



10-86 NEWSLETTER

FALL 2019

LOCAL 10-00086 ~ UNITED STEELWORKERS ~ AFL-CIO

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER

415.

Five years ago, four members of this Local flew to Chicago to attend a conference sponsored by Labor Notes, a non-profit organization and network for union members and labor activists. The mission statement for the event was **Putting the MOVEMENT Back in the Labor Movement.***

Some 2000 rank-and-file players from twenty different countries gathered in Chicago to share stories and lessons learned from their struggles with global capitalism. Over 140 workshops were available to train, educate and energize new workers and fine tune the veterans of the labor movement. A rebellious spirit was in the air.

As well as it should be. Then and now. Of the great many issues threatening our futures none was/is more crucial than the subject of weather. In a discussion entitled **Labor Confronts Climate Change** a packed room got an earful on the issue we can no longer ignore. Sean Sweeney of Trade Unions for Energy and Democracy facilitated the session. His opening statement was sobering and frightful. "Any kid born today (2014)," he said, "Will see a 4 to 6-degree temperature rise in their lifetime."

Other speakers that day were Dave Coles, a former president of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, whose members challenged the Keystone XL pipeline and the misinformation campaign by the oil and gas industry. And Elizabeth Lalasz, a Cook County nurse, who talked about the effects of air pollution from a nearby coal burning plant on the poor and elderly. Lalasz also volunteered with other nurses to go and help people in the Philippines after the death and destruction wrought by Typhoon Haiyan.

Bruce Hamilton, a Chicago Bus Driver, advocated for common sense in addressing Climate Change. "People aren't going to stop driving their cars tomorrow," he said. "But if we don't start the conversation now, tomorrow might be too late."

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Back to the present. SEPTA plans to raise its rail beds three feet by the year 2050 to protect its tracks from flooding. The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation company recognizes the threat posed by powerful storms on their ability to have the trains run on time.

The Pentagon considers Climate Change a threat multiplier that increases the likelihood of armed conflict and even nuclear war. Crop

failures and drought lead to mass migrations of people searching for a way to stay alive. Countries agreeable to helping these "refugees" soon find their natural resources are not unlimited. Hatred for immigrants and people of color soon follows.

Building a wall against the threat of Climate Change is like using an umbrella against a tidal wave. And no one is spared.



The sheer enormity of the issue is enough to fry your brain. Literally. Hopeless or not there are people out there trying to change the narrative. This year Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Massachusetts Senator Edward Markey introduced a congressional resolution that lays out a grand plan for tackling Climate Change – the Green New Deal.

The idea has been kicked around before. It is a proposal that will attempt to take on two things – Climate Change and Inequality. Like President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal during the Great Depression this time around it will do the same from an environmental point of view. It would mobilize vast public resources to help us transition from an economy built on exploitation and fossil fuels to one driven by dignified work and clean energy.

It would call for upgrading our infrastructure, rebooting our energy system, retrofitting our buildings and restoring our ecosystems. It would cut climate pollution while creating millions of family-sustaining jobs, widening access to clean air and water, raising wages and building climate resilience. And all players would get a seat at the table for discussion not just corporate talking heads.

The Powers-That-Be will find ways to undermine any such efforts. They will mock the idea of the government fixing anything as a pipe dream. They will call it "socialism." They will insist that private enterprise should lead the way and be our salvation. They will be lying.

Exxon/Mobil knew back in the 1970's about the threat posed by Climate Change. They could have warned us of the dangers posed by fossil fuels. Instead they hired the same public relations firms and shyster scientists who challenged any evidence that cigarette smoking is bad for your health. They allowed nothing to hinder their ability to make money.

And so here we are. With a President who, like Nero fiddling away while Rome was burning, plays golf while the oceans heat up and rise. Turn on the nightly news. You will see stories about storms, tornadoes, floods, drought and wildfires of ever-increasing ferocity and unlike anything we've seen before.

It's time. Time to talk the way that Chicago bus driver suggested five years ago. It's time we talked about the weather. And what we intend to do about it.

Because it might already be too late.

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*see our 10-86 Newsletter/Spring/2014

LOCAL NEWS

• On June 12th membership voted three of our own to serve on the Local's Negotiating Committee. Vice President Johnny Beidler, Jimmy Ford and Gary Holland will join President Mike Gauger, Plant Chairman Bill Panetta, Plant Committee members Debbie Yakscoe, Randy Rosenberger, Joe Messina and Kevin McCafferty as well as our attorneys from Willig, Williams and Davidson as they prepare to work out our next collective bargaining agreement. Danny Peterson will serve as an alternate. Our agreement expires April 30, 2020.

• Members of the Executive Board and the Plant Committee will meet sometime in September for CAT (Contract Action Team) training by the International. They in turn will share the information with remaining members of the CAT Team at our Union Office on Garfield Avenue on a forthcoming date. Once all are trained CAT Team members will be tasked with keeping you, the membership, engaged and informed about all things contractually related. The purpose of all this is to build Solidarity. CAT members are a good resource for questions, suggestions and rumors because of their proximity to the Negotiating Committee. Make no mistake. You will be hearing a lot of rumors. Some advice: if what-you-heard didn't come from the Negotiating Committee, Union leadership, your CAT rep or your shop steward then odds are it ain't true.

• CAT members are provided to keep you informed. Sometimes that information will come as a CAT letter from the President. Or a posting on our webpage (www.usw10-86.org). Other times its given face to face during your breaks or lunches. You might be asked to attend a rally or show your solidarity by wearing your USW gear every Wednesday. (Wednesdays are USW t-shirt day). CAT Team communications are meant to flow both ways – not just top down.

• Regardless if you are a CAT Team member, a new hire or a venerable veteran eyeing retirement this is not the time for apathy. We have a contract ready to expire and a new one on the horizon. Speak up about what works in your department and what doesn't. Get engaged. It's your Job. It's your Future. It's your Union.



Roadside Cleanup/Next Gen Committee

• The Company has continued to invest **significant** amounts of money into the plant site. West Point's Site Leadership Team (WPSLT) believes we are a cost effective, reliable supplier of quality product which we provide in a safe and compliant manner. Understanding and embracing those words is our meal ticket – COST, RELIABILITY, QUALITY, SAFETY, AND COMPLIANCE. They put the butter on our bread. It's why we are an attractive place to do business. And it makes any decision by Corporate to send work elsewhere a difficult one.

• Regarding that **significant** amount of money. You will notice a lot of construction going on around the plant site. That is a good thing. It means an investment in infrastructure capable of supporting new work. And that means JOBS. Don't complain when you have to detour the long way around to get where you're going. Be thankful we're going anywhere at all.

• When you encounter a construction site be sure to pay attention to signage. Dangers around an ongoing project can change daily. Don't assume a work site is the same as the day before. Chances are it isn't. Be woke. The path you take today might change come tomorrow.

• The Company has decided to utilize Article 12.10-4 Right to Cancel in the contract to terminate the Expedited Arbitration process. The purpose of expedited arbitrations was to clear out the current backlog of grievances awaiting arbitration. Up to five cases could be heard in one day before an arbitrator. No cross-examination is allowed. The first time the process was utilized the arbitrator found for the Union three out of four times. Since then the Union has won the majority of the expedited arbitrations. Citing the inability to cross-examine as the reason for ending expedited arbitrations the Company opted out of the process at the first available opportunity.

• Membership continues to step up and pay it forward to the community. Manna on Main St. volunteers, roadside cleanups, backpack drives for needy children, donating time at community centers, charitable organizations and so much more. Paying it forward is what it's all about. Good work by all our committees and the committee chairs. You make us proud to be Union.

• As of June, this year we currently have 1776 dues paying members.

• The Local was good enough to send members once again to the PhilaPOSH Workers Memorial Day Event last April down at Penn's landing in Philadelphia. Everyone owes it to themselves to attend this ceremony at least once in their lifetime. It is a deeply felt experience that stays with you long after the event. In the year since the last Workers Memorial Day 114 people died on the job in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. If you attended West Point's Safety Day in June, you may have seen the "Strike" placards on display coming and going to the event listing some of the individuals from the 114, who they were and how they died.

• A big thank you to Nicole Fuller the new Director at PhilaPOSH. She replaced the former Director Barbara Rahke who retired this year. Nicole allowed us to honor former USW Powerhouse Operator Joe Radosin in a short eulogy. Joe passed away in January. He was a tireless advocate for safety and health at West Point for 25 years.

• Finally, with bittersweet regret we bid adieu to retiring USW International President Leo Gerard. He will be missed. They don't make them like Leo anymore. If you'd like to know more about Gerard there is a good article in the most recent issue of USW@Work.

TRANSITIONING TO A GREEN NEW DEAL

As the presidential campaign season kicks off you should be hearing a lot about Climate Change, a Just Transition and a Green New Deal. We are reaching a point where it's not worth denying whether the climate crisis is, for the most part, manmade. The fossil fuel industry has successfully framed the debate as a "political" one when in reality it is a "scientific" one. Global warming is not an opinion. It's a fact. Period. And because we've allowed it to happen we have lost precious time discussing what to do about it.

If a Green New Deal is the best answer (see front page) it's going to need the support of Labor. It is pretty much a given that in the next five to ten years a good forty to forty-five percent of our population will be out of work due to automation. Don't think so? Amazon has a robot that picks, wraps and sends 600 packages an hour.

Our jobs here at Merck, while not guaranteed, aren't easy to fully replace with automation. We may not be as vulnerable as other folks out there in the country's workforce. Rising temperatures and changing cycles of seasons are likely to create breeding grounds for new strains of disease and the critters that carry them. Hopefully the medicine business should be okay.

But what about the men and women in the fossil fuel industries? When coal miners and coal burning plants and refineries began cutting back (for all the right reasons) Labor heard about a Just Transition. It never appeared. It's no wonder so many people grew sour and angry. Take away a person's job you take away their dignity.

Sara Nelson is president of the Association of Flight Attendants and Communications Workers of America (AFACWA). She is considered a possible candidate to replace Rich Trumka, the President of the AFL-CIO if he retires. Recently Nelson was interviewed by **In These Times**. She was asked about a New Green Deal and what a Just Transition could look like. Here's her response:

SN: "What is a Just Transition? I can tell you what it's not! A few hours of training is not a Just Transition. The transition needs to begin before the jobs go away. A Just Transition must ensure pensions and healthcare are protected for workers who spent their lives powering our country in the fossil fuel industries. A Just Transition includes bringing the expertise of unions to the table, so we don't create policy that has unintended consequences, such as making it impossible to produce steel needed to create alternative forms of energy. A Just Transition must also invest in technological innovation to determine whether current energy sources can be utilized in a green way. A Just Transition includes focus on negotiating fair trade agreements for American workers to keep production in the United States so that, for example, American workers are building wind turbines and solar panels. And finally, a Just Transition means maintaining income for families who depend on an actual transition of jobs, career training, apprenticeships."

Nelson goes on to say that other countries have already begun their transitions and if we (American workers) don't get on board now we'll be left behind.

The lady gets our vote.



GRADE SCHOOL SCIENCE CLASS

If you are having a hard time getting your head around the facts about Climate Change and the number **415** (See "Let's Talk About the Weather" on the front page) it might help to go back to our third-grade science class. You might recall that carbon dioxide is exhaled by animals, including us humans, and inhaled by plants. Plants use photosynthesis to turn the carbon dioxide into oxygen. We, and other animals, breathe in the oxygen and use respiration to turn the oxygen into carbon dioxide and send it back out there to the plants. The Great Cycle of Life so to speak.

Animals and humans aren't the only things putting carbon dioxide into the air. It is also released when plants and animals decay, volcanoes erupt, and, most importantly, when we burn fossil fuels. Last year we dumped 37 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels. The more coal, oil and gas we burn, the faster that number rises. Before the Industrial Revolution (about 250 years ago), the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was 280 ppm. Sixty years ago, it was 315 ppm. The past few years? It's been rising 2 or 3 ppm a year.

That might not sound like much. The problem is carbon dioxide molecules are very good at trapping heat in the atmosphere. Scientists have understood this since the 19th Century. Carbon dioxide molecules act like hall monitors of the Earth's atmosphere. They let sunlight in, but they don't let heat out.

Scientists might argue about how well carbon dioxide is at warming the earth, but there is basic agreement that a doubling of carbon dioxide levels from 280 ppm will warm the Earth's atmosphere by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius.

Right now, at **415** ppm, the climate has already warmed about one degree. And you don't need to be a scientist to see the how that plays out: glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising, wildfires are more frequent, hurricanes and typhoons are growing more intense.

And the changes are happening fast. Think back to the words from that United Nations report we cited earlier – "more than a million species of animals and plants are at risk for extinction."

And how exactly does the Merriam Webster dictionary define extinction?

Extinction: In biology and ecology, extinction is the end of an organism or a group of organisms, normally a species. The moment of extinction is generally considered to be the death of the last individual of the species, although the capacity to breed and recover may have been lost before this point.

Class dismissed.

WORKERS COMP/INJURY REPORTING

If you are injured at work, you must notify management and report to Health Services immediately. We STRONGLY suggest you bring a shop steward or someone from the Union office or a member of the Workers Comp Committee. This is to insure your injury report is accurate in order to protect your rights.

If you can't find someone to accompany you to Health Services, take notes. If the process is going too fast, ask for a timeout. Always ask for a copy of the report. Remember that the caregivers in Health Services are human too. Be respectful to them with the understanding you deserve respect too. Remaining calm and asking questions works for everyone in the long run.

Why all the drama when reporting an injury? Sometimes a member knows they have a problem, but they think going to Health Services is a "hassle" (It's been known to happen). So, they go to their own doctor instead. Not a good idea. Using our USW medical plan for a workplace injury means the wrong people are going to pay for it. The environment in the workplace that caused your injury is never addressed. Your co-workers may suffer too. Down the line if a second injury occurs or a procedure becomes necessary for a

different condition, you may run out of sick time. That's right. By not reporting that first injury you may have lost sick time that would have been protected under Workers Comp. Avoiding a "hassle" might cost you your job.

Local 10-00086 has the best medical plan in the Merck network. We are self-insured and doing well. But things can always change. If the plan should suffer financial problems the Union has one free re-up of funding. If it happens twice we would be forced into the Company medical coverage program. Richard Gabriel and Associates, who administer our plan, do an outstanding job assisting our membership. We really don't want that all to go away because of a "hassle" now, do we?

Questions? Need assistance?

Contact your Workers Comp Committee:

Pamela Russell /Committee Chair/267 663 1152/215 652 8534.

Debbie Yakscoe/Committee Co-Chair/215 652 0185/215 872 1787.

Rodney Mathias/484 645 6953

Mark Frankenfield (second shift)/267 642 0184

**(Medical Trustees: President Mike Gauger/26555;
Plant Committee Member Kevin McCafferty/20187;
Treasurer Danny Peterson/27479).**

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As you are all aware, our collective bargaining agreement with Merck expires April 30th next year. If you've gotten this far in the newsletter you know the Company has committed to spending a lot of money at West Point. And not just Band-Aid money for repairs but big investments to our infrastructure and our future. That is a good thing.

However, I don't believe we should fool ourselves into thinking negotiations will be a walk in the park. They never are. We continue to have disagreements over employee movement, outside contractors doing bargaining unit work, training and safety, and of course, our absence control policy. We are certain to hear complaints from the Company about costs and premium pay. We have faced challenges before. But I am confident that if we stick together, we can be successful in addressing any and all issues management will bring to the table.

Our preparations have begun. Your Bargaining Committee has already met to discuss strategies. We will meet on a regular basis in the coming months to review our collective bargaining agreement and analyze and prepare for whatever issues come our way.

As you may have read in our Local News section training is scheduled in September for your CAT (Contract Action Team) Team. The CAT Team is an important piece of our negotiating strategy as they will work closely with our Bargaining Committee to keep you informed throughout negotiations. Get to know your

CAT Team representative. And get registered on our webpage for the latest news and information – www.usw10-86.org.

As for negotiations themselves we will listen to any sensible proposals that make West Point an attractive place to do business. We believe our reputation for being a safe, compliant and reliable supplier of quality medicines can continue without sacrificing or compromising our principles as members of the United Steelworkers Union.

I believe that our membership has the talent and ability to continue to make West Point the most productive medicine manufacturing facility in the entire Merck Sharp & Dohme network. I believe that most of the problems the Company perceives can be fixed if management would only listen to our members. After all, we know our jobs better than anyone else.

This is the time for our membership to present a unified front to management. This is not a time for politics or personal agendas that divide us and/or keep us from our goal: to provide the best contract and safe working conditions for all our members and to assure job security for us and future members of our Union.

In Solidarity,



Mike Gauger/President USW Local 10-00086

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