

World's First Global Union Agreement Signed Standing Ovation from Convention Delegates

The agreement to create Workers Uniting, the world's first global union, was signed Wednesday by leaders of the United Steelworkers, North America's largest private sector union, and Unite the Union, the largest labor agreement in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The USW's 2008 Constitutional Convention erupted in applause as International President Leo W. Gerard and other USW officers signed the agreement with Derek Simpson, General Secretary of Unite's Amicus section.

"This union is crucial for challenging the growing power of global capital," Gerard said. "Globalization has given financiers license to exploit workers in developing countries at the expense of our members in the developed world. Only global solidarity among workers can overcome this sort of global exploitation wherever it occurs."

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Convention Greet Obama with Thundering Applause Candidate Pledges to Make Life Better for Working People

Following a stirring introduction by former Senator John Edwards, presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama, appearing by satellite hookup from Colorado where he was campaigning, told delegates Wednesday, "In America we rise and fall together."

"Politics didn't lead us to working people," Obama said, referring to himself and Senator Edwards. "Working people led us to politics," recounting having gone to the south side of Chicago after graduating from college to help working people deal with the devastation of steel mills that had been shuttered.

Senator Obama condemned the Bush administration for its blatantly anti-worker values. He was greeted with thundering applause when he said flatly: "This is the most anti-labor administration in our memory. Well, we've got news for them. It's not the Department of Management; it's the Department of Labor."

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Landry Hails Women of Steel's Successes in Accepting New USW Vice Presidency

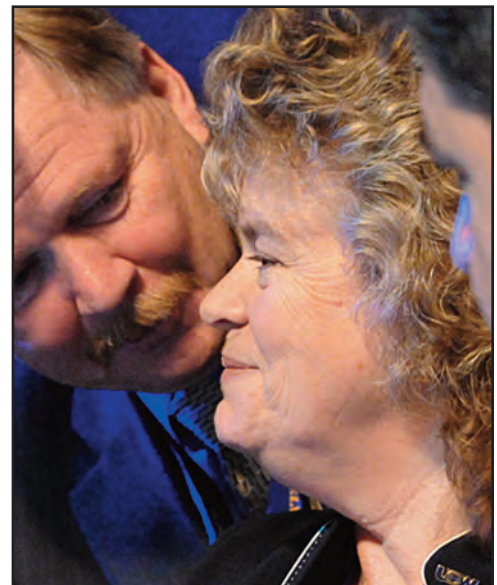
Carol Landry was introduced to the convention Wednesday in her new role as Vice President at Large, the first Steelworker to assume the newly-created Executive Board position and the first woman ever to serve on the International Executive Board.

In accepting her new responsibilities, sister Landry told delegates, "Today, 21 years ago the Women of Steel program was started by our president Leo Gerard in District 6. The object was to give women the skills and confidence they needed to take leadership roles in our union.

"The success of the WOS program," she declared, "is evident right across our union today. We have succeeded in building power, women's power, in our union."

Landry cited the growth in female-dominated industries, and pointed out that Women of Steel headed up the Get the Lead Out initiative in our Stop Toxic Imports campaign.

"Women of Steel," said the new Vice President, "is not about segregating women, it is about building and growing the power of our union. It's about educating. It's about offering opportunities to all of our members equally."



John Edwards tells USW Delegates: Take Down the Walls that Divide Us



“You’ve lived through George Bush’s war on work for the last eight years,” said former Senator John Edwards in announcing the appearance by satellite of Senator Barack Obama.

“There’s a wall around Washington,” Edwards said. “The American people are on the outside and on the inside are the big corporations, the lobbyists, and the special interests that want to protect a broken system that works for them.

“Our job come January 2009 is to tear that wall down and give this government back to the American people. Make no mistake about it. This election is about tearing down these walls and ending this war on working people.

“McCain with every fiber of his being will let that wall grow taller. It is our responsibility, our responsibility to our children, our responsibility to our grandchildren, to take that wall down. Barack Obama will take it down.

“Barack Obama understands this to his core,” Edwards explained. “He’s lived it. He knows what it’s like to fight for everything in his life. Sometimes when times were tough, his mother needed food stamps to get by.”

Edwards asked rhetorically, “Why has this war on workers gone on for so long? It’s not an accident. It is by design.

“This is what happens when the leader in the Oval Office doesn’t know a thing about how regular people go about their lives. This is what happens when our leaders don’t respect and honor hard work.

“This is what happens when corporate profits come at the expense of people who work for a living every day.”

Los Mineros President Gomez Grateful for USW’s Solidarity

Condemning his persecution and the persecution of his members, Napoleon Urrutia Gomez, president of the Los Mineros, the Mexican steel and mineworkers union, expressed his deepest gratitude to the United Steelworkers for our union’s solidarity in demanding his return to his legitimate role as the elected president of his union.

Gomez was illegally removed from his office more than three years ago on trumped up charges after accusing the government of colluding with Grupo Mexico in committing what he called “industrial homicide,” after it shut down a mine only six days after 65 miners were trapped below ground following a deadly explosion.

Gomez, who is being given asylum by the USW in Vancouver, Canada, called the assault on his union “one of the worst political persecutions and abuses of powers. We have defended our union with dignity and have received all kinds of threats – even death threats.

“They have assassinated three of our members. They have kidnapped some of our members and beaten others. We have resisted them all. Because we have committed no crime. They are the real criminals acting like the mafia.”

Gomez accused the Mexican government of controlling unions with the same sort of fascist methods employed by Benito Mussolini to control unions in Italy before and during the Second World War.

“We cannot allow these criminals to win this war against unionism. An aggression against one,” he said emphatically, “is an offense against everybody.”

Obama Continued

He condemned President Bush’s call for an “ownership society,” declaring the president really meant: “You’re on your own. If you lose your job, tough luck, you’re on your own. If you lose your pension, tough luck, you’re on your own.”

While acknowledging McCain’s service to country, Obama contested the Republican’s recent claim to be an agent of change. “It’s not change,” Obama asserted, “when John McCain decides to stand for George Bush 95 percent of the time as he did last year.

“Let me tell what change is. It is understanding the struggles of working people. It means giving the middle class a tax cut and putting a college degree within reach,” he said.

Delegates gave Obama a standing ovation when he said change is “ending tax breaks for companies that send jobs overseas. Change is a president who has walked with you on a picket line and who doesn’t choke on the word ‘union.’”

“You need a president who will finally make the Employee Free Choice the law of the land – that’s what change is.”

Obama said he would be a president who “wakes up every day thinking about you, determined to make life better for working people in this country.”

He concluded by declaring that he and the Steelworkers share a common vision for our nation; the belief that we rise and fall together, and that we must seize this moment to build a better future for working people and all Americans.

Global Union Continued

Workers Uniting will draw on the energies of the two unions more than three million active and retired workers from the United States, Canada, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland who work in virtually every sector of the global economy, including manufacturing, service, mining and transportation.

"In addition to empowering the interests of our unions' members, our mission is to advance the interests of millions of workers throughout the world who are being shamefully exploited," Simpson said.

Tony Woodley, General Secretary of Unite's T&GU section, said in a video broadcast during the convention that the creation of our new union is only the beginning.

"We're laying the foundations of an even larger and stronger global union yet to come," he said.

The new global union's founding constitution calls on its combined membership to "build global union activism, recognizing that uniting as workers across international boundaries is the only way to challenge the injustices of globalization."

Consistent with this calling, Workers Uniting will "match our words with action and resources, utilizing our collective expertise and knowledge through collective bargaining, organizing, global political action and international solidarity."

During the past year while discussions about the creation of a new global union have been ongoing, the two unions have been actively engaged in joint efforts to advance global union activism, including:

- Extensive discussions about strategies that each of the unions has adopted for saving manufacturing capacity in their respective countries.
- Joint collective bargaining efforts with common employers in the paper, chemical and titanium industries.
- International solidarity projects, such as efforts to protect the rights and safety of trade unionists in Colombia and Mexico.
- Participation by rank and file delegations of activists in each other's education, rapid response, health and safety, civil rights and women's conferences.
- Exposure to the political processes in each other's countries, including Democratic Party primaries and Labour Party conferences.

Workers Uniting will be a fully functional and registered labor organization in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Ireland, with the ability to fully represent all of the members of its founding unions. It will be governed by a steering committee with equal membership from each participating union.

The new union's staff will be headed by an executive director who will oversee an initial budget of several million dollars, and a staff that includes research, international affairs, and communications specialists.

Both participating unions have pledged to have Workers Uniting "challenge exploitation anywhere in the global economy, since it is fundamentally unjust and is destructive of decent living standards everywhere."

Toward this end, the new union, in conjunction with the National Labor Committee, is creating a Global Labor Rights Network that will have allied staff on the ground in Central America, the Middle East, Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and other regions.



New Global Partner Lowers the Boom on Exploitation by Multinationals

Derek Simpson, general secretary of Unite the Union (Amicus section), our partner in the new global union, Workers Uniting, repeatedly brought delegates to their feet Wednesday with ringing denunciations of globalization.

"Globalization is not a hurricane," he declared. "It's not a typhoon. It's not a natural disaster. It's a disaster forged in the board rooms to exploit the rest of us."

He called America and the United Kingdom "the two most unregulated markets, where workers are more exposed and exploited than anywhere in the industrialized world.

"We seek your support for what needs to be done to challenge global capital," Simpson told delegates. "What we need to tackle is not immigrants, it's not the Chinese workers. What we have to fight is the multinational companies that are using them to destroy our lives."

Recounting his own experience as an activist, steward and local officer, doing work that often puts trade unionists "between the devil and the deep blue sea" trying simultaneously to combat employers and satisfy the members, he asked: "Why do we do it?"

"It's not just what's in it for us. It's what's in it for us as workers, for us as a class. "It isn't for the money. You want to make a difference. You want to make things better for you, for your wife, your kids, your grand kids.

"Make a difference," he trumpeted. "Workers Uniting!"