

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

July 28 - August 3, 2010 • Las Vegas, NV

# CONVENTION REPORTER

## *Protecting and Strengthening our Collective Power*

The fourth day of the 38th Constitutional Convention of the BCTGM International Union reconvened after the weekend break.

BCTGM International Representative James Rivers delivered the invocation. Delegates viewed a video, *Bargaining for Better Lives*, that highlighted the union's success in contract negotiations in the last four years.

### **Hurt Delivers Collective Bargaining Report**

Reflecting on the day's theme, International President Frank Hurt said, "I believe this theme is highly appropriate considering the bargaining environment we found ourselves in over the last four years.

"On the one hand, in the face of an economic collapse of the like we have not witnessed since the Great Depression, we had to get defensive and protect what we had. We had to protect our health coverage, which employers went after. We had to protect our wages and pensions, which employers tried to cut. And we had to protect our workplace security, which employers tried to water down," reflected Hurt.

Hurt reflected on the significance of the National Labor Relations Act which was signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935. He noted that amongst other things, this law gave workers the protected right to bargain with their employer, forced the employer to bargain fairly, and provided remedies in case an employer refused to bargain with a union," he stated.

"We take it for granted that bargaining collectively is a right. It's always been that way for us. But, it is important for us to remember how historic these pieces of legislation were. At the time of the passage of the National Labor Relations Act, critics of the legislation

called it 'socialist'. Corporations said it would bankrupt them. Politicians from both parties said it violated the constitution. Others called it criminal. In Canada, opponents of the right to collectively bargain were just as hostile. Yet, for the first time, protected by federal law, workers were allowed to band together and bargain over the terms and conditions of their employment. This was monumental," he reflected.

"Of course, employers were outraged. And almost 80 years later, they still are. Big Business still hasn't gotten over it. Do you really think Nestle, or Frito Lay or Kraft Foods, really want to spend time and money negotiating with us? Do you think they really want to sit down at a table with us and argue over wages, benefits and working conditions? Of course not. But they have to sit down with us. They have to negotiate with us, because the law says so," said Hurt.

He pointed out that nearly half of all newly-organized workplaces in the U.S. never get a first contract. "Employers in the U.S. know they can delay negotiations indefinitely until they either precipitate a strike, or force a decertification," Hurt told delegates.

He explained that in Canada, first contract arbitration levels the playing field and results in less lockouts and strikes, less labor-management animosity, and allows for a more productive union-employer relationship to develop.

Reflecting on the importance of first contract arbitration contained within the Employee Free Choice Act, Hurt said, "Not only would this give us tremendous strength at the bargaining table, it would ensure a positive outcome for our organizing efforts."

Hurt told delegates that despite numerous challenges, the BCTGM has been successful in negotiating many excellent contracts in the last four years.

He noted the newly formed General Mills bargaining conference negotiated a historic master contract in 2006 and a second “stellar” agreement in 2010.

“Our Master agreements with Kraft, Kellogg’s and Keebler were all overwhelming successes because of healthy wage and pension increases and maintenance of health benefits. We successfully negotiated very good pattern agreements with Sara Lee in the bread and cake sector, which set the stage for other successful negotiations in that sector.

“At the local level, many of you successfully negotiated excellent contracts for your members that you can be proud of. These examples show that we were able to overcome a rash of challenges and deliver positive results to our membership. We should all be very proud of this,” added Hurt.

He noted that plant closings continue to present a challenge. “New technology and improved automation made some plants obsolete. Corporate restructurings, always in the name of efficiency, also led to plant closings,” he said.

“But what is inexcusable, and quite frankly unconscionable, is when a plant in the United States or Canada is closed and that production is shifted to Mexico or some other low cost country, solely to avoid the union and line the pockets of well-to-do owners.

“And then these companies have the gall to make insinuations at the bargaining table that if we fight too hard, they’ll move even more production out of our plants. This is despicable behavior that we must continue to fight against,” said Hurt.

The hiring of non-union co-packers by some of the union’s largest employers is another problem being faced increasingly by the BCTGM. “This practice puts our negotiators at a disadvantage as companies whipsaw one plant against another, or use the threat of outsourcing to scare our members,” he said.

“First and foremost, we need to keep production in house, but when it does get outsourced, we need to organize those co-packers. Fortunately, we have had some success with this over the past few years. But employers will continue to try their hardest to avoid us, so we must be vigilant,” added Hurt.

Reflecting on the bankruptcy of IBC he said, “While the sacrifices of our members were able to help pull the company out of bankruptcy, there was collateral damage in the form of plant closings. I can tell you quite honestly that this bankruptcy has been one of the toughest things we’ve had to face in all my years as President. But I am proud of the way our members took the lead in helping

to save this company from the brink of collapse,” he said.

Hurt told delegates that the BCTGM will never quit fighting for its membership, noting, “There are always going to be challenges thrown our way. But that’s just what they are—challenges. And throughout our storied history, this union has not backed down from any challenge.

“So we will fight the private equity sharks that take over our companies. We will push back at Employers that continually try to shift the cost of healthcare benefits onto our members. We will educate the public about the repercussions of relying on imported food. And we will continue to press our elected officials to pass meaningful labor law reform that includes first contract arbitration. And most importantly, we will continue to negotiate first rate contracts for all of our members,” Hurt concluded to a standing ovation.

## **U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services**

Deputy Director Office of External Affairs, U.S. Department of Health and Human Service’s Ann Widger addressed the convention, focusing her discussion on the recent passage of the Affordable Care Act.

“Thanks to all of you in the BCTGM for all the hard work you did for passage of this historic health care legislation. It may not have everything we all wanted – but is an excellent first step,” Widger told delegates.

Widger explained the Affordable Care Act signed into law by President Obama on March 23. The law puts into place comprehensive health insurance reforms that will hold insurance companies more accountable and will lower health care costs, guarantee more health care choices, and enhance the quality of health care for all Americans.

Widger noted that the entire Act will not be implemented all at once. Portions of the law have already taken effect. Other changes will be implemented through 2014 and beyond. Specifically, Widger explained several details of the new law including: \$250 Medicare drug cost rebate; expanded coverage for young adults; small business tax credits; and pre-existing condition insurance plans.

Widger concluded her address to the convention by encouraging delegates to check the Health & Human Service’s special web page, [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov), regularly for additional details of the Act.

## **U.S. Economic Crisis Explained**

Jack Marco, Chairman of the Marco Consulting group, spoke to the delegation about the economic crash of 2008 and its aftermath. Using a Power Point presentation to help illustrate his points, Marco began by discussing the collapse of the U.S. housing market and how the flow of money has halted.

He explained that in the first half of 2008 overall lending slowed and was frozen in risky areas. In the second half of 2008, Marco discussed the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers and how that caused the freezing of lending across the board in prime mortgages, corporate bonds, and interbank lending.

“Imagine a world where people can’t get mortgages; people can’t get car or student loans; Companies can’t raise funds for new factories or new products; companies have to stash more cash to cover payroll or operating costs; and, banks don’t want to lend to each other,” Marco recalled.

He noted the crisis at hand and told delegates that help was desperately needed. That help came with government intervention in the form of the bailout—the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP).

“They believed the future looked hopeful— with the biggest hope being the 2008 presidential election,” recalled Marco.

In early 2009, America’s primary concern was unemployment. Marco explained that among the unemployed, the number of long-term unemployed continued to increase, reaching 6.1 million. In December 2009, 4 in 10 unemployed workers were jobless for 27 weeks or longer. He noted with optimism that the recovery has begun. “Economy is on a path to growth but the path is still uncertain,” Marco said. He reminded delegates to continue their political efforts. “Do not let the party of NO get away with anything. You need to get out and vote NO at the ballot box to those who are against us – you can’t afford to do anything else.”

## **Allison Beck Addresses Convention**

Allison Beck, the Deputy Director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), served as the general counsel of the IAM prior to taking her post in 2010. She detailed her 30 years of labor experience and explained how that experience enhanced her current position at the FMCS.

“I am passionate about collective bargaining and about encouraging real relationships between honest companies who want to share their success with their workers. We know that committed workers can help

make these companies a success,” Beck told delegates.

“Nothing is possible at the bargaining table without a decent, honest relationship between unions and employers. At the FMCS, we’ve been trying hard to create an environment between workers and their companies that will give fair collective bargaining a real chance,” added Beck.

Beck outlined the FMCS nine core programs: collective bargaining mediation, arbitration services, grievance mediation, relationship development and training, outreach, L-M committee grants program, employment mediation, international training & exchange, and, the FMCS Institute for Conflict Management.

Beck noted that in 2009, FMCS mediators monitored nearly 14,000 negotiations, was actively involved in about 5,000 cases and reached a settlement in nearly 86 percent of cases.

“The FMCS has a wide variety programs and services that can help you in your collective bargaining relationships. You simply have to let us know how we can help you — and let us know how we can improve our services,” concluded Beck.

## **Building Justice Campaign**

June Rostan of the AFL-CIO Organizing Department and Norma Uribe, an organizer for District Council 15 of the Painters Union in Las Vegas, discussed the Building Justice Campaign, an effort to organize painters and sheet metal workers at Pulte Developments in Nevada and Arizona.

Building Justice Campaign is a coalition of workers, community members, Pulte homeowners, and elected officials working together to improve working conditions at Pulte developments. Rostan distributed postcards for delegates to sign that will be sent to the CEO of Pulte Homes.

She also directed delegates to the website: [www.poorlybuiltbypulte.info](http://www.poorlybuiltbypulte.info) and asked them to spread the word about Pulte Homes’ treatment of workers and homeowners.

## **Convention Pays Tribute to Troops**

In a special tribute, President Hurt asked delegates to honor and show gratitude to American and Canadian troops currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“We honor their heroic service and we offer our lasting gratitude for the daily personal sacrifices they have made in these conflicts,” he said.

“As citizens of two grateful nations, let us now pause

to offer in silence our thanks, and our prayers. For those who lives have been lost or have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan; for the safe return home of those now serving, and for a joyful reunion with their families and those they love.”

### **Committee Reports**

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

#### **Political Action Committee**

Resolution Number 3. *BCTGM Supports Historic Health Care Reform*: **ADOPTED**

#### **Resolutions Committee**

Resolution Number 14. *Bargaining Collectively for a Voice at Work and a Better Life*: **ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 7. *Preserving Public Health Care in Canada*: **ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 35. *Organizing an Imperative for the BCTGM*, submitted by Local 9: **REFERED TO B&C FUNDS TRUSTEES**

Resolution Number 4. *Achieving Retirement Security for Working Families*: **ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 33. *Change of the Minimum Time Required to Become Eligible for P-Plan Entitlements*, submitted by Local 334: **REFERED TO B&C FUNDS TRUSTEES**

Resolution Number 34. *Change of Minimum Time Required to Collect a Full Benefit Level Plan G, Golden 80 Pension and a Plan C, Golden 90 Pension*, submitted by Local 334: **REFERED TO B&C FUNDS TRUSTEES**

Resolution Number 15. *America’s Economic Agenda: Good Jobs, Hard Times*: **ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 38. *On An Official BCTGM Color for Apparel*, submitted by Local 1: **NON CONCURANCE**

#### **Constitution Committee**

Resolution Number 23. *Amend Article, III, Section 7, Require Delegates to the International Convention to Stay at the Convention Hotel in Order to Receive Compensation Under the Article*: **ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 28. *Article III, Section 7, Compensation of Delegates From Local Unions*, submitted by Local 55: **NON CONCURANCE**

Resolution Number 21. *Amend Article XIII, Section 1, Per Capita Increase and Article XVI, Section 4, Local Union Dues Increase*: **ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 22. *Amend Article, XX, Section 1, Require Local Unions to Include Provisions Regarding Retiring Cards in Their Local Bylaws*: **ADOPTED**

Resolution Number 39. *Retirement Cards (RC) (Withdrawal Cards)*, submitted by Local 1: **NON CONCURANCE**

Resolution Number 37. *Delegate Equity*, submitted by Local 100G: **NON CONCURANCE**

#### **Congressional Video Greetings**

Delegates viewed special video greetings from Senator Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Senator Kirsten Gillebrand (D-N.Y.), U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.) and Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio).

### **International Vice Presidents**

The *Convention Reporter* distributed on Monday, August 3rd, incorrectly listed the International Vice Presidents by Region. The correct information follows.

On Friday, July 30, delegates to the Convention unanimously elected the following BCTGM International Vice Presidents:

**Region 1:** Art Montminy

**Region 2:** Bob Oakley

**Region 3:** Steve Bertelli

**Region 4:** Tony Johnson

**Region 5:** Sean Kelly

**Region 6:** Randy Roark

**Grain Milling Sector:** Mike Konesko