BIG BROWN AND THE NEW STOP WATCH

At United Parcel Service digital on-the-job surveillance joins old-fashioned Taylorism in its most dramatic form. A common feature on the landscape, UPS, the nation's third largest employer, is also a massively dynamic yet overlooked technological innovator. Known among its workers as "Big Brown," "Uncle Brown," or the "Brown Machine," the firm handles 7 percent of US GDP, has over 350,000 workers worldwide, and was described by one analyst as among "the most technologically sophisticated companies doing any kind of business anywhere."[45]

Always a rigorously ordered firm with a penchant for time-motion studies, UPS was started in 1907 by James Casey as a small local delivery firm in Seattle. By the 1920s Casey's firm had merged with a few competitors and expanded to Oakland and Los Angeles, and just a few months before the crash of 1929 the firm opened United Air Express, which flew packages up and down the West Coast and as far east as El Paso. Despite the depression of the 1930s UPS continued innovating with technologies such as mechanized package sorting and conveyor belts. During this era an authoritarian corporate culture began to flourish, and all UPS vehicles were painted Pullman brown "because it was neat, dignified, and professional."[46] So too were the company's strict work rules, written up in a tome called the UPS Policy Book. Along with practical instructions on package handling these pages offer up a plethora of "Caseyism" epigraphs, such as "You can't be a big man unless you have shown competence as a small man."[47]

Much of the firm's rigorous work rules and intense surveillance culture flowed from the personality of Casey, who in his austerity (despite phenomenal wealth) and business-oriented single-mindedness was almost a caricature of the Calvinist captain of industry. Supposedly, Casey was "so consumed by the package delivery business that he rarely spoke of anything else." [48]

By the 1930s, UPS headquarters had relocated to Manhattan. There the publicity-shy bachelor Casey worked long hours in a barren office, lived in "an unadorned two-room suite at the Waldorf Towers, and was known in his spare time to wander through Manhattan department stores, invariably ending up in the room where workers wrapped the packages for delivery. He liked watching."[49]

UPS was using "scientific management" as early as most other big American firms, and eventually its work rules were crystallized into a set of procedures called "the Methods." Today the Methods run about fifty pages and describe basic procedures, all designed to minimize excess motion, speed work, and keep the drivers moving. For example the Methods instruct: "Buckle the seat belt while inserting the ignition key. . . . Engage the starter with one hand while releasing the parking brake with the other." That sounds fair enough, except that drivers who pause between actions are subject to discipline. In the past the company relied on as many as 2,000 industrial engineers whose job was to watch and measure work practices in the interest of constant refinement and reduction of motion. The same holds true today: drivers guilty of wasteful and excessive movements are fined and disciplined by supervisors, who watch the loading docks and even travel delivery routes in search of errants.

But the firm's culture of observation, measurement, and control took a quantum leap forward with arrival of cheap digital computing. Starting in the 1980s UPS managers began a massive, almost awe-inspiring high-tech makeover. Their first move was purchasing two leading technology firms to develop and test specialized package tracking equipment. By the early 1990s UPS was busy creating the first nationwide integrated wireless network, a task that involved creating a partnership between four major telecommunications firms and their seventy-five junior partners. Big Brown needed this ethereal web to facilitate its latest technology.[50]

At the heart of the new system is the "Delivery Information Acquisition Device" known to all as a "DIAD board." Carried by drivers at all times, this computerized clipboard combines the functions of a time clock, GPS tag, and two-way, text-based pager. At best the DIAD enhances flexibility and efficiency, while at worst it is an electronic leash that keeps UPS drivers working at a furious pace.

Simply stated, the DIAD is the Pokky system on steroids. Work starts when a driver logs on to the DIAD with his or her personal ID. Using cell-phone technology, the DIAD board logs the number, sequence, and duration of stops, clocks the speed of each task, notes the driver's location, and communicates all this to a receiver in the truck, which then automatically relays all data to the local dispatch center and from there to a huge UPS computer (one of the world's largest) in Paramus, New Jersey,

where information is archived and kept for at least eighteen months. Similarly, long-haul drivers at UPS are monitored by a device called IVIS, which records and transmits the truck's location and speed, the driver's work patterns, and the minute details of engine performance ranging from temperature to average miles per gallon.

So what is all this surveillance for? "It's to grow the business and provide better service," says Pat Canavan, UPS vice president for package project management. When asked about cutting labor costs, company spokesperson Joan Schnorburt explains: "The union has been involved in the process at every step of the way. This is about creating more jobs through growth." All this is true, but perhaps not the whole story. Some of the more political elements in the Teamsters, particularly activists with the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) see another dimension to the Brave New technologies. "The holy grail, for management, is to scab a UPS strike," says Charles Richardson, a researcher who has analyzed UPS on behalf of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Richardson argues that the technological leap forward at UPS is ultimately about "stealing knowledge" and making smart machinery that can be operated by not-so-smart scabs. Currently, work at UPS is too complicated and time-sensitive for replacement workers to handle. Thus during the 1997 strike the company shut down operations rather than hire temps.[51]

Short of scabbing, UPS technology can already be used to fight union activism. Steve Henderson, a UPS driver in West Virginia, alleges that surveillance was used to harass and target him because he is a TDU member and was active in the 1997 strike. Along with scrutinizing every detail from his DIAD reports and subjecting him to "on the job supervision" ride-alongs in which line managers with clipboard in hand scrutinize every single move he made, "Uncle Brown" also sent spies out to secretly videotape Henderson while out on his route. They finally busted him taking an unauthorized 18-minute bathroom break at Hardy's, Henderson says he was sick, but UPS fired him for "stealing time."[52] "They're out ta getcha, man," says Henderson, who eventually won his job back with union help. "Only thing to do is watch out and stay organized."

Drivers and linemen at Southern New England Telephone report similar harassment involving the overuse of GPS reports after they won a strike. One CWA organizer reports that rank-and-file union activists have

been given what he thinks are punitively unfair surveillance-based evaluations at Verizon. Another commonly reported pressure tactic is for managers to merely show resistive workers their GPS printouts.[33] Inevitably these reports contain proof of some deficiency or technical violation: when every move made by every worker is tracked all the time, and when work rules attempt to regulate even the minutiae of the labor process, then pretty much everyone will be in technical violation of the rules at some point.

So too at BellSouth, where managers have installed GPS tags on 14,000 of the company's trucks and union activists say they are harassed by a gratuitous focus on efficiency and the details of their GPS reports. Many workers see it as a simple speedup, since they are now held to impossible-to-meet deadlines. "I feel like they got their eye on me all the time," said one cable repairman. "I can't slow down anywhere anymore. . . . They're nitpicking us to death. . . . I love my job. [But] I don't need any more stress." Managers at BellSouth assure workers that only the guilty have something to fear. As one executive explained, "If they are loyal, dedicated employees . . . this [GPS] unit should be of no concern to them."[54]

Some unions have managed to come to agreements in which management limits its use of electronic surveillance while others have used digital records *against* employers. One Teamster official said he had used UPS DIAD records to prove that drivers were *not* taking their legally allotted lunch breaks and thus giving the company labor for free, a fact that helped leverage some minor concessions from local management.