

# Delegates Make History

## 2008 Constitutional Convention A Success

**D**elegates wrapped up final business of the historic 2008 Constitutional Convention on Thursday and headed home filled with energy to fight for a better tomorrow for working families in the United States and Canada.

International President Leo W. Gerard praised the delegates for their commitment and attendance during the four-day event that attracted 3,178 registered delegates from local unions in the United States and Canada.

“As your president, I couldn’t be more proud of you, our members who sent you here and our friends and allies,” Gerard said. “And I couldn’t be more humbled to know that we have an awesome responsibility ahead of us.”

All told, more than 4,500 delegates and observers from the United States, Canada and elsewhere attended, including 77 international guests from more than 20 countries.

The convention officially closed with delegates standing together and singing “Solidarity Forever,” the labor movement anthem.

If we work hard toward our goals, including electing Democrat Barack Obama as the next president of the United States, Gerard said we will soon begin to see the kind of change and progress that working families need.

“At some point next year, we’ll be able to feel the world is changing and we really are on the path toward giving a better society to our kids and grand kids,” Gerard told the delegates.

“This is no longer about us. This is about the kind of future

our generation wants to pass on,” he added. “We cannot fail. We cannot falter. Your kids, your community and your planet are counting on you, and I appreciate everything you do every day.”

The final day of the convention started with a few unusual moments of silence as delegates posed for a panoramic photograph of the huge convention hall.

Delegates also stood in silence later in the morning as they watched a video scroll of the names of our brothers and sisters killed on the job since the last convention three years earlier.

Rank-and-file speakers told of shop floor accidents and the lifelong impact these losses have on co-workers and family members. Heartfelt thanks were offered to our Emergency Response Team for their help with accident investigations and aid to the families of members injured or killed.

Also on the last day, Gerard announced that a fund-raising raffle for the Harley Davidson motorcycle owned by late International President George Becker raised \$350,000 to benefit the George Becker Leadership Development Fund. The winning ticket was held by Sandra Forrer of Local 1150 in Ohio.

Overall, the four-day convention was remarkable for the signing of an agreement to form the first global union and a decision by delegates to bolster the union’s Strike and Defense Fund by passing a modest dues increase.

The new union, Workers Uniting, will draw on the energies of two great unions, the USW and Unite the Union in the United Kingdom and Ireland.



“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.”

Delegates also created a new position of International Vice President – at Large, which was filled, for the first time in the union’s history by a woman, Canadian union activist Carol Landry.

They heard former U.S. Sen. John Edwards, our union’s first endorsed candidate for president, urge delegates to reject John McCain’s bid for a third George Bush term. And they heard Obama pledge by satellite feed to support working families.

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.”

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.

# NDP Leader Hails USW’s Progressive Agenda

**J**ack Layton, the leader of Canada’s New Democratic Party, on Thursday congratulated the 2008 Constitutional Convention for its historic decisions to form a global union and promote a woman to the USW’s International Executive Board.

“It’s a courageous step you’re taking,” Layton said, referring to the USW’s decision to create Workers Uniting with London-based Unite the Union, the largest union in the United Kingdom.

The new global union will represent more than 2.8 million workers in steel, paper, oil, health care, transportation and other industries at first. It is hoped that other unions will join to form an even larger, more powerful organization.

“When did workers around the globe begin to come together?” Layton asked. “They’re going to say right here – the founding of a global union to stand up to global capital and take them on, to take the fight to their front door step, united so the old divide and conquer strategy no longer works.”

Layton also praised the convention’s decision to create a new International Vice President at Large, a position that was filled by Carol Landry, a union activist and contract negotiator from Canada.

Layton said the Steelworkers helped to build the New Democratic Party and have been “the heart and soul of our movement from the very beginning.”

He promised to stand by our side as we fight for more universal health care in the United States and applauded the union’s efforts to elect U.S. Senator Barack Obama as the next president of the United States.

“No family should ever have to think whether they have enough money in their wallet or their bank account to get the health care they need,” he said.

“That is the fundamental value of our

health care system” in Canada, Layton added. “I know you are working to achieve this very same dream in America and we’re standing by your side.” Layton got a standing ovation when he described the successful struggles in Canada to subject corporate managers to criminal charges if workers are injured or killed on the job, and to pass a law giving workers rights to recover wages owed in corporate bankruptcies.

He pledged to fight unfair trade deals, including proposed agreements with Colombia, and called for a cross-border alliance of like-minded social democrats.

“We’ve got to take on these trade deals. We cannot allow unfair trade deals to become law,” he said. “Let’s reach across the border like you do in the Steelworkers and find a way forward to fair trade deals that work for families.”

