

*Voices in Unity* ★★  
**STRENGTH** *in Solidarity*

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# CONVENTION REPORTER

## *Building Our Strength Through Organizing*

Delegates enthusiastically filled the Bally's Event Center for the second day of the 38<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Convention of the BCTGM International Union. BCTGM International President Frank Hurt called the convention to order which was followed by a recording of long time convention singer, the late Ben Parrish, singing "Let There be Peace on Earth." BCTGM International Representative James Rivers delivered the invocation.

Delegates were empowered by a special convention video entitled, "Strength Through Organizing" which highlighted the union's organizing efforts in the last four years.

President Hurt reminded delegates of the vital importance of the day's theme: Building Our Strength Through Organizing. "Everyone in this room understands that organizing is the lifeblood of the labor movement. Each one of us here must understand how vital organizing is to our union, the future of the labor movement, and the prosperity of every working family in North America.

"The labor movement's strength is partly dictated by its numbers. High union density translates into power at the table, power in the streets and power in the halls of Congress and Parliament. Thus, a powerful labor movement results in more worker-friendly legislation, better contracts, and more accountable government," Hurt concluded.

### **Durkee Delivers Organizing Report**

International Secretary-Treasurer and Director of Organization David B. Durkee opened his report on organizing noting the black polo shirts worn by delegates throughout the Convention hall.

"It is wonderful to look out upon you and see all of

the black organizing shirts which represent the local unions that have made accomplishments in organizing during the past four years. Congratulations to you," said Durkee.

"We have worked very hard in organizing during the past four years, not only involving ourselves in organizing campaigns, but also in trying to change how organizing is legislated, in order to give working families in North America a fighting chance," he said.

"We remain hopeful that, given the immediate successes President Barack Obama, we will pass labor law reform in the form of the Employee Free Choice Act, in the same spirit that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had passed the original National Labor Relations Act," said Durkee.

Stressing the vital importance of labor law reform in the U.S. Durkee said, "Only the Employee Free Choice Act can stop workers fear of the repercussions by their employer for the expression of their individual beliefs. Only the Employee Free Choice Act can allow workers to join unions via card-check and without employer harassment, to negotiate first contracts within 90 days, to provide Federal Mediation/Arbitration for first-contract disputes, and to establish strong penalties for violations of employee rights. Only the Employee Free Choice Act can level the playing field between corporate power and working families."

Durkee noted that the BCTGM International Union has been fighting for the Employee Free Choice Act since 2003. "We will not give up hope or back away from our efforts. "Because, if our forefathers had given up, we would not have the Civil Rights Act, or Social Security, or the National Labor Relations Act, or Medicare, or Medicaid or any of the other programs that working families currently enjoy," Durkee said.

He explained how the political and economic climate had presented the union with numerous organizing challenges since the last convention. However, despite such adversities, the BCTGM has been successful in organizing. “We are proud to report that we have fought the exploitation of working people living in North America and have fought to change the outdated laws that promote this activity,” said Durkee.

Durkee detailed the Local 53 (New York) organizing battle that has been fought since 1999 to win justice for the bakers at J.J. Cassone Baking Company. The union has won every court case for the last 11 years. However, because the company has not given up on their union busting, the struggle continues.

Durkee recognized Local 53 President Narciso Martas for “never giving up” in the long J.J. Cassone campaign. Noting that Martas became a union member in 1954 and has spent 56 years fighting for worker justice Durkee added, “He is a shining example of how we should never back down and never quit our fight for workers.”

Durkee also provided details of other organizing battles the BCTGM has been involved since the last convention. “I am proud that our Union has stood tall and proud with the 900 workers at Consolidated Biscuit in McComb, Ohio, in their effort to organize since 2002.

“We are proud of our efforts to assist the 210 workers employed at Weston’s Interbake in Front Royal, Virginia, an organizing campaign that we started in 2006, where we estimate the company has spent approximately two million dollars in legal fees attempting to defend their illegal activity against their own employees,” Durkee said.

He noted with pride the two global organizing victories at Dannon Yogurt plants in Minister, Ohio and West Jordan, Utah where more than 500 workers are now represented by the BCTGM. “The assistance we received from fellow union Dannon workers from Germany, Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland and the Czech Republic was critical to our effort,” he said.

Durkee recognized BCTGM Local 401 (Salt Lake City, Utah) Financial Secretary Steven Wolfe and Local 401 members and Dannon workers Rick Durrant and Boyd Russell for their efforts during the organizing campaign in West Jordan.

He also commended BCTGM Local 70 (Grand Rapids, Mich.) for organizing three new Roskam manufacturing plants in the last four years. Durkee noted other successful organizing efforts at Kraft Logistics, Archer Daniels Midland, Alliance One

Tobacco, Bimbo Baking, Weston’s Baking, Sconza Candy, and Dean Foods.

Durkee said that while the BCTGM could celebrate such organizing success, collectively it is still not enough. He explained that industry consolidation and technological innovation have continued at an unabated pace in the last eight years and outpaced the union’s efforts to organize, resulting in a membership decline.

“Brothers and Sisters, the opportunity for our Union to organize is boundless if we can attain meaningful labor law reform in North America. In spite of the mass exportation of manufacturing jobs to other countries, there are still thousands of non-union workers within our industries to organize. In the United States, there are a total of 125,095 unorganized workers in our jurisdictions,” he said.

In conclusion, Durkee expressed optimism for the future of the BCTGM. “I am optimistic because of your conviction to achieve our goals and your courage to take on any fight necessary. Next year this union will celebrate 125 years. We’re not going anywhere – we’ll be around for another 125 years.”

## **Holt-Baker Addresses Convention**

Arlene Holt-Baker, the Executive Vice President of the AFL-CIO, discussed the vital importance of staying politically active leading up to the November elections.

“In just a little more than three months, Americans will vote on whether to continue our difficult but dramatic progress under President Obama, or back to the job-destroying, wage-cutting, home-foreclosing, union-busting policies of George W. Bush.

“And the crucial question is: Will working people who live in fear of losing their jobs, their health care and even their home still muster the courage to march to their polling places to take a stand for their self-interest and to vote for their values?

“We have to tell our friends and family, our neighbors and co-workers, and each and every one of our union sisters and brothers the simple truth about what is at stake in this election,” noted Holt-Baker.

“As we strive to persuade people who are working harder than ever but are more anxious and angry than ever, we need to be a constant, trusted presence in their communities, every day of the year and not only during the three months before in an election year,” Holt-Baker stressed.

“We need politicians who will stand up for us and who will have the backbone to support policies that move

our country forward and not backward. I have a feeling that the BCTGM is not going to let anybody turn you around,” Holt-Baker concluded to a standing ovation.

## **The Importance of Global Solidarity**

Ron Oswald, the General Secretary of the IUF, addressed the convention. The IUF is a global federation of more than 360 food, drink, agriculture, tobacco and hospitality unions in 125 countries around the world.

Reflecting on the diversity of the IUF membership, Oswald noted that the values and purpose of all the unions remain the same around the globe: to build a better life for our families.

“Beyond that basic purpose, our members are also engaged in a fight to ensure our workplaces, communities and societies are built on democracy, respect and decent work. In too many societies around the world, new generations grow up and simply don’t know that if they have a decent life and decent standards of living.

Most importantly for the BCTGM and the IUF is that we increasingly face the same global employers. Oswald said, “This reality makes what we do together across borders more relevant and more important than ever,” said Oswald.

“I can make you all one promise. Whatever the companies you take on might be, wherever and whenever we can bring some concrete value to your organizing efforts, you have my personal promise and a guarantee that we will mobilize everything we have in your support. We need to win and we need to organize many more members, and we need to do that together,” concluded Oswald.

## **Economics Simplified**

Larry Mishel, head of the Economic Policy Institute addressed the delegation in the afternoon session. Mishel began his speech by outlining some of the economic problems facing working families. However, he noted that there was a bright side: “it is in our power to change this course, because these are man-made problems”.

Mishel explained how the stimulus package helped avoid what could have been an even worse economic disaster. He then used the analogy of a burning building to describe how the stimulus package was working but how certain interests are blocking its effectiveness and ability to be even more effective.

“Imagine a 10 story apartment building that is up for sale. President Obama buys the building when five

stories are on fire. By the time he takes possession of the building, all ten stories are on fire. So, he mobilizes all the firefighters he has at his disposal to fight the fire. Against great odds, he and the firefighters succeed in putting out the fire on five different stories. This is an accomplishment. Yet five stories remain burning so President Obama tries to rally more firefighters and resources to battle the remaining blaze. But certain individuals block his efforts and say he shouldn’t spend more resources. These same individuals then blame Obama for starting the fire in the first place. These individuals don’t want others to remember that it was these individuals who were the ones that started the fire in the first place.

So that’s what Obama faces. He is trying to put out the fire and save the building. Yet the guys who started the fire and let it spread, are now criticizing the President for not putting the fire out. The reality is they want him to fail, and they want the building to burn down.”

He also explained how the stimulus package affected BCTGM union members. “When the stimulus package spurred job growth, those new workers in the economy had money to buy products made by BCTGM members. That kept BCTGM members employed, and they in turn we were able to buy products that kept other workers employed. That’s how the system works.”

## **Social Justice and Political Action**

Paul Lemmon, Assistant to the AFL-CIO President Trumka, gave a rousing speech to the delegation to end the afternoon session.

“There is no other segment of America that fights social justice like labor does.” But, added Lemmon, it was imperative for organized labor to continue its organizing efforts because there was a direct link between union density and voter turnout. “For every 1% drop in union density, there is a quarter percent drop in voter turnout. Which means you are all an essential element to ensuring democracy in America,” he said.

Lemmon described what is at stake in the 2010 gubernatorial elections in November. His slide show revealed which states were most at play in the Senate and governor’s races. He explained how imperative it was for BCTGM local leaders to call upon their memberships to rally behind Democratic candidates at all levels of government. “Your members believe in you. When you ask them to go knock on doors on a Saturday-they will. Because they believe in you-their local leaders.

Lemmon commended the BCTGM for their efforts on behalf of Al Franken of Minnesota in the 2008 Senate



race. Franken won the race, decided by a hand recount, by only 312 votes. “You made all the difference,” said Lemmon.

## **BCTGM Organizers Recognized**

BCTGM International President Frank Hurt gave special recognition to local unions who have been involved in organizing campaigns in the last four years. Organizers were given special black shirts with the words BCTGM ORGANIZE embroidered onto them. The sea of black shirts filling the convention hall and symbolizing the union’s many hardworking organizers, was an impressive sight.

Hurt reflected on the work of a union organizer saying, “There are sixty-three (63) local unions represented here today that worked on an organizing campaign since the last convention. There are also a few local unions that participated in campaigns but are not present at this convention. All of these locals have contributed to building this union for the 21st century.

“Organizing is honorable work. By organizing working people into unions to struggle for justice, dignity, respect and a decent standard of living, we are improving the conditions of the common people of this continent. We are making the promise of democracy real,” said Hurt.

“The central challenge of this century will be to continue the forward march of the working people of the U.S. and Canada in the face of threats from abroad and greed and corruption at home.

“Strong and effective unions are vital to keeping tyranny at bay in the workplace and in society. When you organize one worker into this union you are helping in that struggle,” said Hurt.

Hurt then called each individual local union to stand when their name was called and the entire group received a rousing standing ovation.

All photography of the 38th Constitutional Convention will be available to view and purchase online through Hank deLespinasse Studios, the official photographer of the 2010 Convention.

The Convention photo site is:  
[www.bctgm2010conv.com](http://www.bctgm2010conv.com).

## **Congressional Greetings**

U.S. Senator Al Franken (D-Minn.) and U.S. Representatives Colin Peterson (D-Minn.) sent video taped greetings to delegates.

## **Committee Reports**

The following Convention Committees met and debated the listed resolutions. The Committee’s recommendation and delegate action follows each resolution.

### **Organizing Committee**

Resolution Number 11. *Organizing for Our Future:*  
**ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 10. *Importance of Union Density:*  
**ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 8. *Support for Canadian Legislation Encouraging Card-Check Recognition:*  
**ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 13. *Global Solidarity to Organize and Build Strong Unions:* **ADOPTED**

### **Political Action Committee**

Resolution Number 12. *America Needs the Employee Free Choice Act:* **ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 2. *Making Wall Street Pay:*  
**ADOPTED**

### **Resolutions Committee**

Resolution Number 16. *Fair Trade:* **ADOPTED**

### **Constitution Committee**

Resolution Number 24. *Amend Article V, Section 2(g), Add Email as a Method for Contacting Members of the General Executive Board, and Add Section 2(q), to Provide for Immediate Resignation of Departing Members:*  
**ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 25. *Amend Article, IV, Sections 1 & 2, Reflect Changes Approved by the General Executive Board in the 1999 Merger Terms:* **ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 27. *Retired Members Who Serve on Their Local Executive Board,* submitted by Local 348:  
**NON CONCURRENCE**

Resolution Number 26. *Article XXII, Section 3(g), Trials and Appeals,* submitted by Local 235T:  
**NON CONCURRENCE**

Resolution Number 30. *Article XIV, Section 3, Emergency Pay-Out, Increasing Strike Pay,* submitted by Local 55:  
**NON CONCURRENCE**