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USW@Work

A Publication of the United Steelworkers

Volume 1/2

A Powerful Voice for Workers



Legacy of Caring



On the cover: Emergency Medical Technician Lynn Lee in the emergency room. Pictured above is phlebotomist Diane Hinojosa. Both work for Kaiser Permanente in California. Photos by Slobodan Dimitrov.

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// If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. //

Frederick Douglass
August 4, 1857

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Speaking Out

USW active and retired members and their families are invited to "speak out" on these pages. Letters should be short and to the point. We reserve the right to edit for length. Mail to *USW@Work*, Five Gateway Center, Pittsburgh PA 15222 or e-mail to *editor@usw.org*.



Union support a constant

Since Hurricane Katrina blew into our lives on August 29, 2005, nothing has been the same. We have suffered devastating losses and uncertainty of what the future has in store for us. But the one thing that has remained a constant in our lives, throughout it all, has been the outpouring of love and support which we have received from our Brothers and Sisters across the nation.

Katrina may have been one of the worst storms on record but with its destruction also came a bringing-together of mankind like I have never seen before. The way everyone has come together for a common cause has been an amazing thing to witness. We are building back our lives together!

*Donna Gardner, Financial Secretary
USW Local 245
Gulfport, Miss.*

Thanks for storm assistance

I just wanted to say thank you for the union's financial help after the hurricane.

You may not realize how helpful you have been to my family. We truly appreciate everything. We went from having a home and necessities and luxuries to having nothing.

Your kindness will be appreciated and remembered for the remainder of our lives. Thank you all.

*Donna Jones, USW member
Sorrento, La.*

Neighborhood wiped out

My entire neighborhood was wiped out by Hurricane Katrina. By wiped out I mean the houses were completely demolished — nothing left. My neighborhood now consists of FEMA trailers.

I was glad to see that the USW's Rapid Response network distributed money to the relief effort to help union members who lost their homes, their jobs or had substantial damage.

The USW should also check to see

how many union retirees are living in the disaster area. I, for one, lost my home, furniture, car and all out-buildings. I gladly accepted the help that was offered.

*Kenneth J. Fountain
Retired, Local 5834
Biloxi, Miss.*

National paper bargaining

I was very proud to read in the first issue of *USW@Work* that our Brothers and Sisters in the paper industry have started on the road to national bargaining.

Our members of the prior OCAW International Union have had national oil bargaining since Dec. 31, 1966. To reach that first national negotiation was not an easy task.

Our members had to fight and sacrifice to establish the pattern. We have had strikes and taken union action to achieve many of our goals. But our members supported each other through all these struggles.

By standing together we have made substantial gains in past negotiations. We still have issues, but we also have a way to resolve many of them.

*John Zuniga
President, Local 5
Martinez, Calif.*

New paper policy positive

I just wanted to let you know that I have been getting some very positive feedback so far on the National Paper Bargaining policy. I have had the chance to talk to some Arkansas locals and I am not getting anything but POSITIVE remarks. And for some folks in Arkansas that is just unheard of.

When the *USW@Work* publication arrived, I started getting very good remarks from my local folks, and from other Arkansas locals.

Georgia Pacific management, on the other hand, did not seem to think the

things I had to say in the article were "the right thing to do."

In fact, a couple of times today they tried to start some trouble with me. So, it appears that I will not be in the running for "Employee of the Month."

*Margaret Bell
USW Local 13-656
Van Buren, Ark.*

USW helps its members

Today I received the first edition of *USW@Work*, a real treat.

The purpose of my letter is to share the good feeling I got reading the magazine. It gives me encouragement to read what I feel is an International Union that is willing to go to any means to help those who are members.

I was a UPIU member for 42 years and have been retired for six. For too long representation has fallen by the wayside in making the UPIU bigger but no better. Maybe finally it has arrived in the 21st Century.

*William R. Hendrix
Retired UPIU Local 1876
Red Bluff, Calif.*

New publication noticed

I am a 2002 Mead-Westvaco retiree. Upon receiving the new publication, *USW@Work*, I immediately noticed the wonderful cover page and the new logo. Having been an active union worker for thirty-six years at the plant in Chillicothe, Ohio, and receiving union publications all those years, I knew immediately that I was looking at a great publication. I read it entirely. I encourage every union brother and sister to take the time to read this most informative publication.

*Jerry Detillian
Chillicothe, Ohio*

Culture of Caring

**USW health care workers
help patients and themselves**

When a badly injured trauma or heart attack victim is wheeled into the emergency room at Kaiser Permanente's hospital in Fontana, Calif., Steelworker Lynn Lee quickly flies into action.

Lee cuts off the patient's clothing and attaches monitors to measure heart rhythm and other vital bodily functions as part of a team of medical professionals who move around the bedside with choreographed precision.

"Everybody is working. Everybody knows their part," she said during a break from the fast pace of the ER, where life and death struggles occur daily. "We try to make sure the patient is stable. We're thrilled whenever we can move them to the operating room or on to the hospital floor."



Kaiser Permanente
Pharmacy Assistant
Angelica Bastidas

An emergency medical technician by training, Lee is also a proud member of the United Steelworkers union and its Health Care Workers Council. She is one of 35,000 health care workers represented by the USW at hospitals, nursing homes and other settings around the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico.

"I'm a single mom. I raised four kids and three out of the four went to college on my union wages," said Lee, a former grievance rep who was wearing a blue denim shirt embossed with the Steelworker logo. "If you're going to work in a hospital, it's so important to be a union member."

Oldest and largest

There is a well-developed culture of caring among USW members for both patients and for fellow employees represented by USW Local 7600, the oldest and largest of the council's locals with 4,600 members.

You can see that care among USW members at work in Kaiser facilities in Fontana and Riverside, and in the Local 7600 hall where a new five-year local agreement was wrapped up in March. The local represents 210 job classifications from housekeeping to laboratory and technical work and patient-care occupations.

A long line of patients, some squeamish, some brave, were waiting for Diane Hinojosa, a phlebotomist, and her colleagues to draw their blood. Hinojosa greeted them with a smile.

"It's very demanding work. It takes a lot of skill," she said as one patient left her work station and another approached. "You have to like it and you have to give a lot to it. Be patient."

Challenging work

USW member Ray Valenzuela and his partner Felix Mariano, for example, clean, disinfect and wax the emergency room floor at Fontana after the often messy patient care work is done. It's a job Valenzuela takes seriously.

"It's a challenge for us. We take care of it as if the patients were our family members," said Valenzuela, who quietly added that his feelings are colored by the murder of his son years back. "I try to help other people when they are in hard times. I know their feelings, the pain."

The local was chartered in 1969, well before the National Labor Relations Board authorized hospitals employees to form unions. The local and its committees are member driven. Members elect their leaders and perform their own representation work.

Compassion on the job

Local 7600 President Roy Wiles said the training of the local's 25 member representatives and rank-and-file members on their rights and obligations is the best investment the local makes.

"Each and every one of them has compassion for the employees. They're the best," Wiles said of the local's reps. "For myself, as their leader, I want them to know everything that I know and to empower them."

Kaiser Permanente has a long history with organized labor and with Steelworkers in particular. The health plan was founded by industrialist Henry J. Kaiser and a physician, Sidney R. Garfield, in 1942 to provide health care for workers and their families at a Kaiser steel mill in Fontana and at Kaiser shipyards on the West Coast.

Kaiser Permanente eventually recruited other labor union members as customers. Today it is the largest non-profit HMO in this country with 134,000 employees and 8.3 million members in nine states and Washington, D.C.

Kaiser Permanente
Phlebotomist
Karla Eller

Unions bargain together

To help deal with the complexities of such a large health-care system, the USW has entered into cooperative agreements with 27 other unions at Kaiser and with the hospital itself.

The unions bargain with Kaiser as a group and they use a newly developed partnership program with the hospital to try to jointly solve problems and maintain an ongoing dialogue.

Two national contracts have been settled since the unions began the partnership program, which started in 1995 after a disastrous round of contract negotiations led to lower morale.

"You speak as a very loud voice with 28 unions. It's been a really good thing," said Virginia "Jenny" Fortner, the local's



Photo by Slobodan Dimitrov

treasurer. "Some managers didn't appreciate it but most of them are gone."

Wiles said the cooperative program is "just taking off" after several years of ground work. One immediate benefit is a hospital plan to retrain workers whose jobs are no longer needed as medical records are converted from paper to electronic formats.

"This really works," said Wiles, who praised Kaiser Permanente for its commitment not to displace anyone in the shift from paper records to digital ones. "There's no reason in the world why we can't train a chart clerk to be a lab assistant."

Labor-management committees

Jessie Cortez, the lead linen technician at Riverside, used a labor-management safety committee to press for motorized carts to carry the approximately 9,000 pounds of sheets, blankets and towels that pass through his department daily.

The motorized vehicles, installed in storerooms and the linen department, made a positive difference to on-the-job injury rates, both Cortez and his supervisor, Victor Lemos, said.

USW's Long Proud History

Helping Health Care Workers Help Themselves

It was only in the 1970s that health care employees won full rights to utilize the National Labor Relations Board to organize. But this was not the beginning of union representation in the health care industry.

Those rights were the outcome of many years of organizing both on the political front and in hospitals, where health care employees felt they should have a voice on the job. In the forefront of this fight stood the United Steelworkers.

As the USW came to represent workers in steel, aluminum, metal mining and many other major industries after World War II, the union demanded that family health insurance be a standard part of a worker's benefits.

Kaiser Permanente

On the West Coast, employees at what is now Kaiser Permanente in California affiliated with a USW steel plant local in 1949, more than 20 years before hospital employees gained the right to union representation through the NLRB.

It was a natural fit. The USW by then represented workers at Kaiser's huge World War II era steel and aluminum plants that helped to win the war against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

At the same time, on the other side of the continent, workers in America's Appalachian coal field were organizing and gaining a voice in their conditions of employment as never before.

Faced with the problem of large numbers of coal miners injured on the job, the United Mine Workers of America demanded access to modern health care treatment for the sick and injured. This demand resulted in the creation of a network of Miners' Hospitals in the coal regions, particularly in West Virginia, Virginia and Kentucky.

Miners Hospitals, District 50

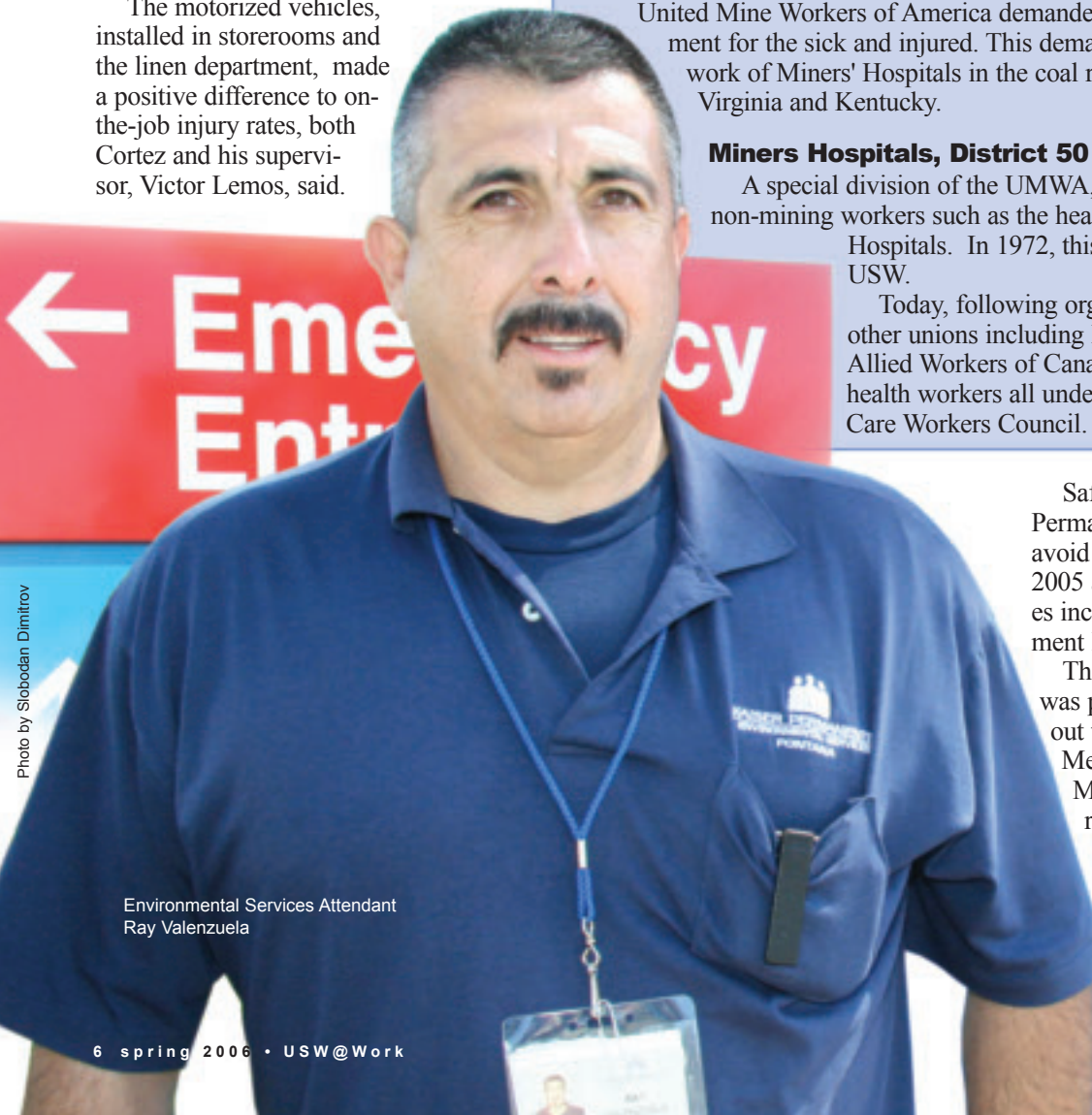
A special division of the UMWA, District 50, was set up to represent non-mining workers such as the health care employees at the Miners' Hospitals. In 1972, this division voted to merge with the USW.

Today, following organizing drives and mergers with other unions including PACE and the Industrial, Wood and Allied Workers of Canada, the USW represents 35,000 health workers all under the banner of the USW's Health Care Workers Council.

Safety committees at Kaiser Permanente helped the hospital system avoid an estimated 3,400 injuries in 2005 and \$77 million in related expenses including medical costs and replacement labor.

The labor-management cooperation was praised by USW members throughout the hospital from housekeeper Mercedes Treveno to Helen Morrison, a front-line customer representative at the hospital's pharmacy in Riverside.

"The more they get along, the better off we all are," Morrison said, smiling broadly after she took a customer's order. "Isn't that true?"



Environmental Services Attendant
Ray Valenzuela

Patients First

USW Health Care Workers make patient care top priority

When registered nurse and USW member Nancy Kirby turns bed-ridden patients in the cardiac critical care unit at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, she gently combs their hair.

"Touch is an important medicine for the sick," Kirby said.

The conscientious care given to patients by USW-represented nurses like Kirby has three times earned the hospital a magnet status designation by the American Nurses Credentialing Center, the highest honor in nursing excellence.

Nation's best

In addition, Press Ganey, a company that measures and reports hospital patient satisfaction, in February rated the New Jersey hospital's nursing care as among the top two percent in the nation.

Press Ganey asked patients to score the friendliness of nurses, how well they keep patients informed, promptness of their response to the call button, their attention to personal needs and attitudes toward requests.

Kirby explains what she's doing as she works. Her talking helps to calm family members who see loved ones connected to pumps, ventilators, heart monitors, wire leads and tubing.

Gloria Bingle, a retired U.S. Steel employee who works as a USW organizer, said patient focus differentiates health care workers from their brethren in other industries even though they share basic contract concerns.

"There are special people in health care. No matter the job, you care about people," Bingle said.

Nurses work in a busy emotional environment made worse by a national

shortage of nurses that can leave those left on duty exhausted and stressed.

Most nurses believe that better staffing ratios — the number of nurses to patients — would lower costs and improve the recruitment and retention of nurses in the industry as a whole.

Patient care issues and working conditions are frequently listed in surveys as the top concerns of professional nurses.

Tom Rooney, a pediatric care nurse, helps kids recover from same-day surgery. He usually works at a go-go pace making sure his young patients are stable and breathing after they leave the operating table. To him, safety is a bigger concern than pay.

Safety important

"We're dealing with people's kids," he said. "If it's unsafe and you kill somebody, how do you sleep? You can't. That's the most important issue to me."

Health care benefits are not always the best for nurses even though they work in the industry. Decent health care for on-the-job nurses and for retirees is a major issue at Robert Wood Johnson.

Vivian Ashbourne is an intensive care unit nurse who floats through departments as needed. He may move from open heart recovery to an emergency room in the same day, depending on demand.

Nurses, he said, need the union for help in securing adequate wages and benefits as well as being an advocate for the education needed to keep up with changing medical practices.

"It doesn't matter how fabulous the



Registered Nurse
Vivian Ashbourne

Photo by Jim McKay

surgeon, if a nurse doesn't know what to do, the well being of your patient is not being served," he said.

Tabitha Walker, a 16-year-nurse, starts her day by assessing her patients before moving on to a myriad of duties including medicine distribution, preparing patients for procedures and keeping family members up-to-date.

"We are the link between the patient and everyone else in the hospital," she said during a shift break.

The pay is typically good, but working conditions can be tough. Nurses frequently work weekends and holidays and often report to work sick because they are afraid of being disciplined.

"This job is as hard as it gets and every day there is more legislation, more paperwork that you have to do because of the legislation and it becomes overwhelming some times," she said.

Walker welcomes the increased activism among the nurses under the USW. For too long, she said, nurses have been happy with the status quo, happy with being treated like second-class citizens.

"If I am overly stressed, overwhelmed, or not feeling well and my work environment is hostile and administration is uncaring, that's going to reflect on the patient care that we do," she said.

Registered nurses Judy Danella and Ruth Shell participated in a disaster drill at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital. Photo by Stephen Chernin/Getty Images

Lower Right: RN Jeanne Clark shows off her union sticker. Photo by Jim McKay



Building Power One Day at a Time

RNs at Robert Wood Johnson stick together for a new contract

On the night before Valentine's Day, registered nurse Judy Danella raced through the floors in the tower building where she works at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick, N.J., passing out hundreds of heart-shaped lapel stickers to her colleagues.

The nurses eagerly snapped them up and the next day pink hearts with the slogan, "We Love Caring For You," adorned the uniforms of most of the 1,260 hospital nurses represented by USW Local 4-200. Even some supervisors wore them — union logo and all.

The effort was more than a cute holiday stunt. It was the first step of an organized "Building Power" campaign designed to unify and inform the membership as they head into critical talks for a new contract to replace one expiring June 30.

Start small and grow

If you can persuade your members to do a simple thing like wearing a sticker, they are likely to do something else the next time you ask, said Vivian Ashbourne, a registered nurse and local union leader.

"You take something small and you go to something bigger and something bigger and then it becomes like an epidemic. That's really what we want to happen to our members," Ashbourne said as he helped to distribute the stickers in his work area, an intensive care unit.

The sticker campaign was deliberately positive. It was designed with a heart to unite nurses around their common theme of caring for patients while at the same time showing management that nurses are working together and mean business about making gains in the next contract.

Strength in numbers

"We always take care of others, but we often forget to take care of ourselves," said nurse Nancy Kirby, a team leader and vice president of the local. "We do want a positive campaign but we want management to know the nurses are behind us. We're trying to make sure they know we're taking care of ourselves this time."

Management did notice. Some supervisors wore the pink stickers along with the rank-and-file union nurses. Other

managers walked through the cafeteria taking note of who was wearing them.

"When you see everybody is behind their union it makes the administration think it won't be so easy to break the ranks," nurse and union supporter Elizabeth Anthony said. "We have strength in numbers. As long as we can keep our membership strong and solid they really can't tear us down."

The nurses at Robert Wood came to the USW through the merger with PACE and are now part of the USW's Health Care Workers Council. The USW has represented health care workers since 1948.

At about the same time as the merger, the Robert Wood nurses voted to leave a larger amalgamated PACE local where only one nurse was on the board and form their own local union.

"The whole board of the union is now made up of the nurses who work here. We're running our own show," pediatric nurse Tom Rooney said. "Having the strength of the USW behind us has made a big difference."

The USW Health Care Council supports union-represented health care units in large hospitals, nursing homes and



other health care settings with services such as preparing for contract bargaining and researching regulatory issues on the state and federal levels.

Training helps

One of the initial efforts at Robert Wood Johnson under the USW was a four-day "Building Power" training program on how to establish a contract campaign and build the union's membership strength. Nurses have also attended classes on grievance handling, union administration, trustee training and the pension and health care trust.

"In order to be successful in the health-care field you've got to have the members involved and 'Building Power' is the best example of a structured way to involve the members in a manner they enjoy, without burning out a few people doing the work of many," Leslie Curtis, the Council's international coordinator, said. "Everybody is involved in some small way to bring power together in a big way."

There are immediate benefits.

The relationship between union and employer at the negotiating table can quickly change in the employees' favor once management realizes that nurses support their bargaining team.

"It changes the dynamics at the table almost immediately," Curtis said. "It sends a message to the employer that the workers are United Steelworkers."

The centerpiece of the program is a network of registered nurses in every department, every unit, on every shift who are responsible for maintaining

person-to-person, two-way communication between individual USW members and the negotiating team. The program is typically called a Contract Action Team (CAT) but Robert Wood Johnson nurses refer to it as a Communication Action Team.

Members surveyed

Although nurses are clearly interested in better work environments, wage increases, weekend pay differentials and improved health care and pensions, the bargaining team distributed a confidential membership survey to identify which issues are most important.

Timely updates give the nurses a way to distribute appropriate information about bargaining while stopping the spread of management rumors and propaganda. It ends the biggest complaint heard about previous contract talks — that the members knew nothing about what was going on.

More than 200 people initially volunteered to participate in the information-sharing program with more

signing on every day. The program uses e-mail, flyers and face-to-face contact.

The nurses have set up a communication tag team that works around the clock. Each hospital unit has at least four volunteer team members, two for the day shift and two for the night shift. Day shift informs the night shift as the shifts change.

More nurses than ever are involved with the union as a result of the CAT campaign, which the local plans to continue operating once the contract negotiations are over to inform the membership on other issues, including staffing concerns and legislative matters.

"People are stepping forward. We will stand together," Judy Danella said after she distributed her stack of stickers. "It makes me proud to be a union member."



RNs Working Together

USW joins health care union alliance sanctioned by AFL-CIO

The USW and seven other AFL-CIO unions that together represent more than 200,000 nurses have formed an alliance to increase strength in bargaining, organizing and politics.

The alliance, called RNs Working Together, is the first AFL-CIO Industry Coordinating Committee, a concept established at the Federation's 2005 con-

vention to encourage workers in the same fields to work together. Other ICCs are in the planning stages for the entertainment industry and unions that represent state workers.

The eight unions with nurses as members have agreed to jointly fund the effort and to cooperate and share information on joint organizing, political and bargaining strategies and member education.

Health care is one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of the national economy, employing more than 2 million nurses. Most nurses don't yet belong to unions but membership in that sector is growing.

First fight ugly

The coalition's first joint fight will likely be an ugly one with the National

Overcoming the Health

The skyrocketing cost of health care is driving the employer-sponsored health care system into crisis, causing grave problems at bargaining tables and swelling the ranks of the uninsured.

It's past time for a new approach.

Employer-based insurance is a uniquely American institution that got its start during World War II when companies introduced health benefits to compete for workers amid labor shortages. Over the years the cost of the system has exploded for both employers and individuals.

The cost of health insurance premiums for a family of four today averages nearly \$11,000 a year, about equal to the full-time earnings of a minimum wage worker, according to a survey conducted this year by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Consider single payer

At a minimum, the current crisis should cause elected officials to consider a system of public health insurance similar to that in place in Canada and every other major industrial nation. A Canadian single-payer system, in which the government directly provides insurance to its citizens, would, among other things, be less expensive and more effective than the system we have now.

Those who wince at the idea of government-supported health care are often

unaware of how costly the current system is to taxpayers. As a result of the private system's inefficiencies, the government already pays directly or indirectly for more than half of the nation's health care — with very little, if any, ability to control costs. The reason is that the actual delivery of care is provided by a mix of private insurers, non-profit hospitals and other players, many of whom add cost without adding value.

Government service

In contrast, most other advanced countries have made universal health insurance a government service. The United States has basically done the same thing with Medicare for seniors and with Medicaid, the means-tested

program that provides insurance to the poor or nearly poor.

Another opportunity for savings in a public system of universal coverage lies in the fact that private insurers spend large and wasteful sums trying to identify and screen out unhealthy or costly customers. Medicare, which covers every American over 65, and the Canadian single-payer system of universal coverage avoid those expenses. Medicare spent less than two percent of its resources on administration in 2003 while private insurers spent 13 percent.

Nearly everyone agrees the system is inefficient and that waste has increased in tandem with rapidly rising health care expenditures. The U.S. spent 5.2 percent of the nation's Gross

Taking Care

Canadian health system works for Williams

When past USW President Lynn Williams returned to his native Canada for an active retirement, he qualified for health care coverage under the Canadian single-payer system.

"Since I've gone home to Canada, I haven't spent a buck in a doctor's office. I go in and wave my card," Williams said as he held his insurance ID high for delegates at a recent R/PIC conference to see. "It meets my family's needs, my grand kids. They are all looked after."

The Canadian system is a publicly funded insurance program where costs are controlled and both hospitals and doctors are private. Any Canadian can go to any doctor or hospital.

It is called single payer because there is only one "payer," which simplifies administration and lessens unnecessary duplication of facilities and expensive technology.

"We need to be doing something similar in America," Williams said.

Labor Relations Board, which is expected to issue a decision soon on the supervisory status of nurses.

The board is expected to act on three cases that could classify millions of nurses who occasionally oversee others as supervisors.

Although the exact impact is unknown, a negative decision could disenfranchise those nurses from their unions and damage union organizing efforts in the private sector health care arena.

The nurses are preparing for the worst, based on a series of anti-worker decisions that have been issued over the past five years by the Bush-appointed NLRB.

Speaking out

Beyond the immediate concern of the NLRB rulings, the nurse alliance has plans to coordinate bargaining and organizing campaigns and fight for appropriate staffing levels — a critical issue in providing adequate patient care.

"With all of these unions working

together, nurses will have an even stronger voice nationwide on issues like staffing, hospital staffing and professional standards," said nurse John DeWitt, president of a UAW local at Newberry Hospital in Michigan. "That's good news for our patients."



Care Crisis

Domestic Product (GDP) on health care in 1960. By 2004, that number had more than tripled to 16 percent. America now spends more on health care than food.

Costs outpace inflation

As health care costs continue to outpace both inflation and average wage growth by wide margins, employers have responded by shifting more of the expense to employees and, in many instances, abandoning paid coverage altogether.

Over the past five years, the percentage of employers offering health benefits has fallen from 69 percent to 60 percent, with much of the decline happening in smaller companies employing fewer

than 200 people.

This drop in the number of insured families only hints at the potential scale of the problem. The whole system of employer-based coverage is threatening to unravel.

In 2004, 63.1 percent of Americans under 65 received health insurance from employers, clear evidence that a third of non-elderly Americans are outside the system.

The Bush administration, under the influence of industry lobbyists and a blind allegiance to free-market ideology, has responded by pursuing policies such as Medicare Part D, that increase the fragmentation of the system and further swell the ranks of the uninsured.

A far more sensible and attractive approach — followed successfully by other major industrial nations — is to opt for a single-payer plan that, by putting everybody in one large insurance pool, limits the cost of coverage per individual medically, as well as administratively.

The successful VA example

One option is to have government employees provide the care as well as the insurance, an idea that may seem far fetched to some, but is already successfully in practice. The Department of Veterans Affairs, which runs its own hospitals and clinics, provides some of the best quality health care in America at

lower costs than the private sector.

The advantage of public health insurance over private includes lower administrative expenses and the ability to bargain with suppliers for lower costs, especially drug companies that charge far more in the United States than they do in Canada and other countries that bargain for bulk-rate prices.

While most people are aware of the discounts afforded Canada, it is less known that the VA qualifies for discounts that are similar to or greater than Canada's because of the VA's buying power.

Pressure for change

How long can the current system survive the public's growing anxiety over the mounting crisis in health care before it overwhelms the opposition to reform of the system by the insurance and drug industries' highly paid lobbyists, many of whom lavish campaign contributions on members of Congress? Not much longer, if voters demand change. History suggests that the combination of skyrocketing costs and political manipulation by the industries' lobbyists will eventually give way to common sense, if not an outraged electorate. Or to paraphrase Winston Churchill's memorable comment during World War II: America will always do what's right — after it's tried everything else.



Employee Free Choice: A Green Light for Renewed Rights on the Job

Initial support for the United Steelworkers was so strong that it took Brandon Howey just one day to collect 31 signed union authorization cards from 34 co-workers at a metal fabricating plant, making an election victory seem like a sure thing.

But Howey and a cosupporter were illegally fired the next work day, a few hours after he admitted to a foreman that he had distributed union literature at Williamsport Steel Container, a Pennsylvania producer of drums and barrels.

The firings had a chilling effect on the campaign. Fearing for their jobs, the remaining committee members and workers stopped responding to an organizer's calls and the petition for an election was pulled despite the promising beginning.

Such quiet defeats are all too commonplace and a large part of why the share of the U.S. workforce belonging to unions has dropped precipitously from 35 percent in the mid-1940s to 12.5 percent today.

Weak labor laws

Aided by weak labor laws and a National Labor Relations Board that has pursued a virulently anti-worker agenda under the Bush administration, employers find it easy to harass or even dismiss union supporters.

By law, employers are prohibited from intimidating, coercing or firing employees for exercising their right to form unions. Yet each year in the United States, more than 23,000 workers like Brandon Howey are fired or otherwise penalized for union activity.

"The United States is the only country in the world where the law guarantees workers the right to join a union yet when they try to form one, key leaders are fired from their work," USW President Leo W. Gerard said.

"Then they are put into a perverted legal system that may take a year, two years, three years or more to have the Labor Board and the courts say they were improperly and unjustly fired and get reinstated," he added.

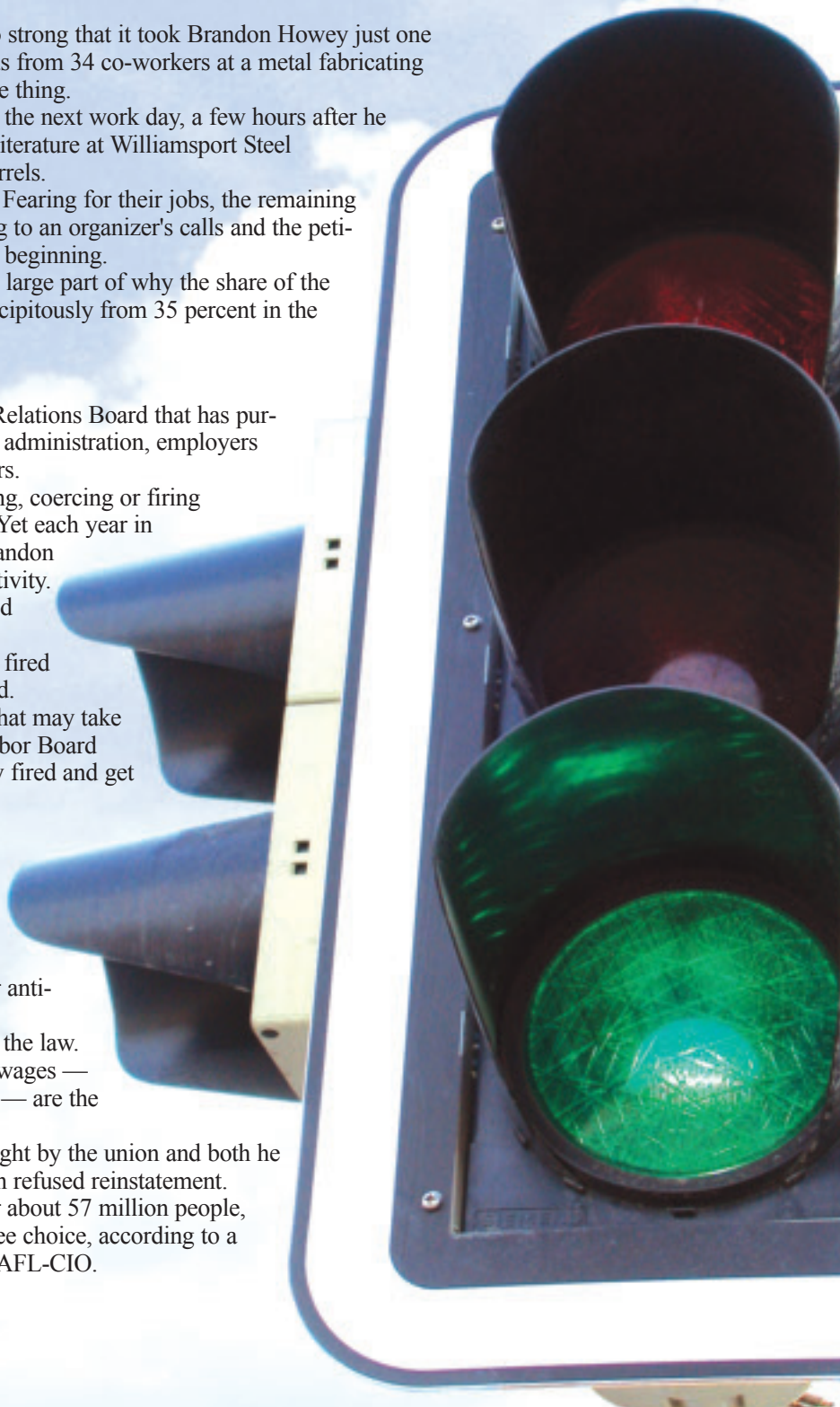
Anti-union consultants

Firings are only part of the employer arsenal. Three out of four employers hire anti-union consultants that specialize in union avoidance techniques, 78 percent force employees into personal meetings with supervisors and 92 percent demand closed-door anti-union meetings.

There is little incentive for employers to abide by the law. Posting a promise not to do it again and paying lost wages — minus whatever the fired worker earns on a new job — are the only penalties.

In Howey's case, the NLRB upheld a charge brought by the union and both he and his fired co-worker received back pay. They both refused reinstatement.

More than 45 percent of non-union employees, or about 57 million people, would like to join a union if there were unfettered free choice, according to a survey conducted by Peter D. Hart Research for the AFL-CIO.



Employee free choice

To help make that possible, the USW is pushing legislation called the Employee Free Choice Act that would give workers the right to union recognition if a majority of workers sign membership cards — a process called card check recognition.

Widespread use of card check, now permitted only when the employer agrees to it, would free workers from the coercion, intimidation and harassment common to the now-tainted NLRB election process.

"We need to fight with all of the energy and all of the compassion and passion we can pull together for the Employee Free Choice Act so that in the richest country on earth, workers ought not have to worry about getting fired, ought not to worry about the boss sticking his or her nose in our business," Gerard added.

The Act provides for certification of a union as the bargaining representative if the NLRB finds that a majority of employees in an appropriate unit signed authorization cards designating the union as a bargaining agent.

It also calls for mediation and arbitration in the event that an employer and a union are unable to reach a first agreement within 90 days of certification. If mediation fails, the dispute would be referred to arbitration, the results of which would be binding for two years or longer.

Additionally, the act would impose stronger penalties on employers for violating labor laws while employees are attempting to organize a union or negotiate a first contract. It would encourage federal court injunctions, treble back pay due to unfairly discharged workers and provide for civil fines of up to \$20,000 per violation.

Rapid Response teams across the country are pressuring legislators to sponsor the Act, seen by labor unions as a way to deflect the heavy-handed and oftentimes illegal tactics used by employers to derail organizing campaigns. At press time, 213 members of the House of Representatives and 42 U.S. Senators had signed on as co-sponsors.

Lobbyists discredited

Anti-union lobbyists and policymakers, including the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, are attempting to discredit card check by claiming employees are coerced or misled into signing authorization cards and they prevent secret-ballot votes.

To counteract those claims, the USW-backed American Rights at Work coalition polled 430 randomly selected workers at locations where NLRB elections or card check campaigns were conducted in 2002. The study was designed to examine whether it was true that card check campaigns leave employees more vulnerable to union pressure than during NLRB elections.

Workers participating in the survey report-

Free Choice Works

No one was fired, disciplined or threatened because of their union activity in the successful campaign to organize workers at Utica Converters, a New York producer of textile reinforcements used in tire manufacture.

"We were able to make up our minds without being pressured one way or the other," said Ray Ferguson, president of the local union at Utica, which is owned by Goodyear Dunlop Tires of North America.

Utica was organized in August, 2004, through a card check provision negotiated in the USW's master agreement with Goodyear. Four other groups of Goodyear workers in Georgia and North Carolina were also organized under the agreement.

The positive difference made by card check spilled over into negotiations. Utica's first agreement included a 4 percent pay hike and a substantial reduction in employee health care contributions. A 3 percent raise kicks in on May 1.

Dick Knowles, a sub-district director who led the Utica negotiations for the union, said the relationship at the bargaining table was substantially different than anything he had previously experienced.

"I've done a number of first contracts and they have always been hostile. I expected the same here, but to my surprise and delight there was a professional and a cordial relationship between the two parties," Knowles said. "I'm happy to say that mutual respect continues today."

Knowles said the time has come for the Employee Free Choice Act, which would expand the use of card check recognition to all workplaces.

"It should be considered major legislation in this country and be given top priority," he said.



ed management pressure was a much bigger issue than pressure from unions. Four times as many workers reported being "greatly" coerced by management as opposed to the union (22 percent vs. 6 percent.)

Fewer than one in 20 of the workers surveyed who signed a card with a union organizer reported that the presence of the organizer made them feel pressured to sign the card. Workers also reported feeling less pressure in card check campaigns than in elections.

The "survey findings dismiss claims of union pressure in card check campaigns as gross exaggeration," said David Bonior, Chair of American Rights at Work.

New USW: Building

Gerard outlines ambitious agenda to grow

The United Steelworkers enters its 70th year as a new union, stronger and more diverse with renewed bargaining power across a wide range of industries, thanks to a 60 percent growth in membership through strategic mergers and new organizing, President Leo W. Gerard said at a March 1 installation as he and his team of International Officers and Directors began a new term.

The USW added 350,000 members during Gerard's first full four-year term, making it the largest industrial union in North America representing 850,000 workers in an unprecedented range of industries in the United States and Canada.

That growth, led by the historic merger with the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers Union (PACE), "strengthens our hand in combatting the anti-worker agendas of Wall Street and Bay Street in their pursuit of globalization," Gerard said.

Aggressive agenda outlined

Gerard outlined an aggressive agenda to grow the union, inside and outside of North America, to fight to equalize the

growing disparity between rich and poor and to win back workers' rights, particularly the freedom in the U.S. to join a union unhindered by government and employer interference.

"There is no Democratic country on earth that can exist without a labor movement," Gerard said as he announced that the USW and its allies would push the U.S. Congress hard for passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, which he said would liberate workers to form a union without the fear of routine and illegal intimidation and firings by employers.

The act, which faces fierce resistance from corporate interests, would require employers to recognize the union after a majority of workers sign representation authorization cards. It also calls for mediation and arbitration of first-contract disputes and would triple penalties against employers for labor law violations.

The United States is the only country in the world where the law says you have the right to join a union yet when workers come together to do that, employers hire anti-union consultants, threaten plant and facility closings, offer

bribes and even fire key supporters, Gerard said, noting that 91 percent of employers hold captive meetings to scare employees away from a union.

“ We're going to take on all of the issues that are important to making sure that our kids and grandkids have a future. ”

Cornerstone of democracy

"The right for workers to come together, the right of free association, is a cornerstone of any democracy and we need to win that right in law in the United States, so that when workers sign a card that says they want a union, and the majority of them wants it, they get a union, simple as that," Gerard said to thundering applause.

Gerard pledged to continue the battle against the



on Growing Strength

union and restore workers' rights

ill-conceived Republican plan to privatize Social Security and to fight for decent health care coverage and fair trade policies in the U.S. and Canada that "make sure you have a middle class."

"We're going to take on all of the issues that are important to making sure that our kids and grandkids have a future," he said.



The USW is now the dominant union in steel, paper and forestry, rubber and tire, aluminum, brick, glass, mining, oil and chemical industries in addition to growing membership in pharmaceuticals and health care, a sector in which the union has been active for more than 40 years.

Yet having more members isn't enough by itself to overcome the challenges facing the labor movement and all working people because of globalization, Gerard acknowledged.

Building power essential

The USW must continue to build power, both locally and globally by mobilizing greater activism among members and greater solidarity among labor unions across the globe, he said.

To achieve these objectives, the USW is forging strategic global alliances with other unions around the world and has launched a "Building Power" program to educate and mobilize members for greater political activism and member organizing.

The newest alliance, signed with an Aruban oil workers' union at the installation ceremony, was preceded by an alliance with workers in the Dominican

Republic Free Trade Zone union. The USW is also allied with Germany's two-million member IGMetal; Amicus, Great Britain's largest union; the Australian Workers Union (AWU); the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) of Australia; Sydicato Mineros, a Mexican miners' union; and with CNM-CUT, the Brazilian counterpart of the AFL-CIO and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).

Several of these unions have joined with the USW in protesting or striking common transnational employers that have sought drastic cuts in members' pay and benefits, or have locked workers out or forced them out on strike.

Proud of growth and alliances

"We're proud of the growth we've achieved and the alliances we've made," Gerard said. "And we plan to work doubly hard to build on those successes through even more mergers and alliances, but especially by winning Employee Free Choice. That's the crown jewel for us in revitalizing the labor movement."



Photos by Tom Fitzpatrick/PI

Cleaning Up FEMA's Act

A Safe Way Back Home



Represented were USW Local Unions 13-1, 13-227, 13-750, 338, 562, 700, 746L, 753L, 9358, The Labor Institute and the USW Health, Safety & Environment Department.
Photo by Sean Gardner

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) hasn't done much to clean up neighborhood contamination in New Orleans, so the United Steelworkers showed the government how it can be done.

The USW teamed up with a partner, Dillard University's Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSCEJ), to remove tainted soil from two dozen homes in a New Orleans neighborhood as a demonstration project.

Volunteers trained by the USW wore protective suits, gloves and respirators and used front-end loaders to remove two to three inches of sediment, soil, grass and other items from lawns along Aberdeen Road in late March.

The lots were then landscaped with graded river sand and fresh soil. Sidewalks, curbs, and streets were pressure washed to remove accumulated sediment. Over the demonstration project's four days, the block was transformed from toxic and barren to green and healthy.

Both the USW and the DSCEJ said they hoped the project, called A Safe Way Back Home, would be both continued and financed by federal Katrina assistance funds appropriated by Congress and that the cleanup would encourage residents who fled the area to return.

"FEMA should replicate this demonstration project on thousands of blocks in hundreds of neighborhoods across the City of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region," USW President Leo W. Gerard said.

Feds missing in action

"Only the federal government has the resources and authority to lead such a massive undertaking," Gerard added. "But it has to be done. The human dignity and economic security of the people of the Gulf Coast depends on it."

Levees broken after Hurricane Katrina struck Aug. 29 left New Orleans with unhealthy levels of toxic substances such as arsenic and diesel fuel in soil, James Frederick, the USW's assistant director for health, safety and environment, said.

"There are no acceptable levels of contamination for the thousands of hurricane victims now living in what resembles a sludge pit - no matter what state and federal environmental officials say," said Gary Beevers, Director of District 13, which encompasses Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas. "The government was doing next to nothing to remedy these hazards, so the Steelworkers felt like we had to step in and take some action."

The USW, which has about 12,000 members in Louisiana, volunteered expertise gained from decades of health and safety experience in industries including oil refining and chemical production, where workers can be exposed to an array of toxic substances. The training program was conceived and developed by the Tony Mazzocchi Center for Safety, Health and Environmental Education (TMC), a project of the USW and the Labor Institute.

Volunteers trained

The TMC trained volunteers to safely remove the top layer of sludge using heavy machinery. In two days, Steelworkers and trained volunteers cleared the lawns of 25 homes to prepare for new sod.

The Safe Way Back Home pilot project is funded in part by groups including the Ford Foundation, the Public Health Institute and the National Resources Defense Council. Corporate support came from contributions made by four USW employers: McWane, Inc.; Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company; BF Goodrich; and Bridgestone Americas Holding, Inc.

"Our overall goal is to see the federal government step up to the plate," Frederick said. "The region desperately needs a centralized public works program to hire the displaced and the poor at decent wages so they can clean up and rebuild their own communities."

If you would like to volunteer on behalf of the USW in the Gulf Coast region, send an email to safety@usw.org and indicate your interest in participating.



CAPITOL LETTERS

The inside scoop on what's going down in D.C.

It's Cherry Blossom time in Washington, D.C. The winter doldrums are over, spring is here and it's comforting to know that Congress will give an "entire" ten days to understanding the details of far-reaching pieces of legislation that will eventually affect every man, woman and child in this country.

Pension Bill Coming

In typical fashion, only the top five Republican conferees are really talking about what will be in the final pension reform bill that comes before the House and Senate. They are under pressure from a self-imposed deadline to have a bill done by early April. Only time will tell if they meet their goal, but chances are pretty good the final product will be bad for workers, so stay tuned!

Anti-Union Web Site

Department of Labor personnel have actively promoted a virulently anti-union web site as an opportunity to "learn more about unions and their funding" when in fact it is a fiction created by a business hatchet man.

The site, www.unionfacts.com, twists publicly available information that labor unions must provide to the government into an indictment of union leaders and unions. The smear campaign is a creation of right-wing lobbyist Rick Berman, who has built a lucrative career establishing other industry-funded front groups.

Berman specializes in personal attacks and playing loose with facts in representing his clients. He smeared Mothers Against Drunk Driving during a campaign to lower blood alcohol level limits, dismissed real concerns about mercury levels in fish, and once defended a chemical company by saying it was safe for children to eat pesticide-laden apples.

Administration Double Dealing

While promoting union bashing with one hand, the Bush administration is reaching out the other to House members to support Free Trade Agreements with Peru, Columbia and Oman. All are negotiated and ready to go, but they are all based on the CAFTA-model — asking only that countries enforce their own labor laws. This is especially galling in the case of Peru, since their president publicly stated that he would be willing to sign an agreement that placed core labor standards and enforcement in the trade agreement. He was quickly taken to the woodshed by the Administration and has made several trips to Washington to promote the bad agreement he subsequently signed.

The Bush administration seems to think if they can get these countries to change their labor laws that will be enough to silence the opposition. But the real issue is the enforcement of the laws themselves since none of the countries in question has a record of paying enough attention to laws they already have on their books.

Signals sent by leading House Democrats and labor that all these trade bills will be important votes, has kept them off the calendar so far. But keep watching; the Administration still says it wants to bring up Peru and Oman before the summer.

Budget Balancing Act

Before the St. Patrick's Day recess, the Senate passed its "kinder and gentler" version of the President's 2007 Budget, by adding \$16 billion more in spending and rejecting Bush's calls for more entitlement cuts to programs that actually help people in need, like Medicare and Medicaid.

U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum, (R-PA) pledged in his latest "Keystone Connections" newsletter that he would stand firm and vote against the budget if it contained cuts in Amtrak funding. Santorum's amendment to save Amtrak

failed — but he voted for the budget anyway. When asked to explain, his office said the statement was "staffer error." Is this an example of the GOP culture of personal responsibility?

Pennsylvania's other Senator, Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), meanwhile, forced through an amendment to commit \$10 billion more for labor, health and education programs.

The budget resolution now moves to the House where the budget will only get leaner and meaner. But wait — it's an election year, so moderation might prevail in the House this time around.

Bush May Give Away Airline Control

The national furor over the potential sale of U.S. port operations to a company controlled by the government of Dubai, an Emirate of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), was quelled when the company withdrew its bid for the ports.

Even Republicans turned against the Bush administration's defense of the sale and passed an amendment in a supplemental spending bill banning the deal.

Undeterred, the Bush administration is only weeks away from changing — through the regulatory process — the rules on foreign control of U.S. airlines. The Bush administration thinks our current regulations limiting greater foreign ownership of U.S. airlines is a hindrance to investment. Alert members of the House Appropriations Committee overseeing the Department of Transportation have called for a delay on the rule, but the Senate must act as well.

Homeland Security Flunks Security Test

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) received an "F" on the annual Federal Computer Security Report Card issued by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). It's the third year in a row the DHS has flunked, but they needn't feel too badly — the government-wide grade was a "D+," just like last year.

Penreco Challenges Law, National Oil Bargaining Program

Penreco's failure to uphold the National Oil Bargaining pattern agreement and its unfair labor practices forced 129 USW Local 889 members to strike the specialty oil products refinery in Karns City, Pa.

"This is a blatant attack on the oil policy and our legal rights," Local 889 President William "Marty" Henry said. "If Big Oil sees they can do it here, they'll try it anywhere."

The local's contract expired Jan. 31. The strike began Feb. 13.

Penreco, a joint venture between Conoco Phillips and the investment firm M.E. Zuckerman, had adhered to the National Oil Bargaining program since 1972. But now the company says it should not participate because it is not a major oil company or a refiner, and it is throwing the rule book out in an attempt to win its way.

"It's not the company's decision to make, it's ours," said USW Administrative Vice President Jim Pannell, who oversees national oil bargaining.

The Karns City facility has the same equipment as a refinery, but not on as large a scale. The plant makes white

oils, petrolatums, solvents and other specialty products used in the manufacture of petroleum jelly, cosmetics, soaps and ink oils used in color printing.

Penreco pushes own agenda

The only part of the National Oil Bargaining policy Penreco agreed to was a three-year contract term. The company rejected the pattern's wage rates of 3.5 percent, 3.5 percent and 3.7 percent for each year of the agreement. Instead, it offered wage increases of 2.5 percent annually and rejected the \$1,500 lump sum bonus in the first year.

Penreco refused to sign on to the Health Care Strategic Committee — a labor-management body created under the National Oil Bargaining program to devise solutions to rising health care costs and instead pushed its own self-insured plan. High deductibles, co-pays and out-of-pocket expenses characterize the company plan.

"We're happy with the current carrier, but the company is stuck on self-insurance," Henry said. "It's shifting the costs to workers and away from the company."

Henry said the union explored other health care plans and proposed them to Penreco, but the company refused to consider them.

Unfair Labor Practices

District 10 international representative Jim Fink said the union has filed unfair labor practice (ULP) charges against Penreco for, among other things, unilaterally changing dental plan benefits without bargaining and threatening to implement a new health plan.

The charges additionally allege the company threatened to shut the plant down if its bargaining demands are not met and take away payments to employees on disability in retaliation for the strike.

As this article went to press, Penreco had threatened to fire all of the strikers. "Penreco has inflamed our membership greatly with its unlawful conduct," Henry said.

In an effort to resolve the outstanding issues, Pannell contacted Conoco Phillips, which has accepted the National Oil Bargaining pattern agreement. Despite its policies and procedures being in place at Karns City, the oil giant stated that it "does not run the plant."

Strikers receive support

The local has received donations of money and food, including help from charities and churches. A "Solidarity Rally" held March 11 attracted 300 people including District 10 Director John DeFazio and local elected officials. Financial and moral support is also coming from the Conoco Phillips council.

Donations can be sent to USW Local 889, P.O. Box I, Karns City, Pa. 16041. The local can be reached by email at uswlocal889@earthlink.net or (724) 756-8711.



EPA Pushed to Challenge DuPont's Teflon

The USW is pressing the government to take more aggressive action against DuPont and other manufacturers from exposing the public to the controversial, Teflon-related chemical PFOA.

PFOA (perfluorooctanoic acid or C8) is used to make Teflon cookware and other consumer and industrial products. Various stain and grease repellents applied to textiles, carpeting and paper food packaging may also break down into PFOA.

“Based on recent information, EPA can no longer conclude that these polymers will not present an unreasonable risk to human health or the environment,” said the Environmental Protection Agency in a proposed requirement to test any new products that rely on controversial chemicals already used in materials like DuPont’s Teflon coating.

This past winter, the EPA’s Scientific Advisory Board said PFOA was “likely to be carcinogenic to humans.” Low levels of the chemical have been found in the blood of humans and wildlife throughout the United States.

USW warns public

DuPont is the only industrial producer of PFOA in the U.S. Along with other companies, DuPont agreed this past winter to an EPA voluntary initiative to reduce emissions and product content of PFOA and related chemicals by 95 percent by 2010. The companies say this does not represent a phase-out because they will continue to use PFOA as a processing agent, however, they will not release it into the environment.

“While EPA has finally recognized the obvious, it must create more pressure on the manufacturers of PFOA to eliminate it altogether and find a safe substitute,” said USW President Leo W. Gerard. “We urge all companies that sell products containing PFOA directly or as a breakdown product to provide warnings to their customers.”

The USW has been in the forefront of

contacting manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers to urge them to provide warnings to their customers about the potential dangers related to PFOA that might be present in products. Over 40,000 letters and information circulars have been sent to clothing, cookware, microwave popcorn, food, cosmetic, outerwear and carpet manufacturers and retailers.

In an alliance with environmental and consumer groups, the USW has petitioned the state of California to list PFOA as “a chemical that is known to the state to cause cancer” under the state’s Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, otherwise known as Proposition 65.

Water warnings sought

If listed, businesses would be prohibited from knowingly discharging the chemical into sources of drinking water, and they would be required to provide warnings before knowingly exposing anyone to PFOA unless they could show that the exposures create no significant risk of cancer.

PFOA has been found in the water supply at DuPont sites around the country. The company settled for \$107 mil-

lion with 80,000 residents around its Parkersburg, W.Va., plant after polluting their drinking water for over 20 years. The company also paid \$16.5 million—the largest civil administrative penalty ever levied by the EPA—for not telling regulators about the drinking water contamination and other information related to PFOA risks.

Recently, officials have confirmed that low-level traces of PFOA have turned up in one well used to supply public taps in Pennsville Township, N.J., near the DuPont Chambers Works site.

The USW has set up a web site about DuPont’s health and safety record at the plants and communities in which it operates. The web site — www.DuPontSafetyRevealed.org — features an interactive “Toxic Map” that pinpoints where the chemical giant may be putting communities at risk of chemical exposure.

Along with unions from other countries, the USW recently formed a global DuPont trade union network to exchange information and plan joint actions where necessary.



iSi se puede!

Vicente Fox hounded to restore illegally deposed union leader

The United Steelworkers sent a delegation to Mexico and held rallies in several U.S. cities to demand the reinstatement of Mexican Mineworker Leader Napoleon Gomez to his democratically elected office.

The USW is a partner in a strategic alliance with the Mexican Miners, known as Los Mineros, and defended Gomez after his illegal ouster as General Secretary of the 250,000-member union by the administration of Mexican President Vicente Fox.

The unions have a commitment to increase communication, collaboration and coordination across our national border in order to retain and build strength that provides both unions with effective countervailing force to the power of global capital and multinational corporations.

Support for ASARCO struggle

Gomez and the membership of Los Mineros were instrumental in providing assistance for USW members in the struggle last year to win a labor agreement with Grupo Mexico, owners of the ASARCO copper mines in the U.S. southwest.

Gomez's troubles began following the mine disaster in which 65 miners were killed at Pasta de Concha, which is also owned by Grupo Mexico. Gomez accused the company of criminal homicide and the Mexican government of negligence. He also called for an investigation and removal of the Minister of Labor.

Gomez removed illegally

Shortly after, Gomez was removed as the union's General Secretary by the Labor Minister

and replaced by someone who is not a union member. His removal was based, in part, on an apparently forged document presented to the government by the union's Vigilance and Justice Committee. Two of three individuals said to have signed the document were, in fact, with Gomez outside Mexico City when the document was supposedly signed.

Gomez's removal violates Mexican Labor Law and international labor conventions. It more than violates the principle of "innocent until proved guilty," since no formal charges have been filed by the government.

Put up or shut up

"The Mexican government has a clear legal obligation," said Gerald Fernandez, USW Director of International Affairs. "It needs to put up or put Napoleon back in the office he was elected by his members to serve in."

A USW delegation led by Fernandez went to Mexico and met with several labor unions, attorneys and human rights groups and attended a major rally sponsored by United Union Front, a coalition of unions formed to support Gomez and defend against government interference in the internal affairs of labor unions.

At two press conferences there, the USW contended the removal of Gomez was an act of revenge by the Fox administration and the country's employers in part because Gomez had led a successful campaign to defeat labor law reform sought by Fox.

Challenging Grupo Mexico

After the mining accident, Gomez criticized Grupo Mexico and the Labor Secretary for what he called industrial homicide and demanded that the Labor Secretary and the head of Mine Inspection step down. He also balked at a

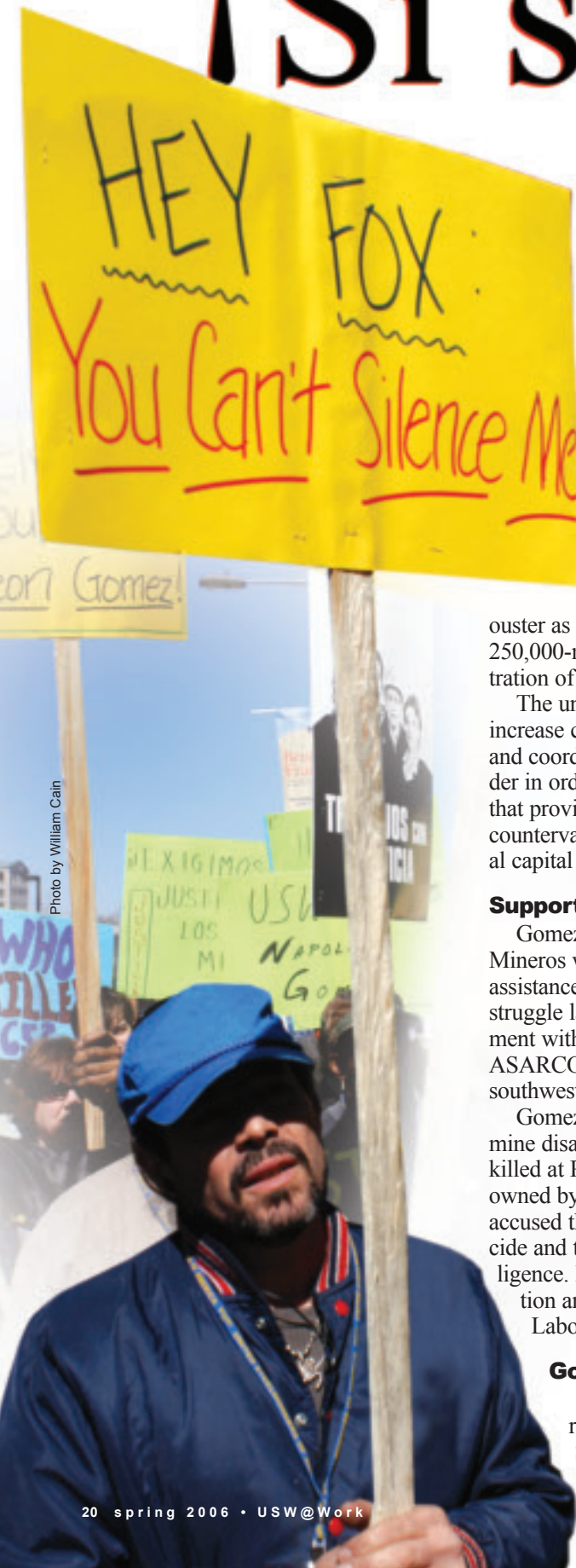


Photo by William Cain

Yes We Can!

\$70,000 payoff to the families of the dead miners, saying it was not enough.

As part of our global solidarity, USW Rapid Response organized protests at Mexican consulate and travel bureau offices across the United States. Letters from USW President Leo W. Gerard to Fox demanding justice were delivered.

In Philadelphia, International Secretary-Treasurer Jim English, AFL-CIO Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson and District 10 Director John DeFazio led a march of more than 200 Steelworkers and USW supporters from the Liberty Bell some four blocks to the Mexican Consulate to deliver the reinstatement letter.

Other rallies in support of Gomez were held in Tucson, Detroit, Portland, Indianapolis, Chicago and Minneapolis/

St. Paul, where Gerard joined District 2 Director Jon Geenen and District 11 Director Bob Bratulich in delivering the letter. In Indianapolis, the letter was delivered to the consulate by District 1 Director Dave McCall and District 7 Director Jim Robinson.

Shameful act

It was a crisp and sunny day in Philadelphia as the crowd marched and chanted in Spanish, "Si se puede," "Yes, we can," along the four blocks to the consulate. A podium and sound system was set up for their arrival.

In addition to Chavez-Thompson and Director DeFazio, the list of distinguished speakers included Pennsylvania AFL-CIO President Bill George; Fabricio Rodriguez, Director of

Philadelphia's Jobs with Justice; Allie Robbins, National Organizer of United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS).

It was St. Patrick's Day and English, who is of Irish descent, told of the similarities between early Irish settlers here and workers in Mexico today.

English called for a challenge to the Mexican government's role in suppressing workers' upward mobility and said employers in Mexico fear Gomez and don't want any challenges to their endless supply of cheap labor.

"This is a shameful act of naked aggression against the human rights of workers who make their living under the most dire of circumstances," English said. "When the government removed their leader, democracy was trampled."





A USW member at Goodyear's tire plant in Topeka, Kansas prepares medium radial truck tires for curing.

TIRE TALKS

Security, Benefits Top Bargaining Goals

A pre-negotiations policy conference attended by 82 local unions in the Rubber/Plastic Industry Conference established job security and protection of retiree benefits as key bargaining goals for this year's round of talks with major tire producers.

The three-day session, called to prepare for upcoming negotiations with Goodyear, Bridgestone/Firestone and Michelin North America Inc.'s BF Goodrich tire units, drew 120 delegates from R/PIC, made up primarily of bargaining units from the former United Rubber Workers union.

"We will face serious challenges in this round of negotiations that will go far in defining our future, but there is no way that we will allow our retirees to become sacrificial lambs in the process," said Ron Hoover, USW executive vice president.

Inflating health care

Rapidly inflating health-care costs for active and retired employees, combined with Wall Street's obsession with short-term earnings, has put those benefits at the forefront of negotiations in many industries where the USW has members, Ron Bloom, a special assistant to USW President Leo W. Gerard and a former investment banker told the conference.

Securing retiree health care is both a political and a bargaining issue that goes to the core of what the USW is all about, he said.

"This is a Steelworker issue," Bloom said during a presentation on the accounting and actuarial aspects of retirement programs.

"We are going to have to make clear to the companies that the union is prepared to take whatever steps are necessary to protect our retirees."

Demand for tires in North America, the largest market for a global industry,

is on the rise as more cars and trucks hit the road, Leon Potok, an industry analyst, told delegates. Tire prices are also rising, particularly for specialty and larger size tires, but so have the costs of raw materials and energy.

Despite rising prices, manufacturers are abandoning domestic union-represented plants for lower-cost locations, particularly China, other countries in Asia, Latin America and Europe, where wages and living standards are lower.

"The major manufacturers are focusing their investments on high-margin products and on low-priced tires produced in lower-cost countries," Potok said.

After three days of discussions, the R/PIC policy committee also cited job security as a critical issue.

End contracting out

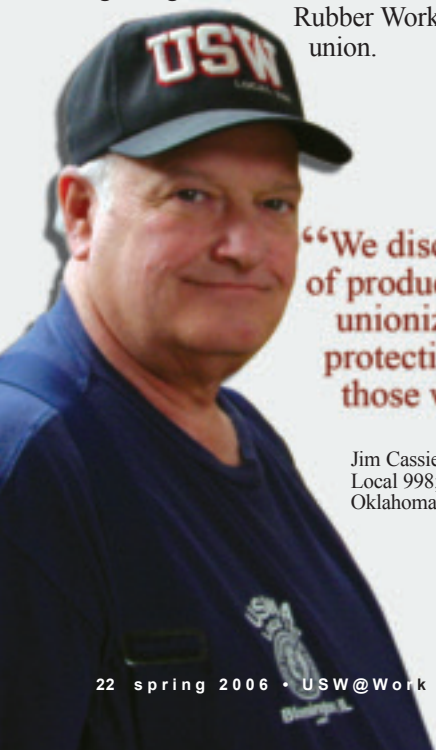
To achieve that goal, the committee established four basic contract elements necessary for job security and protection:

- Eliminating the contracting out of bargaining unit work;
- Attaining a successor clause guaranteeing that in the event of a plant sale the buyer would be required to recognize the union and negotiate a collective bargaining agreement;
- Reducing the level of overtime to maintain the health and safety of current employees and to create new opportunities for others; and,
- Acquiring capital investments for our plants to keep them globally competitive.

While the USW recognizes how technology and work reorganization can improve productivity, Hoover said the union expects management to also become efficient while recognizing the expertise of its workers.

"The most important key to enhancing productivity is investing the money necessary to keep plants modern," Hoover said.

Other key bargaining priorities include negotiating increases in defined benefit pension plans or creating them where they do not currently exist; securing pension improvements for past retirees or surviving spouses; and gaining neutrality card check from employers.



"We discussed the protection of production in this country at unionized facilities and the protection of the benefits for those working and retired."

Jim Cassie
Local 998; BFS
Oklahoma City, Okla.

Bargaining standards aim to level playing field

Faced with an employer that is using the threat of a plant closing to extract concessions, Mark Cieslikowski sees up front the value of USW R/PIC members coordinating bargaining goals and tactics.

"We all need to be on a level playing field," Cieslikowski, president of USW Local 850 at the Continental Tire plant in Charlotte, N.C., said after joining a unanimous vote by R/PIC delegates to approve bargaining standards for this year's round of contract talks with major tire makers.

If his local caves in to Continental Tire North America's demand for \$32 million in concessions, Cieslikowski expects Goodyear and other employers will come to the union and ask for a match.

No rational strategy

The USW contends Continental has no rational marketing strategy and has failed to make adequate investments in product research and development the way other successful companies have done.

"The rubber industry needs to sell their product through their technology, their R&D, and not off the backs of the workers," Cieslikowski said.

Paul Shrum, USW local president at the BF Goodrich plant in Kitchener, Ontario, agrees with Cieslikowski on the value of solidarity. Michelin-owned Goodrich is scheduled to close the plant this summer, idling 1,100 hourly workers.

The company blames the closure on overcapacity in passenger tire production, yet Shrum said management told the union the day before the shutdown announcement that the plant had hit record production levels in January while maintaining maximum quality.

In the same boat

"Everybody is in the same boat. Manufacturers are exiting North America for cheaper markets overseas," Shrum said. "In Continental's case, it has threatened to close its union plant in

Charlotte in September. It stopped production at a plant in Mayfield, Ky. about a year ago, and is now actively seeking to sell its Bryan, Ohio, facility."

It has extracted concessions from workers at its non-union Mt. Vernon, Ill. plant and is spending enough money there to patch up production while it brings a new plant in Brazil up to speed.

At the same time, Goodyear has announced its highest net profits in seven years. Bridgestone/Firestone has likewise seen a huge rise in net earnings. Like Continental, both companies are in master contract agreements with the USW that expire this year.

Nixing innovative proposals

The USW has offered proposals to reduce costs and to improve productivity and efficiencies at the Charlotte plant. Continental, however, has not yet demonstrated to the union committee the need for the savings and flat-out refused to look at ways to enhance productivity.

Continental Tire, part of the German automotive giant, Continental Group, is going plant to plant in this country and in Europe seeking concessions, Cieslikowski said. Developing countries allow companies to exploit the environment as well as labor.

"They want to produce tires cheaper here or produce them cheaper in another country and send them here. It's that simple," he said.

"Unless we get the trade laws changed to hold companies responsible, there won't be a middle class left in this country."

"Health care is our biggest issue along with prescription drugs and job security."

Sally Edwards
Local 286, Goodyear
Lincoln, Neb.

Titan Promises

When Titan Tire Corp. bought Goodyear's North American farm tire business, the company gave the plant's USW-represented work force job security and health care guarantees.

"Health care was a must for both actives and retirees," said Steve Vanderheyden, president of the 725-member Local 745 in Freeport, Ill. "We were able to convince management that it was essential to their interests as much as ours."

The contract, reached after ten months of talks, included wage and benefit increases, maintenance of health care plans and language guaranteeing that products sold by Titan must be manufactured in Freeport or at a sister plant in Des Moines, Iowa.

VEBA established

A management-funded Voluntary Employee Benefit Association, or VEBA, was established to support retiree health care, Vanderheyden said.

The employee contribution to health-care premiums for active workers was capped at 5 percent until 2008. Cost increases are shared after that, and capped at 10 percent.

Mike Mathis, representing the 500-employee Local 164 in Des Moines, said the medical benefit package negotiated with Titan shows the importance of the union's cooperative strategy.

"We received a significant wage increase. We negotiated medical benefits for our retirees, which we had lost last time around. We gained that back," he said. "Titan has made a commitment to be in the agriculture business for a long time."





Worker Economics



Retirement Savings Low

The majority of American workers think they will be able to retire comfortably, but most aren't saving nearly enough money to meet that goal, according to a new study by the Employee Benefit Research Institute.

An estimated 68 percent of workers told the EBRI they are confident about having adequate funds for retirement, up slightly from 65 percent in 2005. At the same time, more than half of all workers and more than four in ten of workers aged 55 and older have saved less than \$25,000 toward retirement.

Jack VanDerhei, co-author of the study, said the poor savings performance is troubling because employers are eliminating traditional defined benefit pension plans that have buoyed the retirements of current workers' parents and grandparents. At the same time, many companies are eliminating retiree health care coverage or asking retirees to contribute more for it.

Staying at the Bottom

Employer organizations that oppose increasing the minimum wage frequently argue that the federal minimum of \$5.15 an hour is a launching pad for a substantially higher wage in a year or two.

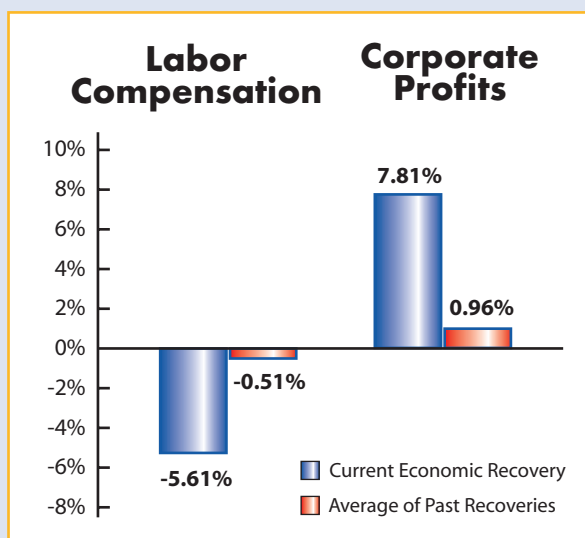
It's a comforting concept, but unfortunately not often true. Many low-wage workers stay mired at or near the minimum wage for years, according to a study by the Center for Economic Policy Research in Washington, D.C.

More than a third of prime-age adults in jobs paying within \$1 of the minimum wage remained in jobs three years later that pay the same, or less when adjusted for inflation, the study found. Only 39 percent of workers had moved up to jobs paying more than a dollar above the minimum wage. The remaining 24 percent did not work at all three years later, the study found.

Uncle Bucky Cashes Out

William H.T. Bush, President George W. Bush's Uncle Bucky, has collected about \$1.9 million in cash, plus \$800,000 in stocks, from the recent sale of Engineered Support Systems, Inc.

ESSI, of which Bush was a director, was sold to DRS Technologies for \$1.7 billion at the end of January after the company experienced record growth from expanded military contracts, most related to activity in Iraq and Afghanistan. The contracts, some awarded on a no-bid basis, include a \$77-million deal to refit military vehicles with armor.



Data released by the Bureau of Economic Analysis shows that in the fourth quarter 2005 corporate profits claimed the largest share of Gross Domestic Income in 37 years.

Labor's share of corporate income has fallen by 5.6 percentage points despite strong productivity growth, while corporate profits' share rose by 7.8 percentage points. The rise in corporate profits' share is about eight times as large as the average shift that characterized previous economic recoveries.

AFL-CIO Puts \$40 Million Into Election

Leaders of the AFL-CIO agreed to spend \$40 million this fall to help oust anti-worker majorities in the U.S. House and Senate. It is the most money the labor federation has ever spent on a mid-term election.

The money, an increase from \$35 million spent in the 2002 campaign, will be used to mobilize union members, not for contributions to political candidates.

Federation leaders said they would concentrate their efforts on 15 Senate races, 40 House races and governor races in California, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania.



TV Indecency Costs More Than Coal Deaths

The coal industry is recording record profits yet it pays some of the smallest fines of any industry in the United States for violations of federal regulations.

The federal government levied a larger fine for the televised showing of Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction" during the 2004 Super Bowl than it did against the operator of an Alabama mine where 13 miners died in 2001.

The penalty for showing Jackson's bare breast was \$550,000. The proposed fine of \$435,000 against Jim Walter Resources for one of the deadliest mine disasters in a quarter century was cut by a judge to \$3,000.

Federal law limits fines to \$60,000 for each violation to safety rules overseen by the Mine Safety and Health Administration. Yet the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Communications Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission may levy fines of \$1 million or more for a single violation of their regulations.

Work Should Not Make You Poor

In 1997, a full-time minimum wage job put a family of three 105 percent above the poverty line when the federal Earned Income Tax Credit and a refundable Child Tax Credit were included in the mix.

Nine years later, the system has broken down, according to an analysis by the Economic Policy Institute, an economic think tank that does research on issues of concern to working people.

Today the combination of an out-of-date minimum wage and the same federal tax credits mean that the single parent of two now only earns 89% of the poverty line.

The minimum wage has failed to keep pace with inflation, losing some 20 percent of its purchasing power. In addition, Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) levels are linked to inflation. So for the last two years, a person working full time at the minimum wage would not have been eligible for the maximum EITC credit.

Trade Deficit Soars

The gap between what America sells abroad and what it imports rose to \$725.8 billion last year, up by 17.5 percent from the previous record of \$617.6 billion set in 2004.

The deficit with China also hit an all-time record of \$201.6 billion last year, the highest deficit ever recorded with any country. That gain included a 42.6 percent increase in imports of Chinese clothing and textiles, which soared after the removal of global quotas.

The trade deficit will keep growing unless the Bush administration takes a harder line against unfair trade practices in low-wage countries including China.

"Unless trade policies are changed, real wages will continue to be driven down and more good jobs will be wiped out," USW President Leo W. Gerard said. "Where will the purchasing power come from then to prop up an economy that counts on consumers for two-thirds of its economic activity?"

Federal Energy Giveaway

New projections buried in a budget plan for the Interior Department anticipate that the U.S. government will let energy companies pump about \$65 billion worth of oil and natural gas from federal territory over five years without paying any royalties to the government.

The government could give up more than \$7 billion in payments between now and 2011, based on Bush administration figures published by *The New York Times*. The royalty relief comes even though the administration assumes oil prices will remain above \$50 a barrel.

The benefits are dictated by laws and regulations that date to 1996 when energy prices were lower and Congress wanted to encourage more exploration and drilling in high-risk waters of the Gulf of Mexico. But what seemed like modest incentives 10 years ago have ballooned.

"It's one of the greatest train robberies in the history of the world," said U.S. Rep. George Miller, a California Democrat. "It's the gift that keeps on giving."

By the Numbers

Average CEO annual salary:
2002: \$7,773,000
2004: \$9,600,000

Median household income:
2000: \$46,058
2004: \$44,389

U.S. manufacturing jobs:
2001: 17,101,000
2005: 14,283,000

Gasoline average price:
2000: \$1.51 gallon
2005: \$2.28 gallon

Average profit hike for oil companies 2005 3rd quarter:
+69 percent

Percentage of companies that provide employee health care:
2000: 69 percent
2005: 60 percent

Americans without health insurance:
2000: 39,800,000
2004: 45,800,000

Average public university tuition:
2000: \$7,020
2005: \$10,982

Source:
The Campaign for America's Future



China is a Rising With Its Own

by George Becker

In April, President Bush will meet with Chinese President Hu Jintao. This is an important meeting that will help define the near- and long-term relationships between our two countries and China's role in the world. This meeting is one that deserves the attention of all Americans.

China's rising role in the world economy certainly cannot go unnoticed. The United States' bilateral trade deficit with China exceeded \$200 billion last year. Using common guides, each \$1 billion in trade deficits is equal to roughly 13,000 lost jobs here at home. Last year alone, China's export powerhouse helped rob us of more than 260,000 family-supportive jobs. Industry after industry has been affected by China's global economic rise and reliance on export-led growth: from USW jobs in steel, paper, glass, rubber and other industries to other jobs in our economy including high technology jobs, there has been a migration of jobs and production to China. Once viewed only as a threat in low wage jobs, China has become a fierce competitor up and down the food chain, even achieving a huge surplus in high technology product sales to the U.S.

In the last issue of this magazine, I focused on the impact that China's economic policies have had on the U.S. and our economic security. In this article, I want to focus on the increasing threat that China poses to our national security. Indeed, the two issues

Power Goals

— economic and national security — are inextricably intertwined. At a recent hearing of the Commission I serve on, the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, the Bush administration finally admitted that our national security is dependent on a strong national economy.

In a Department of Defense report last year, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asked why, if there are no threats, is China engaging in such a military buildup? China's military budget has been growing at more than a double-digit rate for years. It is acquiring advanced weaponry from Russia and other nations. And it is seeking to build the domestic capacity to be able to, eventually, arm itself.

Military exercises

China has built more than 700 missiles, many of which are positioned just across the straits from Taiwan. China continues to make it clear that it views Taiwan as a renegade province that should be reunited with the mainland. Last year, China engaged in large-scale military exercises with Russia that included large-scale amphibious exercises to show that it is rapidly developing the capability to attack and control Taiwan should Taiwan seek to promote its own independence.

Our interests, of course, are not isolated to Taiwan, no matter how important the democratic ideals and history of that country are to American values and interests. President Bush was right to argue that our nation needed to return democracy and freedom to the centerpiece of American foreign policy goals. Unfortunately, the President has been inconsistent in his advocacy of these goals. While blindly pursuing his approach in the Mideast, he has turned a blind eye to workers and human rights elsewhere in the world.

While China's current military capabilities are dwarfed by those of the U.S., China's military is engaged in rapid expansion and modernization efforts. Within 10 years, China is expected to have a navy that matches the U.S. in size. It has developed its own jet fighter and is expanding production aggressively. It has nuclear weapons and the delivery capabilities to reach the continental U.S. It has dramatically expanded its information warfare operations in order to be able to wreak havoc on the U.S. and its allies, if it so chooses. In short, the time is fast approaching that China will be a major military power with the ability to project its forces and compete directly with the U.S.

Extending power, influence

China does not yet have the capability to directly project power around the globe — it does not yet have a blue water navy, long-range bombers or similar capabilities. But it is extending its power and influence through arms sales, alliances and economic relationships. It is researching other ways of projecting power through anti-satellite warfare, the

modernize its military. We must avoid the pressure to grab a fistful of dollars only to find that we could ultimately face a country whose very military might we have enhanced.

And we cannot overlook the fact that, in the post 9-11 world, China is a major proliferator of weapons and military technology. Chinese companies have been sanctioned for sales of missile technology to Iran which is seeking to create not only a nuclear weapons program, but the means to deliver it. They've sold weapons to Sudan to secure energy resources while helping to arm forces involved in committing genocide. Time and time again, China has blocked actions at the United Nations designed to address some of the most heinous acts by nations around the globe. The Chinese government's actions often undermine world peace and stability and our own interests.

One of the principal problems is that China's military intentions and goals are opaque — they refuse to publicly identify what it truly is seeking to do and what leadership role it wants to play in the world. Given the nature of China's

“The time is fast approaching that China will be a major military power with the ability to project its forces and compete directly with the U.S.”

potential for space-based weapons, and other programs. Its capabilities will eventually catch up with its desires.

Now China is arguing that one of the quick ways we can reduce our nation's trade deficit with them is by loosening our export controls so as to sell them high technology items and other products. Export controls are placed on some of these items because they are "dual use" items: products that can be used in general commercial applications but that also can be used to enhance China's military strength. Only a tiny fraction of our products are even subject to export controls — by some estimates less than half of one percent of our products. Taking away these export controls would make no real difference in our bilateral trade relationship but could provide dramatic help to China's efforts to

authoritarian government, its military buildup and intentions must be viewed with skepticism and concern.

China doesn't play by the rules and is building up its economic and military capabilities at a rapid pace. It's time for China to accept the role of leader and begin to accept international standards to govern its actions. Only then can other nations begin to believe that the policy of "engagement" was worth pursuing. Clearly, our economic interests have not been adequately advanced in the U.S.-China relationship. We must not allow our national security interests to continue to be put at greater risk as well.

George Becker is a Commissioner on the Congressionally-created U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission and the former President of the United Steelworkers.

USW-SCA Partnership Shows Paper Industry New Way of Doing Business

MAKING YOUR

A new experiment is going on at SCA Tissue's Barton, Ala., tissue converting, paper making and distribution center. Instead of focusing on controlling their work force and thwarting their employees' union, the company is working in partnership with

the USW to be competitive in an industry fraught with increasing imports and rising energy prices.

The former PACE created a strategic alliance with SCA in November 2004. Both parties agreed to respect each other during the organizing drive, and pledged to work together in a positive, productive manner to improve competitiveness.

Brain, not brawn

Elizabeth Pigg checks a "parent" roll of paper for damage. When it's time for a roll change, she moves in synchronized fashion to get a new one started.

She likes having control over her job and area and being responsible for her work. Meeting or exceeding her production goals gives her a feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day.

Like the rest of the Local 1535 members at the plant, Pigg is operating in a "high performance" workplace. That means employees are expected to make decisions, work with minimal direction, control the flow of work, and work as a team to solve problems and devise better ways of working. The additional freedom comes with more responsibility and accountability.

"The benefit I see is that you're allowed to use your body above your shoulders," said Jeff Heathcock, an hourly safety partner at the plant. "At most places you don't get that, your body is there to work, not to think."

Instead of supervisors, there are shift coaches for every 60 to 70 employees. "They are there to support the crew and to coach them and not dictate," said Bryan Dyar, SCA employee relations specialist.

Respect for the union and management

The contract between the USW and SCA at Barton contains certain articles not normally found in an agreement, such as the values, beliefs and principles to be followed in the union-management partnership.

"In place of work rules, you have principles," said Emory Barnette, District 9 international representative.

One of them states: "We will show respect for the union and always recognize its role and responsibilities in representing and leading employees at our site. We will also show respect for management and its responsibilities."

Joint union/management teams are defined in the contract. Each area of the plant-logistics, converting (napkins, folders and bath tissue), and paper manufacturing-has a union/management team that meets at least every other month. Then there are union/management teams for each shift that are composed of a team coordinator, human resources representative, safety representative, shift coach, quality representative and shift steward.

Identifying common interests

These teams resolve issues by using interest-based problem solving to reach consensus. "We try not to take positions," Dyar said. "It's not a situation where the manager says 'this is what is going to happen.'"

Dyar helped organize the Barton facility over two years ago when he was a former PACE member. He believes in a team-based work system, but acknowledges that it requires a lot of resources, time and struggle.





There also has to be the willingness to make changes. "In order to stay competitive, a company has to continually change," Dyar said. "Those not wanting change have difficulty adapting."

"It's a continual work in progress," Heathcock added.

Establishing trust is the most challenging part, said Local 1535 President Joey Weston. "For this to work, everyone has to buy into it from the union side and the management side. It's tough for management to let go of control, and it's hard for the union to step forward and grab control. They (employees) have to work this like it's their own business."

Financial aspects of the business are shared with the union, which also participates in the budget setting process.

Consultation precedes discipline

Unlike traditional contracts, the USW-SCA agreement at Barton allows for grievances to be handled verbally until they reach the international representative and are submitted in writing.

"Depending on the issue, we're not tied into a time frame and we can study it more," said Local 1535 Executive Vice President Darren Franks.

"We've been there two-and-a-half years and have not had a formal grievance," Barnette said. "The consultation system has been successful 100 percent of the time. I have other locations (paper

mills) where there are 300 grievances a year."

To earn more pay at the Barton plant, workers have to learn more jobs and be actively engaged in teamwork, Dyar said. Co-workers evaluate each

other when they move to the next pay level, but give feedback along the way so they can help each other achieve the next technical level.

"We've tried to develop the attitude that we're all in this together,"

"I think the strategic alliance has been a productive relationship for both parties," said SCA council chair Bill Gibbons.

Weston said. "If you see someone do something wrong, you provide support and help. You take care of each other..."

There's no competition between two people for one position."

Seniority is still recognized at the plant for job bids and layoffs. The person who has the most seniority and meets predetermined criteria set by the union and management gets the job.

Results of strategic alliance

Dyar said the Barton location meets its customers' needs 99.6 percent of the time and is getting to the point where

future expansion might be an option. Compared to other SCA mills it is in the middle in terms of cost, Weston said. "But that will improve," Franks adds.

"I think the strategic alliance has been a productive relationship for both parties," said Bill Gibbons, SCA council chair. "Under the partnership, if an operation is in trouble, we meet in advance and deal with what needs to be done."

The rest of the paper industry is watching this unique labor-management partnership to see if it is a competitive advantage in today's global economy. "The only way it'll fail is if we give up on it," Weston said.



Under President Bush's overhaul proposal, current Social Security recipients and workers over 54 would continue to get benefits, but younger workers would start to invest part of their Social Security taxes in private accounts. (AP Photo/Bradley C Bower)

Social Security Under Siege Again

Just when you thought President Bush's plan to privatize Social Security and cut benefits for middle class workers was dead for lack of citizen support, it reared its ugly head again.

Privatization of Social Security, a centerpiece of the president's second-term agenda, got slipped into his \$2.77 trillion budget for 2007, even though a majority of Americans abhor the idea.

Although little noticed in the media, the plan would provide for workers to divert funds to private accounts beginning at \$1,000 in 2009 and increasing by \$100 increments through 2016.

The 2007 fiscal year budget also proposes reductions in Social Security benefits by \$2.2 billion over five years and \$6.3 billion over the ten-year budget proposal.

The Social Security privatization scheme is just one bad item in a Bush budget that proposes paying for his top priorities — the military and billions of dollars in tax cuts for the rich — by reducing spending in basic areas crucial to middle-class workers and the poor.

"The chutzpah of these guys. The only thing that can stop them really is the upcoming elections," said Roger Hickey, codirector of Campaign for America's Future (CAF), a non-profit policy group that opposes privatization. "If the Republicans do well in the next election, they're coming back on privatization."

Mobilization works

Bush's Social Security plan was pounded last year by a sophisticated mobilization led by a powerful coalition that included many unions, including the USW, and advocacy groups such as CAF, which used election-day polling results to prove that the president had no mandate for his privatization scheme.

Other organizations opposing Bush's privatization scheme were USAction, a

community action network, and MoveOn.org. Together they comprised a coalition of more than 200 groups under the banner Americans United to Protect Social Security.

Whenever Bush campaigned for privatization, the union-supported coalition was there to make sure that no speech or statement went unopposed. AARP, the retiree organization, independently ran a multimillion-dollar advertising campaign.

Hickey said the same kind of mobilization must continue this year. "Frankly, the first thing to do when confronted with this terrible policy is to stop it," he added. "The public is against it."

Polls show no support

Numerous polls show that privatization has little or no public support. One poll conducted after Bush's State of the Union address found 56 percent of Americans believe investing Social Security money in the stock market is too big of a risk to take.

But the president is unwilling to give up on his bad idea.

He claimed that Social Security is about to collapse and go broke. But while the system clearly needs to be tweaked, no one else is seriously predicting that it will go out of business the way a bankrupt company would. Actually, even if it remains unchanged a few decades from now, the system would continue to pay benefits, just not as many.

Economists Dean Baker and Mark Weisbrot, argue in their book, "In Social Security: the Phony Crisis," that there is no economic, demographic or actuarial basis for the widespread belief that the program needs to be fixed.

"The Social Security system was always based on a growing economy, growth in wages, that the next generation lives better than the current generation," Hickey said. "If that happened, if

the good old American dream were alive, this would not be a problem. There would be no shortfall."

Benefit cuts on tap

The president's proposal would phase in benefit cuts over time. Under his proposed plan, a worker who is 45 today can expect to see a cut in guaranteed benefits of around 15 percent by the time he or she retires, according to an analysis by Baker, codirector of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. A worker who is 35 can expect an approximate 25 percent reduction.

Overall, the cuts proposed by Bush total \$6.3 billion over ten years. In addition to lower monthly checks, they include eliminating the \$255 death benefit paid to surviving spouses, and ending benefits at age 16 for the child of a deceased, disabled or retired worker if that child is no longer attending school full time.

Even if you accept dire funding predictions, Hickey and others argue that there are ways to close the projected funding gap without resorting to privatization.

One potential fix is to remove or raise the current earnings cap. Currently, all earnings up to \$90,000 are taxed at 12.4 percent to fund Social Security. Each dollar earned above that is exempt.

Doing away with the cap could "virtually eliminate" projected funding shortfalls, according to the Economic Policy Institute, which does research on issues that impact working people.

Hickey believes some combination of tweaking benefits and Social Security taxes could fix the problem but that will require compromises and bipartisan cooperation in Washington, D.C.

"But first we've got to change the Congress and the president before we can have rational partners to negotiate with," he concluded.

Flame of Justice

First Rosa Parks Award Goes to Local 8888 Leaders

She tried to steady herself by holding onto the podium. She tried to blink back the tears that filled her eyes. She tried to hold it together in front of family, friends and union members who clapped and cried for her.

But when she could no longer hold back the tears, or the joy, or her swelling emotions, Cindy Boyd-Williams, financial secretary of Local 8888 in Newport News, Va., finally gave into the special moment. It was hers.

First recipients honored

Boyd-Williams and former Local 8888 President Eddie Coppedge were honored as the first recipients of the Rosa Parks Flame of Justice Award. Local 8888 President Alton Glass and Maxine Carter, Assistant to International Steelworkers' President Leo W. Gerard, made the presentations at a membership meeting.

"We are honored to have two Local 8888 members chosen as the first recipients of this prestigious award from our international union," Glass said. "Local 8888 will never forget Mrs. Parks or any of the other civil rights pioneers whose courage and sacrifice created opportunities for so many, including me."

The Rosa Parks Award honors the legacy of Sister Rosa, who ignited the civil rights movement in the mid-1950s by refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Ala. "She proved to the world, but especially to other women, that one person can make a big difference," said Carter, who began her own career with the USW as a stenographer. "It's important that we start honoring our 'she-roes' as well as our heroes."

In accepting her award from Carter, who is also director of the Steelworkers' civil rights department, Boyd-Williams said, "I admire Maxine so much. As a mentor, she has taught me a lot."

Women play a key role

"This union would not be here without women," said Boyd-Williams, a local union officer for 24 of the 28 years she has been a member of Local 8888. "The women in this union are our best organizers, because they understand what families need and how to get our message across to other workers in the yard."

In addition to holding numerous union positions and being a working mother herself, Boyd-Williams served as editor of *The Voyager* newspaper for 16 years when the publication received 17 awards. She was also appointed to the

“The women in this union are our best organizers, because they understand what families need and how to get our message across to other workers in the yard.”

Steelworkers' Civil Rights Committee by retired Vice President Leon Lynch. Her civil rights record also includes membership in the NAACP and participation in many civil rights conferences.

Vision to organize

When President Glass presented Eddie Coppedge with his award, he emphasized Coppedge's vision, courage and leadership in getting the Steelworkers union into the shipyard, currently owned by Northrop Grumman.

"I still call on him for his advice," Glass said.

Coppedge, who served four terms as Local 8888 president between 1979 and 1988, was one of "The Front Four" that included Oscar Pretlow, W.T. Hayes, and Ellis Cofield. They formed the nucleus of the organizing committee that eventually reached 700 shipyard workers and forced the Newport News

Shipbuilding Co. to recognize the Steelworkers as the exclusive bargaining agent for shipyard workers.

Difficult beginning

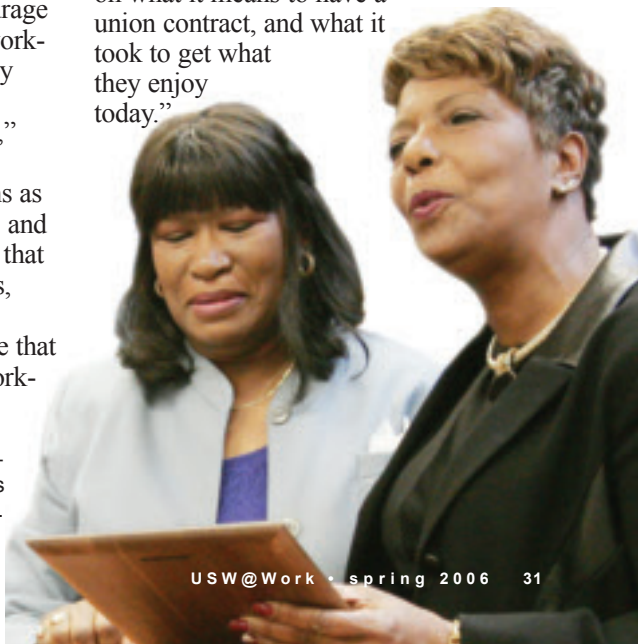
Coppedge said it wasn't easy in the beginning. "We had to tell the Steelworkers' rep – straight up – that if you want to get this union into the shipyard, then you got to go to the black workers."

Consequently, he said, protecting civil rights became part of the USW's fight for union recognition. "That's why civil rights mean something special to Local 8888," said Coppedge, who filed many discrimination complaints on behalf of shipyard workers with the federal Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO).

Now retired but still every bit a "union man," Coppedge says he's proud of Local 8888's progress over the years. And on this night, when this revered wise man from the X18 department got a long-overdue "thank you," from the union that he will love until his last breath, he challenged younger members to take a dose of accountability:

"The union is the average person in the shipyard, not just the leadership," he said. "We've got to educate our folks on what it means to have a union contract, and what it took to get what they enjoy today."

Left, Cindy Boyd-Williams, Local 888 financial secretary, receives the first Rosa Parks Flame of Justice Award with great emotion. The award was presented by Assistant to the President, Maxine Carter.



News Bytes



Wheatland Tube Plans Layoffs

President Bush's decision earlier this year to deny relief to domestic steel pipe producers from unfairly priced Chinese imports is taking away American jobs just as our union feared.

Wheatland Tube, one of the companies that petitioned the government for relief along with the USW, announced that it would permanently lay off up to 140 of the 230 workers at its plant in Sharon, Pa., as a direct result of the president's decision.

Bush rejected a request by Wheatland and other tube makers to impose quotas on unfairly traded Chinese imports even though the relief was recommended by the government's own International Trade Commission (ITC.)

The layoffs at Sharon will occur between May 26 and June 9, the company said in a layoff notice. Wheatland said it may offer jobs at another plant in Wheatland, Pa. to 60 of the displaced Sharon workers.

WCI Steel Last to Emerge From Bankruptcy

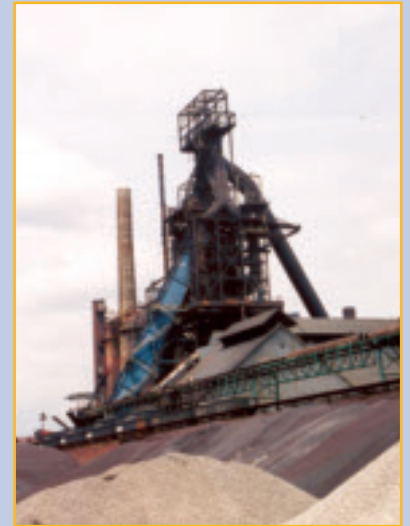
WCI Steel, an integrated steel producer employing 1,250 in Warren, Ohio, has received approval from a bankruptcy court judge for a modified reorganization plan that averts a takeover of the employee pension plan by the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp.

The reorganization plan, however, cannot go into effect until members of USW Local 1375 vote on a tentative contract agreement. A ratification vote is pending.

The tentative contract follows a pattern established with International Steel Group in 2002. It includes pay increases, fewer job classifications, a \$50,000 retirement incentive for 250 members and a \$12 million VEBA fund for health care. The union will appoint two directors to the company's board.

If the deal goes through, ownership of WCI will shift from the Renco Group to noteholders, the largest of which is a New York hedge fund, Harbinger Capital Partners. In turn, the post-bankruptcy WCI will pay between \$15 million and \$25 million to Renco to cover pension obligations.

The new plan ends a legal tug of war between PBGC and Renco over unfunded pension liabilities. If the deal is concluded, WCI will be the last to emerge from bankruptcy reorganization out of 45 companies that filed for Chapter 11 protection following the steel crisis of 1998-2004.



Communication Works

Managers at the International Waxes refinery in Farmers Valley, Pa., saw a crowd of young employees at the plant gate on the first day of a strike by Local 10-607 and took notice. They settled one day later.

"Organization and education were the keys," Local 10-607 President Duane Connolly said.

The local's negotiating committee opened its meetings to the membership to develop a bargaining agenda. Committee members also talked one-on-one with younger members, explaining the union's bargaining proposals.

The communication paid off when management attempted to take away the pension plan and offered substandard wage increases. All 83 local members agreed to reject the proposal and strike.

The company then dropped its pension demand and sweetened the wage offer.

United Steelworkers President Leo W. Gerard commends U.S. Rep. Ben Cardin (D-Md.) for introducing a sweeping trade bill, Restoring America's Competitiveness Act, which would strengthen U.S. trade laws, counteract foreign market-distorting practices and level the playing field for U.S. manufacturers. The bill would, among other things, create a commission to review decisions of the World Trade Organization and strengthen our ability to apply countervailing duty laws to non-market economies like China that consistently and unjustifiably provide support and subsidies to their domestic industries.



Save the Dates!

September 7-10, 2006

14th International Conference on Civil Rights
Music City Sheraton Hotel
Nashville, TN

Official call to follow soon.

The USW has scheduled a National Rapid Response conference to be held in Washington, D.C. at the Marriott Wardman Park hotel on **June 20 through June 22**. Workshops, panel discussions and legislator visits are on the agenda. For information on the program and registration, visit www.usw.org.

UMWA Disappointed in Stickler

United Mine Workers of America President Cecil Roberts has called on the U.S. Senate to reject the nomination of Richard Stickler as Assistant Secretary of Labor for Mine Safety and Health.

Roberts claims that Stickler, a former mine manager who was director of Pennsylvania's underground mine safety agency from 1997 to 2003, would be just another "fox guarding the henhouse."

Stickler told a Senate committee in January that he did not believe any changes to the federal Mine Safety and Health Act were necessary to upgrade safety for miners.

"Career coal company managers and executives like Mr. Stickler spend their time figuring out how to get around safety rules and regulations in order to increase production," Roberts said. "That's the last kind of person American coal miners need as our nation's top watchdog for safety."

Student Athletes Seek Scholarship Relief

College student-athletes, backed by the USW, filed a federal antitrust lawsuit against the National Collegiate Athletic Association that seeks to prohibit the NCAA from telling member colleges they cannot offer athletic scholarships up to the full cost of attendance.

The class-action claim was brought on behalf of Division I-A football players and major-college basketball players, whose programs generate the overwhelming amount of revenue that flows into college athletic departments.

The suit is an outgrowth of the work of the Collegiate Athletes Coalition, an advocacy group started by former UCLA football player Ramogi Huma, with support from the USW.

Alcoa Building in Trinidad

Alcoa, the world's largest aluminum producer, is moving forward on plans to build a \$1.5 billion smelter and power plant in Trinidad capable of annually producing 341,000 metric tons of aluminum.

The move fits with the company's larger strategy of moving away from North America to lower-cost regions such as the Caribbean and Iceland.

Alcoa plans to power the smelter with an on-site power plant fueled by natural gas, an abundant resource in Trinidad.

Medco Lock Out

Medco Health Solutions Inc. illegally locked out 500 USW pharmacy technicians at its mail order pharmacy in Las Vegas on April 5 during a contract dispute. Health-care benefits were at issue.

The USW filed unfair labor practice charges alleging the company failed to bargain in good faith, illegally changed terms and conditions of employment and retaliated against employees who engaged in protected union activity.

USW President Leo W. Gerard criticized Medco's use of replacement workers and notified the presidents of other international unions of the dispute. A large chunk of Medco's business is with labor unions.

Talks were underway at press time.



The United Steelworkers celebrated Black History Month with a display in the lobby of the Pittsburgh headquarters building that highlighted eight American women who made a difference in the lives of others.

Standing with the exhibit are members of the USW International Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). From left: Bill Eakin, Mary E. Moore, Kim Miller, Maxine Carter, Marsha Zakowski, Janet Hill and Dan Bosh.

OSHA Decision Could Cost Lives

The United Steelworkers expressed outrage at OSHA's decision to set a new standard for hexavalent chromium five times higher than the agency originally proposed, and 20 times higher than the level originally sought by the union.

"OSHA's decision guarantees that many more workers will get lung cancer," Michael Wright, the USW's Director of Health, Safety and Environment, said.

Workers are exposed to hexavalent chromium in chrome plating shops, welding on stainless steel, in the production of chromate chemicals and pigments, and in the manufacture and use of some cements.

OSHA's own risk estimates show that the higher standard will cause between 500 and 2,500 additional cancer deaths in lifetime chromium workers, compared to an earlier proposal by the Administration.

The original OSHA proposal was released in response to a 2002 court order issued after a lawsuit was filed by the former Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW) and the Public Citizen Health Research Group. The USW is OCAW's successor by merger.

"We had to go to court to force OSHA to set a new chromium standard in the first place," Wright said. "It looks like we will have to go back to court to get a standard that truly protects workers."



Steelworkers' Summer is an educational and training internship in which participants develop skills useful for union organizing by experiencing firsthand the kinds of struggles workers face while trying to win a voice at work. It is also designed to give participants an understanding and appreciation of the positive impact the union has had on their parents' working lives.

Internships are open to young adults, 18 years of age or older. Selection preference is given to children of members of the United Steelworkers union.

Steelworkers' Summer is committed to uniting students, workers, and community activists to bring about social justice through workplace and community organizing.

What qualifications are needed to participate in Steelworkers' Summer?

Applicants should have a strong commitment to social and economic justice, as well as openness to working with a broad cross section of people. This includes people of various races, ethnicities, religions and orientations. Participants need to be people-oriented, enthusiastic, energetic, flexible and willing to work long hours on an unpredictable schedule. A college degree is not required. Previous union experience is not necessary. Volunteerism or activism is a plus.

Visit the USW website, www.usw.org, to download an application and learn more about this program.

2006

Workers' Bookshelf

World Class Analysis

Rich and powerful of both parties go global, abandon social contracts

***The Global Class War*
By Jeff Faux**

Workers have long known that the rich run the world. Yet a provocative new book by political economist Jeff Faux, *The Global Class War*, lays out in stark but readable terms just how a bipartisan governing elite has used trade policies to empower multinational corporations in diminishing workers' economic leverage even more.

Economic national boundaries are being obliterated by globalization. But rather than bringing prosperity to the working class of all nations, the benefits of the new world order are going only to the few — the rich and powerful.

Faux, the founder and former president of the progressive Washington think tank, the Economic Policy Institute, argues that the new world market is dominated by a globe-trotting network of corporate investors and CEOs who have more in common with each other than they do with their fellow citizens who must work for a living.

NAFTA empowers elites

The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Faux argues, has empowered corporate elites to search for profits anywhere in the world, eating our domestic manufacturing sector alive in the process. It is destroying jobs and economic stability not only in the United States but across our borders in Canada and even Mexico.

And although manufacturing has borne the brunt of globalization's damage so far, services that can be provided over the Internet across borders from India, China and elsewhere are moving into play. The end result will be a drop in our living standards with potentially dramatic political consequences.

The book's main thesis is that globalization has empowered an elite corporate class, supported by both Republicans and Democrats, to abandon America, effectively creating a new global political party that Faux calls the Party of Davos, named after the posh Swiss ski resort where powerful corporate and government leaders gather annually at the World Economic Forum.

Corporate class dominates

The forum, which draws 2,000 financial movers and shakers, is described by Faux as a virtual political network that governs the global market in the absence of a world government, operating free from any ties or allegiances to the political, partisan or individual interests of any nation.

This new world economy, however, protects just one class of global citizen — corporate investors who share common goals

of exploiting the world's cheapest labor and escaping traditional domestic social contracts including pensions and health care.

What we have, Faux documents, is a new class war pitting the global capital elites and their government advocates against the interests of basically everybody else, including workers of all countries. It's the exact opposite of the kind of democracy we should and must have - a global economic system that benefits more than the few who now control it.

The model for this global corporate behavior is NAFTA, which was conceived and nurtured by Republicans Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush and delivered by Democrat Bill Clinton, who stood up against his two prime constituents, labor and environmentalists, to drive its passage through Congress.

Although politicians of both parties promised prosperity for all, NAFTA turned out to be a giant step toward liberating transnational corporate investors to chase down profits anywhere in the world. It gave them license to chase — and in many cases exploit — cheaper labor without the social costs they have at home.

Bipartisan failures

After NAFTA, the bipartisan coalition that promoted the agreement extended it through the entire world with the WTO, which admitted China, where wages of its vast workforce have been suppressed by the bayonet.

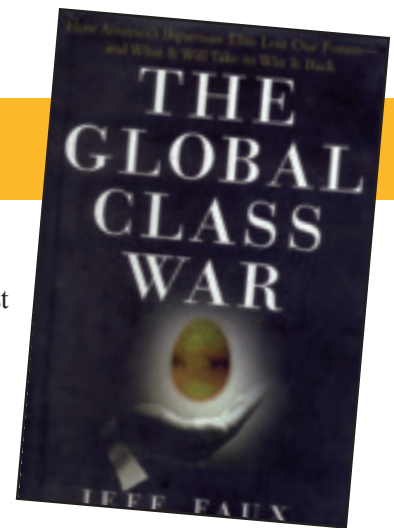
Globalization may bring lower prices for some goods but it is exerting a far more dangerous downward pressure on wages and benefits as domestic companies are forced to meet the "China price" for the products they make.

Labor unions and progressive political parties — the forces that typically act as counterweights to the power of the investor class in national economies — have not yet proved organized enough to prevent the downward spiral.

In the end, Faux says, Americans will have to save more and spend less, export more and import less, to escape the inevitable economic dead end of debt and diminishing competitiveness caused by the global governing class.

Limiting the damage and reversing the long-term downward spiral will require a sea of change in the way the American economy has been managed over the last three decades. Building a political climate for that change must begin with a public discussion that makes clear the distinction between the interests of stateless transnational corporations and the people whose economic fate is bounded by national borders.

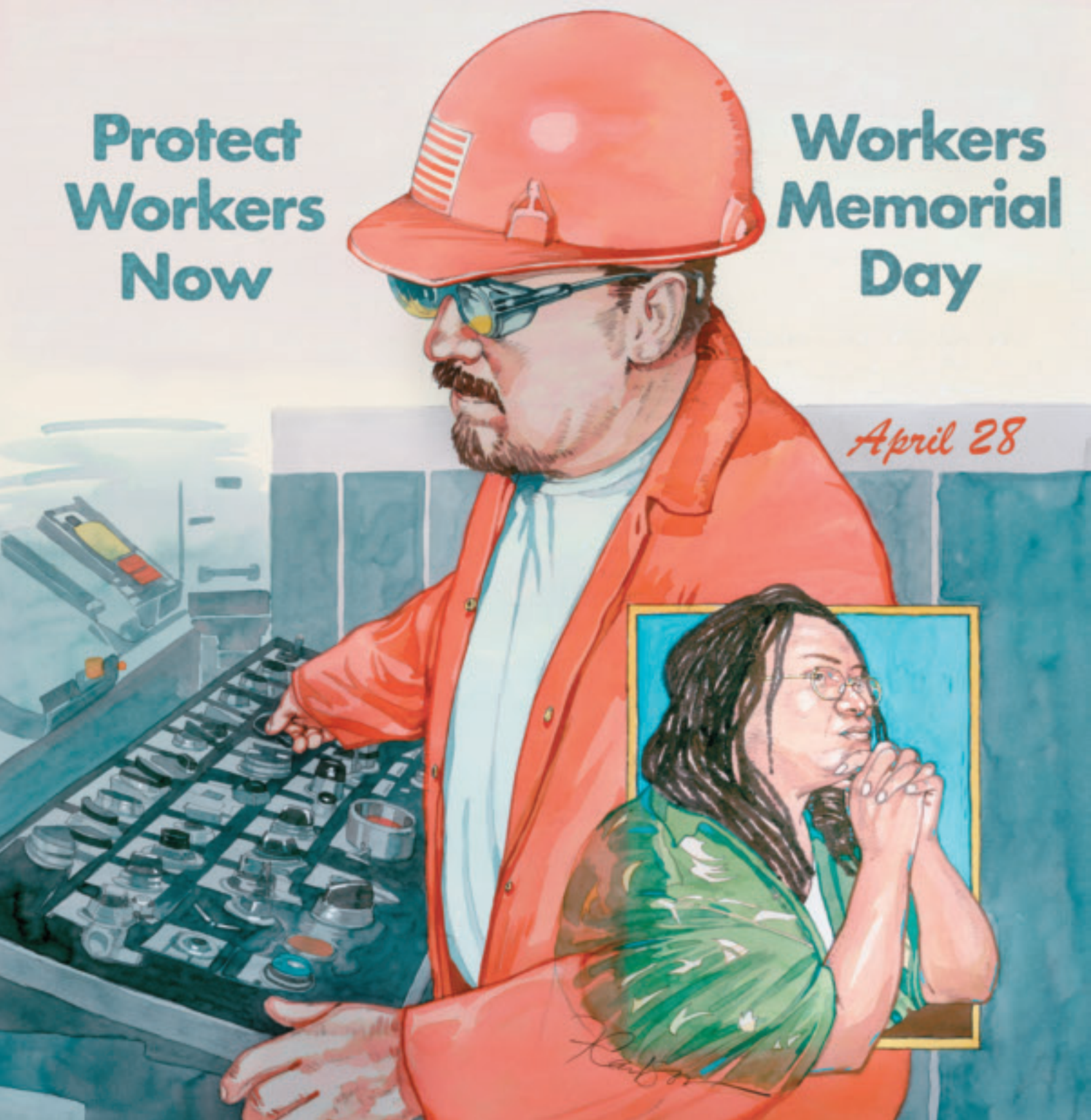
What's at stake is more than trade policy, more than being able to buy a pair of socks cheaply at Wal-Mart. America's historic commitment to economic and social justice is in the balance.



**Protect
Workers
Now**

**Workers
Memorial
Day**

April 28



Have You Moved?

Notify your local union financial secretary, or clip out this form with your old address label and send your new address to: **USW@Work**, USW Membership Department, 1440 South Byrne Road, Toledo, OH 43614

Name _____

New Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____