Studios, and Vendors; the Entertainment Union Coalition; and the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. Meanwhile, Dayan has served since 2009 on the board, including a stint as chairman, of the California Film Commission, which runs the state's incentive program. While it's not uncommon for union leaders to seek out influential positions in organizations that are aligned with their politics, these networks nevertheless betray the patchy and often awkward entanglements at the local, regional, and state level that the operations of capital are prone to produce.²⁶ According to Duffy, "I'm always meeting with legislators, council representatives, or labor leaders. I'm there with representatives from the major studios. We need them to give us clout. But there's always political pushback against incentives. Labor organizations want to know why the entertainment industry deserves the support instead of teachers. Politicians worry the programs are too expensive and only benefit studios and celebrities. Often, I'm the only one in the room with any experience on a film set, so my voice becomes important. I'm there to translate and explain."²⁷ The union's lobbying efforts, which include Duffy's emotional labor and acts of translation, may very well produce value for the studios, but to focus solely on that value loses sight of the union's ability to shape those operations to benefit its members.

While it took a decade for the political pressure to pay off, California launched its first incentive program in 2009, which set aside \$100 million annually for qualified projects over the next seven years. The program has been renewed and expanded twice in the past decade, with its third incarnation (worth \$330 million annually) set to expire in 2025. The program has been a success for the teamsters, both rhetorically and materially.

Recalling the qualifications raised in the first chapter about the “success” of any one individual incentive program over another, it’s hard to deny the program’s ability to reintegrate California into the geography of production, retaining local employment opportunities and generating economic activity from the growth in productions over the past ten years.²⁸ The union’s official publications are peppered with enthusiastic profiles of individual film and television productions that have been lured back to California or remained in the state after receiving incentives. That the publications also feature with equal enthusiasm the work of Local 399 members on productions based around the world remains an unspoken contradiction that simply underscores the complexities of work and union politics in the era of mobile production.²⁹

CONCLUSION

It’s somewhat facile to attribute in any direct or causal fashion a shift in the tone of union politics to two men, but as Local 399’s only leaders over the past four decades, Leo T. Reed (who served as secretary-treasurer from 1988 to 2014) and Dayan (who served in the same role from 2014 to 2022) have certainly exercised significant and distinctive influence on the organization’s strategies that are emblematic of its broader transformations in the mobile era. Reed, a former professional football player, police officer, and bodyguard to Sylvester Stallone, was a towering figure, complete with dark shades and a thick, handlebar mustache. He had a highly combative and competitive reputation that followed him from the football stadium through his turn to law enforcement and then union politics. He once reportedly took out full-page advertisements in *Variety* and the

Hollywood Reporter that read, in part, “To all non-union producers, our office hours are from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. Come see us or we’ll come see you.”³⁰ After fifteen years as a business agent and organizer within Reed’s leadership team, Dayan unseated his boss for the top job in the bitterly contested election in 2013. Dayan, with a leaner frame and bookish visage, has employed a much less confrontational approach, complementing squabbles with individual producers about contract violations with a more politically attuned (and cooperative) approach directed at the politicians in Sacramento.

The differences between the two leaders easily gave way to barbs and accusations throughout their respective election campaigns. Opponents framed Reed as a belligerent, corrupt, and old-school Hoffa crony, while Dayan’s critics worried that he was a corporate sellout, too eager to play nice with producers at the expense of union members.³¹ Of course, the truth is more complicated and contradictory. At stake in the perceived differences between the two union leaders was the organization’s evolving attempts to contend with shifting industrial dynamics, a process that always needed to balance the traditional orientation of the union’s politics and the members’ collective identity with the increasingly flexible logics of mobile production.

Still, it’s hard not to read deeper meaning into even more recent leadership shifts within the organization. Dayan’s recently announced successor, Lindsay Dougherty, is the first woman to be elected to the leadership spot. She’s also the first individual from Local 399 to ever hold a national leadership role. In fact, Dougherty holds two. In 2022, she was elected as the Teamsters Western Regional International Vice President and appointed as the International’s Director of the Motion Picture and Theatrical Trade Division. Despite assumptions about organized labor’s

waning allure among a younger generation of workers, Dougherty speaks about the future in revolutionary terms: “It’s not just in Hollywood but all over the country. We need to reinvigorate the labor movement. We need a revolution. There is a lot of frustration, a lot of unhappiness. We need to get people re-engaged and unified because it’s the only way we can make changes.”³² In my conversation with her, there was a clear sense of urgency for the local to embrace more pressing and contemporary matters: getting new media (e.g., streaming video) productions covered by the collective bargaining agreement; improving workplace health and safety, especially working hours, for members; and reducing conflict and competition among locals in different parts of the country to improve conditions for all teamsters, regardless of location.

The last point, perhaps more so than the others, explicitly acknowledges one of the most enduring impacts of mobile production for the union: shifting the geographic scope of organizing efforts and the contours of collective experience beyond any one jurisdiction. Past attempts at a national contract—a single collective bargaining agreement that would cover all teamsters in the Motion Picture and Theatrical Trade Division—have failed to gather much momentum. Local 399 spearheaded those efforts, but union leaders attribute the stalemate to a persistent suspicion among competing jurisdictions that the local would put their own members’ interests ahead of those outside Hollywood. Further, the symbolism of Dougherty’s appointment in the context of the #MeToo movement is not lost on observers. Despite some modest attempts to improve the visibility of female teamsters, driving remains a close-knit, male-dominated profession with a lot of work to do to reverse a history of sexual harassment, misogyny, and cronyism.³³ While the logics of

Mobile Hollywood require the union to continue to keep its eye on the geography of production, the ability to diversify its agenda is a necessary response to further modernize the organization, incorporating into its arsenal the same multiplicity and syncopated operations as a mobile regime of accumulation.