

PRESIDENT HURT'S KEYNOTE ADDRESS to the 38th Constitutional Convention...



It is truly an honor to address this 38th Constitutional Convention of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union.

Brothers and Sisters, what a difference four years and new political leadership in Washington can make for working families, and our future. When we held our Convention four years ago, the future for working people and the labor movement was ominous.

We were confronting the sixth year of a relentless assault by arrogant anti-worker bureaucrats, who used their power to harass and weaken unions – and to maximize the influence and profits of corporations and to shift the wealth of this country even further from the middle class to the privileged class.

This year we come together in an environment that stands in stark contrast to those dark days. Today — despite opposition from the minority party— our national political leaders are utilizing the power of government to advance the common good and improve the quality of life for all of our citizens.

Never before in our lifetime has the heart, soul and character of this nation's governmental leadership been transformed so dramatically by a single election. And never before have we seen such determined effort to ensure the failure of the most popular President since John F. Kennedy.

As you walked into the Hall this morning you saw prominently displayed the theme of our Convention, "Voices in Unity...Strength in Solidarity". This theme was selected because of fundamental and historic changes that have taken place in this country – and the successes our Union has accomplished over the past four years, were achieved only through the Unity in our voices and the strength of our Solidarity.

Voices in Unity...Strength in Solidarity enabled us to endure a federal government run by people completely subservient to corporate bosses. On Election Day 2008 the voices of working men and women across this country spoke loudly, clearly and in unity. In 2008, working men and women in this country came together in the strongest show of political solidarity ever seen. Brothers and sisters, those millions of Voices in Unity and that powerful Strength in Solidarity changed America forever and sent a bright beacon of hope around the world.

Vile Opposition

Today, against the most vile opposition, we have an Administration in Washington that sides with working people over the captains of industry. We have an Administration that sides with the citizens of this country over the powerful special interests that had their way in Washington for eight long years.

Today, against the most vile opposition, we have a President who works hard to improve the lives of those in society who have the least; those who are the most vulnerable; those who have been shut out and beaten down by the people who were supposed to be representing their interests. A President who forthrightly says, "You cannot have a strong middle class, without a strong labor movement."

Department of Labor

Four years ago, we had a Department of Labor led by a Labor Secretary who took her orders from Karl Rove; a Labor Department staffed from top to bottom with individuals right out of the employer ranks and the right-to-work-for-less committee, who were put in place for one purpose only – to protect and enable corporations in their never-ending quest for more power and profits.

Today we have a Labor Department that has been rescued from the clutches of big business; a Labor Department led by a Secretary of Labor who's proud of her union background and dedicated to vigorous enforcement of the laws that govern the workplace.

When she took office, Secretary Solis sent a clear and forceful message when she announced, "There's a new sheriff in town." She has surrounded herself with qualified professionals who actually believe in the mission of the agency – to protect the rights and interests of men and women in the workplace – much to the chagrin of corporate America, including each and every one of your companies.

Health Care

Four years ago, our health care policy in this country was being written by the insurance and pharmaceutical companies whose obscene profits were earned off the backs of the neediest and weakest in our society.

Today, after a century of struggle, health care is a right for all Americans. Every citizen of this country will have medical services without having to go bankrupt or without food, clothing or shelter in order to receive care.

Today, because of a determined and principled President and a revitalized labor movement, the United States finally stands proudly with the rest of the world's industrialized nations, including Canada, in ensuring health care security for its people.

We know this health care law is not a perfect law. Compromises had to be made along the way to appease lawmakers that represent the health care industry in order to try to achieve bipartisanship, which never materialized. Throughout the long, difficult process, the labor movement was working hard to strengthen the bill.

And we know that the labor movement will lead the way in improving health care reform over time—just as our predecessors did years ago with Social Security, Medicare and the Civil Rights movement. And just as the Canadian labor movement has done with its universal health care system.

But Brothers and Sisters, even with its shortcomings, even without a public option, the health care reform law is a giant step forward on the path to greater social and economic justice for the American people.

Wall Street

At the time of our last Convention, the wizards of Wall Street and the barons of banking were already waist deep in reckless and corrupt activities that would soon destroy millions of jobs, cripple thousands of communities, ruin countless lives and leave our economy on the verge of collapse. Greed knows no limits.

These “thieves” were making hundreds of millions of dollars by betting against their own investors. They were literally cheering as the housing market was collapsing because it meant they would make billions more in profits and bonuses. They were robbing the American people blind and it was all legal.

This shameless, immoral behavior by the people controlling the financial center of the world was allowed to take place because the regulations governing the banks and insurance companies had been gutted. And the people responsible for enforcing what little regulation remained turned a blind eye to the corruption.

Today, these thieves are being hauled before congressional committees to testify because the leaders of this Congress are willing to do their job of looking out for the citizens of this country. Today, the financial industry has the broadest and toughest regulations in 80 years because we have a President who has the courage to take on the richest and most powerful interests in Washington, including the politicians who are owned by Wall Street.

We know that tough regulation and vigilant oversight are crucial to protect the public. Canada largely avoided the global housing and banking calamity because of a robust regulatory environment and strict enforcement of its laws.

Hell No

Corporate bosses wanted tax breaks for the largest corporations and the wealthiest Americans. They got it! They wanted the elimination of government regulations—even those that protect people’s lives and the public health. They got it. They wanted hack cronies right out of Goldman Sachs regulating Wall Street and the big banks. They got it. They wanted to put in charge of OSHA a union-busting attorney, whose greatest expertise was in helping companies avoid compliance with workplace safety and health laws. They got it. They wanted a former coal company executive put in charge of mine safety. They got it. They wanted war profiteers like Halliburton to get billions of dollars worth of no-bid contracts. They got it. They wanted trade bills and labor policies written by the Chamber of Commerce

and National Right to Work Committee. They got it. They wanted energy policy written by the oil companies. They got it. And today the United States is confronting the greatest environmental disaster in our history!

For eight years, they rode the special interest gravy train, gorging themselves like hogs at the financial trough, while working men and women lost their jobs, lost their homes and struggled just to get by from day to day on less and less.

Roadblocks

Brothers and Sisters, the Party of HELL NO and their benefactors in the corporate world are desperate to get back on that gravy train. And the only way they can possibly make this happen is to tear down President Obama and put up roadblocks to everything he is trying to accomplish for this country. And the party of HELL NO and hate radio and hate television offer no solutions, except more tax breaks for the wealthy and less regulation on corporations. Brothers and Sisters, a policy of HELL NO is not a substitute for governing.

It doesn't put people back to work. It doesn't help families keep their homes, or put food on the table, or clothes on the kids' backs. It doesn't improve the quality of public education for our young people, or make college more affordable for working families. It doesn't do anything to make life better for good, hardworking citizens, who just want a fair shot at a decent life for themselves and their families.

Phony Patriots

But these were never their goals anyway. You see, these are the phony patriots, who claim they care about this country but support policies that allow corporations to shift billions of dollars in profits to foreign banks to avoid paying taxes; the phony patriots who support tax breaks for companies that move industrial production and good jobs from North America to low-wage countries around the world; the phony patriots who rail about taxpayer bailouts of Wall Street and the big banks while they are in Washington, but then sneak up to New York City and go on bended knee to the kingpins of the financial industry, promising to block real financial regulation in return for millions more in campaign contributions; the phony patriots who say they care about the health of the American people, then fight health care reform for over a year with despicable lies and distortions, because they are bought and paid for by the health insurance industry; the phony patriots who give speeches at Tea Party rallies about protecting people's rights, but who for eight years enabled the Bush/Cheney "Injustice Department" to shred the Constitution and ride roughshod over our civil liberties.

True patriots are devoted to the well-being of their fellow citizens and their country. Brothers and sisters, we are here to tell these phony patriots and the Party of HELL NO and those Democrats who have turned their backs on the people who elected them, that change is here to stay. We worked too hard to get here.

We say good riddance to the gravy train for corporate thieves and their lackeys in government. America is moving forward! The labor movement has only just begun to lead a great economic and social turnaround. Our fight continues – we cannot falter – we cannot quit. There is so much more to be done!



Labor Law

Labor laws in the United States and Canada must be reformed to give workers an honest chance to join a union and enjoy the benefits of collective bargaining.

Brothers and Sisters, we will not be satisfied until the Employee Free Choice Act takes its rightful place as a cornerstone of a more just and fair society.

And while some of our Brothers and Sisters in Canada enjoy decent labor laws, many of our members work in provinces which have labor laws that are as bad as what we have in this country. That has to change!

We will not be satisfied so long as the insidious new breed of employer – hedge funds and private equity firms – can walk in, take over companies like Stella D'oro and Wendy's, destroy what has been built for decades, ruin countless lives and families, and then walk away unscathed with millions of dollars in their pockets.

We will take on these bloodless bean counters with every resource at our disposal. We will not be satisfied until corporations no longer get tax benefits for closing our factories and moving production around the globe in search of the cheapest, most vulnerable, most subservient labor they can find.

We will not be satisfied until trade laws start protecting our jobs—not the bloated profits of these unpatriotic companies that couldn't care less about North America's workers.

NAFTA, CAFTA and trade agreements with China and other low-wage countries have crippled the middle class in both the U.S. and Canada to the point where the standard of living for our children and our grandchildren is in great jeopardy.

New York Times columnist Bob Herbert was right on the mark when he recently wrote, "The oil companies and other giant corporations have a stranglehold on American policies and behavior and are choking off the prospects for a viable social and economic future for working people and their families."

Brothers and Sisters, enough is enough! This race to the bottom for workers must end and it must end NOW!

Our unity and solidarity is not limited to the political and legislative arenas. Our unity and solidarity has served us well for many, many years at the bargaining table and on the organizing battlefields.

Since the last Convention, our local unions, with the able assistance of this International Union, have successfully negotiated a multitude of high-quality contracts with some of the largest, wealthiest and most influential corporations in the U.S. and Canada.

We accomplished this in the most challenging economic climate that we have ever experienced. We accomplished this at a time when corporations were operating with a free hand, virtually unchecked by the government in any way.

Our successes at the bargaining table over the last four years were the result of tireless hard work and preparation. But even more than that, employers have come to respect the proud unity and solidarity of the BCTGM. Employers know that if they take us on, they had better be in for the long haul – because we are!

Our breakthrough organizing victories at Dannon Yogurt in Minster, Ohio and West Jordan, Utah were possible because we enlisted workers and labor organizations from around the world to join together in a powerful show of global solidarity that the company never imagined was possible and was powerless to stop.

Employers who do not bargain in good faith, or conduct business with us in an unlawful, or unacceptable manner, have come to find out that the BCTGM has a very long reach. They have found out that our will to defend our members and organize the unorganized, is unshakable. We know that they will test us again and again. We are always ready!

Brothers and sisters, the BCTGM endures and prospers: Because we know who we are and what we believe in; Because we negotiate contracts that we are proud of; Because we successfully organize in the toughest places, during the toughest times; Because we are effective in the political process, and in the halls of Congress.

Brothers and Sisters, together with our voices in unity, together with the strength of our unbreakable solidarity, together, we will make the most of this new day for our members, for our Union, and for our two great countries.