



Instructor Mark Graf levels with his bricklayer apprentices. Story on Page 6.

Apprentices a feast of hope

Some of the brightest lights in elevating Milwaukee into good jobs -- and some of the newest lights, the carefully trained beneficiaries of that elevation -- were honored April 8. Unions, guests and the campus directors and teachers of the Milwaukee Area Technical College filled a Downtown banquet hall for a notable step forward

Stories below and on Pages 6, 8-9 and 11.

SPECIAL SALUTE BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION TRADES

in individual and group achievement, though it was largely ignored -- again! -- by Milwaukee media.

Stretching back to the 1960s, the Apprentice Banquet has been

Awards continued **Page 9**



UAW's Tony Rainey shows his civic apprentice leadership plaque to other guests at the banquet, including (right) his wife, Alberta Walker.

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MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN



Thursday, April 30, 2009



(USPS 350-360)

Corporations pray hysteria will prevail

By **Dominique Paul Noth**
Editor, Labor Press

Comment

The over-the-top reactions to improving the lives of workers inspired a tongue-in-cheek contest on the Internet: The Chicken Little Sky Is Falling Bizarre Corporate Panic Over Workers' Rights contest.

There was so much nonsense floating about in the blogs and news stories it was hard to pick a winner.

Should it be the US Chamber of Commerce, whose Randel Johnson called the Employee Free Choice Act a "firestorm bordering on Armageddon"?

Or Fox News commentator John Rutledge who, when not shilling teabag parties, called the act "a Gestapo tactic"?

Or Home Depot founder Bernie Marcus who saw it as "the demise of a civilization"?

Or, my personal favorite, casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson, who offered the act as one of two "fundamental threats to society," the other being "radical Islam."

That made a piker out of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who merely called it "a mortal threat to American freedom."

It made him an also-ran to Wisconsin business groups condemning Gov. Doyle's proposal to extend prevailing wage standards to any project worth several thousand dollars in taxpayer support.

The businesses and their automatic GOP votes in the state legislature acted as if Doyle had thrust commerce into Dante's Inferno, since they apparently regard emulating existing federal standards as doomsday or "economic sui-

cide."

"My Lord," they proclaimed, "doesn't this mean that people can't work for free?!" It turns out the Doyle proposal exempts volunteers, as the pretend panic-stricken well knew.

Yet even all this was mild compared to the invective unleashed in so many Milwaukee suburbs, causing a rush to pass ordinances of no proven value and weight and loaded with unintended consequence. No proof exists that such ordinances would survive challenge -- and there was no challenge planned until such ordinances emerged.

In fact, no suburb was under threat of direct legislation to require minimum paid sick days (as was overwhelming approved as common sense by voters in the city of Milwaukee).

The suburbs were nevertheless goaded into misjudgment by the same business groups whose misjudgments about what would work in the economy had helped drive the US into recession.

The suburbs were further pounded by conservative talk radio, which demeaned the same November voters who put Barack Obama in the White House and kicked out so many Republicans. These are the very voters accused by radio-talk of passing "feel good legislation" (which I suppose makes paid sick days the left-wing equivalent to the right-wing's Terri Schiavo case).

But here's the ironic boomerang. Such widespread wrong-headed hysteria didn't just produce sarcastic comments that

Hysteria continued **Page 7**



Re-elected officers and a new executive board (all listed on Page 2) were sworn in by Municipal Judge Valarie Hill at MALC's April 1 Open House. Related coverage on Page 3.

US labor on the move

New union emerges as old ones move closer to solidarity

Even unrelated moves on the national labor front have repercussions at the Milwaukee Area Labor Council. One example: Few noticed that in the first three months of 2009, an international union disappeared in Wisconsin while remaining alive (certainly in courtrooms) in most other states.

But here all the locals associated with UNITE HERE disaffiliated and, through their common Chicago/Midwest board, voted to be part of a newly formed national union, Workers United.

Among the newly aligned familiars joining Workers United was Local 122, famous locally for handling major restaurants and hotels.

UNITE, itself a merger of needlepoint, garment and laundry unions, and HERE (hotel and restaurant employees) had merged in 2004 to activate organizing, particularly in neglected low-wage professions. It became

about 425,000 strong. UNITE had the money through the nation's only union-owned bank, Amalgamated, and HERE had the higher numbers. It seemed an understandable marriage among workers, who also split from the AFL-CIO in 2005 to become an anchor of the Change to Win federation.

But it also set the stage this year for a very public and ongoing divorce. In Wisconsin, there was no animosity between the garment and restaurant locals. They got along and saw the same needs, which is probably why they moved in tandem to become part of Workers United.

Behind the scenes there was acrimony and maybe testosterone ambition at the top. Bruce Raynor, the veteran leader of UNITE who became the new

UNITE HERE general president, was openly upset by how much money (most brought in from UNITE's coffers) and how little successful organizing emerged from the president of the hospitality division, John Wilhelm, who came from HERE and was focused on the gaming and big hotel industries on the coasts. Meanwhile, actual gains in these areas were being made by SEIU, UAW and AFSCME.

So UNITE HERE councils and locals from Philadelphia to Chicago - most of the Midwest, in fact - felt ignored in organizing clout and attention from the Wilhelm forces while charging that \$61 million had been spent to little avail.

The upshot? Raynor made sure to keep a sympathetic ear at the bank and Wilhelm felt shut

Workers continued **Page 14**

Put food drive at front door

The nation's largest food drive to combat hunger will be conducted this year on Saturday, May 9, when letter carriers from more than 1,400 branches of the union will collect non-perishable donations from homes as they deliver mail along their routes.

The annual NALC National Food Drive to "Stamp Out Hunger" by the National Association of Letter Carriers (led in the Milwaukee region by Branch 2) collected a record 73.1 million pounds of food in last year's drive. "Stamp Out Hunger" is held annually on the second Saturday in May in over 10,000 cities and towns in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Nationally the union has 300,000 members. The food is delivered to food banks, pantries

and shelters that serve the communities where they are collected. Rural letter carriers and other postal employees support the efforts as do other unions and civic volunteers.

NALC President William H. Young emphasized that as successful as the food drive has been in the past, it simply must be even better this year.

"Millions and millions of families are suffering - struggling to make ends meet and put food on the table," Young said. "More than ever food banks, pantries and shelters need our help this year." He detailed how the economy has turned the collection critical and that more school lunch programs are suspended during the summer months.

Residents are asked to col-

lect the nonperishable items and place them in bags near where their mail is dropped off. Carriers will pick up these items after handling the mail.

Co-sponsors include the US Postal Service, Campbell Soup Co., Feeding America (formerly known as America's Second Harvest), Valpak, the United Way of America and its local United Ways; and the AFL-CIO.

Obey to anchor gala

Congressman Dave Obey, a committee leader in the House fashioning Democratic policies and a 40 year progressive and fighter for working families, will serve as the main speaker and attraction at the Wisconsin Democratic Party's biggest fund-raiser Saturday, May 16, at the Midwest Airlines Center.

Founder's Day is the party's signature event and primary fundraiser to lay the foundation for candidates and campaigns.

The gala starts at 6 p.m. All tickets include a copy of Obey's book, "Raising Hell for Justice."

For ticket information, visit www.wisdems.org or contact Mary Lang Sollinger at (608) 260-2408, maryls@wisdems.org.

Calendar

For updated master list of events, visit www.milwaukeeelabor.org

Friday, May 1

March for Labor Rights
supporting Employee Free Choice Act and Immigration Reform
Downtown to Veterans Park
sponsored by Voces de la Frontera

Saturday, May 2

African American Labor & Community Summit on Economic Justice in Hard Times
7th annual conference by Milwaukee Area Labor Council
9 a.m. and concluding after 1 p.m.
Registration fee \$15, students \$10
includes breakfast, lunch. Story on Page 13.
Laborers Local 113 Union Hall, 6310 W. Appleton Ave.

Sunday, May 3

Annual Bay View Tragedy Remembrance
Speakers include Amy Stear, 9to5
3 p.m., Bay View Historical Marker
S. Superior St. and E. Russell Ave.

Wednesday, May 6

Monthly Delegate Meeting
6:30 p.m., Serb Hall, 5101 W. Oklahoma Ave.

Wednesday, May 27

Executive Board Meeting, 2 p.m.
Yatchak Hall, 633 S. Hawley Rd.

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CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Willie D. Ellis, business rep and organizer for Operating Engineers Local 139, was congratulated by IBEW Local 2150 leader and delegate Forrest Ceel on his reaffirmation as president of the Milwaukee Area Labor Council. Milwaukee Municipal Judge Valarie Hill (left) gave the oath of office to the re-elected officers and the new executive board. Some notables attending the Open House at Serb Hall April 1 would be elected six days later in their respective Milwaukee County Circuit Court races: Ellen Brostrom, shown clapping below, and J.D. Watts, below Hill.

Election goes labor's way

Most of the April 7 General Election went the way organized labor wanted and endorsed.

More than three decades of public service -- and a deep war-chest to inhibit any of those nasty attack ads of the past -- allowed Shirley Abrahamson, the Wisconsin Supreme Court chief justice, to sail back into office with an easy victory. She took some 70% of the vote over Jefferson County Circuit Judge Randy R. Koschnick

In the other statewide race, for superintendent of public instruction, longtime deputy and educator Tony Evers fared almost as well, fending off a well-funded campaign of conservative radio simplicities embodied in novice Rose Fernandez.

He drew 60% of the 792,758 votes cast (a low, even pathetic turnout) while she could not even muster 60% on her home turf of Waukesha County.

Winning their respective Milwaukee circuit court races were labor endorsed Ellen Brostrom and J.D. Watts. The first race was honorably conducted and both Brostrom and her opponent, Chris Lipscomb, had labor support.

The latter race can be qualified as a come-from-behind win for Watts after his opponent, Dan Gabler, managed to offend the legal community with his campaign tactics.

Also surprisingly easy was Peter Blewett's re-election to the

Milwaukee Public Schools Board, 62% to 38% over ReDonna Rodgers. Larry Miller had labor support but no opposition on the East Side and the winner of District 7, firefighter David Voeltner, was also the only active campaigner.

In MPS District 4, many voters went to bed thinking Michael Mathias had won by 82 votes -- only to discover that absentee ballots had been recorded two to one in Annie Woodward's favor and gave her the victory by 76 votes.

The number of absentee ballots -- 402, only slightly higher than in the other district contests -- stood out mainly because voter turnout in District 4 was so pitiful. With a mere 2,296 votes cast -- half of the number that turned out in Blewett's district -- the absentee ballots totaled 17.5% of the votes. Neither Mathias nor electors disputed the results.



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Crawling your way to mighty good stuff May 9

The Milwaukee Fair Trade Coalition urges Milwaukee families to walk, crawl, bike or bus to the variety of shops that have sprung up in our community offering fair trade items. Many shoppers did just that last year in the first Annual Crawl.

This one takes place Saturday, May 9, as part of a celebration of World Fair Trade Day. Businesses around the greater Milwaukee area will have tastings, special deals and activities during open hours that Saturday.

Owners and vendors connected with such shops as Four Corners of the World Fair on Vliet St., Fair Trade for All on North Ave. and the Outpost Co-ops helped plan this event.

Beyond that, the crawl will provide a unique opportunity to meet and chat with Peruvian artisans who are visiting the US. These Peruvian speakers are already scheduled to be at the Bay View Outpost from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., at Fair Trade for All from 1-2 p.m., and at Four Corners from 2:15-3:15 p.m., and then back to the Outpost from 4-6 pm for a concluding reception.

The invitation and sponsor support to visit around the country as well as in Milwaukee was extended by Green America, the nation's largest fair trade advocacy organization; the Green Business Network (formerly known as Co-op America), and Partners for Just Trade, a fair trade federation.

Among the likely visitors are two women with fascinating personal stories and lessons about what the fair trade movement can accomplish in lifting up families as well as the home country economy.

Upon leaving her village in the Andes at age 17 in

search of a better life, Evangelina Pizarro found a job in a jewelry factory in Lima working 80 hours a week in unsafe conditions. After seven frustrating years she determined to start her own business with similarly talented but desperate colleagues. It is now Munay Rumi, a successful jewelry cooperative.

Andy Riveros also grew up in a rural village in the Andes but hers was destroyed by the years of terrorism that plagued Peru. She fled the violence and with her husband, a construction day laborer, struggled to make ends meet while continuing the knitting skills passed down through generations of her family to help support their three children.



Never did she make more than \$5 for a sweater that took days to knit. Now, with other women in Huancavelica, she has formed the El Mercurio cooperative, which allows her to earn five times her previous wage.

Their stories, which will be detailed firsthand in Milwaukee, are reminders of what fair trade can create.

"This is a great opportunity for people in the Milwaukee area to show support for socially responsible shopping, sample fair trade foods and drinks, and have a great time," said coalition chair Steve Watrous.

He noted that many of the participants "will even offer fair trade prizes like chocolate" to people who can then crawl on to other stores and discounts.

Nearly all the shops will participate in the World's Largest (fair trade) Coffee Break during that Saturday, even trying to get into the Guinness Book of Records. Several stores will have free tastings of coffee, tea, chocolate, wine and even oil, plus entertainment and educational presentations.

Milwaukee is now officially a "Fair Trade City" and part of an international movement insisting that the workers who pick or make your products be treated fairly.

The full list of Milwaukee stores and special activities is at www.milwfairtrade.org.

To become an outlet in the crawl or otherwise participate, contact Steve Watrous at watrous@uwm.edu or Sachin Chheda, director of the Wisconsin Fair Trade Coalition, at sachin@nationconsulting.com




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Lessons in brickmanship

Even children's stories advocate for homes built from brick rather than straw. And there's a building dedicated to the strength of brick even though its students are constantly knocking brick walls down -- and then regularly rebuilding them.

This is the piece by piece training method. Repetition builds good walls, something a lot of adults haven't yet learned as you can see around town with any number of "do it yourself" askew home fences.

But instructor Mark Graf points out this is also a brave new world for mason mavens. His charges are constantly facing technologies, materials and interlocking design skills their parents never heard of. To the wheelbarrows of traditional bricklayer skills now must be added "staying current on all the new that's on the market."

The big bad wolf would certainly be dismayed to learn how durable these modern materials can be in the hands of a craftsmen cross-trained in blocks, stones, restoration caulking, tile layering, "flowable terrazzo," adhered veneers and anchored calcium silicate.

The skills developed through the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC) can range from the old-fashioned click and scrape of the brick pile, the measuring with leveler sticks and the cornering with trowels, to modern masonry camps, an International Masonry Institute, green technology and intricate integration of the bricklayers' skills with designers, architects and union contractors.

These are the people you call on when you want quality and endurance.

The bricklayers union, like every union apprentice program, puts its dues money where its quality is. Construction trades unions pour money into the training of new workers through detailed apprentice programs, a reality that for some unions brings in government and foundation support.

Not so with the bricklayers, points out Ray Wersel, the state field representative for the union. "All of our training is paid for by our members," he noted.

These training programs often bring non-union workers knocking on the door since historically a union apprentice displays more skills than a non-union worker who has been in the craft for years. (As a sheepish non-union mason contractor told me, "We have good non-union workers. It just takes lon-

ger to get them there.")

Right now, troubled economic times have hit all these extensive trainings in the construction field. Stories of good news and good perseverance dot this issue, but there's no denying the dilemma of workers eager to learn and join a union for the better skills and a job market that has put many trained members on the shelf.

The bricklayers reflect that.

Debbie Mehling, who handles the applications and phone calls for the apprentice programs and the union offices, sees something of a slowdown in applicants (though the Internet may have spurred curiosity).

The facts are both brutal and, down the road, promising. Apprentices who have already completed years of training and worked on projects alongside the required number of journeymen on a job - well, both they and the journeymen are suffering a 20-25% layoff of members. So report many of the unions in the Milwaukee Building & Construction Trades Council.

Using a reduction of hours as a guide, Wersel estimates that the Milwaukee area bricklayers are working through 13% unemployment among its members. There are no non-union apprentice bricklayers in the state, he noted. The BAC has 3,100 total members in Wisconsin, including retired and disabled. Its Local 8



The walls go up and down when bricklayers are learning their craft.

covers Milwaukee, Waukesha, Washington and Ozaukee counties and has 900 members.

The Milwaukee metropolitan area outlined has the only union training facility in the state and "it is supported by and utilized by the rest of the state for training programs," Wersel noted. Beyond that and the pre-apprentices Labor Press observed, the facilities has added classes for apprentices and journeymen and hosts seminars for architects, engineers and contractors through the IMI (International Masonry Institute).

Mark Graf has been leading the way for eight years at this training facility and seen a 600% increase in his students in that time. That facility at 17125 West Cleveland Ave. (an adjacent building handles the tile-laying classes) may have a bit of slowdown in his current 12-week pre-job apprentice program. It has maybe a third of what would be normal membership.

But all six candidates still work 40 hours a week and step gingerly around tubs of mortar as Graf helps them develop skills and a keen eye with practice

upon practice.

These candidates are prepped through tests, must prove high school equivalency diplomas and show a dedication to the project. In exchange they are supported in their training by union dues (another aspect you don't hear about in the mainstream media), and all get pocket money of \$50 a week - and considerable joking that they spent it all at the fast-food drive-in just outside the union building.

Many candidates over the years have been found through the highly regarded Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership/BIG STEP.

The preparation the union invests in its future would probably surprise many outsiders. "There isn't an easy way for someone in this industry to obtain top-notch skills without proper training," noted Graf with pride. Committed and current trainers are the distinct advantage construction unions hold -- even while business groups pressure contractors to cut costs in who they hire and cut corners in what they pay. Big bad wolves sometimes talk out of the sides of their mouths.

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Comment

Hysteria

From Page 1

business leaders had gone mad. It also produced reasoned counter-measures. Most likely the overreaction will broadly spread the very rules and supervision that the business community tried to bury by yelling.

Paid sick days? The effort to stall it in courts or ring it with unwelcoming suburbs changed the game. Once only cities like San Francisco, D.C. and Milwaukee had fashioned such rules. Now entire states were starting to act, bolstered by the wild overreaction from the business community at precisely the time when Americans should be pulling to lift each other up.

Such a bill, with support from segments of the business community, has sped through the labor committee of the Minnesota legislature, and similar laws are under active development to affect all of Connecticut, Massachusetts and California.

As soon as the budget issues are solved, a similar statewide bill will likely be introduced in the Wisconsin legislature.

When that happens, it will undercut the lead argument employed by Milwaukee's mayor and other officials, that this paid sick days ordinance would be a better fit if it were statewide.

The mandates around the US also expose that minimum paid sick days are not a make or break economic issue for even small businesses - and that arguments over wording just reveal how easy the solutions are to help contractors and merchants make the laws work.

All this action also confirms how Milwaukee missed a terrific public relations opportunity -- that it could have and probably should have embraced the ordinance and the public voice as proof the city was a better place to bring your company, a place that truly cared about low-income families, stable workforce and public health.

In contrast, consider the slogans awaiting so many suburbs:

"We encourage workers to cough sputum into your soup. We don't care if they get sick, so set up shop with us!"

"We force mothers to choose between caring for a sick kid and just quitting in mid-shift. So make Franklin (or Menomonee Falls, etc.) the place to live!"

Imagine those as road signs welcoming you to a community.

Even more amusing has been the reaction to the prevailing wage legislation.

The MORE ordinance so resisted in the city now looks mild with its \$1 million floor and

40% residency requirement, compared with the looming state law to extend prevailing wage to every project supported with public dollars above \$2,000.

Of course there will be a lot of discussion about where to set the state money threshold -- and once again a lot of red herrings, such as the canard that prevailing wage could stop volunteer help.

But what is really nonsense is to treat prevailing wage as some new threat to the business community when the rules have been around for decades and have helped a lot of businesses and communities.

Perhaps because so much of the media places its coverage of labor issues within the business section controlled by corporate faxes, the press is routinely guilty of falling for this, and often guilty of inverting reality.

It describes union wages as setting prevailing wage in urban areas while it is government-provided prevailing wage that has set the floor for union wages.

"It's actually more like a base we shoot for," noted Lyle Balistreri, president of the Milwaukee Building & Construction Trades Council. "In some cases, depending on where you are geographically and what the trade is and the demand, union rates are lower than prevailing or higher."

John Schmitt, business manager of Laborers Local 113, erupts in laughter at the idea that prevailing wage is an invention of labor federations.

"Around the country 70% of established prevailing wages have nothing to do with unions," he points out, amazed by the clout businesses see in the mere 10% of the private workforce that is unionized.

All these union leaders move back and forth between amusement and profanity, frankly, over the misconceptions the business community has sought to insert into prevailing wage.

"Everyone is treating prevailing wage like it is some brand new prospect," said Balistreri.

But it is rather a method that has been around for years, through Republican and Democratic control, established by government surveys of what private industry (union and non) is paying for a particular skill.

The prevailing wage is 50% plus one of what the survey determines, varying by regions within states. Every now and then someone wants to tweak the methodology as being too generous or too miserly, but that is routine give and take and you will note that it is never mentioned by opponents to prevailing wage laws, who simply want to demonize the entire concept.

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"This is the way to establish the market rate and it has been for all these years," said Balistreri. But note how the Republicans deliberately don't call it the market rate.

Added Balistreri with considerable sarcasm, naming a major local developer who keeps fighting prevailing wage laws, "If Barry Mandel doesn't understand it, let him come over. It's a centerpiece of union concern because when you undercut prevailing wage you drag down what everyone is paid. Maybe that's what they want to do."

Leaving union leaders aside and talking to academics and construction experts around the county, they see other reasons than low pay for the resistance to prevailing wage laws (though Obama has reinforced the rules on federal projects).

Paying less to workers is a small part of the game, these experts say. Prevailing wage rules take away much of the flexibility in maximizing payoffs on projects.

Developers can't shop around for a contractor willing to undercut the market rate, or kick back a percentage to the developer, or use more apprentices on a job that unions will, or combine skills and materials in unsavory ways, or otherwise find wrinkles in the system.

There will always be wrinkles and evasions, but prevailing

wage laws make things more difficult. They encourage oversight and penalties for violations. So while it is easier to pretend that there is an ideological objection to government interference, the simple truth remains that some businesses don't want their methods revealed.

As with prevailing wage, the opponents of the federal Employee Free Choice Act are trying to wipe away a sense of history.

Six and seven decades ago, many companies were unionized by simple majority choice, something the public hasn't been told much in the media. Rather than having to deal with a union that watches what they're doing, many companies would rather spend more money on union-busting lawyers.

Only now, months into the attack campaign, are opponents finally acknowledging their basic lie - that Employee Free Choice doesn't eliminate the secret ballot. It simply moves the choice of a secret ballot to the workforce not the employer.

Nor has the media much emphasized that it still takes only a simple majority of 51 in the Senate to pass the act. (The votes are there in the House.)

What will be required first is 60 votes to cut off Senate filibuster of the bill, but not all those voting for cloture will have to vote for the final bill; they may just think

this is a bad use of the rules. So there is a lot of maneuvering, compromise and decision-making in the future.

The bile being thrown at all this -- paid sick days, prevailing wage, a balanced federal labor law -- has got to give the country pause. Think of where we have just been economically.

Behind the laughter at the hysteria and the amusement over the falsehoods, there is also a growing anger in the labor community.

Many on both sides agree that the laws are worthy but then the opponents say that times are too tough to pass them right now. When times were good and the Republicans were in control, they weren't passed either. So if not now, when?

"We want businesses to succeed because we want the jobs," said Balistreri. "But get real. We're going through an interesting cultural change but they don't seem to know it."

"For eight years, we let 1% of the top 10% owe 90% of everything. We've had stolen pensions, stolen savings, frozen wages, and on and on. We know one thing. They're not about to give anything back willingly.

"But now if they're fighting these simple steps, if it's going to be a war between the rich and the working class, well, fine. Let's go there. I'd rather negotiate, but we can go there."

Training, belief beat back bad economy

Union members we talked to during and before the banquet are honest that the economy has put a number of their good workers on the waiting list.

So on the surface it might not seem the best moment to become an apprentice - not when even established journeymen have to scramble for work.

But the enthusiasm is if anything higher than normal for how union apprentice programs prepare workers for long careers, and how the unions pay for further specialty training. In a turnaround from decades ago, unions are throwing their doors wide to minorities, women and disadvantaged communities.

Change may concern all those skittish developers and cautious investors but it seems to be a challenge to try harder and learn more for the workers. In apprentice programs they are absorbing new skills, new material and expertise in green technology, alternative fuels and other cutting edge techniques.

To touch on the concerns of Pemela Fendt and other community leaders at the banquet, virtually all the unions in the Milwaukee Building & Construction Trades Council report an increase in minority apprentices, to meet the staggering unemployment and lack of education Milwaukee faces.

All the unions were quick to share statistics and detailed how they were well able to handle any demands that emerge for residency preference in hiring on government-funded projects, a requirement with the new MORE ordinance passed by the city of Milwaukee.

"We have more trained people living in the designated ZIP codes that we have jobs for," said Lyle Balistreri, president of



Lyle Balistreri, a member of the MALC executive board, shared his belief in training programs and his anger at the opposition to prevailing wages (see Page 1) at the April delegate meeting.

the building trades council.

His unions make a distinction between what they call vertical and horizontal construction. Much of the economic stimulus money deals with roads, rails, bridges, pipelines and the like, known as horizontal. These unions are responding to or getting ready for a growing need. Layoffs seem more temporary. Journeymen are seeking out more specialty training to be prepared.

Vertical construction is a different story at this point. Here there is probably a greater need to match special skills with available jobs.

This is the region of houses, condos, apartments, stores, both new and renovated structures. There is some money becoming available in stimulus funds for green technology to help older buildings and weatherization, but it will take a massive infusion of

new projects in housing and mercantile to bring advances to these unions..

The members we talked to are surprisingly and steadfastly optimistic that this is going to occur.

The Laborers are a case in point. In the Milwaukee area, Local 113's business manager, John Schmitt, expects a steady advancement even if 20% of his members are right now on waiting lists. But this is a large union, 9,000 statewide and about 3,000 in Local 113. And it is sometimes both a seasonal and specialized union. Some demanded skills increase and some diminish.

But both seasoned apprentices and the veteran journeymen are taking classes at the main facility in DeForest augmented by classes at the Appleton Ave. Laborers Hall.

Schmitt also points out that "80% of our current crop of applicants for apprentices are minorities and lots of people already trained to work now also fulfill residency requirements" in the ZIP codes established by the MORE ordinance.

"It's not just apprentices but journeymen who are filling us up," reports Tom Fisher who helps runs the laborers' state training facility at DeForest.

"We're pushing additional training as contractors' needs and technology changes."

Over the past year about 1,200 laborers have taken courses as the DeForest training center, though Fisher noted that, as of the end of March, about 25% of its members in the state were unemployed.

"We have a large list of apprentices -- some laid off, some back to the work -- but we've got to get more members back to work before we take additional candidates," he said. "If you want to talk minorities, we're doing well - statewide 50% of our apprentices are minorities and about 10% are female."

Both Schmitt and Fisher say they have more than enough skilled workers ready to tackle anything.

Fisher in fact recounted a meeting with the higher ups at the state Department of Workforce Development, concerned if there would be enough trained laborers to meet any projects, resident hiring concerns or minority memberships as government stimulus moves ahead and as the economy rebounds. "I was really happy to be able to tell them, 'No problem,'" he

More photos and survey of the painters' training on Page 11.



Laborers Local 113 leader John Schmitt.

said.

The laborers' "no problem" is echoed by Willie D. Ellis, president of the MALC and an organizer and business rep for Operating Engineers Local 139. Ellis also fills in as a teacher at Coloma, site of the massive Local 139 training center that the Labor Press once described as a Disney World of union training. Each skill (pipe bending, crane operating, grading) is laid out like a separate ride.

Currently about 80 workers a day are engaged in training at Coloma and in one class four out of six participants were minorities. Interest and applicants are also up.

In terms of minorities and women, the union view is that they need to do more, but they are also doing more than anyone else is.

"Unions are the only ones doing the real training, the bonafide training programs," noted Balistreri. "And we pay for the training out of our own pockets. We may have been the ones beaten up over the last eight years, when the wealthiest 1% got everything and we just suffered."

"But today, it's finally obvious. We're the believers."



Awards

From Page 1

saluting practical skills, community dedication and a blend of current and future leaders. MATC apprentice coordinator and emcee Nick Triscari provided a rundown in the lavish program for the banquet, chock full of not only the names being honored but also a historical parade of people who had led the city and the county into productivity over the decades.

See opposite page and Pages 6 and 11 for the state of state apprenticeships.

But there have been few years in all that time to match the current swoon in the economy -- a swoon that ought to underline why media and businesses should appreciate these emerging hard workers and inspirational leaders.

Dozens of awards and new graduates into the labor force certainly are good news, but so it turned out was what is happening in both attitude and reality to Milwaukee construction unions in admittedly tough times.

You'll find a roundup next to this story, but first, consider: Of the 23 apprentice awards given out at the banquet, all but four were union apprentices. Of the total 29 graduates honored, all but four belonged to unions. In the academic classes mastered, the straight As and other top grades were dominated by this group.

It was unions -- glaziers to electricians, plumbers to steamfitters, roofers to masons -- that bought most of the 32 tables and made up most of the 250 applauding guests at the ceremony. They clapped equally hard for the non-union cosmetologists and cooks -- and wouldn't you know, for the lavish supper in the Italian Community Center's main hall supervised by banquet manager Rico Castio, himself a graduate of the MATC culinary program.

On the bright light front, the main attraction was the Distinguished Service Award, which went to Pamela Fendt, director of the Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods Coalition, which had just been instrumental in getting the Common Council to pass the MORE ordinance, requiring 40%

A parade of veteran stars of retraining Milwaukee's workers and newer future leaders were applauded at the Apprentice Banquet. **RIGHT:** First honors, for distinguished service, went to Pamela Fendt, bracketed by interim MATC president Vicki Martin and apprentice coordinator Nick Triscari.



Seated at the MALC table with proud relatives was another award winner: Tool and Die Maker apprentice Kevin M. Keinhofer, honored for academic excellence.

levels of resident preference in hiring and prevailing wage on city projects using \$1 million or more in taxpayer money, guaranteeing that the economic gains raised up hometown families and consumers.

Fendt was also tapped in 2007 to chair Milwaukee County's Apprenticeship Study Work Group. Its task has been improving apprenticeship pro-

grams and standards. This year it will offer a range of specific recommendations. But County Board Chairman Lee Holloway made a point of noting that Fendt had already ensured "that disadvantaged and minority citizens have access to apprenticeship opportunities, regardless of their level of education or socio-economic status."

Both the county and MATC praised her work to enable peo-



ple of color, women, and individuals with disabilities. Fendt, with typical briskness, thanked MATC for the award and emphasized the work yet to be done.

Following Fendt to the podium to be honored with the Civic Apprenticeship Award was a member of her Work Group who is also a board member of the Milwaukee Area Labor Council and last year's recipient of the Werner J. Schaefer Award.

Tony Rainey, also head of the MALC Community Services

Committee and president of UAW Local 469 (Master Lock), credited his mentors and his wife, Alberta Walker, but deflected the moment away from himself to talk seriously to the apprentices, about what this success means and what they should start giving back.

"You have no idea what a great opportunity this represents and how it will change your perspective," he told the dozens of students and new graduates. "It's life changing."

-- Dominique Paul Noth



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Rebukes churn the DOL

The importance of change at the federal level was driven home during March and April. First came the simple act of actually paying attention to facts and self-criticism.

A Government Accountability Office report emerged that, in the Bush years, would have been buried or ignored by the Department of Labor - but this time it brought immediate action.

The GAO's detailed investigation, using undercover agents, was larded with examples of how the federal agency responsible for enforcing child labor, overtime and minimum wage laws had failed miserably to protect workers, resulting in wage theft that could potentially represent billions of dollars. The culprit was the Department of Labor's vital but neglected Wage and Hour Division.

The report this March brought a quick response from the new secretary of the DOL, Hilda Solis. She announced the Wage and Hour Division will add 250 investigators, a staff increase of more than a third, including monitors for contractors on economic recovery projects..

The division lost more than 200 investigators during the Bush administration.

Supervising wages and hours was a central reason the DOL was created, and yet it was a minor unit at the DOL that received largesse during the Bush years of Secretary Elaine Chao's anti-union side-show, with full support from her husband, then-majority, now minority GOP leader in the Senate, Mitch McConnell.

Republican hiring literally exploded at OLMS (Labor-Management Standards) largely to ensure that far more paperwork, oversight and harassment fell on the nation's unions than on the nation's businesses.

So, while Americans really needed protection from wage theft, Chao sought instead to discredit and hamper the union movement by increasing staffing by one-third in the narrowly focused OLMS.

Under Chao, the GAO revealed, wage and hour inspectors dropped from 942 to 732. Investigations into employers' refusal to pay minimum wage, overtime or even any wages at all dropped from 47,000 cases in 1997 to 30,000 in 2008.

Fewer than 750 wage and hour investigators for 130 million workers is neither enough nor fair, as Solis is pointing out. But even these inferior numbers of investigators were not vigorously used. The price of neglect is only now being calculated in the middle of the worst economic decline in 80 years - and wage theft played a role.

The GAO investigators created believable complaints to file with the DOL -- only to discover the Chao operation "left thousands of actual victims of wage theft who sought federal government assistance with nowhere to turn."

In one case the DOL office ignored a complaint that underage children were working dur-

ing school hours at a meatpacking plant with dangerous machinery. In other cases, the DOL case officers lied about even investigating a complaint.

The New York Times also found stories in the GAO report that reeked of favoritism to businesses at the expense of ignoring worker complaints. Talk about secret ballots! There was clearly some backdoor winking and nodding between DOL and business leaders and lobbyists.

"These violations of the law are not trivial," said Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, at a promptly scheduled hearing on the GAO report.

"Those most vulnerable to wage theft are likely bearing the brunt of our economic crisis."

Much of the evidence and solutions echo a book that Labor Press reported on months ago written by Kim Bobo, executive director of Interfaith Worker Justice: "Wage Theft: Why Millions of Working Americans Are Not Getting Paid - and What We Can Do About It."

Solis "says she's the new sheriff in town," Bobo worries, "but I'm concerned she's facing the Wild West of wage theft."

Other studies are emerging on the price the American economy is paying for the Bush years. In April the DOL's inspector general issued a scathing indictment of how OSHA leaders systematically failed to perform follow-up inspections on employers who put workers in serious danger, perhaps leading to as many as 60 deaths.

OSHA failed or was deficient in 97% of the cases in its Enhanced Enforcement Program, which, ironically, was designed to step up enforcement against serious violators.

-- Dominique Paul Noth



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Training paints headlines

A commitment to training actually brought headlines on TV and in newspapers for the painters. They had to convince the town of Vernon to let them convert the once popular Waynz World of Recreation into a union training center.

"This is going to be such a boon for us," said John Jorgensen, the business manager of District Council 7, of IUPAT, Painters and Allied Trades.

Some in the community bemoaned the loss of a recreation center to a bank lease the opera-

tors could not renew. Some even tried to hold up the painters' education center because it required a special permit in a business district, but the IUPAT won out with its commitment to education and belief in a better economy. It was a big step to take over and start refurbishing a facility valued at \$5 million.

"We're making quite an investment in the future and the development of apprentices by buying this building," said Jorgensen.

One union painter told a

Journal Sentinel reporter to stop worrying about a place for kids to play volleyball and "think about the jobs this will create."

Such belief in the future

pointedly dismisses the demons. In the

Related stories on Pages 6, 8 and 9.

Milwaukee area, there has been a drop in the number of union painters on the job -- about 20% -- and some diminishment in apprentice numbers. Balanced against that in the leaders' view are the growth in minority training and the signs that things are turning around for the state's 2,400 union painters, about 1,200 in southeast Wisconsin.

Adam Holmes, the training coordinator for District Council 7, provided some hard numbers for the Milwaukee area apprentices -- 23 glaziers currently, including two minorities, and 44 painters/drywall finishers, 12 of them minorities and 5 women.

"The painters are in better shape in the Milwaukee market," said Jorgensen, who also laughs when he's reminded that his union is treated as "one of the lesser construction skills" by aldermen and developers who



Several proud relatives at the Apprentice Banquet reflected generational continuity. Rick Schriener completed his painters' apprenticeship in 1969. Now, 40 years later, son David completed his.

opposed the MORE ordinance, which the unions strongly supported. These are the people "who believe you can stick a paintbrush into anyone's hands and pay them as little as possible." But even non-union painting companies value trained experts to the tune of \$19-\$21 an hour.

If this trade were so easy, noted both Holmes and Jorgensen, why are the union's apprentice programs so valued?

Jorgensen proudly points out that the painters currently hold the largest economic stimulus grant from the state for its training programs -- \$325,000 for

green construction and apprentice training. In cooperation with the state, the union offers apprenticeships in painting and decorating, glazing and glass work, drywall taping and finishing -- and as the state of the art advances these courses keep up to date, a reality of progress for all the construction unions' apprentice programs.

"These are skills and constant advancing techniques the critics just don't understand," Jorgensen said. "The painters are often singled out because we've often led the fight" for better laws and prevailing wage.



The painters' district training coordinator, Adam Holmes, congratulates Pamela Fendt before the awards banquet.

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Nurses aim for mandatory victory

Over the last eight years, 15 states, including Illinois and Minnesota, have banned or restricted the use of mandatory overtime for nurses.

Now Wisconsin nurses are trying for a fifth time to get such a law in this state - in an Assembly and Senate that now have Democratic control and more nurses among their members than ever before.

The legislation would offer a universal standard -- it would limit mandatory overtime in hospitals to unforeseen emergencies. Currently, despite denials, hospitals regularly use mandatory overtime to fill shifts and force nurses without notice to work for sometimes up to 16 hours in a row, noted Stephanie



Stephanie Bloomingdale

Bloomingdale, director of public policy for the Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, AFT, and a new member of the Milwaukee Area Labor Council executive board.

The bill has passed four times in the Wisconsin Senate,

but has not been able to get out of committee in the Assembly, which this year has a Democratic majority, so Bloomingdale has more confidence in its success.

Mandatory overtime is driving nurses out of the profession, which worsens the nursing shortage, Bloomingdale told reporters.

State Sen. Judy Robson (D-Beloit) is circulating the bill and a new member of the Assembly and former professor of nursing, Rep. Sandra Pasch (D-Milwaukee), is a co-sponsor. Hearings have already been strongly attended by nurses and unions.

A 2008 survey by the nurses federation found 42% of nurses are forced to work overtime at least once a month and 12% have had to do so at least once a week.

That same survey of 1,500 Milwaukee-area nurses found 82% of nurses believe mandatory overtime is a contributor to nurse turnover, while 73% believe a ban would significantly improve the ability to recruit new nurses.

Labor Press interviews confirmed that hospitals use mandatory overtime as a staffing practice.

The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) is opposed to the bill, saying it will restrict hospitals' ability to care for patients in difficult circumstances or unexpected staff absences.

Its spokesperson suggested that the issue of fatigue should be discussed with OSHA, nurse leaders, insurers and others to educate employers.

But while it conceded that mandatory overtime is "inappropriate" as a staffing strategy, it denied that hospitals routinely use it in this manner, despite interviews that found otherwise.



When the Association of Flight Attendants held its board of directors meeting in Milwaukee, largely to show solidarity with its battered, depleted members at Midwest Airlines, it took a moment to honor its own with the rarely given C.B. Lansing Award for Heroism. From left, Doreen Welsh, Sheila Dail, and Donna Dent were honored for their work in the famous "Miracle on the Hudson" landing - see story at milwaukeeelabor.org - of US Airways Flight 1549. Attending and speaking was co-pilot Jeffrey Skiles, a Wisconsin native who also got to throw out the first pitch at the Brewers home opener. The Lansing award is named after the flight attendant who performed with valor but did not survive a 1988 emergency landing at Aloha Airlines.

Official Notices

IBEW Local 2150

Nominations for officers of IBEW Local 2150 will be held at the regular unit and designated meetings of this International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers local during May of 2009. Check the schedule of meetings in the "State of the Union" newsletter mailed to all members or visit www.ibew-local2105.org

All voting will be by mail ballot in the month of June, as outlined in the bylaws.

Nominations take place for these constitutional offices (Business Manger/Financial Secretary, President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Recording Secretary and Executive Board) as well as for unit office (chair, vice chair/recorder, unit executive committee).

Nancy Wagner,
Recording Secretary

IBEW Local 715

Nominations for various offices at IBEW Local 715

(Wisconsin Broadcast Engineers) will be held May 7, 2009, at 633 S. Hawley Rd., Yatchak Hall-West, in a two-part meeting at 1 p.m. and again 6:30 p.m. for convenience of members.

It will cover nominations for President (Business Manager and Financial Secretary and Delegate to the International Convention), Vice President (and Executive Board), Recording Secretary (Executive Board), Treasurer, Alternate Delegate to the Convention, and Executive Board (5 positions).

Candidates (members in good standing for at least two years) must be present or signify in writing willingness to serve at or before May 7.

Elections will be held on June 4 at the union offices, or absentee ballots will be available by writing Michael Behlen - Election Judge, Absentee Ballot Request, P.O. Box 721, Grafton, WI 53024.

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Appleton and Green Bay locals of the Communications Workers of America joined Local 4603 in front of the downtown AT&T headquarters April 20 to chant "No contract, no peace" over stalled negotiations and some demeaning comments by the company. Informational picketing is taking place across the country. Here, the workers continue without a contract as AT&T seeks to merge out of existence some hard-won gains and cut health care. Pleading tough times is hard to stomach when workers are being laid off, lower pay is imposed and AT&T made an enormous profit in 2008. Visible at the rally is new MALC board member Joy Roberts.

Hygiene drive underway

For a 20th year, the Milwaukee Area Labor Council and its members will provide concrete help for the people and budgets of the area's homeless shelters in its annual health and hygiene drive.

Leaders, rank-and-file and partners will run their own events or simply drop off items at the offices of the AFL-CIO Community Services liaisons or the MALC itself at 633 S. Hawley Rd.

There will also be a special collection at the May 6 monthly delegate meeting at Serb Hall, 5101 W. Oklahoma Ave.

Public school children and their teachers also support the campaign through their own supervised projects and collections.

Gaps are filled by shopping at union stores with donations accepted by check through Labor Community@Work, mailed to the Hawley Rd. address. Call organizer Annie Wacker at (414) 771-9830 or annieaflcio@sbcglobal.net.

The campaign ends with a special press conference June 4 when products are distributed to homeless shelters from the United Way of Greater Milwaukee headquarters.

Suggested items include toothbrushes and toothpaste, non-alcohol mouthwash, razors, shaving cream, combs, brushes, deodorants, lip balm, baby products, paper products, laundry supplies, feminine products and first aid supplies.

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This Summit speaks for economic justice

Times are tough. But without justice, the plight of workers cannot change. These are among the lessons for workers of all colors and wages behind the 7th annual African American Labor & Community Summit, held from 9 a.m. into the early afternoon Saturday, May 2, at Laborers Local 113 Union Hall, 6310 W. Appleton Ave.

The theme -- ". . . the price of hamburger - Economic Justice in Difficult Economic Times" -- is taken from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who once noted: "What does it benefit a man to sit at an integrated lunch counter if he can't afford the price of a hamburger."

Speakers and networking will take place the entire summit, with registration and a continental breakfast at 9 a.m., concluding after 1 p.m. with a lunch, networking and adjournment.

The food and materials are included in the registration fee, \$15 regular and \$10 students.

For more information, call Jay Reinke, AFL-CIO Community Services liaison at (414) 771-9828, jayafclcio@sbcglobal.net, or Sheila Cochran, MALC secretary-treasurer, (414) 771-7070, sheila@milwaukeeelabor.org.

Fletcher speaks at UWM

A veteran labor leader and international activist who has led events in Milwaukee before (notably at the Summit a few years ago -- see story at left) will give a special talk, free and open to the public, at 7 p.m. Sunday, May 31.

Bill Fletcher Jr., a founder of the Black Radical Congress and a Senior Scholar for the D.C. Institute for Policy Studies, will

talk about the antiwar movement and being a leftist in 21st century America at the UWM Union Fireside Lounge.

Fletcher was also CEO of TransAfrica Forum, a national non-profit advocacy for the peoples of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. His appearance is sponsored by the Milwaukee Students for a Democratic Society.

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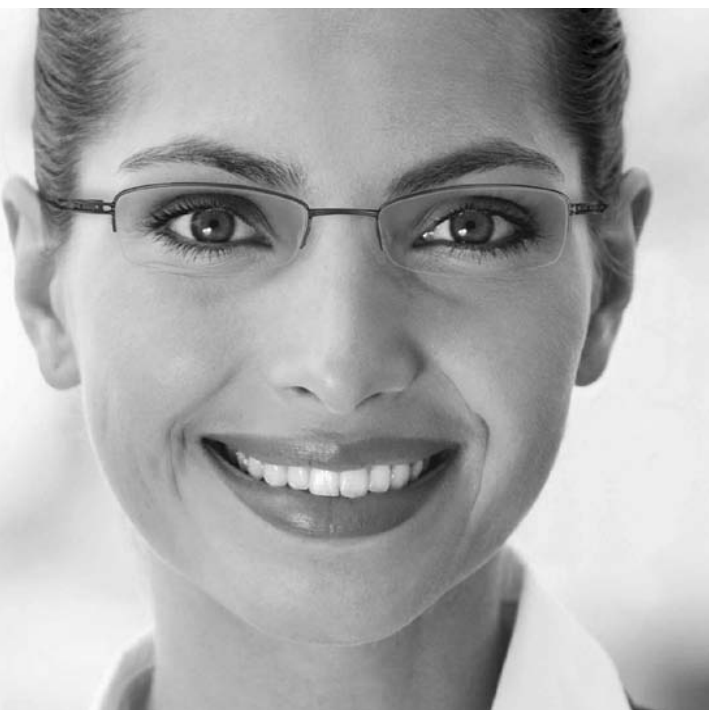
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Workers

From Page 1

out. Raynor intends to complete his term into the summer at UNITE HERE but is credited with encouraging unhappy rank-and-file to join the new Workers United, which promptly announced a close relationships with SEIU and the intention to join Change to Win.

Wilhelm accused SEIU of tampering and has personally singled out SEIU head Andy Stern as the culprit.

He is seeking to pull UNITE HERE out of Stern's creation, Change to Win, and wants re-affiliation with the AFL-CIO. He has regions of strength and regions of doubters in trying to keep current UNITE HERE members from bolting. The head count roughly works out to UNITE HERE hanging on to under 300,000 members while 150,000 have already moved to Workers United, including about

25% from the hotel-restaurant units.

Chris Rose, who came to the April delegate meeting of the MALC and is the current Wisconsin Council Director of the new (out of the old) Chicago & Midwest Regional Joint Board of Workers United, put the whole dispute succinctly: "We were one union created by two great historical unions that didn't work," he said. "While the merger of UNITE and HERE was supposed to have increased our organizing ability, the numbers show a complete failure in that aspect."

Sam Gallo, long the business manager for Local 122 and a member of the MALC executive board, is adamant as is Rose that close relationships with SEIU don't translate into becoming a division of SEIU. Workers United, he emphasized, is a new independent international union.

"While I hope for a peaceful settlement to end this ugly divorce," said Rose, he emphasized that members of Workers



Chris Rose

United, not "Stern or SEIU," led the charge to form a new union.

"Our members have held town hall meetings about the facts of the UNITE HERE merger failing, and have democratically been free to vote their voice, without intimidation or retaliation from the new union on the issues, while the Wilhelm faction has obstructed our abilities to represent with false threatening legal claims sent to employers of our members, and paid staff attempting to raid our locals," Rose said.

In some states, UNITE HERE has gone to court to oppose departures. In Milwaukee, there is still some contractual language to be worked out from the disappearance of the UNITE HERE brand, but Gallo sees the problems as few and the gains as many.



Sam Gallo

"There is a new focus on growth that was long lacking," he said.

The emergence of a new union comes in the midst of national efforts to get the nation's unions and split federations back together on paper as they are on such issues as immigration reform, the Employee Free Choice Act, health care and retirement concerns.

Quiet meetings have been taking place and a national committee has been formed of union leaders under David Bonior, the former House leader from Michigan who has also attended Milwaukee's Laborfest as a guest of the MALC.

Bonior said his goal is to build a labor group powerful enough to reverse what he called decades of lost ground for middle-class workers.

Emphasizing that his role was a facilitator, and echoing an AFL-CIO internal statement to council leaders around the nation -- that the Bonior's committee is not the start of yet another labor federation with yet another name -- Bonior confirmed that the talks are underway not just between the largest federation, the AFL-CIO and its 54 unions, and Change to Win (including SEIU, the Laborers and the United Food and Commercial Workers) but also with the NEA,

the enormous union of teachers that includes Wisconsin's WEAC and Milwaukee's MTEA.

The NEA has already made overtures to and encouraged some locals into the AFL-CIO.

There are rumors that other outside national unions such as UE are also involved in the discussions. State and local labor councils are being loosely informed about the ongoing talks, because, after all, it is at the local level that much of the realignment will have to work. It was the local councils that already got the federations back together for regional cooperation through Solidarity Charters.


Bonior sees his role as far more than getting back to even. "It's not good enough to get back to where we were before this economic crisis," he said.

"Middle-class families have gotten the shaft ... and the way to change that is through collective bargaining."

As a sign of new accord, the Change to Win and AFL-CIO also announced agreement on a broad framework of immigration reform. The overhaul endorses legalizing the status of illegal immigrants and opposes any large new program to bring in temporary immigrant workers.

John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO, and Joe Hansen, head of the UFCW, are seeking to unify discordant voices and amend bills proposed to Congress in 2006 and 2007. A May 1 march in Milwaukee unknowingly anticipated such a coalition.

-- Dominique Paul Noth



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