

## Conference Report

### Unions

#### Labor Leaders, Researchers Recommend Expanded Efforts to Cooperate Globally

NEW YORK--Labor leaders and researchers appearing at a Feb. 9-11 Cornell University conference on global unions called for an expansion of efforts to use international alliances and coordination to advance worker rights.

Speaking at an opening plenary session Feb. 9, AFL-CIO Secretary Treasurer Richard Trumka cited several examples of successful cooperative international campaigns for union rights but argued that more work is needed.

The conference, which was organized by the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations, was sponsored by 33 academic institutions and labor organizations. It drew more than 500 participants from 55 countries.

"We must make a commitment to the kind of scope and scale necessary to bring some balance back to labor relations around the world, because for every success we've had, we've had 10 battles go the other way," Trumka told the conference. "Despite all the very good work that has been done, we haven't done enough to build a greater international capacity for organizing and bargaining with multinational employers, and we haven't done enough to help workers in developing countries join and form unions."

#### Cooperative Union Organizing Drive

Among the gains he cited was a cooperative unionizing drive at the Montreal-based printer Quebecor World Inc. by the AFL-CIO; the Graphic Communications Conference of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters; the Communications, Energy, and Paper Workers Union of Canada (CEP); and the Swiss-based United Network International (UNI).

That effort drew on campaigns in the United States and 11 countries in Latin America and Europe, which featured work stoppages and pressure from large customers, including the Brazilian Education Ministry, which has a textbook contract with Quebecor, Trumka said.

In the United States, he reported, the effort yielded a neutrality

agreement in May 2005 (89 DLR A-1, 5/10/05 ). In Chile, more Quebecor workers have been organized and have negotiated a better agreement with management, and earlier this year in Brazil, an international trade union delegation backed up striking workers who

successfully gained recognition at a Quebecor plant in Recife, he reported.

In another part of the world, efforts by the Communications Workers of America and UNI affiliates helped a workers union negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement with Chungwha Telecom in China "that brought significant gains for the workers," Trumka said. CWA and the AFL-CIO focused attention of investors and the public on the company's stock sales in the United States, he added.

Trumka acknowledged that U.S. unions need to organize more members "so we can get tougher at the bargaining table and in our worksites and take back control of our government," and that U.S. workers "must go to extraordinary lengths just to exercise their freedom of association."

But he added: "I realize the challenges may be different in different countries, but it's a fact that union density has declined in a large swath of countries on every continent, and none of us is immune to the ravages of globalization."

Earlier in his speech, Trumka said that unions "have been playing catch-up for too long" against global corporations. "We're in a global fight for the rights of every worker, and the sooner we realize it, the better off we will be," he said.

Alluding to his roots with the United Mine Workers, he said, "We're all in this together, and just like in the coal mines, we've got to watch each other's backs."

Following Trumka, UNITE HERE Vice President Harris Raynor sought to offer reassurances that the split between the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win coalition that his union supports would not result in diminished efforts by U.S. organized labor.

Pointing to Trumka, he said: "That is my brother. I've got his back, and he's got mine." He said his message of unity was directed at Wal-Mart and other large employers resisting union organizing drives.

Detailing his union's unsuccessful efforts to save U.S. jobs at bankrupt Pillowtex textile operations, he said the task has been made impossible by competition from cheaper goods made elsewhere in the world.

Despite success in using international pressure to gain leverage with some other companies, Raynor said, the labor movement has shown a "totally inadequate response to this problem." He called for intra-union discussions, saying, "It's on our watch that these things are happening, and it's our responsibility to turn things around."

Union leaders are optimistic about a campaign to organize multinational food service companies based in the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, which "is growing by leaps and bounds and has already succeeded in some places," Raynor reported.

In an upcoming effort, UNITE HERE will launch an organizing campaign at "hotel chains around the world," Raynor said. Called "Hotel Workers Rising," the drive will be tied to coordinated contract negotiations at sites where UNITE HERE already has recognition, he told BNA.

Organized labor must send employers the message that "if you fight the unions in one place, you fight them everywhere," Raynor said.

### **Researching on Global Campaign Strategies**

At a Feb. 10 plenary session, Tom Juravich, director of the Labor Relations and Research Center at the University of Massachusetts, reported on a yearlong research project aimed at providing strategic information to "jumpstart some global campaigns." The research, he said, would help move the discussion from theory into practice, he suggested.

The project grew out of work begun around 2000 to develop research and analysis techniques that would help unions move from the "proceduralist" model of using negotiation, grievances, and labor law, as well as the traditional "walking around the fire barrel outside the plant" approach of prolonged strikes and picketing, Juravich said.

Neither one has been enough to meet the power of global firms, he said.

Looking for alternatives, researchers first sought to analyze a company's power structure, operations, stakeholders, and other characteristics to find points of leverage, Juravich continued. In a more advanced technique, he said, researchers now seek to identify a company's profit sources, its growth plan, its key decisionmakers, and the "key relationships needed to execute its growth plan."

A firm's CEO may not be the key decision-maker, Juravich suggested, and the company's greatest vulnerabilities may lie with divisions and affiliates not directly involved in the bargaining or organizing drive.

Taking a broader approach makes it possible for unions to make "an end-run around the managers," he said, adding, "If we are going to have a global campaign, we need to understand the complexities of these firms."

Later breakout sessions in the conference were devoted to research findings on 10 multinational companies being targeted by labor or other activists.

Meg Casey, director of strategic research for Change to Win, reported on the progress of a "trans-Atlantic campaign" to protect union school bus driver jobs in the United States by applying pressure on a United Kingdom-based bus fleet service that she said has been seeking to use privatization schemes to expand into the U.S. market.

The effort against the British parent company First Group PLC was carried out by the Service Employees International Union, the

International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and the Transport & General Workers Union, which represents the company's workers in the United Kingdom, she said. The company is the largest U.K. transit operator and the second largest private U.S. school bus company, she added.

In a joint research program, the unions took aim at the company's "low-bid model," its interest in areas where unions may have political power, its need for new business, and problems with "safety, reliability, and value for cost," Casey said.

Using that information, she said, they launched a campaign--"Driving Up Standards Together, Workers United for Better Wages and Safe Working Conditions"--to help educate communities considering the company's privatization offers. A tracking system helps them identify bids and "get information into the hands of decision-makers in communities before the contract is awarded," she added.

"It's an ongoing campaign," she said. "We have not yet won. We're trying to figure out how to reach shareholders and the financial community with our critique of First Group's financial model."

*More information on the conference and related research has been posted at <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globalunionsconference> on the World Wide Web*