

Day 1
CONVENTION COVERAGE



2014 USW CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

GERARD ROUSES CONVENTION TO ACTIVISM

The 2014 Convention of the United Steelworkers (USW) greeted International President Leo W. Gerard with a standing ovation, to which he responded by asking the 3,000 delegates and guests to sustain that enthusiasm for the hard but essential work ahead of organizing and political activism.

“Are you among those of our members who are prepared to go to the wall for our labor movement, our union and our families’ future?” he asked. Resoundingly, the reply was yes.

In his keynote speech at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, Gerard first acknowledged the union’s achievements in bargaining, trade enforcement and preserving jobs, all of which illustrate the convention theme – that the USW is a union that works.

Gerard described the array of shrewd forces that schemed for decades to advance the greedy interests of the one percent and diminish the general welfare of working people.

These powerful forces intend to destroy collective bargaining, he said, to pauperize working people and permanently elevate the wealthy.

“In a few months, there will be a federal elections in the USA that could result in majorities in both chambers of our legislatures with some of the wackiest, right-wing, anti-worker nut jobs in our histories,” Gerard warned. “And if that does not get you fired up, it’s hard to know what will.”

The antidote, he said, is a combination of organizing and political action. Included, he said, will be organizing in the right-to-work (for less) southern states. Going there is crucial, he said, because “the only way to change people’s minds about

the value of unions is to share their vision for a better life and offer them a way to achieve it.”

“We must,” he said, “find new and more powerful ways to get the target off our backs and get new members in to the fight.”

The officers and other union officials on the dais are not the solution, he said. “We need you,” he said, “Our power as a union comes from. . . the activism of our members and our solidarity.”

And Gerard made clear that success is contingent on members contributing at all levels, from brainstorming to door-knocking. “We need the energy of new ideas about how to organize. And you’re the ones we’re counting on to come up with those innovations.”

Triumph for working people means hard work, he said, “in every corner of our two countries.”

And victory won’t be achieved after one election cycle or one organizing campaign.

“But it will come from stopping the one percent from turning our children into pawns in a global board game of shameless greed.”

That, Gerard said, is a cause worth fighting for. And success, however long it takes, would show, definitively, that the USW is a union that works.



PELOSI DECLARES ELECTIONS AN OPPORTUNITY TO REBUILD THE MIDDLE CLASS

Convention delegates jumped to their feet and cheered yesterday when House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi pledged to rebuild the middle class if the Democrats take back control of the House and retain the Senate majority in the mid-term elections this November.



“We cannot win if you do not fight,” Pelosi said to applause. “Together, we will defend opportunity, and we will jump start the middle class.”

The Democrats, she said, have a “100-day action plan” to help middle class families that they would implement in January with the help of President Obama if the election is won.

Currently the Democratic Leader of the House of Representatives, Pelosi, (D-Calif.) served as the first woman Speaker of the House from 2007 to 2010. She took the stage as delegates waved placards declaring her the “Best Speaker Ever.”

Pelosi praised the USW’s resolutions calling for social and economic justice, full employment, fair wages, an end to economic inequality, affordable education, fair trade and re-regulation of the financial sector.

“Your resolutions are our party platform,” she said.

The Republicans and the special interests they support are pledging to eliminate collective bargaining rights and dismantle the National Labor Relations Board if they win control of the Senate and keep the House, she said.

“Strong unions have been the guardians of the middle class since the beginning,” she said. “Every good thing that has happened to working families in the United States in the past 100 years or more has happened because of the union movement. Let’s take pride in that.”

LYNN WILLIAMS – MENTOR, INSPIRATION, HERO

It was at once a solemn and uplifting moment Monday as Steelworkers paid tribute to a legendary leader of their union.

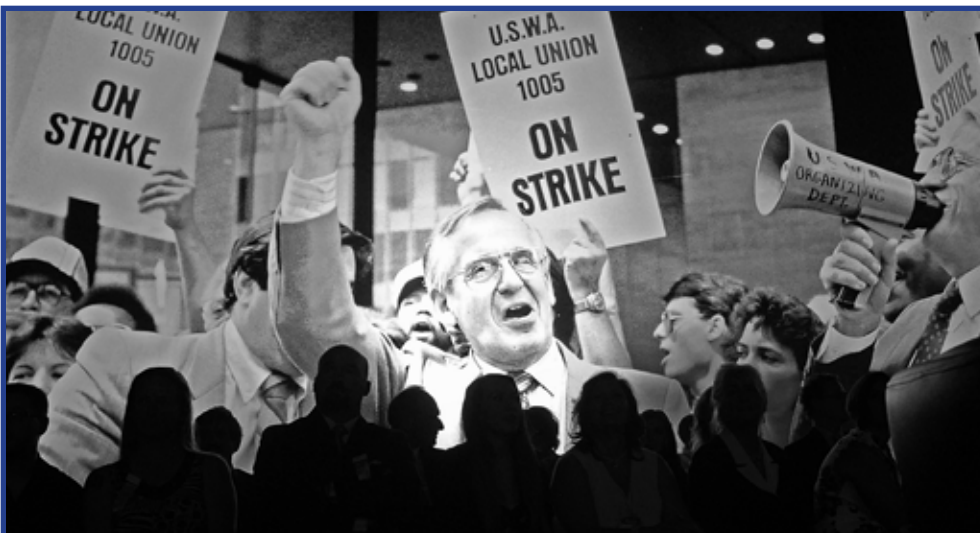
Present-day USW leaders and activists took to the microphones to acknowledge the enduring impact Lynn Williams had on them and their union.

“Lynn was one of the most impressive people any of us could have ever worked with or ever met. He had an undying desire to succeed for fairness and justice,” said David McCall,

Director of USW District 1.

Lynn R. Williams, the USW’s International President from 1983 to 1994, died May 5 this year in Toronto. He was 89.

Lynn deserves immense credit for the USW’s enduring status as one of the strongest unions anywhere. Through an unprecedented brand of leadership, he led the union through one of the most tumultuous periods in its history, as the steel industry was decimated by mill closures, bankruptcies and massive layoffs.



On Monday, convention delegates were moved by a screening of the video “One Day Longer,” commemorating Lynn’s extraordinary legacy.

“Lynn Williams always wanted to make a better world,” USW International President Leo Gerard says in the video. “He had a vision of activism, he had a vision of participation, he had a vision of fighting back, of drawing everybody into the union and building the union as an important part of the social justice movement.”

To countless Steelworkers and activists across North America, Lynn Williams was a friend, a mentor, a role model, an inspiration. A hero.

TOM MULCAIR

USW, NEW DEMOCRATS POISED TO 'RAISE THE BAR'

After more than a half-century of standing up and fighting for working people, the United Steelworkers and Canada's New Democratic Party are poised to take their unparalleled social democratic partnership to the next level, NDP Leader Tom Mulcair says.

"Together, New Democrats and Steel have been leading the fight to strengthen and protect collective bargaining rights – on the picket lines, in the workplace and in government – for over five decades," Mulcair told USW convention delegates in his keynote address Monday afternoon.

"And today our movement faces a turning point in its history," said Mulcair, who was introduced to delegates by USW Canadian National Director Ken Neumann as "the next Prime Minister of Canada" – in reference to the pending federal election in Canada in 2015.

As leader of Canada's New Democrats, Mulcair also is leader of the Official Opposition, or government-in-waiting, in the federal Parliament. The latest polling confirms he has the highest approval rating among Canadians – 54 per cent – compared to other federal political leaders.

The USW was a founding partner in the New Democratic Party's creation in 1961. The partnership remains as strong and as important as ever, given the urgency to defeat Canada's right-wing, anti-union Conservative government in the 2015 election, Mulcair said.



The Conservatives have doubled down on regressive policies advanced by previous Liberal governments that have led to "levels of inequality not seen since the Great Depression," he said.

"I'm here to tell you there's hope. When New Democrats form government in 2015, we're going to raise the bar," Mulcair said.

"Every one who's ever dreamt of fairness and equality, has brought us to this day.

I know the United Steelworkers doesn't just talk about these goals, it's willing to fight for them.

"Together ... we'll make that dream a reality. We'll build a better world, not just for today, but for generations to come."

RESOLUTION: A UNION THAT WORKS

Delegates yesterday voted unanimously for a resolution that renews the USW's commitment to work for social and economic justice at all levels in the United States and Canada.

The resolution, "A Union That Works," directs the USW to fight for full employment, decent wages and the end of economic inequality that flows from deregulation, de-unionization and race-to-the-bottom globalization.

"Take this resolution seriously," International President Leo W. Gerard told delegates. "Bring it home, build programs around it, and we'll start on the pathway to rebuilding our union, revitalizing our labor movement."

Delegates lined up at every microphone on the convention floor to stand for its adoption. One of them, John Lепley, representing a local in Ohio, said he is afraid for the future of his 10-month-old son.

"I rise in support of this resolution to make sure our children have a decent shot at life," Lепley said to applause.

The union will press for legislation that would permit all workers to bargain collectively and for economic stimulus programs to revitalize manufacturing and revive the U.S. and

Canadian economies with investments in infrastructure, education and technology.

Saying that secure retirement and access to quality medical care are fundamental universal rights, the resolution pledged the union's support for both principles.

The USW will work to ensure all levels of government are properly financed and able to provide quality education, environmental protection and other public services, including effective regulation of workplaces, marketplaces and economies.

The resolution called for a progressive tax structure in which corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share and pledged the union will fight to reverse tax cuts and other schemes that benefit only corporations and the wealthy.

The USW will work to reregulate the financial sector and reestablish corporate accountability because, as the resolution noted, the economic future of working people will be hurt by short-term profiteering and financial speculation as long as economic policy puts the interests of corporations over them.

The resolution renewed the union's pledge to work for a global economy where trade is fair and balanced and the rights of all workers and the environment are protected.

BARBER APPEALS FOR UNITY TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE

The Rev. Dr. William Barber delivered a powerful sermon to the USW faithful on Monday afternoon, denouncing right-wing attacks on working families as immoral and providing a model for Steelworkers and their allies to fight back.

“It is immoral to kick hard-working people when they are down,” Barber told the delegates on the opening day of the USW Constitutional Convention. “The right-wing agenda is contrary to every promise we’ve made in America.”

Barber, the North Carolina NAACP leader who launched the “Moral Monday” movement in his home state to fight back

against policies that hurt working families, said progressive activists of all stripes must join forces and focus not on Republican vs. Democrat, but on what is morally right.

“The same people who are fighting us are the same people who are fighting them,” Barber said of civil rights and labor groups. “If they are smart enough to be together, we ought to be smart enough to fight them together.”

Since the Moral Monday protests began in April 2013, the movement has spread across the American South, where working families are under relentless attacks from right-wing politicians who control most state governments.

Barber invoked the memory of Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders as he drew examples from history of workers joining with other groups to fight for change, especially during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s.

“They did not have all the money. They did not have all the votes. They didn’t even have, at first, the majority of public

opinion, but they did not shrink,”

Barber said. “They turned moments of despair into moments of hope.”

The same groups must join forces again to achieve economic justice for all, Barber said.

“It’s high time for all of us to embrace a moral discussion. America needs it now more than ever before,” he said. “We need a recovery of our moral compass, and we need it now.”

In closing the day’s agenda, Barber alluded to the steelmaking process in describing what America needs to return to greatness.

“They tell me that steel is iron with most of its impurities removed. These impurities weaken steel, so they’ve got to be eliminated,” Barber said.

“Today, there are impurities in our political system that have got to come out if our nation is going to be as strong as steel.”



STEPPING UP TO FIGHT FOR WHAT'S RIGHT

Delegates unanimously approved the Political Activism resolution calling for all USW members to commit to engaging in the struggle against right-wing suppression of workers’ rights in both countries.

The resolution asks members to financially support progressive candidates, to work to elect fellow USW unionists to political office and to educate members, families and communities through phone banking, websites and canvassing.

More than 30 delegates rose to urge support for the resolution, including Jerome Davison, Rapid Response coordinator for District 7, who said USW activists should “reward our friends and punish our enemies” at the ballot box.

The resolution details the enormity of the right-wing efforts to crush workers’ rights. In Canada and the United States, that includes efforts to restrict collective bargaining in the private sector, to end collective bargaining in the public sector, to

impose Right to Work (for less) legislation and to limit access to the ballot box.

In addition, the resolution notes, right wing forces have advocated for more job-killing trade agreements and blocked common-sense legislation to create jobs through investment in infrastructure.

In Canada, the New Democratic Party, which the Steelworkers helped to found, is now the official minority party. With successful activism, the NDP could, for the first time, win the opportunity to form a Federal Government in Ottawa in 2015.

Similarly, labor activism in the United States could mean the difference between right wing control of the federal government and labor-sensitive majorities in the House and Senate next year and sustaining worker sympathy in the Oval Office the following year.