

North Carolina starts to shed its antiunion bias

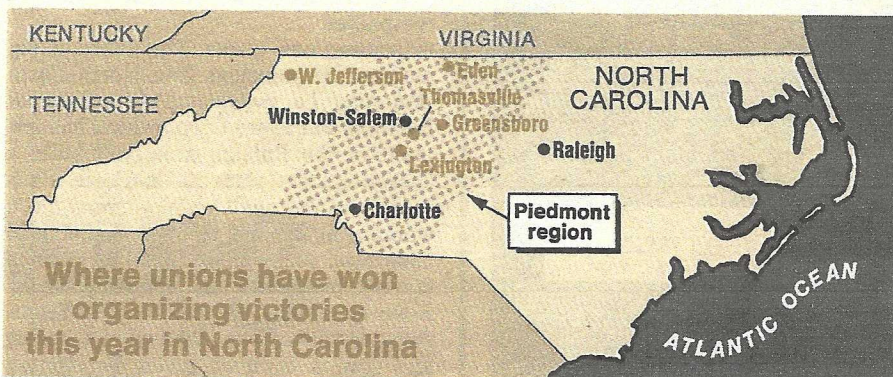
With its low-wage economy, agrarian culture, and nonunion textile mills and furniture factories, North Carolina—the least unionized state in the U.S.—for decades fiercely resisted organized labor. But the state has been shedding its old ways, and now an influx of new jobs—and people—in high-wage industries appears to be softening the rabid anti-union attitudes that once dominated the state. This change was apparent in some important union organizing victories this year.

While unions lost far more representation elections than they won in North Carolina, as they did nationally, the gains in North Carolina were still significant. The AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Dept. achieved its first breakthrough last June in an all-out effort to organize an estimated 80,000 nonunion furniture workers in the state. It has singled out Thomasville Furniture Industries Inc., with 23 plants and 5,500 workers, as the primary target in this campaign. In

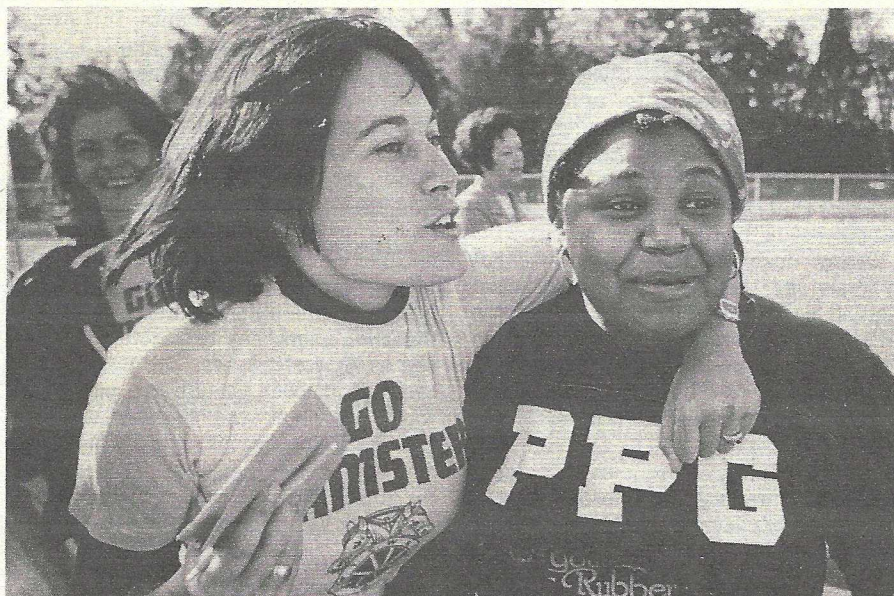
conservative North Carolina like a Texas cheerleader. The union organized four plants in Lexington alone, converting that community of 20,000 into a union town practically overnight. "It caught the whole town by surprise," says Ralph Simpson, editor of *The Dispatch*, Lexington's daily paper. "The industrialists here are scared because they know they're vulnerable," adds Simpson, who

about the same as in recent years. But NLRB statistics indicate that the unions, because they organized some large plants, added well over 5,000 new members to their rolls, the highest since the early 1970s.

This year's union "surge," as one cautious unionist describes it, might merely reflect a cyclical upswing in organizing from the trough of the 1974-75



Robert McAlvey—BW



Teamsters organizer Saporta: "It's the people themselves who are demanding the union."

June, the IUD won bargaining rights for 500 workers at a Thomasville plant in West Jefferson in the northwestern corner of the state.

Star organizers. Moreover, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, moving afield from trucking and warehousing, mounted a rapid-fire series of organizing drives at manufacturing plants in the Piedmont region (map). The Teamsters won 9 of 11 organizing elections in only 11 months, partly because of the unconventional tactics of Vicki Saporta, a 26-year-old organizer who burst upon

has often urged in editorials that Southern industry put an end to its dependence on "cheap labor."

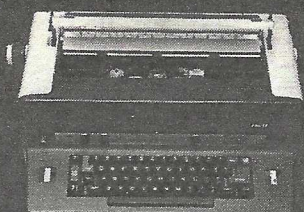
Nevertheless, nobody—and least of all experienced union officials—is predicting that North Carolina is on the brink of rapid unionization. Only 6.8% of its eligible workers belong to unions, compared with a national average of 26.2% in 1974. In the fiscal year ended Sept. 30, unions won slightly more than 35 elections conducted by the National Labor Relations Board, the most since 1974. The unions' success rate of 32% was

recession. The state's currently healthy economy, along with the high inflation rate, spurs organizing. "When the job market gets tight, the workers aren't scared somebody is outside waiting to take their jobs, and they're more willing to join the union," says state AFL-CIO President Wilbur Hobby.

Changing views. More significant, some business, government, and union officials argue—if only tentatively—that attitudes are undergoing a thorough change in North Carolina. John F. McNair III, vice-chairman of Wachovia Bank & Trust Co. in Winston-Salem, says that as industry continues to pour into the state from other regions, unions will be more aggressive—and successful—in organizing. "The major reason that North Carolinians have been opposed to unions is that they've had no need for them," McNair says. "Until 10 years ago, most businesses were small and family-owned. That is changing rapidly."

McNair, who is also a member of the state's board of economic development, says industrialization is increasing at a fast rate. In 1977, companies invested \$1.4 billion in new plant and additions to old plant in North Carolina, and that level has almost been reached so far this year, creating some 43,000 new jobs. But its workers are the lowest-paid in the nation, averaging only \$4.53 in hourly earnings, compared with \$5.72 nationally. This is because of the low wages paid in the textile, apparel, and furniture

Will McIntyre



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industries, which in 1977 accounted for 53% of the state's manufacturing employment.

In recent years, some local business groups in North Carolina have discouraged high-wage, unionized companies from siting plants in their areas. The fear was that such companies would force local wages up and bring in unions. The state has long been aggressively seeking new companies, but the current governor, Democrat James B. Hunt Jr., makes a point of "welcoming all industries," regardless of their union policies. However, he supports the state's right-to-work law, which makes organizing tougher for unions, and the state is not averse to citing the law as a lure to companies.

Organizing new plants. The influx of big national corporations into North Carolina may be increasing. International Business Machines Corp., which has one plant in the Raleigh area, will build a 1,600-employee plant in Charlotte. Philip Morris Inc. will employ some 2,000 workers at a plant to be built north of Charlotte. PM's Miller Brewing Co. has started production in a new plant in Eden employing 950 people. The Teamsters organized the brewery last spring and won a contract giving production workers a wage rate of \$9.25 an hour.

This type of high-wage contract generates intense bitterness among some businessmen, especially those who are ideologically opposed to unions. For example, George E. Shelton, executive vice-president of Capital Associated Industries, an employer association, charges that Miller "sat back and let the employees be had by the union."

Many businessmen and government officials say this attitude is less widespread now than it used to be. On the other hand, many say, the unions' election victories this year could indicate the beginnings of an important change of attitude among Southern workers. "The old concept of loyalty to the company doesn't sell any more," says a labor lawyer at one large Southern company. "People don't love dear old Colonel So-and-So any more. They're interested in bread and butter. They know that unions aren't always good, but it's a matter of picking the better of two 'baddies' when they vote the union in." Daniel H. Pollitt, law professor at the University of North Carolina and a labor law expert, notes that the state's work force is "younger, blacker, and prettier than it ever was before," because of the sharp increase in black and women workers.

Nonwage demands. Many union officials think blacks, in particular, are easier to organize in the South than whites. The work force of the "new South," as Pollitt puts it, wants more than wages. In a recent election, he says, workers voted for union representation because "they

felt they didn't have anybody to take their grievances to."

The Teamsters' Vicki Saporta agrees that nonwage issues are of major importance in North Carolina. A graduate of Cornell University's School of Industrial & Labor Relations, Saporta has been a Teamsters organizer for about five years and went to North Carolina last year at the invitation of Ralph V. Durham, president of 10,000-member Teamsters Local 391 based in Charlotte. Energetic and tenacious, Saporta established an extraordinary rapport with workers, observers say, despite the fact that "I'm a young, female Yankee, and we're not supposed to be accepted down here," as she says.

Instead of conducting the traditional slow-moving, staid campaign, Saporta led prouction cheers at company gates, organized rallies and parades of workers and their families—with everybody wearing Teamsters T-shirts—and met continually with rank-and-file workers.

Luring high-wage industry to North Carolina may be bringing more unions with it

It became an "in thing" to join the Teamsters in cities such as Greensboro, Thomasville, and Lexington, where the union won bargaining units. In Lexington, it organized a battery plant, a building-products factory, a large dairy cooperative, and a fiber-glass plant owned by PPG Industries Inc.

"By and large, what drove the people to us," Saporta says, "was poor supervision, favoritism, and job insecurity. People want to be treated equally. It's not like we're third parties trying to get into a plant. It's the people themselves who are demanding the union."

Digesting gains. The PPG victory, involving 1,400 workers, was the largest, and came about even though PPG paid \$5 to \$5.50 an hour, the highest wage in Davidson County. PPG is contesting the election before the NLRB. The problem for Local 391 now will be to negotiate contracts at all companies it has organized. The union has temporarily stopped organizing to digest its gains.

For most union organizers, North Carolina remains inhospitable. For example, on the same day that the IUD won the West Jefferson election, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters—which does not belong to the IUD—lost a furniture-plant vote in Elizabeth City. Moreover, politicians still feel it would be suicide to be prouction. While conservative groups raised \$5 million for the reelection campaign of Senator Jesse A. Helms (R-N.C.) without embarrassing him, Helms's Democratic opponent in the Nov. 7 election, John Ingram, decided he had to reject a \$5,000 contribution from organized labor. ■

LABOR

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Details on page 2A

Democrat and Chronicle

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Organizer cheers, 'Go Teamsters,' and gets results

By MICHAEL CORDTS

Like the leader of any successful revolution, Teamster organizer Vicki Saporta was flattered when her enemies in Lexington, N.C., sent a funeral wreath to her going-away party.

"I guess I was leaving in the nick of time," she said Saturday. Her smile faded. She paused and tugged at her yellow "GO TEAMSTERS" T-shirt. The smile came back.

"Shoot, nobody would hurt me. I'd make too good of a martyr."

The morbid parting gift was just another indication that the 26-year-old union organizer from Irondequoit is worth every penny of the \$33,250 salary she draws from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the world's largest labor union.

Her stunning success in North Carolina — the least-unionized state in the nation — surprised the Teamsters as much as it shocked the business leaders of Lexington, who watched in disbelief as she unionized the city's four largest industries in 16 months.

But turning anti-union Lexington into a Teamster stronghold is only Ms. Saporta's latest coup.

She was the first graduate in the

33-year history of Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations to sign on with the Teamsters, and she was the first woman to be named to the International's eight-member organizing department.

She organized 1,200 workers at Yosemite National Park when she was fresh out of college. She helped unionize Blue Cross clerical workers in Chicago, which a Teamster publication says is the largest unit of clerical workers ever organized.

Business Week magazine said she "burst upon conservative North Carolina like a Texas cheerleader." Marveling at her ability to surprise management and tap worker unrest, the editor of Lexington's daily newspaper called her "an energetic young woman from upstate New York who would seem as out of place here as the Square's Confederate Soldier would in Rochester."

Friends and foes respect her ability, and a partial list of published adjectives includes highly intelligent, persuasive, attractive, vibrant, articulate, hard-working, charming and unconventional.

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D&C photo by Vicki Valerio

Union organizer Vicki Saporta wears her philosophy

TEAMSTERS

From Page 1B

But it's all a matter of fair play for the woman who lives in California, works out of Washington, D.C., and is headed back to North Carolina.

"We don't want everything the companies have. We don't want the companies to be in the red," she said. "It's simple. The workers deserve a fair share of what they produce. They deserve a grievance procedure and dignity and respect."

She speaks quickly, and her hands race when the subject turns to companies that have raised prices after moving to the South. Sunbelt states offer tax cuts and workers who typically earn half as much in wages and benefits as their counterparts in the North, she said.

"We're talking about husbands and wives and kids who are trying to exist on \$2.90 an hour," she said. "The profit motive — at any cost — of some companies frightens me."

Lexington is still buzzing about the campaign she masterminded, which included cheering, dancing, singing, picnics, parades and a sea of "GO TEAMSTERS" T-shirts. The campaign unionized more than 4,000 workers.

"The town went crazy," she said. "It was the most beautiful grass-roots movement I'd ever seen. The workers became militants overnight, and it was all because for the first time the workers realized they were worth something."

"I love those people down there. It was the best experience of my life."

She's almost oblivious to corruption in the Teamsters, until companies she's attempting to organize bring up the disappearance of former union president Jimmy Hoffa, the murder conviction of New Jersey Teamster leader Anthony Provenzano and the

pension fund scandal.

She was unaware that a close friend of Salvatore "Sammy G" Gingo, Rochester's late Mafia underboss, and current underboss Richard Marino were elected officials of Teamsters Construction Local 398.

"We've got 750 locals, and some of them have problems," she said. "But I'm not affected by what Tony Provenzano did or didn't do. And I just met my first Rochester Teamster two days ago in Washington."

She admits her success has caused some jealousy within the international, "but I've earned my stripes. I was a young female who didn't come through the ranks, but now they (her fellow organizers) know me and trust me."

She also is a new breed of union organizer, said Jean McKelvey of Rochester, one of her professors at Cornell.

"There's a renewed interest in unions, and Vicki was almost a pioneer," Mrs. McKelvey said. "She was a well-motivated student with lots of self-confidence. I thought she would go places, but not this fast. It's amazing."

Curled up in a kitchen chair and sipping milk during a rare visit to her Irondequoit home, the daughter of Abe and Leah Saporta talked about non-union Kodak and Xerox.

"Boy, I bet the whole town would be against Kodak going union," she said, glancing at the ceiling and laughing.

For the time being, she's returning to North Carolina for a series of labor board hearings regarding her latest achievement.

What happened to the funeral wreath, compliments of PPG Industries Inc.?

"I took it to Washington, D.C., and hung it on my boss's door."

The Charlotte Observer

Sunday
April 1, 1979

Local News

From Charlotte and The Carolinas

Section

C

Vicki Is A Driving Force As Teamsters Roll In N.C.

By BOB DROGIN
Observer Staff Writer

SALISBURY — Sporting a yellow "Go Teamsters" T-shirt, Vicki Saporta plays the Fiber Industry workers like an evangelist, her fingers stabbing the air, her voice loud and insistent.

"We don't ask anyone to join us," she shouts. "We're here to offer a product and if you get us you'll be damned lucky ... because we're getting calls from around the state."

Such a claim from a union organizer would have been unlikely a few years ago. But the Teamsters are making inroads in North Carolina, a right-to-work state that the U.S. Labor Department says has, after South Carolina, the second lowest unionization rate and the lowest industrial wages in the country.

Ms. Saporta, a 26-year-old organizer for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, is probably the best — and most unconventional — organizer the Teamsters, or any other union, has in the state.

A self-described "Yankee and carpet-bagger," she sings, dances and leads rallies like old-time religious revivals. She dresses herself and her supporters in bright yellow T-shirts and sticks phosphorescent

"Teamsters Are Beautiful" flowers everywhere. She leads cheers, holds picnics and runs midnight pickup truck parades.

"I'm just a little girl on a white horse leading a crusade," she says with a grin. "I'm out to win."

And she wins. Last summer, Ms. Saporta organized five union affiliates in Davidson County — at Mallory Battery, Binings Building Products, Coble Dairy, Pittsburgh Plate Glass (PPG), all in Lexington, and Thomas Manufacturing Co. in Thomasville.

The drive organized about 4,000 workers, a fourth of the Lexington area work force. None of the companies have signed contracts, however, and Thomas workers have been striking since December.

Since arriving in North Carolina in June 1977, Ms. Saporta also helped win union elections for a total of about 1,200 workers at Gulton Electronics in High Point, Modern Metal Products in Greensboro, Miller Brewery in Eden and Liggett and Platt Metal Bed Rail Division in Linwood.

Contracts have been signed at Gulton, Miller and Modern Metal. Bed Rail's seven employees withdrew from the union after a dispute. Ms. Saporta lost elections at Borden Dairy in High Point and Anaconda

A self-described 'Yankee and carpetbagger,' Vicki Saporta dresses herself and her supporters in bright yellow T-shirts and sticks phosphorescent 'Teamsters Are Beautiful' flowers everywhere.



Co. in Eden, but the union is contesting both elections.

Ms. Saporta's successes have not gone unnoticed by employers and industry groups.

She is accused of using mass hypnosis and intimidation. She is attacked in handbills, called a con artist, skunk, communist, member of the Mafia and worse.

"It's almost a compliment," Ms. Sapor-

"These people have ability above and beyond the normal person."

Whatever the reason, the Teamsters are holding and winning more elections in the Carolinas than any other union. Last year, for example, they won 18 elections with 3,951 workers and lost 22 with 1,026.

The next most active union, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, won 2 and lost 7 elections.

The Teamsters have won 4 out of 10 elections so far this year in the Carolinas, and are running a highly publicized campaign to organize police and public employees in Winston-Salem.

"Right now we're really tied up," said Jimmy Wright, secretary-treasurer of Charlotte's Teamsters Local 71. "We've got our hands full."

Local 71 has 3,700 members and contracts with 56 companies, Wright said. The three N.C. Teamsters locals had 14,228 members in 1976, according to the latest figures from the U.S. Labor Department.

The three S.C. locals had 3,742 members the same year. The Teamsters are the

ta says. "If they didn't think I was being effective, they wouldn't bother."

Rhodes Batson, vice president of Lexington's Chamber of Commerce, compares Ms. Saporta's organizing ability to that of Adolf Hitler and the Rev. Jim Jones, head of the ill-fated Peoples Temple.

"It's charisma, the art of persuasion, the use of language and body language, an understanding of human nature," he said.

Teamsters Pick Up Speed In N.C. — And Vicki Is A Driving Force

Continued from Page 1C

nation's largest union, with about 2.2 million members.

About 141,000 N.C. workers were unionized in 1976, 6.8 percent of the total work force, according to the U.S. Labor Department. About 69,000 South Carolina workers, 6.6 percent of the work force, were unionized. The national union rate was 24.8 percent.

Last week, in a lively, four-hour meeting, Ms. Saporta talked about the Teamsters to about 60 employees from Fiber Industries Inc. She has been trying to organize about 2,200 workers at the plant, which is 9 miles west of Salisbury, for a month. Fiber is a partially owned division of Celanese Corp. and produces polyester for clothing, furnishings and tires.

"As a result of your going union at Fiber, everything isn't going to be neat and fine and peachy keen," she explained, leaning back on a table. "We can't work miracles.

"We do more for working people than any other union in the country," she continued. "We get better wages, better working conditions But they're not going to give you anything unless you stand up and demand it."

Shirley Davidson, 31, a drawer frame operator who makes \$6.07 an hour, stood up and faced the smoke-filled room.

"Vicki can show us how to do it but she can't do it," she shouted. "Do you want to go back on welfare, or if not, do you want to be introduced to Mr. Welfare? Then get off your ass and do something." The people in the room burst into cheers.

Ms. Saporta predicted she will petition the NLRB for a union election in two weeks. She refused to say how many workers already have signed applications but said about 200 have joined an in-plant organizing committee, including seven who signed up after the meeting.

Machinist Joe Tugman, 43, said the Teamsters "have the company scared to the devil."

But in a telephone interview, Fiber plant manager Gene LeGrand said he is "very confident" the company would win an election. "I don't know of any burning issues that the people have," he said.

Employers and anti-union groups cite the Teamsters' negative image, telling workers of Teamsters pension fund fraud, corruption and brutality elsewhere.

"It's a problem organized labor has no matter how they try to wash it down the drain," said Andy Anderson, director of management development for the Central Piedmont Employers Association, a group of about 375 employers.

Ms. Saporta gets angry about such charges, angry that PPG accused her of intimidating PPG employees with a toy gun during the election last summer. The union won 698-639.

"We had little toy blue guns that went 'Errrrrr,'" she explained. "We went up and down the line with 'em for 30 seconds and laughed and then some kid ran off with 'em. They (PPG) went out and said Mafia and violence and Teamsters."

An NLRB official at the regional office in Win-

ston-Salem said a hearing officer is investigating the toy-gun complaint.

"People might say, 'My God, that's a threat,'" said the official, who asked not to be identified. "That's not as facetious as it sounds. Certain things that are innocuous to us might not be innocuous to voters in a tense election."

The daughter of a Rochester, N.Y., custom tailor and homemaker, Ms. Saporta joined the Teamsters five years ago after graduating from Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

She is the International's only woman organizer and makes \$33,250 a year. She lives in San Francisco but spends most of her time on the road.

"It becomes like a religion," she says of her work. "I feel like a missionary sometimes."

Since joining the Teamsters, Ms. Saporta has organized rent-a-car employees in Florida, Blue Cross-Blue Shield workers in Chicago, flight attendants in Seattle and public employees in Southern California. But she says she "absolutely fell in love with North Carolina."

"When you organize Davidson County overnight, you have an impact," she said. "We could be a major political force there. We could elect people When you organize 200 workers in California or New York, who cares?"

Batson, of the Lexington Chamber of Commerce, agreed the Teamsters had an impact there, saying he is "certain" the union will scare other companies from locating in the area.

Experts differ on the reasons for the Teamsters' and Ms. Saporta's apparent success.

"I think the ground is ripe," said Daniel Pollitt, law professor and labor expert at UNC. "If the ground isn't ripe, it doesn't matter how good you are. People want to join unions."

Pollitt said the work force has more women, more blacks and younger people than in the past. "They've got rising expectations, they've been exposed to television, they're smarter and have had more education."

Thomas Kaniesner, a UNC labor economics professor, says the Teamsters have succeeded by organizing skilled workers of large companies that have union plants elsewhere.

"As you see more of the labor force involved in skilled industry, you'll see more union organization," he said. "Traditionally, North Carolina is full of workers that never needed unions."

Ms. Saporta attributes her success to worker involvement and education.

"I come armed with facts," says Ms. Saporta. "I live with my people 24 hours a day. I care. I make them care. And I make them work."

She looked at papers in her briefcase, trying to plan the next phase of the Fiber campaign. She had been working 11 hours and an evening meeting was due to start in 10 minutes.

"I don't know if I'll start them singing yet," she mused. "It's too early for that."

The Teamsters are attempting to organize public employees in Winston-Salem. Story in Monday's Observer.

'Girl on white horse' winning Teamsters' crusade



Vicki Saporta leads Teamsters' cheers

SALISBURY, N.C. (GNS) — Sporting a yellow "Go Teamsters" T-shirt, Vicki Saporta exhorts the 60 polyester plant workers like an evangelist, her fingers stabbing the air, her voice loud and insistent.

"We don't ask anyone to join us," she shouted. "We're here to offer a product and if you get us you'll be damned lucky . . . because we're getting calls from around the state."

Such a claim from a union organizer seems unlikely in North Carolina, a right-to-work state that has the second lowest unionization rate and the lowest manufacturing wages in the country. But the Teamsters are making suprising inroads here.

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"Carpetbagger"

A self-described "Yankee and Carpetbagger" from Rochester, N.Y., she sings, dances and leads rallies like old-time religious revivals. She dresses herself and her supporters in the bright yellow T-shirts and sticks phosphorescent "Teamsters are Beautiful" plastic daisies everywhere. She leads cheers, holds picnics and organizes midnight pickup truck parades.

"I'm just a little girl on a white horse leading a crusade," she said with a grin. "And I'm out to win."

And win she does. Last summer, Saporta organized five union affiliates with about 3,500 workers, a fourth of the local work force around Lexington, in the central part of the state. The victories ranged from a Coble Dairy to a fiberglass plant owned by PPG Industries here.

She also helped win four other Piedmont-area elections, including a large Miller Brewery in Eden, taking on about 1,200 new workers in a 16-month period. She has lost only two elections.

Her stunning success in the state surprised the Teamsters as much as it shocked the business leaders. She is accused of using mass hypnosis and intimidation. She is attacked in handbills, called a con artist, skunk, communist, member of the Mafia and worse.

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union. Last year, for example, they won 14 elections and lost 18. The next most active union, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, won two and lost five elections last year.

But turning an anti-union state into a Teamster stronghold is only Saporta's latest coup.

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The Teamsters March

Led by an energetic young woman from upstate New York who would seem as out of place here as the Square's Confederate Soldier would in Rochester, the Teamsters Union has plowed into Lexington this summer, catching management off guard and industrial workers obviously dissatisfied with their lot in life.

With victories at Binning's and Coble Dairy in May and an important win at PPG last week, the union leads, 3 to 0.

For better or worse, change is coming more quickly than ever to this quiet Southern city that prides itself on taking progress slowly. Many people across the country are watching what is happening here, because the unionization of the South is supposed to be the Movement of the 80's. If what is happening here is any indication of its potential, it will be successful.

While organized labor has both its good points and bad ones, we believe it would be most advantageous if industry throughout the region, and especially those companies here, realized the bleak prospects — from their standpoint — and made every effort to improve conditions so that unions would have no valuable purpose. There is enough evidence to show that workers are made happy not by the means to an end but by the results themselves. They want better working conditions and bigger paychecks, and they do not care how they get them.

Unions are helping to bring about those improvements. On the other hand, we believe

that the employee and the manager can work together far better without a middle man. The question, obviously, is whether the manager is willing to listen to the employee and treat him with respect and decency. In the South, the question is whether management will prove that Southern workers are no less worthy of decency than their counterparts elsewhere in the country.

The days of cheap labor in the South are over. Davidson County, the Piedmont, North Carolina, the South — we will not continue to grow on cheap labor, and if industry still has that notion, it had better change its long-term projections.

There are some indications, however weak, that several companies in town, even a big furniture manufacturer, have decided to try to improve conditions so that unions will have trouble winning the support of their workers.

From a philosophical point of view, it would be better if those changes were the result of a genuine concern for the workers and not from a fear of Vicki Saporta and her Teamsters organizers. But if Miss Saporta is scaring them into change, she is doing the town a valuable service and we should welcome the improvements, regardless of the motivation.

As shocking as industry here must find labor's inroads, as stinging as industry's defeats must be, there still is opportunity for the big employers in Lexington — Burlington House, Dixie, Dacotah, Parkdale to name the largest — to respond to the very loud cries of their workers. To continue to turn a deaf ear is the worst possible reaction.