

Day 2
CONVENTION COVERAGE



2014 USW CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

ORGANIZING IS OUR FUTURE

Delegates yesterday unanimously approved a sweeping resolution that makes organizing the unorganized a top priority of USW members, their local unions, staff and leadership.

The aim is to substantially increase organizing to reverse the decline of labor movements in the United States and Canada and to ensure the survival of the United Steelworkers for future generations.

“This resolution is more than getting on your feet and making a speech,” International Vice President Tom Conway said. “This resolution requires of local unions and the International changes in the ways we do things, changes in the way we allocate resources and a different level of energy that we’ve got to bring to organizing.”

While the union has organized more than 20,000 members in both countries since the last convention, that was not enough to reverse the loss of jobs from deindustrialization and outsourcing.

“We’re at a turning point in our movement and we’ve got to change it,” said Conway, who, with International Vice President Fred Redmond, shared slides outlining the steep decline of membership, union density and middle class income in both countries.

If the current rate of decline continues, Redmond said the labor movement in the private sector will be cut in half within 12 years and extinct in 28 years.

Despite the decline, a majority of U.S. and Canadian residents approve of labor unions, polls show. “The opportunity is

out there,” Redmond said.

Delegates lined up at microphones to support the resolution. “There are workers out there who need your help,” said Jim Norris, of Local 675 in District 12, which has organized car-wash workers in California. “They are willing to work with you. They just don’t know who you are. Find them. We can do this.”

A first step, Conway said, is to sign up members in right-to-work states and locations where the union has contracts. He estimated that 50,000 people accept union benefits without paying dues.

The resolution commits resources to organize in historical core industries, to grow organizing capacity in public, education and non-profit sectors, and to target larger bargaining units.

The USW pledges to increase training, to develop a diverse group of organizers and activists and address barriers that can prevent talented members from participating. Where none exist, the union will make it a priority to negotiate leaves of absence and new employee orientation provisions into contracts.

The USW will negotiate neutrality agreements with employers to allow workers at non-union facilities opportunities to join. It will build its Associate Membership Program and experiment with ways to make associate member systems and minority unions successful strategies for workers to reach full USW membership.

“If any union can make this change and lead us out of this hole, it’s this union, this International,” Conway said. “We have to do it together.”

“College athletes need a union,” said Ramogi Huma to cheers. Huma, founder and president of the National College Players Association, thanked delegates for USW support to college athletes that led to the NLRB decision earlier this year that football players at private colleges are employees with the right to organize.



BURKE HIGHLIGHTS SUCCESS OF WORKERS UNITING

British union leader Tony Burke brought convention delegates to their feet Tuesday with an address that celebrated the success of Workers Uniting, the partnership between his union, Unite, and the USW.

“We face an attack the likes of which workers have not seen for generations,” Burke told the crowd. “We have a vehicle to fight back, and that vehicle is Workers Uniting.”

Unite, the largest union in Great Britain and Ireland with 1.4 million members, formed Workers Uniting with the USW



in 2008 to challenge multinational corporations and combat inequality and right-wing austerity policies on both sides of the Atlantic.

“These countries are dismantling employment rights and collective bargaining,” said Burke, the Assistant General Secretary of Unite. “They’re harming working families.”

Burke, who oversees his union’s manufacturing sector, said Workers Uniting has helped workers in all four member countries fight back against greedy employers, right-wing politicians and unfair trade agreements.

He said global solidarity has aided campaigns to support workers at Crown Holdings in Toronto, as well as other common employers including Kimberly Clark, International Paper, Huhtamaki, Cooper Tire, Dow Chemical, Honeywell and Rio Tinto.

Burke said the “Off the Podium” campaign to stop Rio Tinto from providing metal for the 2012 London Olympic medals during the company’s lockout in Alma, Quebec, was an example of the coalition’s strength.

“They didn’t believe us at first, but guess what? They settled that issue just before the Olympics started,” Burke said.

Burke said the ultimate goal of Workers Uniting is to achieve justice for all workers throughout the world, including countries like Colombia and Bangladesh, where death threats and abhorrent working conditions are common.

“The vision of Workers Uniting is coming together,” he said. “It will take time, but if we don’t do it now, when will we ever do it?”

‘INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY IS THE ONLY SOLUTION’

Steelworkers activists from across the United States and Canada rose to speak from the convention floor Tuesday to attest to the critical need for our union to continue its groundbreaking role in building global alliances to fight for better working and living standards for workers everywhere.

One after the other, USW local leaders testified to the importance of strengthening our union’s ability to collaborate with international allies on global campaigns to resist the attacks of ruthless multinationals like Rio Tinto, Honeywell, Vale, Crown Holdings and Cooper Tire.

“It is so clear that international solidarity is the only solution” to stand up to anti-worker, anti-democratic corporations and politicians worldwide, said delegate Carolyn Egan, president of the Steelworkers Toronto Area Council.

Delegates unanimously approved a resolution calling on

the union to “continue its successful efforts to build international solidarity among workers and their unions to challenge right-wing governments and corporations and achieve social and economic justice and a sustainable environment for all.”

The resolution entrenches our union’s mandate to build coalitions at home and abroad, not only with labor groups but also with progressive allies of every stripe – environmentalists, students, religious, civil and human rights, immigrant, women’s and senior citizens’ groups – “to demand respect for fundamental human rights and democracy.”

The resolution also calls for “practical strategies to engage our members in transnational organizing, bargaining and solidarity, and work to educate them on the ways labor rights violations and declining living standards in other countries adversely affect our workplaces and communities.”

DELEGATES DEMAND GENDER IDENTITY EQUALITY

Delegates overwhelmingly approved adding gender identity to classifications, such as race, creed and age, cited specifically in the union constitution for protection against harassment.

Members stood, cheered and applauded as Leo Gerard shouted: “We are all human beings in this union, and as long as I am president... we will not tolerate any form of discrimination against any human being for any reason!”

UNION LEADER DESCRIBES BRAZIL'S POPULIST MOVEMENT

Lucineide Varjão Soares, president of the Brazilian National Confederation of Chemical Workers (CNQ), told delegates at the USW 2014 Constitutional Convention Tuesday the story of Brazil's successful efforts to reverse centuries of aristocratic rule for the benefit of the 1 percent.

Her account of the world's fifth largest country and seventh



largest economy electing as president a populist whose policies benefitted workers served as an inspiration to delegates who have suffered as a result of right-wing austerity politics.

Varjão recounted Brazil's history of settlement by colonists who decimated the native people and imported slaves, creating a deeply unequal society ruled to further advantage the elite.

Then, she said, after a long struggle, in 2003 Brazilians elected as president the man who led the Workers' Party, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. During his people-centered, populist term in office, both the economy and workers' lives improved dramatically.

As the world lost 60 million jobs in the great recession, Brazil created 10 million, she said. Over a decade, Brazil raised its minimum wage 72 percent, improving the lives of 48 million people.

In addition, she said, the government reduced poverty with massive social programs.

After Lula, the people of Brazil elected another pro-people leader, Dilma Rousseff, who continued these populist programs.

Varjão also affirmed the commitment of her union to work with Steelworkers, particularly on issues involving shared employers, including BASF, Gerdau, Huhtamaki, DuPont, Vale, Goodyear, Owens-Illinois and International Paper.

GERMAN UNION LEADER PRESSES WORKERS TO COORDINATE GLOBALLY

Michael Vassiliadis told the 2014 Constitutional Convention Tuesday that cooperation between the German Mining, Chemical and Energy Industrial Union (IG BCE), and the United Steelworkers has been productive under President Leo Gerard's leadership.



But, Vassiliadis, who is president of IG BCE, said unionists worldwide must step up coordination to combat worker-crushing measures executed by international corporations.

"In times of increasing globalization we will have to intensify this cooperation going forward. . . and. . . we will have to increase our willingness to learn from each other," said Vassiliadis, who served as the first president of IndustriALL, the coordinating body for European Industrial unions.

Vassiliadis urged coordination on three key issues, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) agreement between the United States and Europe, ensuring multinational corporations fulfill their social responsibilities and reducing race-to-the-bottom tactics as the European works councils have.

The TTIP has the potential to increase trade in ways beneficial to workers, he said, but the agreement must ensure fair trade from a union perspective, which would prohibit wage and social dumping.

Vassiliadis questioned the secretly negotiated investor protections in the TTIP, giving multinational corporations the ability to challenge decisions made by democratically elected governments. He noted that the AFL-CIO and the European Trade Union Confederation are working together to demand worker protections.

In addition, he noted, "we need to use our international structures to oppose trends such as the violation of principles like human rights, the freedom to establish trade unions or standards of health and safety at work. It is in this context that international solidarity proves its worth."

Profile:

EDWIN B. CISCO, INTERNATIONAL GUEST FROM LIBERIA

Question: Tell us about the Firestone Agricultural Workers Union of Liberia.

Cisco: In Liberia, we have worked with rubber for many years, since Firestone came in 1926. They were the first mass employer. This forms our link with the Steelworkers. We produce the rubber that comes here and goes into tires and other rubber products.

We grow the rubber trees, tap the trees, transport the rubber to the main factory where it is processed and shipped to places where companies make tires.

Q: How did your union form?

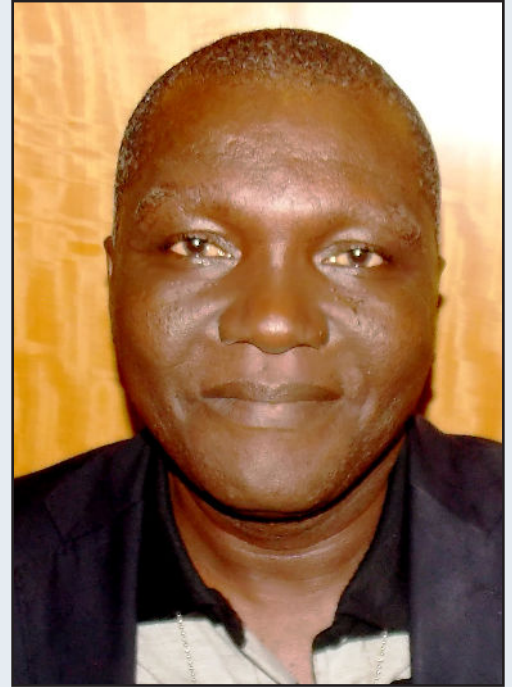
A: The company was based on forced labor. In 2005, workers started rising up against these inhumane conditions. We carried out wildcat strikes and eventually had union elections. Through the process, we had contact with our brothers and sisters in the USW.

We are collaborating with other unions to ensure that the gains we have made are sustained.

The USW reached out when we started our struggle. We were able to gain a lot of understanding through the training that they gave us. This kind of solidarity benefits workers everywhere in the world.

Q: What do you think of Vegas?

A: Everything here is kind of cool, but it is completely different from the ordinary scene in America.



NAPOLEÓN GÓMEZ – A TRUE LABOR HERO

He was denied entry into the country to attend the USW International Convention, but Napoleón Gómez Urutia still received a hero's welcome Tuesday from thousands of Steelworkers.

Delegates cheered a video message Napoleón sent to the convention and paid tribute to the courageous leader of Los

Mineros – Mexico's National Union of Mine, Metal, Steel and Allied Workers.

With the USW's support, Napoleón has lived in exile in Canada since 2006. He left his country to escape bogus criminal charges and persecution over his fight for labor rights and success in raising working and living standards for Mexican workers.

Napoleón has repeatedly been re-elected in absentia by his membership. Under his leadership, Los Mineros is organizing thousands of new members annually, increasing wages and benefits, improving working conditions and resisting Mexico's low-wage economic agenda.

"That is a man who is a true labor hero," International President Leo Gerard said Tuesday.

Although charges against Napoleón have been repeatedly dismissed by Mexican courts, he cannot safely return home. He could not obtain a visa to enter the United States due to renewed, false charges proffered against him.

In his video address, Napoleón thanked Steelworkers for their unwavering support and saluted the achievements of "our strong and powerful alliance."

"Our strategic alliance has been developing new opportunities for everybody – creating a new structure for women, for young workers who have also been benefiting from training and educational programs," he said.



Napoleón was represented at convention by his wife Oralia, his son Napoleón, assistant Sergio Arrambide and a top Los Mineros leader, Sergio Beltran.